

VE Day: Now the real debate begins?

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'I'm off Monsieur'

The response to the Brussels bombshell from the UK European enthusiasts has so far been confused, angry and exasperated. Meanwhile the Sceptical mood feels like VE Day.

As someone who has covered and followed euro politics from a UK perspective for nearly three decades this feels like the moment when various cliches come into play: the cards are now all on the table, the leash is off, with one bound we are free, the elephant has left the room etc

We have been having a false debate all this time. The Eurosceptics pretended that they loved Europe (the wine, second homes and single market at least) but in fact the antipathy is grounded in nationalism as well as the economic self-interest of a group that aligns itself with the financial sector. They want out.

The Europhiles kidded themselves that as long as we didn't talk about it in front of the children, no-one would notice the fiscal fantasy upon which the single currency was built. [Michael Lewis' Boomerang](#) has a lot of nonsense in it about national characteristics, but it gets the crazy economics of the eurozone spot on.

The one good thing about the mess that is emerging from Brussels this morning is that the battle lines are much clearer. David Cameron has sided with those who see Britain becoming like Switzerland as a Good Thing.

Labour is in disarray as it is running scared of crying 'isolationism!' This is because isolationism is probably a very popular idea in the UK at a moment when the continental economies (apart from Germany) appear to be in meltdown. 'Draw up the drawbridge' wins votes, even when it means defending the privileges of British bankers.

[Update: This is Ed Miliband's Tweeted Response: 'David Cameron should be building alliances. The UK went into the summit without them and the outcome showed we lacked influence.' Which completely misses the point. Does Ed think we should have caved in to protecting the City? I am not sure Ed Balls is that bothered is he?]

So it's all down to Nick Clegg. This is the man whom the Daily Mail pointed out isn't really British and certainly isn't married to one. He's supposedly steeped in the Lib Dem love of all things EC (the Commission not the post code) Whether this really is a coalition-breaking moment now depends on whether the Lib Dems have the heart for a vote-risking, power-denying campaign to smash up this Government. Do they lose their ministerial limos or their principles?

I think we know the answer to that one don't we?

The EU will now deepen, probably with a more integrated core as the price of getting past the Euro-shock. Britain will remain outside those developments for at least five years, probably a decade.

As a genetically and ideologically programmed Europhile I find this depressing. But it's almost a relief. Now, perhaps, starts a real debate about the very variable geometry of Britain's relationship with the most important political and economic regional force in all our lives.

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