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> Opinion

The EU referendum is a choice between certainty and risk

ANNA SOUBRY

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In June, you will make one of the biggest decisions you'll ever have to make: whether to stay in, or leave, a reformed Europe. In this debate, it's too important to allow untruths to go unchallenged. It's vital that people have the facts at their disposal to make an informed choice. I want to take on the six big myths being put forward by those who say we should leave Europe.

Myth one: the costs of EU membership outweigh the benefits. The Leave campaign claims we send £350 million a week to Europe. This is untrue. When you take into account the rebate Margaret Thatcher got for us, and the money we get back in EU funding, the true figure is nowhere near that. Indeed, in total, we send a little over 1p in every £1 we pay in tax to Europe.

In return, we get full access to a free-trade single market of more than 500 million customers. Trade with this market is worth more than £500 billion a year, so it is the destination of 44 per cent of our exports, and three million British jobs are linked to this trade. Being inside the EU also makes it more attractive for companies to invest in the UK. The benefits of membership outweigh the costs.

"We have opted out of the passport-free Schengen area and have retained full control over who comes in."

Myth two: if we remain in Europe, we won't be able to control our borders. This is nonsense. To enter the UK, you have to show your passport – whoever you are, wherever you're from – and you always will. That's because we have opted

out of the passport-free Schengen area and have retained full control over who comes in. Indeed, since 2010, we have refused entry to more than 100,000 people to the UK. And in his renegotiation, the Prime Minister acquired even stronger powers to exclude or remove those we don't want here, and to ban them from re-entering for even longer. So we have all the benefits of EU cooperation to fight crime and terrorism but we retain our own hard border.

Myth three: if we stay in the EU, we will be forced to join the euro, a European superstate, or a future European army. These claims are untrue. It's not that we won't want to; because of the Prime Minister's renegotiation, we can't be made to. He has secured an agreement that ensures we never have to join these things.





Myth four: we could leave the EU and retain full access to the Single Market without paying into the budget or accepting free movement of people. The evidence shows that this is not possible. As the German finance minister made clear recently, if you want to access the Single Market, you must pay into the EU and accept complete free movement of people. Just ask Norway. They pay into the EU and accept double the number of EU migrants per head than us. At the same time, they still have to put up with some tariffs on their goods and have no say over Single Market rules. That's the worst of both worlds.

This leads to myth five: that if we were to vote to leave, Europe would have to accept our demands, because they need us more than we need them. But we would be one nation negotiating against 27; a market of 60 million negotiating with a market of 440 million; and a country which sells 50 per cent of its goods to a bloc, compared with a bloc which sells only 7 per cent of its goods to us. The balance seems to be tilted in their favour. This isn't doing Britain down; it's about having a reality check.

Myth six is related: that we could strike a different type of agreement with the EU, like the one Canada has. Leave aside, for the moment, that the Canadian deal was seven years in the making and still isn't in force. What would that uncertainty mean for business and jobs? Forget, if you can, that the Canada trade deal includes tariffs on some of our big exports such as beef and cars. Just consider this: Canada's arrangement with the EU involves much less access for services – which makes up nearly 80 per cent of our economy. That means our banks, our insurers, our airlines and our transport firms risk losing their current level of access to their biggest export market. It may work for Canada, whose top exports to the EU are gold and metal – but what would the impact be on the UK economy?

The longer this campaign goes on, the clearer it becomes. On one side, you have those, like me, who want to remain. We not only offer certainty: certainty about our access to the Single Market; certainty about jobs and prices. We are also backed up by a welter of opinion, from businesses small and large to independent experts. In the past two weeks alone, the London School of Economics, Oxford Economics and the CBI have all warned of the economic danger of leaving.

On the other, you have those who want to leave, who make assertions with little evidence, and don't have their claims backed up. All they offer is risk at a time of uncertainty. With our children and grandchildren's future at stake, that's a gamble we cannot take.

Anna Soubry is the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise



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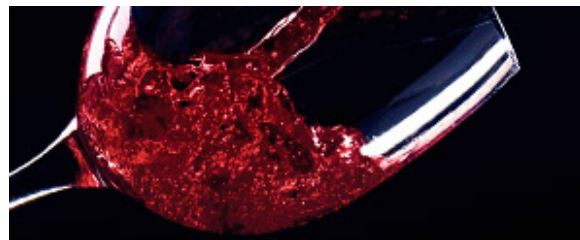
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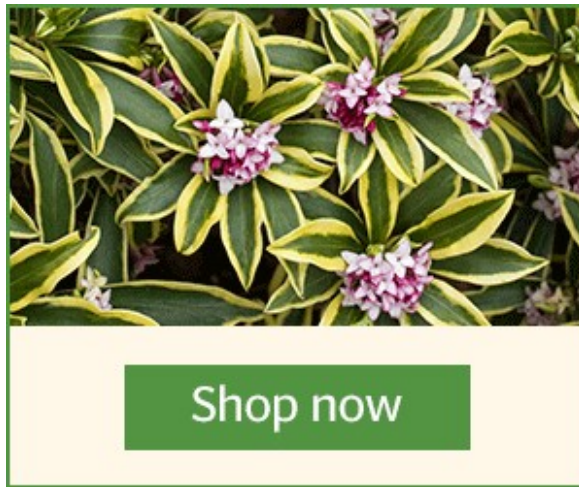
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