

Friday
26 February 2016

Volume 606
No. 121



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Friday 26 February 2016

House of Commons

Friday 26 February 2016

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

The Chairman of Ways and Means took the Chair as Deputy Speaker (Standing Order No. 3).

Overseas Voters Bill

Second Reading

9.34 am

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It gives me great pleasure to move the Second Reading of the Overseas Voters Bill. The Bill was brought forward in the last Session of the last Parliament, in the run-up to the general election. At that stage, I had a very helpful response from the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) who was then Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet Office, who said that the Bill's key element would be incorporated in the Conservative party manifesto and implemented after the general election. As a result, we had in our manifesto a commitment to take action on this issue.

I brought the Bill forward because too many British citizens living abroad are not entitled to vote in general elections in this country. Although the Electoral Commission made a big effort towards the end of the last Parliament, in the run-up to the general election, to register overseas electors, an answer given to me on 5 February by my hon. Friend the Minister—he is on the Front Bench today—showed that only 105,845 overseas electors were registered to vote in May 2015. He said it was not possible to say how many of those who were registered actually voted. I know that a number did not vote because they did not receive their ballot papers in time; indeed, I have had complaints about that from erstwhile constituents who now live abroad.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this Bill to the House's attention. I am listening to his very good speech with huge interest. He said that 105,000 overseas electors are registered. What is the total number who could be registered were they all identified, as his Bill suggests they should be?

Mr Chope: As with a lot of these things, there is no precise answer to my hon. Friend's very good question, but the estimate is probably that 5 million and upwards would be eligible, and I see my hon. Friend the Minister nodding.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): Just to clarify, the figures are a little unclear, as my hon. Friend says. It looks as though about 2 million may be eligible to vote at the moment, and another 3 million or 4 million on top of that might be enfranchised were we to get rid of the 15-year rule in

due course. However, as I suggested, all figures should be treated with a degree of caution, because this is so uncertain.

Mr Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. What he is saying is that, of the 2 million who are eligible at the moment, we registered only 100,000, and many fewer than that actually voted. There is potentially a pool of a lot more who could be registered if the Bill went through and we were able to allow all British citizens living overseas to participate in our democracy.

That, of course, is what happens in a lot of other countries. Some of those countries organise—indeed, facilitate—voting by their overseas citizens at embassies, consulates and other such places. In the recent Turkish elections, the President of Turkey, in a neutral capacity, spent a lot of time visiting other countries in Europe—mainly countries with a significant number of Turkish expatriates—to speak directly to them to encourage them to participate in the election.

So what would be the benefit of this? Apart from the benefit to democracy, it would assist in campaigns such as one that I very strongly support, which is the campaign for an end to the discrimination against British pensioners living overseas. It would mean that those who are campaigning to ensure that there is equal treatment between British pensioners living overseas and those living in the United Kingdom would have more clout. At the moment, there are a handful of these people in each constituency able to vote, and they cannot really make a difference in the general election, but if more of them were eligible to vote, and did vote, they would be able to lobby much more effectively and we might find that the Government were more responsive to their concerns than they seem to be at the moment.

Mr Hollobone: The campaigns that my hon. Friend is mounting for electoral justice and pensioner justice are legendary. I am glad that he managed to persuade the Government to include in the manifesto a commitment on electoral justice. With regard to British pensioners living overseas, presumably Her Majesty's Government know who these people are and where they live, and they are in receipt of at least some element of their pension. Therefore, given the terms of this Bill, it should not be too difficult for the Electoral Commission to put them on the list and get them registered.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend makes a really good point; as he says, it should not be too difficult. In the run-up to the previous election, I encouraged the Foreign Office to try to get people registered. I also tried to get information out of the Department for Work and Pensions about enabling it to communicate directly with pensioners. The 15-year rule makes it more difficult to run these registration campaigns, because the DWP does not know whether an overseas pensioner has been living overseas for more than 15 years, and removing the rule would make it much easier for it to campaign effectively. When I was at a meeting discussing these issues with a member of our embassy staff in Berlin, he told me of the efforts being made to try to get expats living there to participate in voting, and I am sure that such efforts were made. However, as is apparent from the figures, there is an enormously long way to go. When my

[Mr Chope]

hon. Friend the Minister responds, I am sure he will say that this Bill is premature, as most of my Bills are, but I hope he will also say what the Government are going to do about implementing their manifesto commitment.

It is currently a cause of a great deal of frustration for British overseas residents that they are going to find it very difficult to participate in the European referendum. Some cynics have said that it would be better if we did not allow large numbers from overseas to participate in that referendum, but I think it would be desirable for the maximum number of British citizens to be able to do so. After all, we are going to allow Commonwealth citizens and Irish citizens living in this country to participate, so why were the Government unable to bring forward the Bill to facilitate the extension of the 15-year rule sooner in this Session so that it could have had a part to play in the referendum eligibility campaign?

Mr Hollobone: Surely the whole point about electoral registration is that we register people who we believe have the right to cast their ballot. We never register people on the basis of which way we think they might vote in a particular election or referendum.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Too often, we allow cynics outside to misrepresent our policy positions. I think that all democrats would say that the maximum number of British citizens should be entitled to vote and encouraged to participate in our democracy, and that, in essence, is what this Bill is about.

Clause 3 deals with internet voting. This is a controversial subject, but I think that if we are ever to go down the road of internet voting, the starting point should be people living overseas.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): My hon. Friend and I have been very close friends for some while, but I am concerned that internet voting could be open to fraud. How would he seek to deal with that issue?

Mr Chope: Fraud is rife in most electronic transactions, but despite that, a very large number of people are prepared to trust their banking arrangements to being dealt with online. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs is now going to make it more or less compulsory for small businesses to do their tax returns online on a quarterly basis. My hon. Friend makes a perfect reasonable point: there is always scope for fraud. That is why I would not suggest massive internet voting on a universal basis from the outset, but it would be sensible to start off with a reasonable experiment. For example, we could perhaps start with members of our armed forces who are serving overseas. We might be able to develop a secure system for dealing with them.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman not think it odd that he wants to make it a lot easier for people living abroad to vote, but this Government want to make it a lot more difficult, through individual registration, for people to register to vote in this country?

Mr Chope: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise. The Government are keen to ensure that we have individual voter registration so that there is less

identity fraud at polling stations and through postal votes. I supported that when I was a member of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in the previous Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We are not debating UK domestic issues. I know the hon. Gentleman would not want to drift away from his point.

Mr Chope: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. I am intrigued by his proposition on internet voting. As a fellow member of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in the previous Parliament, I can bear testament to his prowess and knowledge. He rightly mentioned utilising the armed forces in an experiment on overseas voting. Perhaps Skyping could be used as a method, because face recognition on computers is now very sophisticated; indeed, we use it in airports across this country and in Europe. Does he agree that this could be a way ahead for internet voting by armed forces in overseas territories?

Mr Chope: I have to admit to not being an expert in this area at all. If my children were here, they would say to me, "When did you last Skype?", and the answer would be, "Never." I know that there is such a thing as Skyping, that other members of my family participate in it, and that it is a very inexpensive way of communicating with friends and family overseas. I imagine that it would fall within the term "internet voting". However, I do not have the expertise to be able to answer my hon. Friend's question about whether it would be possible to secure a system of Skyping that would be proof against fraud or misrepresentations. I leave that to the Minister and his officials.

In clause 3 I do not try to set out a prescriptive arrangement for internet voting. That is because this is a really good example of where regulations should be brought forward by the Government using their expertise rather than relying on albeit gifted amateurs to do the job for them. The clause says that the Government "shall bring forward regulations", and, in subsection (2), that they

"shall include provisions to prevent identity fraud and to ensure that only those eligible to vote can vote."

Mr Hollobone: I anticipate that clause 3 might cause most difficulty when the Bill goes into Committee. Is it not the case that it has never been easier to register an individual to vote and that increasingly that is being done over the internet? That will be of great encouragement to overseas voters, because they should be easily able to register themselves in this country.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Clause 3 addresses internet voting rather than internet registration, which is an important distinction. It is already possible to register on the internet, which, as my hon. Friend says, is a popular form of registration. A lot of young people used the internet to get themselves on the electoral register in the run-up to the last general election.

This is a short and relatively simple and straightforward Bill, and I commend it to the House.

9.50 am

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) on promoting this Bill. I for one appreciate his determination, having promoted a similar Bill last year. Like that Bill, this one has three main provisions. First, it would require the Electoral Commission to register overseas voters; secondly, it would remove the limit on how long British people can live overseas before they lose the right to vote; thirdly, it would allow internet voting for overseas voters.

It is good that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are so eager to make progress on internet voting, but the Trade Union Bill, which is currently passing through the Lords, shows that the Government are wholly opposed to any suggestion of internet voting for the trade union movement. I say that merely as a point of clarification.

I recognise the hon. Gentleman's interest in extending the franchise and in modernising the electoral system. However, given the Conservative party's record on excluding voters through the rushed implementation of individual electoral registration and, indeed, its opposition to votes for 16 and 17-year-olds, I am somewhat perplexed that he has not done more to challenge his party on those particular issues.

Labour consistently warned the Government of the dangers of removing the last Labour Government's safeguards for the introduction of IER. We also warned of the dangers of bringing forward the date of the point of transition—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. As I said earlier, unfortunately this is about overseas voters. I can understand that we want to go over different ways of voting, but we have to remain on the issue of overseas voting. That is what the Bill is about.

Ian Lavery: That is absolutely first-class advice, Mr Deputy Speaker. On the parliamentary process and attempts to get individuals to vote, the latest Office for National Statistics figures and Electoral Commission data, which were published only this week and are really important, show that more than 1.4 million people have fallen off the electoral register since the introduction of IER.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I am trying to be as helpful as I can. If the hon. Gentleman could combine that point with the number of overseas voters who have not been registered—that is the issue—and compare the two, that would be a way forward.

Ian Lavery: As ever, I accept your advice, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wish I did have the figures for those living abroad, but, as has been said, it is very difficult to ascertain them. The only figures we have are those for individual voters in the UK, but I fully accept and understand what you have said.

Elections in May will include those to the devolved institutions in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh, the London mayoral election, and the police and crime commissioner elections in England and Wales. Then—just in case somebody has missed this—at the end of June we will have a rather serious referendum to decide whether this country will continue to be a member of the European Union. The Electoral Commission will play an important

role overseeing all those elections. Personally, I do not think it would be wise for this House to say that, in addition, the commission should make the registration of overseas voters a priority. I hope and expect that the commission will continue its grand efforts of previous years in encouraging British people living overseas to register to vote, which is so important, but if there is to be a priority, surely it must be to ensure that all prospective voters who live in the UK are on the list.

The figures I have cited are alarming, but I will not mention them again, for fear of being pulled up by you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is important, however, to recognise the changes taking place in our democracy. We have to understand that the voting process is a central plank of our democratic process, both at home and abroad.

Clause 2 proposes abolishing the current 15-year limit on an overseas voter's ability to participate in UK elections. We have no objection to reviewing the time limits on eligibility. There is nothing sacred about the 15-year limit. It has not always been 15 years: it has been 20 years and five years in the past, but now it has settled at 15 years. As the hon. Gentleman has said, there are different rules in different countries. However, if we are to consider changing the limit, or even removing it completely, as has been argued, I do not believe that that should be done in isolation. It should happen as part of a wider review of how we can increase participation in elections in general.

The Conservative party made a manifesto commitment to abolishing the 15-year rule, and we are still waiting for the votes for life Bill to be introduced. Although we have no objection to that in principle, if we want to extend the franchise the Government should look again at giving the right to vote to 16 and 17-year-olds in this country. We should learn the lesson of what happened in Scotland, which enthused people and brought them into the parliamentary process. They felt that they were valued. We should take a leaf out of the Scottish book.

Clause 3 would give overseas voters a chance to vote online. We need to do more to make sure that our electoral process better reflects the busy lives that people lead. That could and should include trialling electronic and online voting. However, I am not wholly convinced by the hon. Gentleman's arguments about why overseas voters should be the first to try out such a system.

We are unable to support the Bill, for the reasons I have given. I am sceptical of some of the clauses and the priority given to overseas voters, because of all our other concerns about electoral matters.

Mr Chope: I understand that this is the hon. Gentleman's maiden Front-Bench speech on a Friday; he is making a very good fist of it, if I may say so. He says that he does not believe the Bill to be a priority, but does he not think there is something really wrong with our democracy if some 6 million British citizens are not able to participate in it? Surely that should be a top priority.

Ian Lavery: I fully understand that, but I would not categorise it as a priority. Some 7.5 million people in the UK are not registered, and since the introduction of IER a further 1.4 million people have dropped off the register. The Opposition fully agree that we need to look at encouraging participation in voting, but we do not see overseas voting as a major priority. It should be part of a concerted effort to get as many people as we

[*Ian Lavery*]

can to vote. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman and I are too far apart on that, other than on the question of what should be a priority.

David Morris: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his first occasion at the Dispatch Box for the Opposition. Is the Opposition's standpoint that they would like to see internet voting come online in the mainstream, not only in the UK but abroad?

Ian Lavery: The Labour party's position is that we would like to investigate the potential for that. As I have just said, it is important to remember that people have busy lives and they work. As well as online voting, there are other options that we would like to look at, which could play a major role. We have to try to open it up. Perhaps we need to look at polling day. Why is it on a Thursday from 7 am until 10 pm? How long has that been the case? It is generally accepted across the Chamber that we need to look at more innovative ways to encourage people—whether overseas or in this country—to vote and to take part in the democratic process. I do not think the hon. Gentleman and I are too far apart on those issues. It is perhaps, as I mentioned to the hon. Member for Christchurch, just a case of why one should be a priority and others not.

We need to look at the question collectively and try to come up with a way to encourage people to get out there and vote. As politicians, that is really what we want. There are 5.5 million British citizens living abroad, and I think the hon. Gentleman said that only 100,000 of them were registered to vote. To be honest, the figure that I have is 20,000, so it was news to me that that number had somehow multiplied by five. I am encouraged by that, but we need to encourage people into the process, and we can do that together across parties.

John Penrose: On a point of clarification, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the figure was closer to 20,000 about a year or a year and a half ago, before the last general election. In the run-up to the last general election, a huge effort was made to drive up the level of overseas registration, and it was pretty successful. The trouble was that we went from an absurdly low number to a pathetically low number. We are still only on about 5% of those who are eligible to vote. The figure is massively better and we should celebrate it, but we still have a heck of a long way to go.

Ian Lavery: I thank the Minister for that point of clarification. I thought I had got my figures wrong. We have, as the Minister correctly points out, some way to go. That is the case not just overseas, but here in the UK. Millions of people who are eligible to vote are not even registered. It is an electoral crisis, and we need cross-party agreement on how we can deliver something much more democratic than what we have at the moment.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that extending the franchise is no good for democracy if, in so doing, we encourage or allow fraud to take place? Does he agree, therefore, that in any widening of the franchise or in any proposal to bring forward internet use, we must make sure that it is copper-bottomed certain that fraud cannot take place?

Ian Lavery: The right hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point, which was also raised by the hon. Member for Christchurch. If we are to look at an alternative means of voting in whatever type of election, it has got to be copper bottomed. It has got to be so secure that it contains no mechanism for failure. It is an innovative idea and a new vision, but we have got to get it right. People feel more secure now about internet banking and lots of other things that they do on the internet, and they have to feel secure if they are to participate in that way. It is really important that we get security right from day one.

As I mentioned, the hon. Member for Christchurch is to be congratulated on raising these issues, many of which will undoubtedly come back to the House in time. In reality, the Government do not have a good record when it comes to making changes to our democracy, and with the changes to the parliamentary boundaries, I fear that that record will only deteriorate. However, as I have explained, we in the Opposition should look to work together with the Minister and his colleagues in a cross-party way to ensure that when people go to vote, they feel that they are participating in a genuinely open and fair process.

10.5 am

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I rise to support the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Choje). I am grateful to him for allowing my name to appear as one of his supporters on the back page. I commend him for his excellent speech, but I want to condemn his remark that he feels as though his Bill is premature, because I do not think it is premature at all. He has introduced the Bill to advance a manifesto commitment in a week in which the Government seem to have backtracked on several manifesto commitments, especially with regard to our pledges on the renegotiation of our settlement with the European Union. I congratulate him on the fact that his Bill is commendably short and therefore highly understandable and digestible for everyone.

Sir Greg Knight: Is my hon. Friend aware that support for the Bill goes beyond the list of names that are printed on the back of it?

Mr Hollobone: My right hon. Friend demonstrates that by his presence here today. I know that the subject of the Bill is being talked about in the pubs and clubs of Yorkshire, and he has brought the concerns of the people of Yorkshire to the House. On the south coast, where my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch comes from, the subject is the talk of the town. It is an extremely serious issue. The figures that my hon. Friend has revealed to the House will shock the nation.

Oliver Colvile: I have been down to the south of France quite a bit to talk to members of Conservatives Abroad. Believe me, this is quite a big issue for them.

Mr Hollobone: My hon. Friend's speaking tour of the continent is famous, and I am sure will become legendary as time goes on. I have to disappoint him, however, because hedgehogs are not included in the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I hope that the hon. Gentleman is talking about continental hedgehogs or world hedgehogs, not UK hedgehogs; otherwise he is going off the subject.

Mr Hollobone: Hedgehogs overseas will not be eligible for registration, but I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) is committed to the issue of overseas voter registration, as I am. He will share my shock, on behalf of our constituents, at the figures that have been revealed to the House today. Will the Minister be kind enough to intervene on me in a moment to give us the total number of electors in this country, so that we can establish the proportion represented by the 6 million potential overseas voters as a percentage of the total UK electorate?

John Penrose: I think the figure is roughly 44 million. If I get more precise divine inspiration, I may help my hon. Friend out a little more, but it is that sort of ballpark figure.

Mr Hollobone: I am most grateful for that intervention, and that is the sort of figure that I had in mind. We are now aware that there are potentially 6 million British voters, in addition to the 44 million who are currently registered, who could take part in UK general elections but who are unable to do so because they are not registered. That is a shockingly large figure, and I am surprised that the Government are not giving the issue more priority. Surely, with our traditions of empire and of spreading good government and democracy around the world, we would at the very least want to encourage those 6 million British citizens who are living abroad to retain their franchise in this country and their ability to participate democratically in the future of what is still their nation. I think the nation would be very surprised by the fact that there are 6 million people living abroad whom most of us would like to take part in UK elections.

Clause 1 of this excellent Bill would enable those 6 million British citizens to take part only in “United Kingdom Parliamentary elections if they were registered to vote”.

Although the provision is fantastic, I would want to take it further. It seems to me that it is important that British citizens living abroad should be able to take part in local government and mayoral elections if they want to do so. At the moment, an EU citizen living in this country quite rightly cannot take part in UK parliamentary elections, or at least they cannot do so yet—that may change if we decide to remain in the European Union—but they can take part in local government elections. It seems to me that British citizens, whether they live in this country or abroad, should be able to participate in all elections at every level of the democratic franchise. If I had the good fortune to end up on the Public Bill Committee, I would seek to amend clause 1(a) to extend the franchise to local government elections.

Oliver Colvile: Does my hon. Friend not recognise that local government is about delivering local services? If people do not physically live in the place where those public services are delivered, it seems to me rather strange for them to vote in local elections.

Mr Hollobone: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. However, overseas voters do not physically live in this country, but that does not mean that they are not interested in its future direction. It is true that they do

not receive specific local government services where they last lived, but they would still be interested in the future direction of their former local area. Many overseas voters also have close family relatives living in the same local government area.

That leads me to another point, which is about where overseas voters should be registered. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch will have received, as I and I am sure most Members have received, correspondence from British pensioners living overseas about the fact that they are not entitled to the full uprating of the state pension in some countries, which is an extremely important issue. I always go back to those who contact me to ask, “Can you tell me if you were previously a resident in Kettering, because I am not sure why you’re contacting me?” For those who say that they used to live in Kettering and give me their former address, I have been very happy to take up their cause with the appropriate Minister. When overseas voters are registered, it is very important that they are registered in the last place they lived in this country. It should not be too difficult to ensure that the system works in that way.

Hon. Members have spoken about clause 3. I have concerns about internet voting. However, it is quite clear that it has never been easier to enter oneself on the electoral register on the internet, and that should be encouraged for British citizens living overseas.

I was interested in the remarks of the Labour spokesman, the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery). I congratulate him on his debut performance on the Front Bench. How refreshing it is to see that a man of his calibre—he is closer than most of his colleagues to the beating heart of the Labour party outside the Chamber—has made his way on to the Front Bench. It seems to me that there is hope for the Labour party when Members of his quality can represent it in that way, and I think that trend should be encouraged.

On all these electoral issues, we must make sure that as many people as possible who should be able to vote actually end up doing so. We should not try to predict which way people are going to vote on any particular issue. The important point is that British overseas voters should be able to fulfil their civic duty in retaining their right to participate in the British franchise. The Bill seeks to encourage that. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch is not premature in bringing forward the Bill. I hope that the Government will respond positively to his crusade for electoral justice, and I am sure we all look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.

10.15 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): I join in the chorus of congratulations for my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) on introducing the Bill. I completely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) that it is not necessarily premature. I prefer the adjectives “forward-thinking” and “far-sighted”, if I may put it that way, because my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch is absolutely right to observe that it was a manifesto commitment at the recent general election.

My hon. Friend is therefore heading in a direction that we would wholeheartedly endorse. I will take issue with the details of how he proposes to do it—I have

[John Penrose]

concerns about the practicalities—but we are absolutely on the same page about the principle and about not dilly-dallying and shilly-shallying, or generally not according it a high priority. I want to reassure him that a great deal of work is going on at the moment. I can tell him that parliamentary draftsmen are even now beavering away at high speed on a Bill with all sorts of different possible working titles, including the overseas electors Bill and the overseas voters Bill. We are definitely not hanging around; we are moving forward with it. As he will appreciate—he will be more aware of this than most, having introduced this private Member's Bill—many important details need to be got right if we are to enfranchise this important group. My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering is quite right to observe that this is a tremendously important extension of our franchise that will in many cases extend democratic rights to those whom people would think or expect to have the vote.

I should say up front that I was delighted to hear that the Labour party is very happy at least to consider, and has no objection to reviewing, the question of whether the rule should be set at 15 years. The hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) is absolutely right to observe that other countries set that time limit at different points. In fact, our country has set it at different dates in the past, so there is not necessarily a right or a wrong moment. The figure of 15 years is quite arbitrary, so I am encouraged by the fact that he is willing to participate constructively in a review.

Oliver Colvile: I thank my hon. Friend for saying that the Government wish to introduce such a Bill, but what is his timetable for producing legislation that might support much of what our hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) is proposing?

John Penrose: I am afraid that I must fall back on the response “in due course”, to use that timeworn parliamentary phrase, rather than give my hon. Friend a firm date. However, I assure him that work is going on right now and that we are not hanging around. I will have to leave it at that, but I hope to be able to provide further clarity—in due course.

Mr Hollobone: I am enjoying the Minister's speech hugely and I am encouraged by what he has said so far. Will he do the House a service by placing the 15-year limit in context? We have not yet heard where it comes from, who imposed it and why. There is growing consensus that it needs to be abolished.

John Penrose: As the hon. Member for Wansbeck acknowledged, the 15-year rule is a bit of a hybrid. The limit has been as low as five years and as high as 20 years. Successive Governments have extended it or narrowed it over time. I do not want to be too specific about its history. The point behind the observation of my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering is that, because the line has been moved about several times under successive Governments, it is inherently arbitrary to choose a particular length of time that people have been away. The Government made a manifesto commitment to enfranchise all British citizens, no matter how long they have been abroad, because we think that choosing

15 years, as opposed to 14 or 16 years, is inherently like sticking a dart in a dartboard. We need to say that if British citizens maintain British citizenship that brings with it rights, obligations and a connection with this country, and that that should endure.

I am encouraged by the Labour party's view. I welcome the fact that it is willing to embark on a review of the 15-year rule. I also welcome the hon. Member for Wansbeck's comments about the need for a cross-party approach to driving up registration among all under-represented groups, regardless of where they live—whether they are resident in the UK or abroad. He is absolutely right to point out that there are a succession of groups who are less represented and less registered than others. His colleague, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), wrote to me recently about students. They are one of the less well-represented groups. Some black and minority ethnic communities are also less well represented. Ex-patriots are the worst of all in terms of the percentage of rates of registration—down at about 5%, as we have heard from earlier speeches. They are probably the least well represented of all the under-represented groups.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and others made the point that we cannot—we would all, as politicians or democrats, be diminished if we did—proceed purely on the basis of narrow party political advantage. It is far better, as the hon. Member for Wansbeck observed, to proceed on the basis of what is right for democracy. We must proceed on a cross-party basis without working out which particular groups might be more likely to favour his party or mine. If we all drive up registration in all groups on that basis, we will improve our democratic credentials and reduce voter cynicism very dramatically. That cynicism is perhaps one of the more corrosive influences not just in reducing levels of voter registration but levels of voter turnout—people who are registered but choose not to exercise their vote. We are all familiar with that problem, and cynicism about politics, the political process and politicians is a key driver of it.

One thing we are trying to do, in improving both the registration process and the reasons for encouraging people to register, is to make registration more convenient, simpler, easier, cheaper and more efficient—what we call the plumbing of registration. We want to make it less of a hassle to get registered.

Sir Greg Knight: Will the Minister confirm to the House that he is not looking at the possibility of introducing an Australian-type requirement that people have to vote?

John Penrose: I am happy to confirm that to my right hon. Friend. He is absolutely right. That has not been part of our democratic tradition in this country. It could, of course, be decided and introduced after debate, but it was not in our party's manifesto and it is not part of our current plans.

Mr Hollobone: On registration, a point I have made many times—it fell on deaf ears in the coalition Government; I hope that will not be the case today—is that those in almost all under-represented groups will have had some contact or multiple contacts with Government agencies of one sort or another, whether in relation to benefits, passports, applications for this or

applications for that. Why can we not have a simple cross-governmental rule that every time somebody comes into contact with a Government agency they are asked the question, “Are you on the electoral register?” If the answer is no, they could then be told how to register.

John Penrose: My hon. Friend gave a good example with regard to pensions, saying that the Department for Work and Pensions will inevitably have a list of people to whom it is paying pensions. That one cogent example should therefore allow an opportunity to provide the kind of nudge he talks about. I can confirm that we have trialled a series of links on various Government website pages to do what he describes. We are currently investigating whether that can be extended more broadly across more Government services, so that any time anybody living abroad or in a domestic under-represented group comes into contact with the British state we can provide a nudge for them to get registered. We are looking at that extremely carefully, as it seems like it could be a very sensible way of proceeding. It may not be the whole answer—in some cases it may not be a very effective answer and in others it may be highly effective—but it is certainly something we want to pursue.

Oliver Colvile: As my hon. Friend may know, I represent a naval garrison city with a large military presence. How can we ensure that more military personnel are registered? I have to say that I have found registration levels to be very disappointing.

John Penrose: Special registration arrangements for service personnel and Crown servants are already in place. Special registration systems allow them to register in a slightly different, and I hope more convenient, way than other ex-patriots living in other parts of the world.

What we have encountered, not only in relation to service personnel and Crown servants but other ex-patriots, is that for those people living abroad who are registered to vote and have also enrolled for a postal vote, which they need to do as well, the two processes are not necessarily as linked up as they might be. They may be registered to vote but not automatically registered for a postal vote, even if they thought they were. Sometimes postal vote forms have arrived too late, depending on where they are in the world and the efficiency of the postal service. What we have tried to do more recently, therefore, is change the guidelines, in conjunction with the Electoral Commission, to ensure that postal vote forms are sent out earlier, with sufficient postage on them and so on, and that the overseas postal vote forms can in future be sent out among the earliest batches in each local constituency to make sure that the chances of them arriving in time in every part of the world are maximised. All those measures will help to drive up both registration rates and voting rates.

This issue is not just about the plumbing of registration and voting. Those things are important and I am sure we can make significant improvements to them and get more people in under-represented groups to register and, with any luck, help them to vote. This is not just about plumbing, however; it is also about poetry. There are some groups who are not registered, not because it is inconvenient or because they have not got around to it, but because they view the political process with cynicism or suspicion. Again, this is where a cross-party approach to try to enthuse, convince and persuade

people that the answer to their cynicism about the way politics and the democratic process works is to get involved, not to avoid the whole process. If one party tried to do that on its own, it would be far less effective than if we joined hands. Indeed, it is not just up to politicians. We need to join hands not just across the political spectrum but with civic society groups right the way across the spectrum. We are already doing some of those things. Incidentally, the Electoral Commission is also trying to work in this fashion, too. I welcome the Labour party’s offer of a cross-party approach. I absolutely and would dearly like to pursue that with it if I can. I have already mentioned this to the hon. Member for Wansbeck’s Opposition Front-Bench colleague. The hon. Member for Ashfield is not here today, but she and I have had conversations in the past. It is absolutely the right way to go.

The Electoral Commission understands the importance of not just the plumbing but the poetry, if I may use that analogy. For example, it announced in the course of the past week a collaboration with the writers of “Hollyoaks”. I understand—I hope I am not acting as a terrible plot-spoiler here, Mr Deputy Speaker—that they intend to blend through the storyline of that soap an encouragement to register and information about why it is important to register, how to register and so on. That is something I would hope we all support.

Oliver Colvile: Does my hon. Friend also recognise that “The Archers”, and not just “Hollyoaks”, has a significant part to play? It is a very good soap opera, and would it not be wonderful were it to start talking about people abroad?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I think it is time I joined in. Whatever we do, we are not going around the soaps. We are talking about overseas registration, not plots about registration in the UK.

John Penrose: You are absolutely right, Mr Deputy Speaker, although I would observe that many of these soaps are also watched by overseas and expatriate voters living abroad, but I shall move on before I try your patience any further.

The Bill also deals with internet voting, which is potentially a very important area. It is interesting that we all increasingly take for granted the use of the internet for more and more things. If someone said 10 years ago that a large proportion of us—if not yet a majority—would be using internet banking or shopping, people would have been very surprised, yet here we are, and it is increasingly a part of normal life in this country. If online voting is not already happening—some, like my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, are already asking the question—it will certainly start to happen in due course. People will start to ask, “Why can we not vote online?” The trade union movement has already asked the question, while other organisations are starting to use internet voting for some issues.

That said, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) rightly asked about the fraud issue, and my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch has built this into clause 3. There is an important point here about fraud prevention. While we are increasingly used to online banking and shopping, and those sorts of things, if, in those cases, something goes wrong, broadly speaking, the bank or credit or

[John Penrose]

debit card company—or whoever it might be—will usually stand behind the transaction and take the risk from the consumer. That is perfectly acceptable for commercial transactions. The difficulty is that it is extremely hard to work out whether a vote has been intercepted and potentially subverted—switched from a vote for Labour to a vote for the Conservative party, or from an aye to a no in a referendum—especially given that we have secret ballots, which are an essential part of our democracy. At the same time, the stakes could not be higher. Clearly, stealing the government of a country is an incredibly serious issue, and one that it would be extremely hard to unpick afterwards, in the way we can unpick a faulty commercial transaction, make good the money and undertake a forensic analysis.

I am not saying we do not expect online voting to happen in due course, but I believe that the fraud issues are not yet resolved. I am sure that the technology will continue to advance and be ready at some point, and that we will have a robust and transparently solid political and democratic process that will allow this to happen, but we are not yet there. However, given the way the world is moving—it is happening in more and more areas of our lives—it would be a brave man who said it will never happen, even if, like my hon. Friend, they are not that familiar with Skype. I suspect it is a question of when, not if, but I am afraid that, at the moment at least, the answer is, “Not yet.”

I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch on introducing the Bill, and I reassure him that we are working extremely hard and hope to bring forward a Bill that will do many of the things that he proposes, including getting rid of the 15-year rule and enfranchising British citizens living abroad. In parallel to but separately from the Bill, we are trying to drive up registration among under-represented groups, including expatriates.

Sir Greg Knight: Will the Minister clarify the remarks he just made? Is he saying that internet voting is not part of the proposals the Government are currently preparing?

John Penrose: I will clarify that: it is not currently part of our proposals, because we do not yet think the technology is safe enough. We will keep the technology under continual review, and at some point there might be a democratic consensus that it has become safe enough, but that moment is not now.

To conclude, we welcome the intention behind the Bill and remain committed to the manifesto pledge.

We will introduce our version of it, which I hope will be different in technicalities but congruent in direction with getting rid of the 15-year rule and therefore enfranchising all missing voters. In parallel, we will introduce new measures, on a cross-party basis if possible, to find those under-represented groups, whether they are overseas or domestic voters, and to drive up registration wherever we can. With that, I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured and feel able to withdraw the Bill, while he waits for our Bill to arrive, which I hope will not be too much longer.

10.35 am

Mr Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for his response, and I am delighted to hear that, even as we speak, parliamentary counsel are struggling with the detail of what I hope will be not just a Government Bill, but Government regulations to go with it, so that there is not a long gap between the Bill and the regulations. It is often much better if the draft regulations can be produced at the same time as the Bill. If that is the reason for the delay, I will be prepared to accept that, because it is much easier for the House to consider a Bill when it has the regulations—the detailed implementation scheme—before it. I can understand that it has not been possible to do that. I was disappointed with the expression “in due course”, but I can assure him that, if we have not made progress by the time of the next Queen’s Speech—whenever that might be—I shall seek to resurrect the Bill in the next Session and to keep the pressure on the Government.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) for his generous remarks, but I am not sure I agree with his views about extending clause 1 to local government elections. That would involve a complex interaction, because, at the moment, EU citizens resident here can participate in local elections—the trigger is their residence here. If we said that non-British people not resident could participate in local government elections, that would be a significant extension and might have serious implications. Before we knew it—although this will, I hope, be sorted out on 23 June—we might find the EU suggesting that its citizens should be able to participate in our general elections, which would be completely wrong.

With those remarks, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and Bill, by leave, withdrawn.

OFF-SHORE WIND FARM SUBSIDIES (RESTRICTION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 4 March.

EU Membership (Audit of Costs and Benefits) Bill

Second Reading

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I call Mr Chope to move the Second Reading debate on behalf of Mr Bone.

10.38 am

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) for his being unable to participate in this debate. He has been waiting for the opportunity for a long time, and it is only because of a series of supervening events that he cannot be here to move the Bill's Second Reading himself. In those circumstances, he asked me, as a co-sponsor, to move it on his behalf, which it gives me great pleasure to do.

You may be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this Bill, or a Bill very similar to it, has had a long gestation. It was back in the 2007-08 Session that I brought forward a Bill, supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough and other colleagues. It was entitled the European Union (Audit of Benefits and Costs of UK Membership) Bill to

“establish a Commission to carry out regular audits of the economic costs and benefits of the UK's membership of the European Union; and for connected purposes.”

That Bill had almost a full day's debate here on 20 June 2008.

As we start today's debate it is worth recalling some of the comments I made when opening the previous debate. The Bill was narrower than this one, in that it dealt only with the economic costs and benefits of the UK's membership of the European Union. I started by referring to the preface to an excellent work by Ian Milne, “A Cost Too Far?: An Analysis of the Net Economic Costs and Benefits for the UK of EU Membership”. In the foreword to that pamphlet, which was published in July 2004, the former distinguished and late Speaker Lord Weatherill stated that when he was the Conservative Government's Deputy Chief Whip in 1972, he supported entry into the European Common Market

“on the assurance of the Prime Minister, Mr Edward Heath that ‘joining the community does not entail a loss of national identity or an erosion of essential national sovereignty.’”

Lord Weatherill went on to say that things had moved on a bit since then, and that what was important was that

“Parliamentarians now have a sacred duty honestly to explain the pros and cons of our developing relationship with the European Union. Only then can the people make an informed choice.”

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on putting forward this magnificent Bill and I thank him for giving me the privilege of being one of his co-sponsors. In the debate of 2008 and in the research by Ian Milne, was any prediction made that in 2016 we would be faced with a £62 billion annual deficit of trade with the European Union?

Mr Chope: The short answer is no. I do not think it was ever envisaged that the European Union would be such a manifest failure as an economic entity and would

be unable to maintain its share of world trade. We know that since 1972, the EU share of world trade has declined significantly. We know, too, that the EU has not been growing in economic terms in the way people thought would be possible—even to the extent that we now face a situation in which half the new jobs being created in Europe are being created in the United Kingdom, while the other half are being created in the 27 other countries of the EU. When we first joined, the share of trade that the EU had with the rest of the world was significantly higher than it is now, despite the fact that at that time it had many fewer member countries. As the EU has got larger in numbers, its influence over trade in the rest of the world has declined. I do not think that any of that was anticipated by Mr Milne in his pamphlet.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does not the Bill have a serious drawback if it is seeking to educate the public? Clause 6 seeks to set up a commission that will report within 12 months. If we are supporting this Bill, is not the inescapable conclusion that we are, in effect, arguing for the referendum to be put back two years?

Mr Chope: My right hon. Friend is a lawyer, so he knows that he is absolutely correct. The Bill was brought forward back in June and we did not know then what would happen. We did not know when we would get a referendum. Now we know that we are going to get a referendum so I will not ask the House to give the Bill a Second Reading today. It has been overtaken by the welcome fact that we are getting our referendum on 23 June. I hope that when that happens, we will be able to have an objective assessment of the costs and benefits of our membership, although I must say that on the basis of recent events, I am rather concerned about whether there will be such an open and objective assessment by the Government. Still, I live in hope.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Is my hon. Friend proposing to withdraw the Bill or is he going to carry on with it?

Mr Chope: The answer to my hon. Friend is, as always, that I am going to wait and see what the Minister says in response to my Bill. I am not going to anticipate that. Discussing the Bill provides us with a chance to look at the various issues surrounding information, or lack of it, on the costs and benefits of our membership of the European Union.

Today, I am delighted that Lord Howard—Michael Howard, as he was when he was a Member of this House—has decided to join the leave campaign. I had the privilege of serving with him as a junior Minister for several years in the late 1980s so I know what a great supporter he is of the idea of Europe. What he has shown today by his decision, however, is that he is very much against us continuing to be members of a European Union that is increasingly out of touch with the needs of the people of Europe. That is a really important move, following so soon after the decision by Lord Owen to join the leave campaign.

As a further response to the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), let me say that I tabled a parliamentary question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 1 June 2015. It said:

[Mr Chope]

“To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will commission an independent audit of the economic costs and benefits of UK membership of the EU.”

Do you know what answer I got, Madam Deputy Speaker? I shall read it to the House. It said:

“The Government has a clear mandate to improve Britain’s relationship with the rest of the EU, and to reform the EU”—

I emphasise that point—

“so that it creates jobs and increases living standards for all its citizens. The Government will hold an in/out referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU by the end of 2017.”

What was the answer to the question—I hear you saying, Madam Deputy Speaker—about the economic costs and benefits of UK membership? There was no answer. Why was there no answer from the Treasury Minister? Why did the Treasury not want to answer the question? It knew that if it said “no”, it would be ridiculed; and it knew that it did not want such an audit, so it was not prepared to say yes.

Mr Hollobone: Is it not the case that Her Majesty’s Government have always been frightened of an independent objective analysis of the costs and benefits of our membership, which explains why they were so worried about the answer to my hon. Friend’s question? Only today, we have heard the latest spin from Her Majesty’s Government that, were we to leave the European Union, the pound would fall and holidays would be more expensive for those going to Europe. I always thought it was the convention of Her Majesty’s Government, and in particular the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not to comment on the future direction of exchange rates, so does this not demonstrate that we are now in an era of spin because they are frightened of independent objective assessment?

Mr Chope: As ever, my hon. Friend has made an important and, indeed, fundamental point. I would just add that it is even odder that the Government should comment on sensitive issues relating to exchange rates at the same time—on the very same day—as saying that they were not prepared to answer questions about the disparity between the number of people from the European Union who registered for national insurance numbers last year and the number of people who are alleged to have come here from the European Union to work. I believe that more than 600,000 asked for national insurance numbers, but the Government say that only about 250,000 came here in that year. When the Government were asked to explain the difference between the two figures, their answer—it is in the papers today, so it must be correct—was that it would be wrong to answer the question, because it might influence the forthcoming referendum. I am sure that the Chancellor, the Prime Minister or whoever it was who said that we would all have to pay more for our holidays did not do so in order to try to influence the outcome of the referendum.

Mr Hollobone: I disagree with my hon. Friend. They said that deliberately to try to mislead people into thinking that their holidays would become more expensive. The truth is that exchange rates go up and down, and are very difficult to predict. However, if the Government are going to start commenting on the future direction of exchange rates, should not they at least do so in a balanced way, and point out that were the pound to

decrease in value, that would be extremely good news for hard-pressed British exporters who are seeking to sell more of our products abroad?

Mr Chope: Absolutely. That is another side of this very important argument.

I referred extempore to what the Government were reported to have said yesterday about the disparity between the figures, but let me now give the exact figures. A total of 630,000 EU citizens registered for national insurance numbers entitling them to work or claim benefits in Britain last year, yet it is said that there were only 257,000 new EU migrants. Incidentally, 209,000 of those national insurance number registrations came from residents, or citizens, of Romania and Bulgaria.

Jonathan Portes, of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, sought an explanation for this extraordinary disparity, but was told that the Government were not prepared to give more details because

“it might prejudice the outcome of the EU referendum.”

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I am sure that it would.

Mr Chope: Well, it depends what the answer was, does it not?

This illustrates the problem that we have with the unequal use of resources and statistics. Having refused to answer the simplest of questions from me last June, the Treasury is now refusing to inquire further into what is, on the face of it, an extraordinary disparity, while at the same time making the scaremongering assertions to which my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) has referred.

The purpose of my Bill is to introduce some objectivity and independence into the whole process of evaluating the costs and benefits of our membership of the European Union. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie), the Chairman of the Treasury Committee, has launched an inquiry into the economic costs and benefits. He is doing a lot of good work, and I look forward to the publication of the report, but, having read much of the oral evidence, I note that the answer given by a great many experts, whether pro or anti-EU, is that it is extremely hard to be sure one way or the other.

During the forthcoming referendum campaign, we might be well advised to note the information that is set out so ably in House of Commons Library briefing paper 06091, which was published in January this year. According to chapter 6,

“There is no definitive study of the economic impact of the UK’s EU membership or the costs and benefits of withdrawal. Framing the aggregate impact in terms of a single number, or even irrefutably demonstrating that the net effects are positive or negative, is a formidably difficult exercise.”

Why is that?

“This is because many of the costs and benefits are subjective or intangible. It is also because a host of assumptions must be made to reach an estimate. If the UK were to leave the EU, assumptions must be made about the terms on which this would be done and how Government would fill the policy vacuum left in areas where the EU currently has competence. If the UK were to remain in the EU, assumptions would need to be made about how policy in the EU would develop.”

That is a very important point. We often hear—and we heard from the Prime Minister this week—words to the effect that there will be no leap in the dark if we decide to stay in the European Union; it will all be as plain as a pikestaff. However, the House of Commons Library briefing clearly states that we do not know how policy in the EU would develop if we chose to remain:

“Estimates of the costs and benefits of EU membership are likely to be highly sensitive to such assumptions.”

If the Government, whose current robust line is that we must at all costs stay in the European Union, start presenting figures and data, how shall we be able to assure ourselves that those figures and data are objective? I think the answer is that we shall not be able to do that, because the figures and data will come from a biased source.

Mr Hollobone: It seems to me that, rather than trying to present independent and objective statistics and data to the British public, Her Majesty’s Government are putting increasing emphasis on spin. For example, the claim that 3 million British jobs depend on our membership of the European Union is trotted out by all those who are campaigning for us to remain in the European Union, although any objective, independent assessment demonstrates that it is a complete myth.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is only one of the figures that have been strongly criticised in evidence to the Treasury Committee. It has now been ridiculed, but can we be sure that it will not be replicated in the Government propaganda leading up to the referendum?

The House of Commons Library briefing states:

“Open Europe (2015) The Consequences, challenges & opportunities facing Britain outside the EU estimated the effect on UK GDP in 2030”—

some 15 years from now—

“of leaving the EU could potentially be in the range from -2.2% to +1.55% of GDP. However, the study argued that a more realistic range was between -0.8% and +0.6% of GDP.”

In other words, there is no significant difference either way. Yet between now and 23 June, I predict the Government will be suggesting that it is all one way and it will be an economic disaster if we have the courage and conviction to take responsibility for our own lives and our own destiny and leave the EU.

The other part of the Library paper I want to mention is a reference to a May 2014 report by Civitas on trade advantages of the EU. It found that the trade benefits of EU membership were exaggerated. Based on a study of UK exports since 1960, Civitas found that UK trade with European nations outside the EU had increased dramatically, while the UK’s trade with other EU members accounted for no more of its trade with leading economies than in 1973. That goes back to a point we were making earlier.

Mr Hollobone: Yes, we were making that point earlier, and when we joined the EU—the Common Market as it then was in 1972—we did not have a £62 billion annual trade deficit with our EU partners. Over the 44 years of our membership, the trade deficit has grown. To put this in simple terms, the EU nations are selling to us £62 billion-worth every year more than we are selling to them. So our trade with our EU partners has deteriorated over the past 44 years, not improved.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and the figures he quotes are almost identical to those in this House of Commons Library briefing paper, which quotes figures from the Office for National Statistics balance of payments statistical bulletin. They show exactly the effect my hon. Friend describes. I wonder how much of that information we will see in the Government’s leaflets in the forthcoming campaign.

Mr Hollobone: Can my hon. Friend also confirm that, as a result of our EU membership, we have lost Britain’s seat at the World Trade Organisation? That means that we have lost our sovereign ability to negotiate friendly free trade arrangements with other countries around the world. So, for example, a country as small as Iceland has negotiated a friendly free trade treaty with an economic superpower like China, yet we are forbidden to do exactly the same thing because of our membership of the EU.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend again makes a telling point. I was going to come to it later, but as he has raised it now, let us put on the record, for example, the concern many of our constituents have about TTIP, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership being negotiated between the EU and the United States. A legal opinion has been circulated to a number of us over the last 24 hours saying if TTIP goes ahead as proposed, it would potentially be disastrous for our national health service. I do not know whether that is correct or not, but there is an opinion saying that that could be the impact. Why are we relying on the EU to negotiate a trade deal with the US? Why do not we, as the fifth largest economy in the world—English-speaking, committed to free trade—make our own trade deal with the US? The short answer is that we are not allowed to do so until we leave the EU.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I wholeheartedly agree with what my hon. Friend is saying. On TTIP, does he agree that the following is an interesting factor in any cost-benefit analysis? We are always told that if we want a free trade agreement with the EU, we will have to accept free movement of people. Does he think America will accept the free movement of people—of all EU citizens—into the United States when it signs its free trade agreement with the EU?

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend makes a good point—

Sir Edward Leigh: Or Canada, which has an agreement.

Mr Chope: As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) suggests, North America has its own North American Free Trade Agreement, which brings Canada, Mexico and the United States together. However, as Donald Trump and many others would bear witness, under that there is no free movement of people between Mexico and the US or between Canada and US, but there is still a free trade agreement.

Sir Edward Leigh: More than that, Canada has an agreement with the EU on trade and there is no free movement of EU nationals into Canada.

Mr Chope: Absolutely, and I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend has to say if he is able to catch your eye later on, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr Hollobone: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point about TTIP. He will have received letters and emails from constituents, as have I, expressing very real concern that the 28 additional words we need in the agreement to protect our NHS are not in the draft TTIP terms. Just to make it crystal clear, were we to leave the EU, we could negotiate such an agreement with the US and include in the agreement, under our new sovereign capabilities, those crucial 28 words that all the TTIP campaigners would like to see.

Mr Chope: Exactly, and if we did not include them we could be held to account by our constituents in this House for having let them down. At the moment we can just say, "Well, it's beyond our control; we haven't got any influence over this."

Oliver Colvile : Will my hon. Friend just explain then how long he thinks that might take given the time it has taken to get to the position we are in at the moment?

Mr Chope: That is interesting. I was at a meeting the week before last with a group of people from the US Senate and Congress who were interested in the subject of TTIP. I was invited to take the chair of this gathering, and one of the first questions I asked was how many of these people thought TTIP was going to be resolved by the end of this year. The answer was zero.

What we were told when the Prime Minister launched this initiative in 2013 was that we would get this sorted out before the end of the Obama presidency; it is absolutely clear we are not going to get it sorted out before then. So I then asked the same gathering of people how many of them thought it would be sorted out by the end of next year. Again, nobody thought that. Basically, the message coming from these people who are very well connected on Capitol Hill was that TTIP is very much in the long grass as far as the US is concerned because of the difficulties being put in the negotiations by the European Union, which is trying to maintain the protectionism that is still espoused by so many members of the EU and that is not compatible with what the US wants. So in answer to my hon. Friend's question about how long a resolution would take, my view is that we would get a bilateral trade agreement between the UK and the US one heck of a sight quicker than we are ever going to get a trade deal between the EU and the US.

Mr Hollobone: To extend that principle into a future where Britain is outside the EU, given that we are already 100% compliant with all the EU obligations, should it not be possible to negotiate a free trade agreement between Britain and the EU in double-quick time after our EU exit?

Mr Chope: Absolutely. The fall-back position if we did not negotiate such a deal would be that we would have a continuing relationship on WTO rules, which are signed up to by the EU. So any suggestion that there would be a complete curtailment of trade between us and the EU when we leave is absurd. Why would the EU not want to sign up very quickly with the UK? They are selling us more than we are selling them, so it must be in their interests to try to maintain those connections. Tellingly, and disappointingly, in addressing this point in Monday's statement the Prime Minister did not talk in absolute terms. Instead of facing up to the fact that

we sell less to the European Union than it sells to us, he started talking in percentage terms. That is completely misleading because we are but one of 28 countries in the EU, so if we start talking about the percentage of EU exports that come to us compared with the percentage of our exports that go to the EU, we will present a distorted picture. It was very sad that the Prime Minister chose not to use the absolute figures and instead resorted to such misleading percentages.

Philip Davies: We are also told that if we had a free trade agreement with the EU, we would still have to have all our laws decided by the European Union. When my hon. Friend had his discussions with his American friends, did he become aware of whether the Americans were going to accept their law being changed for them by the European Union, by qualified majority voting, when they entered into their free trade agreement with it?

Mr Chope: We did not get down to that sort of detail, because the feeling was that we are a long way apart on this. There is also a feeling that there is a lot more commonality between the British people and the people of the United States; we share a common language, the common law and a common heritage, and that is very different from the approach of so many other EU countries. On the basis that we have this special relationship with the US, we would be able to prosper and develop our trade together through bilateral open trading arrangements far more effectively than is being done at the moment with the EU. That is an important factor to take into account when assessing the costs and benefits of membership.

I am conscious of the fact that a number of other people wish to participate in this debate, so I will not say much more now. I merely wish to point out that the Bill proposes terms of reference, whereby the independent commission that would be set up to examine the current costs and benefits would be

"taking into account the impact of membership on the UK's—

(a) economy (including consideration of public expenditure and receipts resulting directly from membership)".

Of course, we know that in round figures we are paying in about £10 billion more than we get back every year. Interestingly, in yesterday's statement on the EU solidarity fund and flooding the Minister made much of the fact that we would be applying to get some money back from the fund, but he did not think this would amount to anything more, at best, than about the equivalent of one day's net contributions to the EU. He admitted that even getting back one day's net contribution would involve an enormous amount of bureaucracy on both sides, which typifies the costs at the moment and how unfair it is that our people should be paying £10 billion net a year to the EU.

Sir Greg Knight: My hon. Friend made a prediction earlier. Will he comment on my prediction that if this country is misguided enough to vote to remain in the EU, within a few months our contribution to the EU will go up, because it is totally incapable of keeping within existing programmes and budgets?

Mr Chope: I agree absolutely with my right hon. Friend, who brings an enormous amount of experience, not only as a former trade Minister, but as a former

Deputy Chief Whip. I am delighted that he is playing a key part in the leave campaign. What is happening in Europe to deal with the migration crisis is breath-taking in its incompetence. We are talking about a major cost; this crisis will potentially cost the EU a fortune. Who will have to contribute to those costs if we remain in the EU? It is none other than the British taxpayer. I think my right hon. Friend's prediction is right, but I hope we will never see whether it comes to pass because by then we will have left the EU.

Mr Hollobone: Ten billion pounds sounds like an enormous figure, and it is, but people often struggle to deal with figures when they get so big, so let me place it into a local context. In Kettering, we are struggling to get £30 million for an improvement to Kettering general hospital and the development of an urgent care hub on the site there. That sum is less than one day's subscription to the EU but we are having a really difficult job getting even that small a sum out of the Treasury. Imagine what we could do with £10 billion to spend on important public services across our country, providing hospitals, schools, doctors, police officers and nurses.

Mr Chope: Exactly. My hon. Friend makes the point brilliantly. One thing the Treasury is apparently willing to help on is the cost of vellum; I believe it is offering to pay £30,000 a year. That is the way the Treasury works.

Sir Edward Leigh: Worth every penny.

Mr Chope: I am not commenting on that, but we will have plenty of £30,000 sums to spend when we leave.

Clause 5(b) talks about taking into account our "competitiveness and ability to trade freely (including consideration of the UK's restricted ability to negotiate trade agreements and to engage in free trade with other countries)".

I have already covered that. Subsection (c) then deals with the issue of

"national security and defence (including the UK's ability to decide which non-nationals should be allowed to reside in the UK)".

That is a very big subject and I suspect some of my colleagues will wish to go into it in a bit more detail. At the moment, we do not have any control over non-nationals from the EU coming into our country. The figures published yesterday show a massive increase in net migration—it was again more than 300,000 in the year to September 2015.

We all supported the Prime Minister and the Conservative party manifesto on the promise in 2010, in a pledge repeated during the last election campaign, that we would bring net migration in the UK down to the tens of thousands. I looked today in the press to see what the Prime Minister's response was to the latest net migration figures, which show that more than 300,000 people came in that year period, 257,000 of whom came from the EU. If we were going to get the figure down to the tens of thousands and even if we prevented anybody from coming to this country from anywhere other than the EU, we would still have to reduce the number of people coming from the EU by about two thirds—from 257,000 to just less than 100,000. With the most heroic assumptions, how is it possible to say that the very modest measures contained in the package that came back from the negotiations in Brussels could ever deliver a reduction of 157,000 EU migrants a year?

Mr Hollobone: Is this not the crucial point for people who voted Conservative at the last election on the basis of that manifesto pledge to cut immigration to tens of thousands? The truth is that that objective will simply be unattainable while we remain a member of the EU, so the only way to solve this is to vote to leave on 23 June.

Mr Chope: Exactly. If we ask whether the Government have any idea how we could achieve that without leaving, I am sure we will be told that we cannot have any more information because it might prejudice the outcome of the referendum.

It is not just the numbers; there is also an associated cost. I refer to the document called "The best of both worlds". There is a problem with the title of that document. I believe in one world, and the people who are defending our position in the European Union seem to be under the illusion that there is more than one world. There is just one world, and we can be the masters of our own destiny in that world if we are released from being in the European Union.

Mr Hollobone: Maybe some members of the Government are living on a different planet.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend makes the point in his own inimitable way. Perhaps that should be the subject of a parliamentary question in due course.

The document entitled "The best of both worlds" refers in paragraph 2.103 to the costs of the migration coming in. It has been pretty difficult to get hold of this information, but it has at last been wrung out of the Government. The document states:

"On average, families with a recent EEA migrant claim almost £6,000 per year in tax credits".

If a million EU migrants have come in during the past four or five years, as we know from the latest figures, and over 40% of those are claiming tax credits, the cost of that is 400,000 multiplied by £6,000 per year. That is a lot of money, and that is just the cost of in-work benefits to non-UK citizens from the European Union. That creates pressure on our public services, such as health and schools. I saw in the *Evening Standard* last night how many people will not be able to get their children into the school of their choice in London in the coming year because of the increased population.

All the issues have a bearing on the question whether it is in our best interests to leave the European Union. Having done research such as I have, I am in no doubt that it would be in the best interests of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. The purpose of this Bill is to ensure that the Government put forward objective figures in relation to the issue, rather than figures that are based on prejudice.

11.22 am

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) who, as ever, has put his case persuasively. I did not need much persuasion, as it happens, but if I had, he would certainly have persuaded me of the case that he made.

I shall focus on a few aspects of the Bill. One part that needs stressing is the independence that the Bill asks for any cost-benefit analysis. My fear is that over

[Philip Davies]

the next few months we will hear the Government say—we may even hear it from the Minister today—that they will do a cost-benefit analysis of our membership of the European Union, and, as we have been calling for that, we should be placated by that assurance. But we are not asking just for the Government's cost-benefit analysis of our membership of the European Union. We already know the Government's view of that, and I have no confidence at all in the Government producing an objective cost-benefit analysis. They will resort to all kinds of dodgy figures, spin, presumptions and so on, and we will no doubt end up being told that the benefits of being in the EU are enormous and the costs are negligible, and vice versa were we to leave.

I have no doubt that that is what the Government would do. We have only just started the referendum campaign and already some rather strange arguments have started to develop. I will come on to some of those shortly. The key part of the Bill, which I hope the Minister will take away with him for when the Government pull their cost-benefit analysis out of the hat, relates to the appointment of the commission that carries out the analysis. The Bill calls for a balance between those members of the commission in favour of remaining and those in favour of leaving the EU, with an equal number on either side. The chairman should be broadly neutral, and no member should be or have been a Member of the European Parliament or an employee of the European Commission, whose pension would therefore be dependent on our membership of the European Union.

Those are not unreasonable proposals. Most people would say that that is a reasonable basis for carrying out a cost-benefit analysis. If the Minister thinks that saying that the Government intend to conduct a cost-benefit analysis will satisfy us, it will not. We want some guarantee of the independence of the people involved, and only at that point will I be satisfied.

I was intrigued by what my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch said about the questions that he has posed to Treasury Ministers, and not getting an answer to the question, but a different answer altogether. Funnily enough, I asked the Chancellor a question in the Chamber a while ago. I thought it was quite a patsy question. As far as I could see, I was giving him a great opportunity to sell the benefits. I asked him in June last year to outline what exactly we get from our £19 billion membership fee to the European Union. Here was a great opportunity for the Chancellor to stand at the Dispatch Box and reel off a huge number of benefits that we get for our £19 billion membership fee. I could not have asked a more helpful question.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that £19 billion is an inaccurate figure? It has recently been reported in the press that our membership of the EU costs up to £120 billion. The point of this debate is to try to find out exactly what our direct membership fees are to the EU and what benefits we get back from it.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is right. I have taken the figure from the Office for Budget Responsibility, which publishes the figures in the Treasury Red Book. It states that our gross contribution is around £19 billion

a year. The EU generously gives us back some of that money—a very small amount—as a rebate. That has been a diminishing amount since the Labour Government gave up much of our rebate for nothing in years gone by, but the gross figure that we hand over each year is £19 billion.

In answer to my question, the Chancellor said:

“I certainly commend my hon. Friend for his consistency. I remember that in his maiden speech he made the case for Britain leaving the European Union, and he will of course have his opportunity in the referendum. I would say that this is precisely the judgment that the British people and this Parliament have to make: what are the economic benefits of our European Union membership, such as the single market, and what would be the alternative? That will be part of the lively debate, and as I say, the Treasury will be fully involved in that debate.”—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 165.]

As far as I could see—people can make their own interpretation of the Chancellor's reply—he could not give one single example of what we got back for our £19 billion membership fee. He knows, presumably, as he is a canny kind of fellow, that he could not say that we get free trade for our £19 billion a year, because he presumably knows, just as the rest of us know, for the reasons set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, that given that we have a £62 billion trade deficit with the EU, we would be able to trade freely with the EU if we were to leave.

David Morris: Hypothetically, if we did come out of the EU, what would happen to the £62 billion trade deficit? Does my hon. Friend have any idea how we would be able to pay Europe back, or vice versa?

Philip Davies: I suspect that, in the short term, not a fat lot would happen to the £62 billion trade deficit with the EU, as we would pretty much carry on in the same way. We would keep trading with it, and it would keep trading with us. I tried to check that out. I asked the Prime Minister, after one of his European Council meetings, whether he had had any discussions with Angela Merkel that would indicate that, if we were to leave the EU, she would want her country to stop selling BMWs, Mercedes, Volkswagens and Audis free of tariff to the UK. The Prime Minister did not say anything at all about that, so I presumed that he had not heard anything. Given his determination that we should stay in the EU, I am sure that, if he had had any inkling at all that the Germans were not going to continue selling us their cars free of tariff, he would have been more than happy to put it on the public record. As people can see from his answer, it appears that he had had no such indication from the German Government that they would stop trading freely with us.

Sir Edward Leigh: The answer to my hon. Friend's question is simple: if we left the EU, we would not have to pay a £10 billion a year subscription just to have a £70 billion a year deficit.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At the end of the day, what this boils down to is people's confidence in their negotiating abilities. I used to work for Asda, and I fear that, if some of my hon. Friends had been our buyers and had used their negotiating skills, we would have gone bust. In effect, what many of my colleagues are saying—and what Labour Members

are saying—is that we have a £62 billion trade deficit, but we do not think that we can negotiate a free trade agreement without handing over a huge membership fee every single year. That is the easiest negotiation known to mankind. If they cannot negotiate that deal, what on earth can these people negotiate? If the Prime Minister were to claim that he could not negotiate a free trade deal with the EU based on that trade deficit every year—I am sure that he will not say that because he claims to be a good negotiator—he would not be fit to lead this country into those negotiations. That is what I would say to anybody who aspires to such a role.

Mr Hollobone: Is not my hon. Friend's point exactly right and enhanced by the fact that we already by definition meet 100% of the EU's requirements for a free trade deal because we are part of the single market? Once we are outside the European Union, it should be relatively straightforward, given that we are the fifth largest economy in the world, to come up with terms.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The point he makes is self-evident, and I am sure that it will be self-evident to the British public.

When we look at the terms of reference of our cost-benefit analysis, the areas that the Bill asks the Government to consider are the economy, trade, national security, further regulation, and sovereignty.

David Morris: What I want to clarify is this: if we are the fifth largest economy in the world, how much is that down to trading with Europe, and how much does that contribute to us being the fifth largest economy in the world?

Philip Davies: It is not a question of “if”—we are the fifth largest economy in the world. That is a matter not of hypothesis or aspiration, but of fact. We are the fifth largest economy in the world, and therefore, clearly, we are in a very good position to negotiate trade deals. I am not sure that there is any country in the world that would not want to have a trade deal with the fifth largest economy in the world.

Interestingly, the people who are so anxious for us to stay in make what they think is the killer point that 44% of our exports go to the European Union and that only a very tiny proportion goes to the emerging economies of the BRIC—Brazil, Russia, India and China—nations. We should not boast about that; we should be deeply concerned. The fact is that we have got ourselves shackled to a declining part of the world's economy. That is the problem for the remain campaigners. According to figures from the House of Commons Library, when we joined the European Union, the countries that make up the EU now account for a third of the world economy. By 2020, that will be 20%, by 2030 17% and by 2050 13%. We should bear in mind, too, that we are 4% of the world economy. If we were to leave the European Union we would take off the 4% that we represent, which would mean that the EU would be 9% of the world's economy. Some people think that it is great that so much of our trade is dependent on being shackled to such a group, but I think that is something that we should be deeply concerned about. It is a matter of great shame that we have such a low proportion of

trade with the growing parts of the world economy, which is why it is so important that we leave the European Union. We need to leave this declining market and start building up our trade with all the growing parts of the world economy. That is what we should be doing.

Mr Hollobone: The world's largest economies in order are: China, America, Japan, Germany and Britain. Were we to leave the European Union, there is every chance that we could overtake Germany and move into fourth place. We could negotiate on our own terms, with our seat back at the World Trade Organisation, friendly free trade agreements with growing economies such as China and India, and all those old Commonwealth countries that we effectively abandoned in 1972.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. We are always told that the EU is the biggest single market in the world. What is not said is that it would not be if we were to leave. It is only the biggest single market in the world largely because we are a member of it. If we were to leave it, it certainly would not be. Nobody ever mentions that particular point.

Interestingly, a briefing from the House of Commons Library said that if we were to leave the European Union, the UK would be the EU's single biggest export market—bigger than China, America and anywhere else in the world. Why on earth would the EU not want to do a free trade deal with its single biggest export market? Of course it would. Anybody who tries to suggest otherwise is either completely crackers or is deliberately misleading people. It is palpably clear that that would not be the case.

The case in terms of the economy and trade is very clear. Competitiveness is one of the key points. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch touched on that when he said that staying in the EU was a leap into the dark. Of course, it is just that. We pool our sovereignty in many areas because we sign lots of treaties, but when we sign treaties with other countries, that treaty agreement tends to stay the same; the nature of it does not change in any shape or form unless we agree to it. That is how treaties tend to work. But our membership of the European Union is based on a treaty that does not work like that. What happens is that, every so often, the European Commission, which is completely unelected and unaccountable to anybody, proposes new legislation. We think that it is completely ridiculous. In any other normal kind of treaty relationship, we would not be susceptible to it unless we agreed to it. With the EU, we are being asked to sign up to changes on a monthly basis based on qualified majority voting where we get outvoted in the Council of Ministers. If we vote to remain in the EU, we are not signing up to the status quo; the European Union does not do the status quo. The EU is always trying to introduce new regulations, new burdens on business, and new protectionist measures to protect its failing businesses, to protect French farmers and all the rest of it. Effectively, we are signing up to something about which we know little. We have no idea where it ends and what measures will be introduced as a result of it.

David Morris: As far as I am aware—I have been out to Brussels and done battle with the bureaucrats there—the problems are to do with not what Europe gives to us,

[David Morris]

but how ineffectively it is scrutinised when it comes here. A lot of the problems that we have are lost in translation. For example, there was a proposition to stop women wearing high heels in hairdressing salons, and that legislative measure spread to town halls, and perhaps even to shiny floors here in Parliament. When we drilled down into the detail, however, it was a mis-translation that eventually got the whole thing thrown out. Does my hon. Friend agree that more scrutiny should be given to European issues in Parliament and in Committees, and that more Committees should be set up should we vote to stay in the EU at the referendum?

Philip Davies: There is not much point in spending hours and hours scrutinising legislation that we have no ability to amend or change in any way. It does not matter how much time we spend scrutinising it; we are still susceptible to it, so I cannot see that there is a great deal of point in doing that. If my hon. Friend is right and a lot of the problems in this country are created by bad translations of European legislation, that is another good reason why we should leave the European Union, so that all our laws can be decided in this place and written in English so that we understand them. I am pleased that he has given us yet another reason—one I had not thought of—for leaving the European Union. His intervention is welcome.

Mr Hollobone: An extension of that argument is the imposition of VAT on key products in this country, and a lot of fuss has been made about the fact that we cannot cancel the 5% VAT on domestic fuel, which has a big impact on low-income households. Recently, a very big fuss was made about VAT on women's sanitary products. The British Parliament and Government are unable to remove VAT on those items without the consent of the European Union. If people want such situations to change, surely the message is clear: vote to leave on 23 June.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is right, and we have a ridiculous situation. We are supposed to be a proud nation, and in that debate on sanitary products, everybody in the House agreed that it was inappropriate for VAT be levied on them. If we were a properly sovereign nation outside the EU, that could be mended in a flash in the forthcoming Budget. In mid-March, the Chancellor could announce that VAT on sanitary products will be ended, and that would be the end of the situation. Instead we are left as a proud nation that resorts to a Treasury Minister saying, "I will commit to go and ask the EU if it will give us permission to do something. It will be hard. It might not want us to do this, so I cannot promise anything, but I will do my best and have a word." What a situation we are in when we in this country are unable to make such decisions for ourselves.

My constituency suffered terribly from the floods over Christmas, and one of the worst affected places was the Bradford rowing club, which has to spend tens of thousands of pounds repairing the damage. It has to pay VAT on those repairs. I wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and said that given the extenuating circumstances, it would be a decent gesture for him to waive VAT on the repairs caused by that flooding. What was the answer? That the Chancellor's hands are tied

and he does not have the ability to waive VAT because that matter is decided by the European Union. Therefore, 20% will be added to the bill of my rowing club for the repairs from the flooding, and we cannot make decisions on VAT ourselves because they are decided for us by the European Union. It is funny how we never hear that from the remain campaigners. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) will defend that situation.

David Morris: I will defend that because VAT is the sole domain of HMRC and not the Chancellor of the Exchequer—I know because I had a similar problem in my constituency. Perhaps my hon. Friend will consider the point about sanitary products. I agree that we should not be paying VAT on them, but because of our special relationship in Europe, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince)—sadly, he is not in his place today—found a way around that VAT going to Europe, so that it now goes to charities. Does he agree that that was a good move?

Philip Davies: That had nothing to do with a special status, and neither does it benefit the consumer who still has to pay VAT on the sanitary products that they buy. Where the money ends up is of no benefit to the consumer whatsoever; it just means that it does not benefit the Treasury directly.

Mr Hollobone: As I understand it, VAT is still paid on the sanitary products and it still goes to Brussels, but the Chancellor is paying the equivalent sum of money to charities. We are effectively paying twice as much as we would if we had sovereignty.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend makes his point well, as always, but we should not be in this situation. Such decisions should be taken in this House for the benefit of our constituents, but they are not.

We are signing up to a treaty, and the EU is saying to us, "You sign the treaty, and if we want to change things against your wishes, we have the freedom to do so through qualified majority voting." If I said to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, "Let's sign a deal on something, but by the way, I can change the terms at any time, and there is nothing you can do to stop me", I do not think you would sign up to it—nobody would sign up to such a deal, but that is in effect what we are being asked to sign up to in the EU referendum if we vote to remain.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend has not mentioned the part of the deal that states that we will now lose the little influence that we had in the past in relation to the deeper integration of the eurozone. For example, we will not be able to argue that Greece would be better off outside the eurozone, or have any influence on the consequences of a sclerotic eurozone being uncompetitive, and the result that that leads to of more people from the eurozone wanting to work in our country.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is right. I have already covered economic and trade matters and regulations, and I know that other people want to speak so I shall not go on for too long. National security and immigration are crucial issues that are mentioned in clause 5 of the Bill. National security is a key area, and the remain campaign seems to think that it is one of its trump

cards, and that we are more secure and safer from terrorist attacks within the European Union. I would love them to go and tell the people of Paris how much safer they were from terrorist attacks as a result of being in the European Union, but I suspect they would not get particularly far.

Last night in a debate at York University we hit a new low in the tactics of the remain campaign. I was making the point that we cannot stop people coming into the UK from the EU if they have a valid EU passport, and that that applied to everybody, whether law-abiding people or criminals. But would you believe what the remain campaign announced last night? Perhaps the Minister can confirm it. I am on the Justice Committee, but I was not aware of it. It emerged last night during the debate that, apparently, when an EU national comes to the UK, our robust border controls mean that we check who people are. Apparently, when passports are scanned—this was a new one on me—it flags up whether or not a person has criminal convictions in their home nation, which enables us to stop them entering the United Kingdom. If only that were the case. The most generous thing I can say about that claim is that it is an absolutely blatant lie, because no system exists across the European Union to scan passports, trigger a huge list of criminal convictions and enable us to stop people coming into the country. That claim is simply untrue—I cannot be any clearer than that. The Minister may want to confirm or deny that when he comments, but let us please have an honest debate about these things. That system does not exist.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Philip Davies: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will repeat that claim.

Mark Tami: I am not going to repeat it. However, the hon. Gentleman should make it clear that a lot of terrorism is actually home-grown. We should not suggest that this is just about people coming from outside—the UK faces a much bigger problem than that.

Philip Davies: I invite people to look at the transcript of what I said—I am not sure I did say that terrorism came only from other parts of the European Union and that it could not be home-grown. Of course it can be—it is both. We cannot stop British people from living in Britain, and I do not think that anybody has ever proposed that we should, but the fact that we have home-grown terrorists is surely no reason to let in people from other countries who may want to cause us harm.

If people think that this robust system is in place, perhaps they would like to explain why so many crimes in the UK each year are committed by EU nationals and why the UK prison population of EU nationals has gone through the roof since we had free movement of people. The reason why it has gone through the roof since we had free movement of people is that a lot of those people have taken advantage of that arrangement to come here to commit their crimes. That is the fact of the matter; it may be an inconvenient fact, but nobody can deny that that is what has happened.

Every quarter, the Ministry of Justice publishes the prison population figures broken down by nationality.

I invite anybody to look back over a few years at the figures for each nationality, because they will see a huge increase in the number of EU nationals in our prisons. That is because these people are coming to the UK under the free movement of people to commit crimes. As a result, we are creating lots of unnecessary victims of crime in the UK. People who want to remain in the EU should be honest about the fact that that is one of the downsides. They should not pretend that there is some miracle passport control system that stops these people coming into the UK, which, as I say, is a blatant lie.

David Morris: I wish there were a passport control system that could vet these people coming into the country, but does my hon. Friend not agree that the Prime Minister, in his renegotiations, has secured easier ways to deport these criminals and, may I add, to stop them coming into the country?

Philip Davies: No, I do not accept that at all. The Prime Minister has done absolutely nothing to stop these people coming into the UK—literally nothing. There is nothing in place to stop them; there are a few people on a watch list whom we can stop coming into the UK, but they would be on a watch list whether we were in the EU or outside it. We need to develop a watch list for people from around the world, because this is not an EU issue. We can already stop those people coming to the UK, and we would always be able to stop them coming to the UK, if they are on a terrorist watch list. I am talking about the thousands and thousands of criminals who are unknown to the British authorities, who come through every week on an EU passport to commit their crimes. When I was out with West Yorkshire police a few years ago—this might seem fanciful, and it seemed fanciful to me when I first heard it—they told me they had a problem with people getting a short-haul flight from other EU countries to Leeds Bradford airport, going out into Leeds city centre and committing high-value crimes and robberies, and then being back on the plane out to their country of origin before the police have even finished investigating the crime. I had not even thought that that type of thing could happen, but West Yorkshire police told me that that was a serious concern for them.

Of course, it is easy for people do these things while we are in the EU—there is nothing to prevent them from coming here. They are known to their own national law enforcement agencies, so they are at risk of being apprehended in their own countries. It is much easier for them to commit crimes in the UK, where they are not known to anybody—they can come in and go out in a flash. We have to be aware that these are problems.

Sir Edward Leigh: To be absolutely fair—we should be fair, and that is why we need an independent audit—our own crooks can presumably do the same in those other countries?

Philip Davies: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The problem is that there are much richer pickings in the UK than in some of the countries these people come from.

The other aspect of this is that, even if these people run the risk of being caught, they would, I suspect, much prefer to spend their time in a British prison than

[Philip Davies]

in a prison in their home nation. So this is a win-win, given their chances of being caught and what happens when they are caught. I am afraid that that does not quite work the same in reverse.

Mr Chope: When I visited Denmark with a Select Committee in the last Parliament, we heard directly from the Danish about the problem they have with eastern Europeans coming into Denmark and committing crimes. If those people are convicted of those crimes, they will earn more in prison than they would have been able to earn in their home country, so there is no deterrent.

Philip Davies: That is another interesting point I had not factored in. I will bow to my hon. Friend's superior knowledge. I have visited prisons in Denmark, and that is not something I was aware of, so I am grateful to him for putting that point on the record.

Suggesting that our national security is enhanced by being in the EU, when we let thousands of EU criminals in every year, is fanciful in the extreme. Being susceptible to crime from such individuals is doing nothing at all for the security of my constituents.

Mr Chope: May I give my hon. Friend an example of where our security is much worse as a result of being in the European Union? People from outside who come into the European Union at the moment often do not give their fingerprints, as they should. I suggested that we take DNA samples from people coming from outside, but I was told that that is unlawful under the Eurodac regulations, so we cannot take that precaution.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. I very much agree that people wanting to come and live in the EU should have to give their fingerprints and DNA, so that if they do commit a crime, it is easy to track them down, convict them and deport them. As he says, however, that is not what happens. The best the Government have come up with so far is that if somebody comes into the UK and commits a crime, the police can go through some burdensome procedure of asking other EU countries whether they have a fingerprint match for a crime that has been committed there. If those countries ever manage to get back to us, which they probably do not half the time, Lord knows what may happen on the back of that. However, that is not the same as stopping people who are criminals coming into the UK.

David Morris: I am listening intently to my hon. Friend's eloquent arguments about letting people into the country. Will he clarify whether these are people coming into the EU from nations outside the EU? As I understand it, the security systems between the EU bloc and Great Britain are seamless and can interface with, say, the databases of the French and the German authorities, but where people are coming into the EU, we have to get the co-operation of the country they are coming from. If we came out of the EU, would we have to do the same procedure in reverse?

Philip Davies: I am not entirely sure what my hon. Friend is driving at. At the moment, if somebody comes to the UK from outside the EU, we do not have to let

them in, whereas if they are an EU citizen, we pretty much do have to let them in. It does not matter how suspicious we are of their motives—that is irrelevant. I want the more robust immigration policy that we are allowed for non-EU nationals to apply to EU nationals too. Nobody is saying that we do not want anybody to come into the UK from the EU, but I would rather we had some choice as to who we allow in. It is a great privilege to come into the UK. We should make sure that it is indeed a great privilege and that we are not just letting any old person into the country, which is the situation at the moment.

On sovereignty, it cannot be right that people making so many of our laws are unelected and completely unaccountable to anybody. The remain campaigners say, "Well, of course we have a European Parliament to scrutinise all these laws." First, Members of the European Parliament who represent the UK are a tiny proportion of the total, so even if every single UK MEP voted against something, there is no guarantee that it would make any difference whatsoever. Secondly, if, in this country, the Government were permanently in office and the only people elected were the MPs scrutinising the decisions they were making, that would be a bizarre situation and there would be uproar. Yet the justification for having the European Commission, unelected and unaccountable, initiating all the legislation, which is the role of Governments in most national Parliaments, is that MEPs are elected. It is unbelievable that anybody can justify that kind of democratic situation. When we sign treaties with other countries, that is the end of it—the position does not get changed every five minutes by qualified majority voting, with things being imposed on us against our wishes. That is not how treaties work, but it is how our relationship with the European Union works.

We are told that we have a lot of influence in the EU. That argument was completely demolished by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) in his contribution to the Prime Minister's statement on Monday. He pointed out that a freedom of information request showed that over the past two decades there had been a definitive vote in the European Council 72 times and that we had been outvoted 72 times. So on Monday the idea that we are wielding this huge influence in the European Union was clearly demolished. It was shown to be a complete load of old codswallop. It is an illusion of influence. We do not have any influence; we are having discussions around a table and being outvoted at every single turn, as Ministers who attend these things know to their cost.

We are told that the US wants us to stay in the EU and that that is a reason why we should. I do not doubt that it is in the United States' best interests that we stay in the European Union, because we add a bit of common sense to it and it does not want the French, who are very anti-American, having even more power. If it is so important for the Americans that we stay in the European Union, perhaps they will pay our £18 billion membership fee each year for us. I look forward to President Obama making that offer when he comes to campaign in the referendum. I am sure that amount would be a drop in the ocean for the United States.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Let me bring to my hon. Friend's attention the fact that the person representing the United States Government

who has called for us to stay is John Kerry, a former senator, who in the 1980s showed himself to be no friend of the United Kingdom but a sympathiser with the IRA when he held up a treaty allowing for the deportation of IRA activists from the United States to the United Kingdom, saying that the justice system in Northern Ireland did not work effectively. He is no friend of Britain and has been in the past a terrorist sympathiser.

Philip Davies: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that to the House's attention. With friends like that in the United States, I suspect we do not need many enemies.

I am prepared to accept that it may be in the best interests of the United States that we stay in the European Union. I am not going to question that for one minute, and I am sure that if I was an American I would probably be arguing the same. However, we should be making decisions that are in the best interests of the United Kingdom, not of the United States, which is big enough and bad enough to look after its own interests.

I look forward to a truly independent cost-benefit analysis that takes into account the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch has made and some of the points that I have made. Any cost-benefit analysis that ignores those points that have been raised today is not worth the paper it is written on. I say to the Minister that, if anybody in the Government is working on some bogus cost-benefit analysis that they think is going to work in hoodwinking the British public, I hope he will insist that it takes into account the points we have raised today.

Crucially, the membership of any committee that puts together a cost-benefit analysis must correspond to that insisted upon by this Bill, which calls for a balance of people who are in favour of and people who are against the UK's membership, a neutral chairman, and for none of them to be a current or past Member of the European Parliament or the European Commission. Only if those criteria are met will we have a truly independent and worthwhile cost-benefit analysis. However, given the Government's reluctance over many years to publish such a cost-benefit analysis, I am afraid that any decision to rush one through now will be treated with a great deal of cynicism and scepticism, not just by me, but by many people across the House and, more importantly, by the British public.

12.5 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) for promoting the Bill. This is an interesting debate. I am not sure that anybody could rationally oppose the idea of an independent cost-benefit analysis run by independent people. If somebody, including the Minister, wishes to intervene on me and deny the rational basis of that argument, I would be interested to hear what they had to say.

We had a debate about Europe yesterday. I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, because this is the third time this week I have wearied the House with my views: I spoke yesterday, I questioned the Prime Minister on Monday and I am also speaking today. However, this is such an important issue and, frankly, it is our job to be

here, even on a Friday morning, to hold the Government to account. I make no apology for that.

You were present for some of yesterday's debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I recommend that you read it in its entirety in *Hansard*, because some very interesting arguments were made. I knew that my hon. Friend was going to promote this Bill today, so I asked the Foreign Secretary directly why we could not have an independent cost-benefit analysis of our membership of the EU so that we could decide whether we should stay. He said that that would not be possible because there were so many uncertainties involved in what leaving the EU would amount to. That is an interesting point of view, but it has not stopped many groups—I will refer to them in a moment—feeling that it is possible to have, or at least possible to make a decent fist of having, an independent analysis of what the decision either to remain in or to leave the EU might mean.

It is extraordinary that, while the Government tell us, quite rightly, that this is the most important decision we will take in our lifetime, constituents are already writing to me, asking, "Please can we have all the arguments laid out?" Most people in this House know their views, but millions of people in the country want an informed debate and would welcome some independent analysis of what this most important decision would mean. Apparently, unless there is going to be an announcement today—I doubt that that is going to happen—we are not going to have an independent analysis.

The question we need to direct to the Minister, therefore, is whether the Government are going to produce their own analysis. He and the Prime Minister are completely honourable people—they would never, ever wish to deceive the British public—but they are arguing for a certain point of view. Therefore, civil servants produce documents that argue a certain case. As the Minister has indicated, the Government's viewpoint is absolutely clear: under its rules, the civil service works according to Government policy. Government policy is that we remain in the EU, so civil servants will defend that policy and produce briefing papers, analysis and all the rest in terms of that policy. Of course, civil servants would not consciously lie or deceive in any way, but we want to know from the Minister exactly what analysis the Government intend to produce over the next four months, what form it will take and what will be the nature of its independence.

The question that I put to the Foreign Secretary was this. I said that during the years when we were in opposition, we accused Gordon Brown, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, of making assumptions before the Budget that were influenced—let us put it as gently as we can—by the direction in which he wanted to go. That is why we created the Office for Budget Responsibility, which is one of our foremost achievements, apparently. I agree that it is an achievement. The assumptions that lie behind the Budget are now in the hands of a genuinely independent body.

When I was Chair of the Public Accounts Committee during those years of Labour Government, the moment the Chancellor stood up and started his Budget speech, a messenger would deliver to me on the Back Benches a fat envelope containing all the assumptions on which the Budget was based. The trouble was that they were assumptions written by civil servants who were working towards Government policy—the policy of the then

[Sir Edward Leigh]

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. That is why we created the Office for Budget Responsibility. The question that I put to the Foreign Secretary, which he did not answer and which I repeat to the Minister, is: if this is the most important decision that we are going to make, why can we not depute the OBR to produce an analysis?

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch has suggested a different format. Because this is a private Member's Bill, it is, as we know, for all sorts of reasons unlikely to become law, but he has at least raised the question. It is now incumbent on the Minister to answer my hon. Friend. I am sorry, but I think that my hon. Friend's creation is unwieldy, calling as it does for us to find an equal number of people who are in favour of leaving and of remaining. There may be perfectly justifiable arguments for that, but the Government already have independent bodies, such as the OBR and the National Audit Office, which could do the work. The NAO, which is well respected, would perhaps not be expert at dealing with issues of sovereignty, but it could certainly deal with other issues mentioned by my hon. Friend such as "burden of regulation",

"economy (including consideration of public expenditure and receipts"

and "competitiveness and ability". The Government already have in their hand a body or bodies that would be capable of producing such an analysis.

It is deeply worrying that Ministers who have decided to campaign to leave the EU are denied any civil service briefing on the matter. They are immediately thrown into purdah this week, and yet Ministers who are campaigning to remain in the EU have the full benefit of the civil service, which can apparently for weeks churn out propaganda. I do not use that word in a derogatory sense; propaganda simply means putting one's point of view forward. The situation seems to me to be fundamentally unfair. Surely, the British way of doing things, particularly in referendums, is that we are fair.

We had a vote on purdah in the autumn, and my hon. Friend and I got into a bit of trouble for voting in favour of it, but we thought it was important. We thought that once the referendum campaign started, the Government should not be able to use its machine—its civil service—to argue for a point of view, because that does not happen in a general election. Perhaps we will learn from the Minister today when that purdah will actually start. Obviously, the Government are not in purdah at the moment. Civil servants are fully briefing, and the whole machine is churning out papers all the time.

All this is important because the referendum is supposed to bring a degree of closure to this subject, is it not? To do so, it must be seen to be absolutely fair. It is very important that both sides of the arguments are properly aired. Speaking for myself, if the British people decide by 55% to 45%, or whatever the figures are, to remain in the EU—after all the arguments have been properly put, and the no and yes campaigns have spent broadly the same amount of money—I will just have to accept that point of view.

However, this is a very complex area and the whole nature of the Government's case is that leaving is all too risky. I made this point yesterday, but it is an important

one: we should bear in mind that the Government are not approaching the referendum campaign with the sense of a great visionary movement in favour of the EU. The Prime Minister is saying, "Look, I am as great a Eurosceptic as you are, but I'm sorry, it's all too risky." When he says it is all too risky, he presumably means the costs of leaving in terms of national security, which is mentioned in the Bill, and particularly the very detailed debate on our competitiveness, the decisions of European Council meetings and the rest of it.

I want to emphasise that I see no rational argument against the Government commissioning a genuinely independent cost-benefit analysis. As I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), our membership of the EU means paying a subscription of £10 billion a year in order to have a £70 billion a year deficit with the EU. Normally, when someone pays a subscription to a club, they do so to have a benefit: they are prepared to pay the cost because they get something back. Frankly, given that there is a deficit of £70 billion—I agree that it exists now and will almost certainly remain if we leave the EU, because of the strength of German engineering products or French food and drinks products and all the other reasons—that is quite a big subscription to pay for it.

We want an independent study. To go back to yesterday's debate, the Minister for Europe said in his summing up, "I've sat through this debate, and those who want to leave the EU have not given any sense of their vision." That is quite true, and it is incumbent on us—it could be done as part of such a study—to give the people and the House some sense of where we want to take the nation if we leave the EU. I accept that argument—the Minister for Europe kindly added that he said that "with the exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough"—and I tried to give an alternative vision yesterday.

Such alternative visions need to be tested. I just have a point of view—I believe it is reasonable, but other people may say it is a prejudice—but there is no point my standing up in the House of Commons and articulating my alternative vision if there is no independent analysis of it. That is surely what the British people want and demand. I am asking them on 23 June to take the risk of leaving, and they therefore have the right to come back to me to ask such questions.

If we left the EU, I believe it would be quite exciting—I represent a rural area—to reclaim control of the common agricultural policy. In that context, I recommend the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, to the Oxford farming conference. He made a detailed analysis of what leaving the EU would mean for farming policy. He made the point that although food and agriculture is a huge and massively important industry—it employs more than 3.5 million people and accounts for £85 billion of GNP—agriculture policy is entirely determined by the EU. On that, this House has very little, or virtually no, independence from the EU. He was putting forward his view and arguing that alternative subsidy arrangements could be made. For instance, he argued that we should broadly spend on subsidies what we are spending now, but create a different subsidy system.

He argued that we could divert more agricultural subsidies away from lowland farming to hill farmers in difficult farming environments.

I have been trying to wrestle with an understanding of farming policy for the 30 years I have been in this place. It is immensely complex, but again we have had virtually no detailed debate or analysis to inform our farmers on how they should vote. This is desperately important to them. There are hundreds of farmers in my constituency and tens of thousands of farmers throughout the country who want an answer, because they, for better or for worse, depend on the subsidy system.

Oliver Colvile: Does my hon. Friend recognise that it is not only the farming industry but the fishing industry that needs to be taken into account?

Sir Edward Leigh: I will come to the fishing industry in a moment.

Farmers are genuinely worried. I suppose the Government have got quite an easy task. They can just say, "Don't worry. You don't like the present system. You've been complaining for years that it is regulatory and burdensome, and that for years you were paid by the EU to rip out hedges and now you're paid to put them back. You have to spend all your time not out on the land but sitting in your office in your farmhouse dealing with farming subsidies. It's regulatory, burdensome, late and difficult but," I suppose the Government would argue, "at least you are supported." There is an implication on the part of the Government that if we were to leave the EU, the subsidies would vanish.

The Vote Leave campaign is absolutely explicit about that. I am absolutely explicit about it and I give this pledge. One should be quite careful what one says on the Floor of the House of Commons, but if we leave the EU the level of subsidy to the farming community will remain exactly what it is now. That is a pledge. I cannot give a pledge on behalf of the Government, but I cannot believe that anybody would resile from that. We have no idea. We have no independent analysis. We have had no real attempt, apart from by a few right hon. and hon. Friends, at detailing how the subsidies would change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) mentioned fishing, which is even more important. I referred to this subject yesterday. I think I was the only one to mention it. This was the great debate we had on Europe this week with the Foreign Secretary and the shadow Foreign Secretary: we were limited to very short speeches and I had time to say perhaps one sentence about fishing. There was no detailed analysis yesterday of what leaving the EU would mean for our fishing industry, yet it is of absolutely massive and crucial importance.

People forget that in the final days of the negotiations conducted by Mr Heath, way back in 1971, he was worried that the talks were stumbling. In the final days, he handed control of our fishing industry to the European Commission with disastrous results for the port of Grimsby, which is close to my constituency, and for our entire fishing industry. I would argue that if we left the EU, it would be extraordinarily exciting to reclaim control of our fishing fleets and fishing industry, given that we are an island and that we sit surrounded by some of the most productive fishing grounds in the

world. Again, there has been virtually no intelligent, thorough and informed debate of how we could manufacture or create an alternative fishing policy.

Oliver Colvile: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Leigh: Of course. I give way to somebody with far greater expertise in this area than me.

Oliver Colvile: The Plymouth marine laboratories were set up—I think in 1870—and they analyse whether we are overfishing our seas. If my hon. Friend wants, he could come and talk to them, but most certainly he might want to give them a ring.

Sir Edward Leigh: I would be delighted to visit my hon. Friend's constituency. Perhaps I could sail there in my boat from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, where it is moored. But obviously we are deeply serious about this, because the last 30 years have been a traumatic experience for our fishermen. It is a matter of immense importance. Again, we need an independent audit.

Mr Chope: Bearing in mind what my hon. Friend said about Ministers, is there not an issue with the fact that the fishing Minister, who has all this expertise and is keen that we should leave the EU, will not have the support of his civil servants in doing what needs to be done to ensure a strong and independent UK fishing industry after we leave?

Sir Edward Leigh: Exactly. It is extraordinary, given that we have this great industry and are a proud island race, and that much of our past and present is tied up in our fishing fleets, that the fishing Minister has already been put in purdah by his own civil servants and cannot talk about this subject at all. It beggars belief.

Apparently, the Government are not going to do any independent analysis over the next four months of what leaving the EU would mean for fishing. Presumably, at some stage or another, a Minister will make a claim—perhaps a fairly wild claim—and there will be no comeback, because the fishing Minister has been put in the corner, like a naughty boy with a dunce's hat on his head, and told to keep silent. It is amazing. This is the most important decision we are going to make—yet silence.

In trying to answer the Minister for Europe, who asked, "Why don't the leave people give an alternative vision?", I have talked a bit about fishing and agriculture, but what about trade? I have quoted Winston Peters, a former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary of New Zealand—no slouch—who has talked in public about leaving behind the "betrayal" of 1973. Yes, we did betray them. We betrayed our friends in New Zealand and Australia, who, in two world wars, had come to our aid. He says there is the exciting prospect of recreating free trade between Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. It is an exciting prospect. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley made a good point about the declining proportion of world trade taken by the sclerotic, over-regulated and overtaxed EU. There is another world out there—the world of the burgeoning growth of China and India.

I will go into more detail about the Government's case in a moment, but I would be quite happy for them to say, "This is all just pie in the sky—a romantic

[Sir Edward Leigh]

illusion—and it's not going to happen. You wouldn't have any influence on the world trade body, because you'd just be one voice out of 130." Well, we have very little voice at the moment, because we are one vote out of 28—at least we would be there on our own—but I accept that the Government can make these arguments. Given the importance of this issue, however, surely we want at least some independent analysis, so that the people, before they cast their votes, know what the realistic prospects are of a United Kingdom outside the EU being able to negotiate good trade deals with the rest of the world. But we have nothing.

That was my introduction, Madam Deputy Speaker. I now want to go into more detail about the history of this independent audit and analysis. People now argue—there is some lazy thinking on this—that way back in 1957 when the treaty of Rome was being signed, we were casual in our decision not to join it. A sort of myth has been created, particularly by my personal friend, Michael Heseltine, now Lord Heseltine, and others that this was an enormous wasted opportunity. Actually, people in government at the time were attempting a reasonable audit and analysis of what joining the treaty of Rome would mean. This debate has therefore been going on for a long time.

One cause of worry in 1957 was article 3 of the European Community treaty, which would

"eliminate...customs duties and quantitative restrictions on imports and exports"

between member states, establish a common tariff and "common commercial policy" and

"abolish obstacles to freedom of movement for persons, services and capital".

When we were having these debates in 1957, the view taken by the then Conservative Government was that that was a risk too great and particularly, showing the importance of objective analysis, too great a risk to the Commonwealth.

My personal view is that that was a right conclusion. Unfortunately, during the 1950s and '60s, there was a lack of confidence in our future as an independent nation. We should bear it in mind that we were dealing with a generation scarred by the second world war—I accept all the arguments about that. The hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass), who is going to reply to this debate on behalf of the Labour party, spoke most movingly yesterday about the scars of two world wars, and I can understand how that was an influence on people at the time. As I said, there was a lack of confidence, not just about peace in Europe, but about our own nature and the resilience of our manufacturing and service industries. That led directly to Harold Macmillan's failed bid to join the then European Economic Community.

As we know, of course, we eventually joined the European Economic Community. What then happened after we joined it? We were told at the time that it was going to be primarily a trading mechanism. The British people were never really made to understand and appreciate that under articles 2 and 3, it was much more than that. This was effectively the end of the sovereignty of this House. It was completely different from any other treaty that we had ever signed. Those arguments were made by

Tony Benn, Michael Foot and Enoch Powell at the time. To its credit, Labour tested this in the referendum, and the British people decided to join.

Let me move on to the treaty of Nice. Although there had been a reasonably detailed debate, as I mentioned, in the mid-1950s about the benefits or otherwise of joining, this is where I believe the debates got rather weaker and there was less and less independent cost-benefit analysis of whether we should take this ever closer union further.

Article 3 of the treaty of Nice created an explicit common policy in fisheries, when it had previously been included under agriculture. An environmental policy was also created. Under the guise of strengthening competitive industry through the promotion of research and technological development, the EU acquired competence. The EU was authorised to establish and develop trans-European networks. I was here and I may be wrong, but although I certainly know that no independent analysis was done, I am not aware how much analysis of any kind was done on the costs and benefits of these very important matters that furthered the integration of Europe and our involvement in it. The treaty of Lisbon completed the process by making all remaining pillar three matters subject to EU justice-making procedure.

There was a steady increase in the area of EC and EU activity, and thus a steady increase in the number of pieces of legislation until the 1990s. Until we set up the Scrutiny Committee—which is now under the distinguished chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash)—there was very little analysis of the vast plethora of legislation that was pouring out.

In a paper published by the Robert Schuman Centre, Professor Carol Harlow, of the London School of Economics, noted:

"On the regulatory side, an average of 25 directives and 600 regulations per annum in the 1970s rose to 80 directives and 1.5 thousand regulations by the early 1990s".

In a study of the evolution of European integration, EU academics Wolfgang Wessels and Andreas Maurer observed that the increase in legislation had been accompanied by an increase in the EU's institutional structures and sub-structures. While all that was proceeding apace, there was virtually no debate in the House of Commons or, I suspect, within the Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and I were Ministers at the end of the Thatcher Government and in the Major Government. We remember going to the Council of Ministers, and we remember, as we sat there all night, a vast tide of more and more pieces of legislation which was subjected to very little, if any, independent analysis. Output peaked in 1986 with the single market legislative programme. It fell slightly after that, but it continues apace. Meanwhile, apart from the analysis conducted by the Scrutiny Committee, very little detailed analysis of what the directives involved mean for our country is available to Members of Parliament—if, indeed, they are interested, given the complexity of many of those directives.

David Morris: The figures that my hon. Friend is citing are truly frightening. Does he agree that there should be more Scrutiny Committees, and perhaps even a larger Scrutiny Committee whose members could operate a shift system when European regulation comes our way?

Sir Edward Leigh: I agree with that entirely. If we were to remain in the EU, we would need—and this would require the sort of analysis that would arise from a measure such as this Bill—to create much more impressive, comprehensive structures in order to deal with the continuing tide of legislation. People who want to remain in the EU assume that it is a static organisation. We apparently have an opt-out from ever closer union, but the European Court of Justice does not refer to ever closer union because it does not need to. If we remain in the EU, this wave of legislation will go on and on and on.

Rulings by the European Court of Justice have also given rise to a number of amendments to United Kingdom laws. One of the most significant cases in this regard was the *Factortame* case, which concerned the UK's obligation under EC law, and the terms of the 1985 Act of Accession whereby Spain joined the European Community, to allow Spanish fishermen to fish in UK waters within the prescribed EC quotas.

We need much more analysis, much more control, and a much more intelligent debate about what is going on, because most people in the House of Commons are blind to it. Naturally, as Members of Parliament, we are all much more interested in the great debates about assisted dying, gay marriage or hunting, or even about whether to stay in the EU or leave it, or whether to bomb Syria. We are much more concerned about those issues than about the detailed nitty-gritty of what is going on under our noses. However, it does not stop. It does not rest. The machine keeps grinding on, with very little control from Ministers and virtually no control from the House of Commons.

Let me now deal with the cost of EU membership.

Mr Chope: Before my hon. Friend does that, may I ask whether he recalls—this is an example of what he has just been talking about—that in October 2000, the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), who is now the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, assured the world that Europe's new charter of fundamental rights would have no greater legal standing before EU judges than a copy of the *Beano* or *The Sun*?

Sir Edward Leigh: That sort of casual statement is quite worrying, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for telling us about it.

I was about to deal with the cost of EU membership. The following information is taken from various papers that I have been studying. The cost is set to be £3.1 billion higher over the next five years than forecast before the 2015 general election. This is not a static process, therefore. That change is due to a reassessment of the size of Britain's economy relative to the rest of the EU, thus penalising the UK for its economic success. The bigger and more successful we get, the greater a magnet for migrants we become and the bigger the sub we have to pay, despite the fact that the deficit carries on much the same as it always has done.

Philip Davies: On that point, is it not ironic that the Prime Minister trumpets the fact that he has managed to get a cut in the EU budget but did not mention that as a part of that cut the UK's contribution to the EU budget went up, not down?

Sir Edward Leigh: I am astonished that in this great negotiating triumph no attempt has been made to address the issue of the rebate, and I will give a few details on that in a moment. This was considered to be one of the most important issues—such as when Mrs Thatcher secured the reduction—but no attempt has been made to deal with it.

For 2016 the UK will pay £9.5 billion. It was only expected to pay £8.2 billion. Everybody casually rolls off the figure of £9 billion now as if we always thought it would be £9 billion, but it was not always going to be £9 billion; it was going to be £8.2 billion. It has suddenly gone up and nobody in the Government or elsewhere complains about that to our partners. I remember that when my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and I were Ministers everybody talked about our “European partners”. This Government seem to have dropped that; they have dropped all the visionary case for Europe in terms of partnership and so forth. They all claim they are great Eurosceptics, but they do not tell us the casual little fact that we were expected to pay £8.2 billion and that has now gone up to £9.5 billion. We are now estimated to pay just under £250 million per week for EU membership.

Civitas has debunked the Government claim that the EU makes each household better off by £3,300 per year. The Government can argue against Civitas and have an analysis of its case, but they do make that claim. It would be nice to have some analysis of where they get those figures from, but we have not been given that.

According to Open Europe, the top five costliest EU regulations enforced in the UK are: the UK renewable energy strategy, with a recurring cost of £4.7 billion a year; the capital requirements directive IV package, with a recurring cost of £4.6 billion a year; the working time directive, with a recurring cost of £4.2 billion a year. I appreciate that one of the cases made by the Labour party is that it rather likes the working time directive. That is a perfectly logical, good case to make, and I have no argument with them making it, but I would like to know—perhaps the Labour party, the Government and the people would like to know—whether this figure of a recurring cost of £4.2 billion a year is right.

The next cost in the list is the EU climate and energy package, with a recurring cost of £3.4 billion a year. I am quoting Open Europe, which may be wrong, but the Minister can debunk these arguments if he wishes. Then there is the temporary agency workers directive, with a recurring cost of £2.1 billion a year. These are not insignificant sums—£4.7 billion, £4.6 billion, £4.2 billion, £3.4 billion, £2.1 billion—but how much detailed analysis are the British people being given about any of this?

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Is it not also ironic that the Labour party seems to be so enthusiastic for our membership of the EU, yet it comes to the House every month and asks that the Government do more to help the steel industry and the coal industry when it is the policies of the EU that are doing most to obliterate the steel and coal industries in the UK?

Sir Edward Leigh: I have mentioned Grimsby and fishing, but my constituency also abuts Scunthorpe. What about these poor people there? They are also going to be allowed to vote on 23 June, and are being encouraged to do so. They would rather like to know

[Sir Edward Leigh]

the detailed costs of what the EU means for their jobs and what the possible alternatives are. This is serious stuff for them—it is not just a debate in the House of Commons; it is about their whole way of life and their town.

Mr Chope: Does my hon. Friend share my view that if we had been independent, we would have been able to introduce our own anti-dumping measures against cheap Chinese steel imports and to do so within six weeks, whereas this has taken the EU years?

Sir Edward Leigh: It beggars belief that whole towns can be suffering a possible wipeout and yet we are apparently putty in the hands in the Chinese. We should have stopped this on day one, as it is so serious—this is steel we are talking about.

Mark Tami: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that in truth this is about the failure of this Government, who are more interested in cosying up to the Chinese than protecting the steel industry in this country?

Sir Edward Leigh: We are impotent; it is not a question of cosying up to the Chinese, as we have no control over this. Whether we like it or not, China will be the greatest, biggest and most important economy in the world within the next 10 or 20 years. Whatever the Minister's views, the fact that we are part of the EU means that he could do nothing to defend Scunthorpe. I accept that the Government may argue that we get other advantages, perhaps in steel, but let us have an analysis of what it all means.

Open Europe is not some sort of purely ideological campaigning group; it produces fine studies, some of the most voluminous available, and it attempts in a reasonably intellectual way to work out what staying in and leaving the EU involves. Open Europe says that according to the UK Government impact assessments, "these regulations also provide a total benefit of £58.6bn a year." Open Europe is trying to be fair. It goes on to say:

"However, £46bn of this benefit stems from just three items, which are vastly over-stated. For example, the stated benefit of the EU's climate targets (£20.8bn) was dependent on a global deal to reduce carbon emissions that was never struck... Open Europe estimates that up to 95% of the benefits envisaged in the impact assessment have failed to materialise."

Where is the Government's response to that?

Open Europe continued by saying:

"Taking the regulations individually, the impact assessments show that Ministers signed off at least 26 of the top 100 EU-derived regulations, despite the IAs explicitly stating that the costs outweigh the estimated benefits. These regulations include the UK Temporary Agency Workers Directive and the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive.

A further 31 of the costliest EU-derived regulations have not been quantified. Between the over-stated benefits, the regulations that come with a net cost and the ones with unquantified benefits, it remains unclear how many of these EU-derived rules actually come with a net benefit in reality, showing that there is plenty of scope to cut regulatory cost to business and the public sector."

I would echo that. I may be wrong and if the Government want to argue these points in detail, I, for one, would be delighted.

Open Europe went on to say:

"Although the cost of EU regulation too high in proportion to the benefits it generates, it is important to note that these rules

can bring benefits including by facilitating trade across the single market, for example in the case of financial services".

That is an argument in favour. I fully accept that and Open Europe accepts it, but we need a genuine impact assessment of the costs and benefits of all these regulations. Where does this leave us in the total picture? My view is—[*Interruption.*] I would be grateful if the Whip would not speak too loudly while I am speaking. She is not supposed to be heard, unlike me. She has the real power; I can just speak.

My contention is that people are worrying too much about this decision in terms of the impact on the economy. Again, there have been many studies on this, but I do not believe that the impact on the economy of whether we stay or leave will be as dramatic as has been made out. That is "Project Fear"—that we are all going to lose our jobs and so on. According to Open Europe,

"In a worst case scenario, where the UK fails to strike a trade deal with the rest of the EU"—

thereby having to fall back on the World Trade Organisation rules—

"and does not pursue a free trade agenda"—

fairly unlikely, I would have thought, but this is the worst case scenario—

"Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be 2.2% lower than if the UK had remained inside the EU."

So 2.2% lower, which is quite significant, but I am not sure that we would all suddenly lose our jobs.

David Morris: The figure of 2.2% is near enough as much as the economy is expected to grow in the next 12 months. I am certain that if we leave the EU in the next few months, especially with an oil crisis on our doorstep, we could face financial catastrophe. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Sir Edward Leigh: This is the worst case scenario and I am being completely fair in putting it. I think it is unlikely.

Philip Davies: Will my hon. Friend give way briefly?

Sir Edward Leigh: Does not my hon. Friend want me to go on with the best case scenario? Then I will give way to him.

According to Open Europe,

"In a best case scenario, where the UK strikes a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the EU, pursues very ambitious deregulation of its economy and opens up almost fully to trade with the rest of the world, UK GDP would be 1.6% higher than if it had stayed within the EU.

However, these are outliers. The more realistic range is between a 0.8% permanent loss to GDP in 2030 – where the UK strikes a comprehensive trade deal with the EU but does nothing else; and a 0.6% permanent gain in GDP in 2030 – where it pursues free trade with the rest of the world and deregulation, in addition to an EU FTA."

These arguments about disaster and millions of jobs being lost are, I think, overstated, but I may be wrong. I keep making this point: the Government have vast resources, such as the National Audit Office and the Office for Budget Responsibility. We would like to know before we cast our vote.

Philip Davies: The Treasury now acknowledges that 3 million jobs depend on trading with the EU, not on being a member of the EU. If that is the case—I am sure there is a lot of truth in it—given our substantial

trade deficit with the European Union, does that not mean, therefore, that about 5 million jobs in the EU are dependent on its trade with the UK?

Sir Edward Leigh: Yes, that is the point that was made time and again during the debate yesterday. I am not sure the Government have entirely answered it to my satisfaction.

The Government seem to argue that were we to vote to leave the EU, that would be such a catastrophic snub to our EU partners that there would be a degree of vengeance. I think that is a childlike view of how policy is created in Paris and Berlin. Many people in France—I take a bit of an interest in this—have argued for many years that it would not be an absurd state of affairs for Britain to leave the EU, for all sorts of reasons. However, the Government argue that a dramatic vengeance game would be initiated.

By the way, if our European partners acted in that way, would we want to have anything to do with them? It is a ridiculous argument anyway. They would not behave in that way, because of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies)—because of our trade deficit with them, particularly with our German friends. They are intimately bound up with us in terms of trade and there is every incentive to conclude a reasonable deal.

Mr Chope: It is not just about the trade issue. The Baltic states, for example, are very dependent on our NATO presence in helping them to defend themselves against the Russian threat. They would never countenance the rest of the European Union taking it out on the UK, when the UK is doing so much to defend their interests.

Sir Edward Leigh: Perhaps I have banged on a bit too much about the economy, and should briefly touch on defence and security, as it is in my hon. Friend's Bill and is a matter of acute concern. Apart from "Project Fear", which is based on this false premise of a loss of millions of jobs—Lord Mandelson appears to have made that up on the back of a fag packet—which no one has ever quantified in any great detail, although we wait to hear what the Government say about that, there are all these arguments about security. David Owen, a former Labour Foreign Secretary, who has now come out in favour of leaving the EU, dealt with that matter and debunked it very well on his interview on the "Today" programme yesterday. He asked how the European Union has improved our security by creating, in an imperialist and expansionist way, a new trade association deal with Ukraine, which led directly to Russian fears of being encircled and to the annexation of Crimea and eastern Ukraine. By the way, I do not countenance, approve or support in any way what Russia has done. The fact is that the EU gave President Putin that opportunity.

In a direct answer to my hon. Friend, is it really conceivable that, if the UK decided to leave the EU, our friends and allies in the Baltic states would want to throw us into some appalling doghouse and have nothing more to do with us when their freedom and security depends so much on us? We do have the strongest armed forces in the European Union. France and Britain are the only two countries that are capable of deploying world power. The Minister who is summing up this debate has considerable expertise in this matter because, as a Back Bencher, he spent years talking about it.

Although I cannot speak for the French Government, I do regularly speak to people in France, and I can assure Members that France has no interest or desire in not continuing to co-operate in an ever closer way, in terms of an ever closer union of sovereign states, in military policy. This whole argument that, somehow, the peace and security of Europe would be endangered if we were to leave the EU does not hold water. I will not repeat all the arguments that have been made many times before about our peace and security depending not on remaining in the EU, but on NATO. That is not a point that can be directly summed up in any cost-benefit analysis, but it needs to be articulated. We Eurosceptics are not nationalists. We love Europe; we love Europeans; we love European culture; and we want to have the closest possible relationship with our friends in France and Germany.

Let us go back to some of the detailed studies of the cost-benefit analysis. I am very grateful to the Library of the House of Commons for this. In fact, we should pay tribute to it because it is one of the few bodies that has actually attempted, with its limited resources, to collate all these studies. The study by the Institute for Economic Affairs—Minford et al, 2005—"Should Britain leave the EU" estimates a range of 3.2% to minus 3.7% of GDP in ongoing costs. I have dealt with Open Europe. The 2014 study by Gianmarco Ottaviano "Brexit or Fixit? The Trade and Welfare Effects of Leaving the European Union", the Centre for Economic Performance and the London School of Economics estimated the trade-related costs to the UK of leaving the EU as being in the range of 2.2% to 9.5% of GDP. That is their argument, but it would be nice for it to be tested. In the literature review for "Our Global Future", the CBI—again, I am not citing people who are naturally friendly to my point of view, but we need to test the arguments—found that the net benefit arising from EU membership is somewhere in the region of 4% to 5% of UK GDP.

Philip Davies: Does my hon. Friend have the figures that the CBI gave for the great benefits that we would have received when it recommended that we join the euro?

Sir Edward Leigh: We should have had more independent analysis of that. Conservative Members often criticise Gordon Brown, but we should never forget that he kept us out of the euro, against the wishes of his Prime Minister, Tony Blair. We were told that disaster would strike by some in the City of London, the CBI and so on, and they used precisely these arguments. Now the Prime Minister goes to the Dispatch Box and says as a great virtue that we are out of the euro, but we were told by all the powers of the establishment that not joining the euro would be a disaster, and many of the arguments used were exactly the same.

Mr Chope: Roger Bootle told the Treasury Committee on 27 October last year:

"A large number of supposedly very highly qualified people argued that there would be a mass exodus of the financial services industry if Britain were not in the euro. It did not happen. In fact, the reverse happened: it was the provincial continental financial centres that suffered, as business concentrated on London".

Sir Edward Leigh: The Mayor of London and the Conservative mayoral candidate represent, or hope to represent, the powerhouse of the British economy.

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

Presumably they deal with and talk to businesses in London every day, and significantly they have both decided that London would not be disadvantaged by leaving the EU.

I am not necessarily quoting people who are friends of mine, but in evidence to an inquiry by the Lords EU Committee into relaunching the single market on 27 July 2010, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills stated that

“EU countries trade twice as much with each other as they would do in the absence of the Single Market programme”,

That is based on the argument that increased trade with Europe since the early 1980s may be responsible for UK income per head being around 6% higher.

That is fair enough. We accept that we want to recreate the single market in some form. However, the Government immediately replied, “Well, I’m sorry but the rules of the EU are absolutely clear. If you want to be part of the single market, you have to accept free movement of people.” But that is not necessarily true. For example, it does not apply to Canada. As I understand it, Canada has created a good trade deal with the EU, but I am not aware that EU nationals are allowed to travel freely to Canada without a visa—I have some knowledge of this because my wife has a Canadian passport as she was born in Montreal.

The argument about what sort of access we would have in the single market is so crucial that we must have some independent analysis. Otherwise, we are making a decision based not on facts, but on prejudice. Those of us who argue from a Eurosceptic point of view are not in any way trying to convince the British people that they should make this choice in terms of nationalism, although many will, and that is their prerogative. We are arguing that there is a perfectly good, legitimate, intellectual, rational case for leaving the EU, but we want it to be tested by the Government.

I had better sit down as I have probably wearied you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I want to end with a study, which people here will not be aware of, commissioned by the Bertelsmann Stiftung of Munich—so this is not, as far as I am aware, some sort of UK Independence party front organisation, but a well-respected German institution. It is interesting that people around Europe—Stiftung in Germany and think-tanks elsewhere in Europe—are starting to take seriously the prospect of the United Kingdom leaving the EU. They are also writing studies that could form part of the independent cost-benefit analysis we want the Government to do.

In the second and third columns of its detailed analysis of what countries pay into and get out of the EU, the Stiftung demonstrates that Germany, the United Kingdom and France are the biggest absolute net contributors, paying in about 0.5% of their gross national income. Eleven of the 28 member states were net contributors in the 2013 budget, and the Stiftung gives various detailed figures for member states’ gross contributions. In terms of net contributions as a share of GNI, we always come second to Germany.

The Stiftung says:

“Because the United Kingdom benefits relatively little from CAP expenditures (for example, it received only €3.16 billion in 2013 compared to France’s €8.58 billion), Margaret Thatcher

negotiated the introduction of a ‘UK rebate’ in 1984. At its core, this contains a refund of approximately 2/3 of the United Kingdom’s annual net contributions to the EU budget. For the years 2011-2013, the rebate averaged around €4.1 billion. A correction in how the rebate is calculated was introduced in 2008, which reduces the rebate depending on the costs of the EU expansion. According to forecasts by the UK’s economic and finance ministry...the rebate will hover around an average of €6 billion”.

The Stiftung provides various detailed figures and illustrates how the UK’s net contribution has risen. It says:

“One key element of the Brexit debate is that net payments have increased sharply since the global financial and economic crisis in 2008...If the United Kingdom exits the EU on January 1, 2018, this will change how the EU budget is financed”—

that must be the understatement of the year. It continues:

“According to estimates by the UK’s economic and finance ministry”—

Her Majesty’s Treasury—

“the United Kingdom will pay a net contribution of £8 billion for fiscal year April 2017-April 2018.”

These arguments are therefore being set out in detailed papers by think-tanks throughout Europe, but here—in the most important decision this country will make, in just four months’ time—the Government are apparently telling us that they do not believe there should be any independent cost-benefit analysis of what that decision will mean for the United Kingdom. Shame on them!

1.7 pm

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): This is the first time I have intervened in the European debate, and hon. Members can rest assured that one thing I will not be talking about is the future of the hedgehog, or le hérisson, as I think it is called in French.

This is probably one of the biggest, most controversial issues we will deal with as a country, and I am acutely aware that a number of my hon. Friends take a completely different position from the one that I will espouse during my speech. I would also say that this issue—like the corn laws, free trade and imperial preference—is one of the big issues in British history. Of course, this, too, is a big trade issue, and we have to take that into account.

Over the last 15 years, as the parliamentary candidate for the Plymouth Sutton seat and, more recently, as the Member of Parliament for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, I have always sought to take a rather pragmatic attitude to what our relationship with Europe should be; I do not start from the basis of a set view of how we should proceed. I very much support what the Prime Minister has been able to do in the way of bringing back reform. The big issue of Europe kicked off when Jacques Delors said how important it was that the single market was not just about money but employment regulations and stuff like that too. I want the UK to be in Europe but not run by Europe. Now that the Prime Minister has finished his negotiations and presented his new plan for Europe, I have decided that I will vote to remain in the EU in the referendum on 23 June. I want to make it abundantly clear that I have exactly the same influence as every single one of my constituents or, for that matter, anybody in the whole of the United Kingdom. I have one vote, no more and no less.

To my mind, Britain’s role in Europe is to maintain the balance of power, and that is utterly crucial. Over the

course of history, when we have walked away from Europe, we have had to go back in and sweep up the whole mess. We have invested time, money and blood in that relationship with Europe, and now is not the time for us to wash our hands of our allies and turn back.

Mr Chope: What does my hon. Friend think about the interventions this week by Lord Owen and Lord Howard, both of whom take a similar view to his but seem to have reached a different conclusion?

Oliver Colvile: Well, that is the whole business of politics, isn't it? My hon. Friend is right to raise these issues, but ultimately this is about the future of our country within Europe and whether we are led back into having wars and things like that. I very much want to avoid that. Believe you me, my heart is for coming out, but my head says that it is not a clever thing to do.

Last week, during the recess, I spent a few days with the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy in Norway doing a survival course. We ended up building a shelter and a fire, and then we had to go and kill a chicken and eat it. Needless to say, I did not get too involved in the killing of the chicken, because I think I would have found that incredibly difficult. I heard at first hand the Norwegians' real concerns, shared by the Baltic states, about the whole business of Russia potentially invading their country and coming through the north and the Arctic in order to do so. That made me very concerned as well. I therefore believe that our national security should not be weakened at a time of global insecurity.

Philip Davies: I am intrigued by my hon. Friend's view that everything in the EU is about peace and harmony. Has he seen the rise of the far-right parties across the EU in recent years, including the largest party in France, and the record amounts of barbed wire going up around the EU? It does not strike many people as being about peace and harmony but quite the reverse in many cases.

Oliver Colvile: I fully agree with my hon. Friend that that issue must be looked at and taken into account, and I do, but I am talking about my personal view. This is about trying to make sure that we can maintain peace within Europe. I recognise, though, that other people have significantly different views—some even more extreme than his position might end up being. I have a great deal of time for my hon. Friend.

The EU is far from perfect, but this is not the time to throw away the good progress that the Prime Minister has made in reforming it. I am pleased that we have managed to secure an opt-out from being dragged into an ever closer union with the other 27 member states. In the previous Parliament, he managed to secure a deal that would bring the EU's budget down for the very first time, and we should most certainly welcome that. I am, however, keen for further reform of the EU, including bringing UK fishing waters back under UK control, for which I will certainly continue to campaign. That would significantly improve the conservation of our fisheries, which I am very happy to support.

I believe that the Prime Minister's deal will go a long way to restoring British sovereignty and reducing migration to the UK. On future immigration, if we are going to put up the shutters—we do need to control it—I am

concerned about what would happen to my local Derriford hospital. If we found ourselves without any nurses from abroad, that would be a significant issue.

Philip Davies: Does my hon. Friend not understand that controlling immigration means that we would be able to allow into the country those we want to allow in and that we could keep out those we want to keep out? If we leave the EU and his hospital needs some nurses from abroad, there would be nothing to prevent us from allowing them to come here. We just would not have to accept everybody from the EU who wants to come here.

Oliver Colvile: My hon. Friend has a point, but it is important that we acknowledge that this country needs people to come here to do those jobs.

Mr Chope: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Oliver Colvile: I am afraid not.

Businesses in Plymouth rely on the UK's deep links. My constituency has a global reputation for marine science and engineering research. Representatives from the Plymouth marine laboratory and from maritime organisations have told me that it is important that we continue to have links to Europe. University students in my constituency also want to be able to travel abroad. I am afraid that I have doubts about what the alternative would be if we were to leave.

Babcock, which runs the dockyard in my constituency, signed a letter to *The Financial Times*, saying that it is very important that we stay in. One of the big boat manufacturers in my constituency explained to me a couple of weeks ago how difficult it is to sell boats to south America. The company has to pay a 15% premium and it is very concerned about what would happen in France and Greece if we left. They would want to protect their own businesses and boat-building industries. That is another reason that I find it difficult to deal with this whole debate.

Britain has a proud history of playing its part in Europe, and I want it to continue to play an important role in reforming Europe while also promoting its interests worldwide. The terms Europhile and Eurosceptic are thrown about quite a bit, but I am neither. I am not Euro-suicidal but a Euro-realist, and that is why I will be voting to remain in the EU.

1.18 pm

Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), who is not present but whose Bill this is, for giving us the opportunity to once again debate the merits or otherwise of the European Union.

I think we should have a cost-benefit analysis of this debate, given that right at the beginning—it has been going for some three hours—we were told that it was highly unlikely that the Bill would be taken any further, because that would require the referendum to be delayed. It is, therefore, a complete waste of everybody's time and of taxpayers' money.

Mr Chope: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Pat Glass: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could tell us how much this debate has cost the taxpayer.

Mr Chope: May I ask the hon. Lady whether that is her best point?

Pat Glass: No, but I think it is worth saying. We have sat here for three hours, and we have heard Members talk for at least an hour about a Bill that they do not intend to take any further. As the Bill is about a cost-benefit analysis, perhaps we can have a cost-benefit analysis of this morning for the taxpayers of this country.

Oliver Colville: My great grandfather was a rural vicar in Oxfordshire. He said that he did not mind his congregation looking at their watches; it was when they started shaking them that he became concerned. I feel that that is something we should take on board.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I assure you that I am beginning to look at my watch.

Pat Glass: That is helpful. As the hon. Gentleman has spoken about his great grandfather, I will talk about mine a little later. *[Interruption.]* Would the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) like to say something about my great grandfather? I will talk about him later, and perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to intervene then.

Oliver Colville: I would like the hon. Lady to talk about her great grandfather.

Pat Glass: I will do so later.

We had a long debate on European affairs yesterday. I am sure we would all agree that it was an excellent debate, with many outstanding contributions. The debate has felt a little flat today, because we have returned to the usual suspects with the usual very narrow arguments. However, it gives me an opportunity to talk once again about the benefits of being a member of the European Union. I do not think—this is one of our criticisms of the Bill—that the benefits of being a member of the European Union can be narrowed down to simply an economic cost. The question is much bigger than that.

Labour, as hon. Members know, are united on this issue. We believe that Britain is stronger, safer and more prosperous as part of the European Union.

Philip Davies: Is that it?

Pat Glass: No; just a second. We are a proud nation, with almost half our exports going to European countries. Those exports were worth £227 billion last year to the UK economy. We receive, on average, £26.5 billion of investment every year from the EU. Jobs and businesses, large and small, depend on our trading with the EU. Future EU trade could create 790,000 more jobs by 2030 by opening up markets in digital services, energy and tourism.

I will talk a little about my part of the country. The north-east is the only part of the country that has a trade surplus. Proportionately, we are the biggest exporting region in the country. We make things in my part of the world and we export them, largely to Europe. As I said yesterday, we make more cars in one city in the north-east in a month than that great car-building country, Italy, does in a whole year. I invite Conservative Members to go along to Teesport or the port of Tyne and see the lines of cars that are made in the north-east and exported to the European Union. In my region, 75% of our trade depends on being part of the European Union. Hundreds

of thousands of jobs in the north-east are directly or indirectly linked to being part of the European Union. That is just one aspect of the benefits.

I will talk about the peace dividend later, but I want to talk a little about the fact that we live in a global world where we face issues such as international terrorism, international crime, war, migration and Russian expansionism. Listening to the debate today, I have not heard anything from Conservative Members that gives me any answers to the big questions facing us. It is not possible to reduce those huge issues to a cost-benefit analysis or an economic cost.

TTIP has been mentioned. I have to say that my blood runs cold at the thought of negotiating a TTIP arrangement outside the European Union. I am quite clear that our public services and our NHS need to be protected in any negotiations about TTIP. Having listened to the libertarians opposite, I am sure that that would not be the case.

David Morris: On negotiating TTIP within Europe, it is my understanding that that point is a non-issue, especially in relation to the NHS, as has been clarified many times during the past three years. Will the hon. Lady elaborate on that point?

Pat Glass: In such negotiations, it is clear that we are much more likely to get a TTIP agreement with red lines around our public services and the NHS as part of the European Union. If we were outside the European Union and negotiating such a treaty directly with the USA, I would not be so confident that that would be the priority of the current Government.

David Morris: For the record, does the Opposition agree that there will be protection for the NHS under TTIP within the European framework as it stands?

Pat Glass: We agree that if there is to be a TTIP agreement, it is much better to negotiate it with Britain as part of the European Union.

We have talked a lot about sovereignty in recent weeks. Many of us would agree that we have in various ways negotiated on our sovereignty in order to be part of something bigger. We have given up part of our sovereignty in defence to be part of organisations such as NATO, and we have done the same with the UN. On a personal level, when I married—I have been married for 30 years—I gave up some of my sovereignty over decisions that I would have made myself to be part of something that I accepted was bigger and better for both of us. The principle is very clear: in order to be part of something better, we sometimes have to give up things we want to hang on to. That is true of our sovereignty. I do not believe that this country has given away our sovereignty. It is very clear that whenever decisions are made in the European Union, they come back to and come under the sovereignty of this House.

On immigration, one of the huge strengths of this country—it has made us one of the strongest, richest, most powerful and greatest countries in the world—has been our ability, over centuries, to absorb and integrate millions of immigrants, migrants, people fleeing oppression and economic migrants. My family were economic refugees who came to this country during the Irish famine in the mid-19th century. Such people came to this country and

worked hard for it. They brought up their children in this country, and paid their taxes. They fought for this country and, frankly, some of them died for this country. That is part of what makes this country the great country it is. To the idea that we can close the doors to people who will work in our NHS or our schools, I would say that that is part of what has kept this country rich. This country has got rich and stayed rich on immigration. We need to be very careful when talking about closing the doors to people, particularly those from the European Union.

Mr Chope: I do not think anyone has talked about closing the doors. We have talked about giving equal access on the basis of merit to foreigners regardless of whether they are from the EU or from outside the EU. For example, the hospital in my area tried to recruit nurses from the Philippines because they are well qualified for its needs, but it was unable to do so because priority has to be given to EU nurses.

Pat Glass: If we look at EU immigration, we can see that it is almost the same: 2.3 million people from the European Union are in Britain; and 2 million Brits live in the European Union. Many of them are working in and contributing to European countries and some of them, having worked hard all their lives, have retired and are now living in the European Union. We must be absolutely clear about what “out” would look like for those people. At the end of this debate, I want us to be very clear about that. We know what “in” looks like—we have had 41 years of what “in” looks like—but we absolutely no idea what “out” would look like for jobs and the economy, or for people from the EU working in this country and people from this country working in the EU.

Philip Davies: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Pat Glass: If the hon. Gentleman is going to tell us what “out” would look like, I will happily give way.

Philip Davies: I am rather interested in the Labour party’s views. I urge the hon. Lady to look up the meaning of net migration. Net migration means the number of people coming in after we have taken out the ones who have already left, and that figure is 325,000. Is her party happy with the net migration figures as they are? Is she not prepared to take any measures to reduce them?

Pat Glass: Once again, another opportunity to tell us what “out” would look like and we do not get it.

We had an excellent debate in the Chamber yesterday, a lot of which centred on the peace dividend. I have not heard anything about that from Conservative Members today. The first aim of the European Union was peace. It was created not as a project or a political union, but to ensure peace in western Europe after the ruins of 1945. We committed genocide on one another in western Europe every 30 years up until 1945. As I said in the Chamber yesterday, for me this is personal. It is not just about politics. I accept that the European Union is not the only reason why young men and women are not lying in graves outside Thiepval and Ypres today, unlike my great grandfather and his brother, two young men from this country aged 22 and 25 who died within six weeks of each other and are lying in unmarked graves in Belgium and France.

Great though the loss was to my family, it pales into insignificance alongside the loss suffered by other families. Mrs Smith from Bishop Auckland, a town just over the hill from where I live, lost her husband and her five sons. How can we put an economic cost on that? At the end of the awful wars in western Europe, when we regularly turned our continent into a killing field, the victors and the vanquished said never again will we allow this to happen. I believe that by voting to remain in the European Union we will ensure that this never happens again to the young people of this country.

1.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): If debating European affairs is your thing, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will have had a great week.

The starting gun to the core of what we are debating today began with the Prime Minister’s Bloomberg speech in January 2013. That was the first indication, by any Prime Minister, to say that he intended to take the opportunity to have a serious conversation with Europe; to say we are not content with our relationship with Europe, that we believe too many powers have been ceded to Brussels and that the EU is not transparent or competitive enough. That culminated in the Prime Minister last weekend debating with other Heads of State and Prime Ministers to establish the changes that he feels need to take place if Britain is to be justified in staying in the European Union.

The Prime Minister returned from those discussions on Saturday. On Monday, he made a statement, saying that his principal recommendation is to remain in the EU. He said, however, that it would not be for politicians but the people to decide on our long-term relationship with the EU. This generation gets to choose. As we now know, the referendum will take place on 23 June. If that was not enough, the issue was raised at Prime Minister’s questions, and there were the launches for the various in and out campaigns, with all their gusto and vim. Then, yesterday, we had a full day’s debate, in Government time, opened by the Foreign Secretary and closed by the Europe Minister. I agree about the repetition in some of our Europe debates—I remember many times just printing off my speech from my hard drive, with the bullet points ready to go, and coming here to give a similar exposé of my views on Europe—but, despite seeing the usual suspects committed to debating Europe, I think that today’s subject matter is different.

I disagree with the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass). Although it is clear that, should the Bill get anywhere, the date of the referendum would have to shift, I believe the debate is useful. Every time we have a debate, in the House or elsewhere, on Europe, more details emerge and more questions arise, and that is healthy. We saw it in the debates leading up to the Scottish and alternative vote referendums. That is important because these are difficult matters for us to get our heads around—there are questions to be raised and challenges to be made. In fact, new questions have been posed today, on both sides of the argument, and, if it helps, I will try to answer some of them.

I agree that this place has not always been brilliant at understanding the EU at its heart. I recall writing a pamphlet in opposition entitled, “Upgrading UK Influence

[Mr Tobias Ellwood]

in the European Union". I think there are only two copies left: the one I have in my hand, and the one proudly owned by my mother, who is the only other person I know who has definitely read it. I flicked through it to remind myself of my frustration that the country did not scrutinise enough of what was going on in Brussels—this was before 2010, when we were in opposition.

The pamphlet asked what Parliament could do to better understand what was happening in Brussels. We spend a lot of time in this place arguing and complaining about the results of legislation coming from Brussels, but how much time do we invest in understanding the mechanisms and processes in order that we might challenge or stop it coming through in the first place?

Oliver Colvile: Does my hon. Friend recognise that we also need to send good-quality civil servants to Europe to argue our case properly?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I would argue that the civil servants we send there are among the best in the world. It is a huge privilege and honour to work in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, although many of the civil servants in Brussels come from other Departments.

I must say, however, that we are granted 12% of the jobs in the EU, in the various Commission roles and so forth, but, of late, we have not taken them, because there are language exams to be taken, and the language school in the Foreign Office was closed down. There were important top jobs to be had, but because our civil servants could not pass the two language courses required—one at a higher level, one at a more subsidiary level—we could not fill the very roles that would have allowed us the necessary influence in the EU, in the bowels of Brussels, to change, affect and advance legislation.

I am pleased to say that we are changing that—the language school is back in place and able to train civil servants to the correct levels—but when I wrote the pamphlet, before the 2010 election, we were filling only 3% to 4% of those jobs, meaning that 8% of the jobs to which Britain was entitled were going to other countries. One is supposed to relinquish one's passport—metaphorically—when one becomes a civil servant in the EU, but of course one remains British at heart, or Italian or French, or whatever it is. It was a waste of an opportunity to scrutinise, understand and affect what was going on in the EU. I am pleased to say that the civil service situation has changed, and that we are now far more immersed in Brussels.

Let us look at some of the big ticket items that have been agreed—I shall come on to them in more detail later, if I may—such as the trade deal with Korea or the patent agreement that protects any invention. You might have a small invention that you have pocketed away, Mr Deputy Speaker, and not yet told us about, but you can be assured that you will be able to present it and it will be protected right across the European Union. It was British civil servants who were able to pilot this measure through, and it provides an example of the sort of work they are doing.

To answer my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope), our understanding of these matters is important. When I was the Parliamentary Private Secretary

to the Minister for Europe, I remember organising cross-party visits for Members of Parliament to make the trip to Brussels so that they could learn about the EU, meet civil servants and understand how the European Parliament and various parts of the Commission work. Most of them were so delighted to get back on the Eurostar at the end of the day that they never wanted to see Brussels again, such was the scale of the bureaucracy. That highlights a challenge, but it perhaps also reflects the absence of a determination to say that we should be turning the situation around. We should not simply turn our backs on it and accept everything that happens; we should try to enhance British influence over what happens in Europe.

That is exactly what our Prime Minister has done in working with our allies and trying to effect change for the better. There are many countries, many Prime Ministers and many statesmen who agree with our free market liberal views on how the European Union should be conducted. They agree with us that it has become too politically empowered and not sufficiently transparent, and that although it is the largest single market in the world, it is becoming overburdened with red tape and bureaucracy. From a social perspective, furthermore, it is the most costly area in the world. Some 50% of social services in the world are found on our own doorstep in the European Union. That means that we are uncompetitive in comparison with other places in the longer term, which is exactly what the Prime Minister was trying to determine in his negotiations at the weekend. He explained what he returned with in his statement on Monday.

I am pleased that we have had yet another opportunity this week to debate these matters, and I am sure it will not be the last time. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch for stepping in for our hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), who was originally going to articulate his views on the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch has done so with the same gusto that he has always shown in previous debates on the European Union. It is a matter of record and knowledge that he is my parliamentary Dorset neighbour, and I look forward to him donning one of the amazing ties that the leave campaign is promoting and going on the campaign trail in Dorset in the run-up to 23 June.

We heard contributions from other Members, including from my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), who articulated important questions about the merits of the European Union which need to be answered by those who want to remain in the EU. That is important for the public, many of whom are yet to make up their minds on the merits or otherwise of continuing our membership of the European Union.

The speech of the day was, I thought, given by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh)—not simply because of its length, but its quality as well. He made some erudite points, and I thought he was extremely honest about what the British nation might expect from the leave campaign when it comes to articulating what it would mean if we did leave. He was honest in raising some question marks over what might happen to the common fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy. Many people support these policies now, so it is important for them to understand the

consequences of leaving. It was very honest of him to pose those questions, and the nation must hear the answers in a proper debate.

The “Project Fear” label has crept into the discussion many times. We want to win the arguments because people have decided on the merits—the whys and wherefores—of both sides, rather than because they were unclear about the position, or because one side had decided to scaremonger. What worries me is that this might descend into something like an American presidential election campaign, in which the negative overshadows the positives and the educated points of view.

My hon. Friend also raised a number of specific questions, and I shall come to those later.

I am pleased to say that that my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colville) managed to get hedgehogs into yet another debate, although he was not intending to talk about a subject for which he has become famous. He also made the point that this is one of the biggest debates that we will ever have, and that it is therefore right for us to devote time and energy to looking at all the details.

I am saddened that more Members have not taken the time to join us on a Friday. I do not know where the Scottish nationalists are, but at least the Labour Front Benches have made it, and I am pleased about that. In any event, I am sure that Members will have further opportunities to debate these matters in due course.

As I said earlier, we had a full and wide-ranging debate on Europe yesterday, opened by the Foreign Secretary. One speech that was pivotal, and stood out, was the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames). It was a powerful oration, not least because my right hon. Friend mentioned his grandfather. As Members will know, his grandfather, looking at the mess of Europe, was concerned about how countries could integrate to the point at which they were no longer independent but interdependent, and would therefore never go down the road towards war again.

Sir Edward Leigh: May I take up that point about history, for the sake of the record? In his own very good speech, my right hon. Friend did indeed refer to his grandfather’s speech. Winston Churchill was always a robust defender of European unity, but he made it absolutely clear that what he foresaw was continental European unity. No one has ever been able to find any quotation from Winston Churchill suggesting that Britain should join a European union.

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend has made my point for me. What I think our right hon. Friend was trying to articulate was, “Please do not try to second-guess what would be the view of someone who is not alive today and able to understand the issues of today.” He made the point, very powerfully, that it was disingenuous to try to judge in that way. He was frustrated that people had taken the famous Zurich speech—of which we are now in the 70th anniversary year, and in which Churchill talked of a continental Europe—out of context, and had reinterpreted it in order to make their own points. In fact, it has already been used by both sides in the debate leading up to 23 June. Similarly, people have said of Margaret Thatcher, “I am sure that, if she were alive today, she would say this, that and the other.”

I think it unhelpful to lean on great statesmen who are not here today, because today’s circumstances are very different.

It is, however, worth reminding ourselves that from the devastation of war-torn Europe has emerged a union of 28 nations, which are living in peace now, and which have also lived through a ragged period of dealing with the growth and subsequent demise of communism. We have become part of the biggest and most powerful single market in the world, and it is important for us to remember that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough also gives me licence to touch on how this is playing out in other European capitals. Things can be quite parochial in the Chamber, and sometimes the things that we say here do not reach much further, but we are being watched, registered and monitored in other capitals across the world as we have this debate. I have to say from my role as Foreign Minister responsible for the middle east, north Africa and south-east Asia that there is some puzzlement about this debate, as Britain has a legacy of being at the forefront of decision making—being a P5 UN Security Council member, a leading member of the Commonwealth and playing such a pivotal role in NATO, and given that in every international organisation from the World Trade Organisation to the International Monetary Fund to the World Bank, Britain is at the forefront.

Other countries hesitate and look at us to see which direction Britain is looking in, knowing that we have a powerful, strong and important relationship with the US, that we have experience, and that we have an interest in, and understanding of, much of the world around us, yet they also look at us and see that we might want to opt out of one of the largest organisations in the world. The Prime Minister also articulated that point on Monday.

We do not make any reference to the fact that the UK could survive outside the EU. We are a great and powerful nation—the fifth biggest trading nation in the world. The question is the degree of that success. That is what we need to debate up until 23 June. Are we better off out and making decisions separately, or are we more powerful as part of this organisation and collectively exerting more influence from inside? That is pivotal in the debate we will have in the next three months.

Much has also been made about the security concerns and whether Britain’s security status and competence would rise or fall were we to leave the EU. When the starting gun was fired, and the debate opened up and people declared their position, some comments were made about the Paris attacks, saying that they would be more likely to take place in the UK if we were outside the EU. I think those comments were disingenuous; I will not go further than that. We need to have a sensible and measured discussion about security. I certainly do not agree with that sentiment at all, and I urge those on both sides of the argument to be very cautious about making flippant comments and scaremongering. We are of course subject to the pressures of the media and the sensationalism they seem to encourage so that they have soundbites for the evening news or the Twittersphere, but our allies are looking at this and it does not bode well for Britain if we scaremonger in this way.

However, we are living in a very dangerous and complex world, one that is far more complex today than it was a couple of decades ago. The consequences of the

[Mr Ellwood]

Arab spring are still with us, we have an emboldened President Putin—far more unpredictable than ever before—and we have the growing concern of extremism. When the Bali bomb went off in 2002 there were just over 20 listed extremist groups—listed groups of terror. Today there are over 50. These are registered, listed groups recognised by us as organisations of terror. That means that at the moment we are not winning the battle to contain them. Daesh is obviously the biggest, and it is a franchise; other organisations, such as Boko Haram, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis and Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, are joining forces and gaining a franchise from Daesh. We need to think about how we collectively defeat that, and there is a question about the role of the EU in dealing with that.

Much has been said about the role of NATO—it was mentioned today. It is, of course, the cornerstone of our security endeavours, and we also have our strong relationship with the United States, but along with the growth of the European Union comes soft power. These things complement each other, and one does not replace the other. In certain areas where other countries are wanting to pursue a European-style army, we have made it clear that we would not support that, and neither would many other countries. Everybody has recognised that from a kinetic perspective NATO is the cornerstone of our security, but soft power comes with the ability to provide political leverage in introducing sanctions, and it is the work of the European Union that started the ball rolling in getting sanctions built up against Iran. Those sanctions eventually forced Iran to curtail its nuclear programme, come to the table and agree a long-term solution which denies the Iranians the ability to build a nuclear bomb. EU sanctions and EU discussions led to the P5+1 talks, which involved other countries such as China, Russia and the United States. That gives us an indication of the role the EU can play, and the counter-piracy operations off Somalia are another great example of this work, which can complement what NATO is doing.

We also need to consider the bilateral operations that work underneath the umbrella of the European Union, for example, the Border Force capabilities in Calais. One could argue that if we step out of the European Union, we could negotiate these things one by one, but carrying out bilateral talks with a number of countries is a lot more complex. The question is: would such an approach be as efficient as going to a single organisation—Interpol, Frontex or the European border forces—and at these meetings having a say not just in bilateral arrangements, such as those we have with France, but collectively? Internationally, what is the European Union's view on the situation in Libya, with the movement of refugees and with the criminal gangs exhorting funds from refugees who wish to make the perilous journey across the Mediterranean? My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley posed the question as to the impact of extremist parties in Europe, as it could be argued that that has been a consequence of the movement of refugees. But the only way we are going to sort that is by dealing with the problem at source—by addressing what is happening in Syria. Again, I would argue that the EU can put far greater emphasis and might into providing a challenge and looking for solutions by

working collectively, not only on managing the refugee crisis, but on addressing the challenges at source in order to mitigate what is going on.

Philip Davies: Everyone would agree that the Minister is making a balanced and good speech, but I am surprised that he seems to be talking down the ability of the mighty Foreign Office, of which he is a part. Is he really saying that if, after we had left the EU, the UK and the EU thought that sanctions should be imposed on Iran, the Foreign Office would have no mechanism for discussing that with the European Union, and coming to that decision and agreement? Is he saying that those discussions can take place only from within the EU? Since when has the Foreign Office been so pathetically powerless around the world?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to know that his description of the Foreign Office is not one I agree with—

Philip Davies: It is your description—

Mr Ellwood: It is not my description. Provocatively, my hon. Friend is putting words in my mouth. We can step back from this particular issue to all the other issues, saying that in each case Britain would have the ability—in fact, we would have the obligation—outside the EU to step up and do all that work as well, whether it be on sanctions on Iran or any other relationships. The question is: on our own, can we exert greater leverage on a country such as Iran, which continues to have a proxy influence in Bahrain, Damascus and Syria, Baghdad and Iraq, and Yemen and Sana'a, or would we have more leverage and power by leading from within the EU? That applies right across the board.

Mr Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the way in which he is responding to the debate. May I ask him about the Syrian refugees? I think our Prime Minister and our Government have the right idea in saying, “Let's take the refugees from the area of the theatre, rather than encouraging them to make the dangerous journey to Europe.” Why does my hon. Friend think the European Union has not been prepared to listen and respond positively to that common-sense approach from our Government?

Mr Ellwood: I am not sure that is quite correct. Federica Mogherini, who leads on these matters for the European Union, is very much in alignment with that view. We discussed these things in Rome recently when we looked at Syrian and Iraq matters. My hon. Friend is right to say that there are a number of challenges—first, the genuine Syrian refugees caught up in the region. We should pay tribute to Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other countries, for the massive burden that they have taken on. We have chosen to support those refugees who are most vulnerable. The challenge that has come across Europe comes not just from Syrians. Mixed in with them are Afghans and others from Africa, taking advantage of the patterns of migratory flow. We have said that if we open our doors to them, we are likely to encourage more. That is why we have been very firm.

The consequence is that thousands are still coming in across Europe every day and we need a solution to deal with that. If my hon. Friend visits Greece now, he will

see the scale of the challenge there. On beaches that should be for holidaymakers, there are migrant camps and individuals everywhere, some in transit and some having put up a temporary home. EU countries are affected by that, which is why collectively we need a better solution.

Central to that is solving the problem so that people do not feel they want to turn their back on their country, thereby making it all the weaker. Many of the people who can make it and are making it to Europe are the ones with mobile phones, the ones who are fed and have a family. I do not doubt that they are going through an horrific time, but many of them are educated and if they depart from Syria, they deny it the doctors, nurses and engineers that will be needed once the guns fall silent and the country starts to rebuild itself.

Sir Edward Leigh: May I say that the Minister is replying to the debate extremely well? It just shows that sometimes there is an advantage in having to wait a bit before one gets on to the Front Bench because one understands this place better.

May I ask my hon. Friend a serious question about the refugees from Syria? I put this point to the Prime Minister and I am not sure I got an adequate reply. I want the Minister to try and deal with it. I am not so worried about east European migrants to this country because they work hard and integrate. I am extremely worried about the millions pouring in from the middle east, including Syria. I said to the Prime Minister that Merkel's million would all have a right to come here once they get passports. The Prime Minister said that only 2% of people coming into Germany get passports.

The Minister cannot give me an answer now, but will the Foreign Office do some more work on this? Based on history, I think a much higher proportion of those pouring into Germany now will get passports. I would like the Foreign Office to keep an eye on this because those people would have a right to come here and it is an important issue.

Mr Ellwood: The first thing that has to be acknowledged is that the normal processes in place across Europe for dealing with refugees applying for status are going to be tested, because of the scale of the migration that we are dealing with. Under Germany's current rules, they would have to wait a number of years—eight years, I think, but I stand to be corrected—before they can gain a passport. If they have a criminal record, they will not get a passport. So there is automatically a delay in the process of securing a passport. The German analysis is that in such a time frame, many will hope to return home or to remain in Germany. We need to keep the problem in context. If they are in Germany, have a German passport and receive benefits there, why would they want to come to the UK? These are big questions, but they are for further down the line. They should not be ducked. The scale of what we are dealing with is unprecedented since the movement of populations after the second world war.

I should just mention that much of the focus of the Syria conference that took place in the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre was on some of those questions as well. We raised an unprecedented amount of money—\$11 billion was pledged in one day—from the international

community. I spoke at one of the non-governmental organisation conferences, and much of the energy was focused on how the European Union deals with such challenges. If I am honest, the EU could be regarded as a fair weather organisation: when economies are doing well, that is all fine and good, but when something such as Ukraine comes up, that is when the mechanics of bringing countries together to achieve consensus has yet to be tested. That is where the European Union is having to learn far faster than NATO, which, from a security perspective, had the machinery in place to be able to react to these events on a more regular basis. None the less, my hon. Friend raises an important point.

I just want to talk a little about the consequences of exit, which is what this Bill is all about. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, we would have to delay the referendum. There is a trigger notice in article 50, which would prompt negotiation. A country cannot simply walk out of the European Union, nor can it tear up its membership card as one can do, presumably, with a political party. It needs to apply to leave, and in the good old European Union way there is a process to be followed. That process can last up to two years. It also requires the support of the 27 members, and that can take time. With all this, there is a question for those who are advocating departure: if the process were to last more than 24 months, what happens to businesses and where do they fit in? What will happen to deals, negotiations and reputations? How does the City of London continue to attract business if there is a question mark over the departure date—and that is before we have even considered what we might be entering into.

Michael Howard's comments were referred to this morning. He talked about renegotiating to get back in. So, let us say that a country manages to get out of the EU in two years, it then might have to begin negotiations to get back in again. It took Switzerland eight years to consolidate its deal. That is time consuming. Arguably, the process can be faster. We are a far bigger country than Switzerland or Norway, so the process could be expedited. Again, there will be delays. There is a question mark over where we actually stand and what our relationship is.

It is just worth mentioning article 49, which does not get as much press as article 50 in the European treaty. It says:

“Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union.”

Article 49 is all about what a country does to regain its membership. It says:

“The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application.”

All the national Parliaments then have a debate and discussion about a future British application.

“The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the consent of the European Parliament”.

So the country needs unanimous support. If one country were to say to us, “No, you can't come back in on those terms” then we are stuck. Also, anybody who knows the European Parliament knows that it has myriad views.

[Mr Ellwood]

It goes one to say that the European Parliament

“shall act by a majority of its component members...The conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded, which such admission entails, shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State.”

I could go on, but I think that the message is clear. There are an awful lot of hurdles to clear to complete the process. It is not a simple process.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend seems almost pleased to paint such a grim and complex scenario, but does he accept that that is only one possible scenario? Can he tell us what contingency plans the Government are making at the moment so that leaving the European Union after the vote on 23 June is much more straightforward and that there will not be all the problems that he is talking about?

Mr Ellwood: We will have to wait until 24 June to see whether what that crystal ball says is correct. I am not painting a scenario; it is in article 49 of the Lisbon treaty. That is what we must honour and what we signed up for. We do not have a choice in that matter—that is how it is.

Mr Chope: Does my hon. Friend accept that, under international law, it is open to any country that is party to a treaty to denounce that treaty? We could choose to denounce the treaty, repeal the European Communities Act 1972, and not do anything else.

Mr Ellwood: I will contemplate and reflect on what my hon. Friend has said, but my immediate reply is that we must honour the international law to which we have signed up. A nation must first consider article 50—that is about departure and getting out, which I always said is not an easy process—and then article 49, which states how we can get back into the treaty.

Let us pause for a second and think of the countries that are queuing up to join the EU. I was involved a little in encouraging Bosnia to meet the necessary requirements to be accepted into the European Union, and there is also Serbia and other countries. There is a long list of countries that want to become members of the European Union, or have some kind of status—it does not have to be full membership; it could be something similar to the arrangements of Norway or Switzerland. One argument could be that Britain has to get into line—

Mr Chope *indicated dissent.*

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend shakes his head. I hope that were that horrible scenario ever to take place, recognition would be given to Britain’s place in Europe, but other countries could quite rightly say, “Hang on a minute, We have dedicated teams looking at us. Why should Britain jump the gun?”

Sir Edward Leigh: Why is the Minister spending so much time arguing about a process for how we will get back in the European Union when we will have just left it? I am confused.

Mr Ellwood: Because as I understand, the heart of the argument from the leave campaign recognises that some aspects of the European Union are welcome, such as the single market and some aspects of the security situation, and that there would be a desire for re-entry so that we could have that relationship. [*Interruption.*] What I heard on the radio this morning is that we would renegotiate aspects of our relationship with the European Union—I have heard that again and again. If my hon. Friends are saying, “No, we will have no truck with the European Union whatsoever”, that is a new direction of travel that I have not heard before, so I am grateful that the debate has clarified what the leave campaign has been after for all this time.

Philip Davies: Is the Minister aware that many countries have free trade agreements with the European Union without being members of it, an example being the agreement that America is seeking to make at the moment? The future for the United Kingdom is to have free trade with the European Union from outside it, in the way that many other big countries do. Does the Minister understand that?

Mr Ellwood: I will heed the advice and encouragement, because other issues have been raised that we must also touch on. Let me be clear: there is a fair bit of bureaucracy to be gone through, but even securing a free trade agreement with the European Union would require a process to be followed and would not happen overnight.

Mr Chope: The Minister says that we would need a free trade agreement, but does he accept that when we leave the European Union, the default position will be the World Trade Organisation rules that ensure free trade?

Mr Ellwood: Let me come on to free trade, because those issues were raised in the debate and perhaps I can answer my hon. Friend’s point. The European Union is our main trading partner and, as has been said, that trade is worth more than £500 million a year. That is half our total trade in goods and services. However, we can still trade with the rest of the world as well, and the EU has free trade agreements with more than 50 countries—that is alongside the 28 countries in the single market. Around 45% of Britain’s exports are designed for the single market itself, while 56% go to the single market and to countries the EU has free trade deals with. [*Interruption.*] I will give way to somebody if they would like to give me a break so that I can clear my throat.

Oliver Colvile: Could not failing to go through the right procedures end up delaying our exit from the EU because the issue would need to go the various courts? It is a bit like when a planning application goes wrong and someone is not happy with the process.

Mr Ellwood: I am grateful for that intervention—from a number of angles—and my hon. Friend makes an important point.

We have dealt with the delays, so I will move on to TTIP’s impact on the health service, which hon. Members raised. Many hon. Members have received emails on this subject questioning what the situation is. I should make it clear that TTIP poses no threat to the NHS

whatever. It cannot force the UK to privatise public services, and any suggestion to the contrary is irresponsible and, indeed, false. The Prime Minister, the European Commission and the US Government have made that clear. The NHS—indeed, public services—will not be privatised through the trade deal, nor will the deal open NHS services to further competition or make irreversible any decisions on the provision of NHS services that are taken by the UK Government. I hope that that makes the position clear in answer to the many emails many of us have had on this issue—in fact, there might even be a 38 Degrees campaign on this.

Mr Chope: I hear the assertion the Minister makes from the Dispatch Box, but it seems to be totally at odds with the opinion of leading counsel with which we have been circulated.

Mr Ellwood: That is why these debates are helpful. I can only make clear what the Government's position is. I can also ask the Minister for Europe to place a letter in the Library to set out in more detail what the consequences would be. Given the number of emails, there is clearly huge interest in this matter across the country, so I am pleased to have this opportunity to address it.

Guidance to the civil service was mentioned. The example was given of the fishing Minister's dilemma in being unable to participate fully in the debate on the European Union. Of course, he can participate fully, but to clarify—the Prime Minister also responded on this issue at Prime Minister's Question Time—the Government have a clear position, which is to recommend to the country that people vote to remain members of a reformed European Union.

Quite exceptionally, Ministers are being allowed to depart from the normal rules on collective responsibility, in order to dissent from the official Government position on the referendum question. However, the civil service exists—we cannot get away from that—and it is there to support the Government of the day and the policy agreed by the Government of the day. The letter published by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and subsequently extended by formal guidance from the Cabinet Secretary to civil servants, does no more than give effect to that.

Sir Edward Leigh: On that point, when will purdah begin?

Mr Ellwood: I am coming to that shortly, when I will go into the details of the timetable, but I just wanted to clarify the position, because it may be raised again in relation to other Ministers who have different views as well.

Philip Davies: The Government's view seems to be that we should stay in the European Union. I presume that even they would concede that being a member of the EU is disadvantageous in some ways, although their view overall is that it is better for us to remain. If their view on fishing, for example, is that it may be to our disadvantage to be in the EU, and the fishing Minister wanted to use the Government machinery to come up with something better, would he be allowed to do so, or are we in the ridiculous situation where every Minister has to pretend—whether it is true or not—that every aspect of EU membership is in our interests?

Mr Ellwood: The Prime Minister returned from the European Council having managed to secure the changes necessary for him and the Government to confirm the position that a reformed European Union is in the interests of British membership. From that perspective, there is a collective responsibility to support it. The reason for the change is the unique situation of having the vote. It is absolutely the case that individual Ministers can dissent, but people cannot pick and mix—they cannot take out a slice and say, “I don't agree with that”, because that would make a mockery of participation and involvement in the European Union.

I was going to wait until the part of my speech dealing in detail with the timetable before I answered the question on purdah, but because of the lack of time, I am pleased to confirm that it will begin 28 days before the vote. I hope that helps my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough.

Several hon. Members have discussed VAT on sanitary goods. In our view, EU member states should have the flexibility to apply a zero rate of VAT to sanitary products. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury has written to the European Commission and other member states setting out the Government's view that EU member states should have full discretion over the rate of VAT they should apply. The Financial Secretary has been informed by the Commission that its action plan may put forward options to allow member states greater flexibility in the application of the reduced and zero rates of VAT. I am sure that he will make more statements on this in due course.

We have touched on the trade deficit, which is an important issue. The Office for National Statistics' “Pink Book” with data for 2015 and 2014 confirms that UK total exports to the 28 nations of the EU were £229 billion, and UK imports from the 28 states were £291 billion. The UK's trade deficit with the EU 28 was therefore £62 billion. However, it would be disingenuous to use that figure on its own because of the difference between goods and services, of which hon. Members will be aware. We are far stronger in the services aspect. With the reforms that are coming through, that is where the single market is likely to grow in future, and where we are likely to be in surplus rather than in deficit. It is very important to recognise the opportunities for Britain in remaining in the European Union as a result of that.

Passports have been mentioned. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley talked about what happens when an individual from the European Union enters our borders and has their passport swiped. There is a watch list system used by Home Office staff for the purposes of border and national security, and the detection and prevention of crime. During business as usual, 100% of passengers arriving in the UK have their identity documents scanned against the watchlist, so somebody on it will be identified and can be detained if need be. The Government's strategic objective to enhance border security and militate against organised criminality and terrorism risks has led to a requirement to check arriving passengers against the Schengen information system at the border. This is another great example of “what if?” If we were to depart from the European Union, would we have to renegotiate ourselves back into the ability to use SIS II, as it is called?

Philip Davies: Will the Minister confirm that, contrary to the assertions made in yesterday's debate, when somebody comes into the UK from the European Union their entire criminal record does not flash up before the Border Force, and we do not then cart them off to kick them out of the country on that basis? Will he confirm that that was a wholly false assertion?

Mr Ellwood: I was not privy to the exact point in the debate when that comment was made, but I will ask the relevant Home Office Minister to write to my hon. Friend to clarify exactly what does happen. I am now mildly curious to find out those details myself.

Pat Glass: That is really interesting and I wonder whether that happens. It sounds like a damned good idea, doesn't it?

Mr Ellwood: I feel an element of consensus breaking out in the Chamber, which is a rare thing.

As I bring my introductory remarks to a close, may I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch on promoting the Bill, and my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough, who has been an astute advocate of debating these matters in more detail? The issue of Europe is not only topical, but of the utmost importance. It received a full day's parliamentary debate yesterday and we will have further debates leading up to 23 June.

The British public made it clear that they were not happy with the status quo, and the Prime Minister sought to address that, so last November he wrote to Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, setting out in detail the four areas in which he sought change to the European Union, namely economic governance, competence, sovereignty and immigration. At the February European Council he achieved a deal covering each of those areas.

As the Prime Minister has said, we said that we would get Britain out of ever closer union and give national Parliaments the power to work together to block unwanted EU laws. The deal we have delivered means that we will never become part of a European Union superstate.

We said that we would make Europe more competitive, and we have delivered that in this deal as well, with commitments to cut red tape, in particular for small businesses. That means we can create more jobs and security for working people in Britain.

We said that we would protect Britain as the eurozone continues to integrate. We have delivered that in this deal, which means that British taxpayers will never be required to bail out the eurozone and that British businesses can never be discriminated against because we are not part of the euro.

We said that we would put an end to the "something for nothing" welfare culture for EU migrants so that we can control immigration from Europe, and we have delivered on that as well. EU migrants can no longer claim full in-work benefits for four years, which some people said would be impossible to achieve, and child benefit will no longer be sent overseas to Europe at UK rates. We have already delivered our commitments to require EU migrants to leave Britain after six months if they have not found work and have no genuine prospect of finding a job, and to stop EU migrants being able to claim universal credit while looking for work.

This is a legally binding and irreversible deal that delivers for Britain. It means that we will never join the euro, never join a European army and never be part of the Schengen borderless zone.

Soon the people of Britain will have their say on the UK's membership of the EU. The Prime Minister has announced that he intends to hold the referendum on Thursday 23 June, and that must now be agreed by both Houses of Parliament. We have already published information on the outcome of the Government's negotiations on the UK's membership of the EU, as required by the European Union Referendum Act 2015. In time, we will publish information on the rights and obligations resulting from the UK's membership of the EU, as well as examples of countries that are not members of the EU but have other arrangements with it.

This will be a once-in-a-generation moment to shape the future of our country. Ultimately, it will be for the British people to decide, but the Government have made it clear that we support continued membership of a reformed European Union. I want to set out in more detail the Government's thinking on renegotiation, but first I will explain some of the benefits—I am sure that Back Benchers will appreciate this—of our membership of the EU.

The Government's long-term economic plan is delivering economic security for families and businesses, underpinned by sound public finances, by investing in the UK's future, addressing the productivity challenge and rebalancing the economy towards trade and investment. With turbulence in the global economy, membership of the EU supports that plan by giving British businesses access to the free trade single market and dozens of trade deals across the world. The Government's deal keeps the EU moving firmly in the right direction. It hardwires competitiveness into the decision making of the EU and commits the EU to pursuing more trade deals with non-EU countries. We contribute a huge amount and get a huge amount in return. We cannot be a force for good in a reformed Europe if we are not at the heart of what is going on. We are a major player—

2.30 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 11(2)).

Ordered, That the debate be resumed on Friday 4 March.

Business without Debate

DEFENCE EXPENDITURE (NATO TARGET) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 4 March.

CONVICTED PRISONERS VOTING BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 4 March.

UK BORDERS CONTROL BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 4 March.

HOUSE OF LORDS (MAXIMUM MEMBERSHIP) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 4 March.

CROWN TENANCIES BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 4 March.

WORKING TIME DIRECTIVE (LIMITATION) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 4 March.

AUTOMATIC ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (NO. 2) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 11 March.

Planning Rules

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price.*)

2.31 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. My apologies for the fact that this debate means that you, the Minister and I will have to spend the last half hour of this parliamentary week together.

I want to talk briefly about some of the planning issues that are impacting on a particular part of my constituency, Haughton Green. For the benefit of the Minister, I will explain that Haughton Green is an urban village. Had he visited the place 60 years ago, he would have found open countryside separating Denton and Haughton Green. That has gradually been filled up, mainly by the creation of a Manchester City Council overspill estate in the late 1950s and 1960s, to the point where there is very little open space separating Denton and Haughton Green, although Haughton Green still classes itself as a village and is proud of its historical identity as a village.

The plan-led system has, in part, protected places such as Haughton Green, but Haughton Green now feels under siege. I first became involved in planning issues in the mid-1990s, when I was successfully elected as a member of Tameside Council representing the Denton West ward. Back then, there was a controversial proposal to build a business park on some open space between Denton and Gorton called Kingswater Park. It was so controversial that the application was called in by two Secretaries of State: the noble Lord Heseltine in 1990 and the noble Lord Prescott in 1998. Ultimately, the planning application never saw the light of day, thankfully.

Let me set the scene in respect of how the people of Haughton Green feel badly let down by the planning system. That started in 2008 with the application for the demolition of the old rectory. The Minister probably will not appreciate that the old rectory is part of a collection of significant Victorian architecture across Denton. It was part of a collection of quirky and unique buildings designed by James Medland and Henry Taylor, who were two of the most important architects at work in the Manchester area during that period. We are very fortunate to have a number of Medland and Taylor buildings in Denton. They were responsible for the grade I listed church of St Anne in Haughton, the grade II* listed rectory of St Anne in Haughton, the grade II* listed extension to St Lawrence's church in Denton and the grade II listed St Mary the Virgin church in Haughton Green.

Sadly, the old rectory of St Mary the Virgin church in Haughton Green never made it on to the register of listed buildings. English Heritage initially decided not to recommend the building for listing, but—as result of representations by the Denton Local History Society and local residents, led by my friend Margaret Smethurst, and the Manchester Victorian Society—the Department for Culture, Media and Sport asked English Heritage to look again at its recommendation. Sadly, English Heritage refused to reconsider the building for listing, citing the many changes that had been made to the internal and external structure over the years. However, I believe that

[Andrew Gwynne]

enough original features were left to warrant listing the building in its own right, and certainly to do so as part of the collection of Medland and Taylor buildings in and around Denton.

The application for the redevelopment of the old rectory site was passed by Tameside Council, and the application to demolish the old rectory was approved on 30 June 2009. We now have the blight of a derelict site in Meadow Lane, the most beautiful of locations in Haughton Green, because the site has never been brought forward for redevelopment. As a result, we have a lost some pretty significant local architecture.

Local residents, not wanting to lose any more of the unique heritage of the Meadow Lane area, the historic core of the old village of Haughton Green, applied for the grant of conservation area status. The Minister will not know that everybody who goes down Meadow Lane appreciates its beauty and historical character, particularly in the urban area of Denton. Tameside Council was very sympathetic to its becoming a conservation area, but at the time it had what I can only describe as a pretty useless conservation officer. Unless a property was a Cotswolds, chocolate box cottage that had not been in any way altered throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, let alone the 21st century, she came up with every reason why it could not be protected or listed. She pretty much blocked the Meadow Lane area becoming a conservation area.

All has not been lost, however, because Tameside Council found a way around that. It is in the process of consulting local residents about designating the area under a supplementary planning document. I hope that that will offer some residents a say in how the Meadow Lane area, the historic core of Haughton Green, is permitted to develop in future, not least because we still have the blight or eyesore of a big gaping hole where the old rectory once stood. I will work with local residents to make sure that Tameside Council gets that SPD right for the people who live in Haughton Green.

That brings me to the devolution agenda. As the Minister will know, I have raised this several times because I have real concerns about how the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has gone about the initial, so-called public, consultation for its spatial framework. I and my constituents feel that we have been locked out of the process. The GMCA had a call for sites and identified those that were suitable for new housing development across the whole of Greater Manchester. Significantly, however, a very substantial number of infill sites have been identified in and around Haughton Green.

The deadline for public consultation was 11 January. Sadly, I only found out about that not because I was contacted as a Member of Parliament—I was not—but because I noticed that I had retweeted something on Twitter that I thought was linked to health devolution in Greater Manchester. It turned out to relate to this planning process. When I saw it I just about had enough time to put in my own comments. After the consultation deadline passed on 14 January, I raised in business questions whether we could have a debate on the approach of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in respect of its flawed public consultation.

I would argue that nobody is against future development. Greater Manchester needs it as much as anywhere. However, there has to be sufficient public buy-in and there has to be a sensible release of sites across Greater Manchester. Whole swathes of sites are suitable for housing development. Some of the sites in the Haughton Green area may be suitable for the future housing development needs of the people in Haughton Green. The wedge of paper I have here are all the sites that have been identified by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority as being suitable for future housing development. These differ in sizes from one extreme, the school playing fields of the former Two Trees secondary school, which have been identified as being suitable for 237 new homes, right the way down to small sites such as a patch of land on Keats Avenue, which has been identified as being suitable for six new homes. In total, in Haughton Green alone, these sites would amount to 423 new homes. I say to the Minister that that is fine, but we need the infrastructure to be able to cope with that. We need to ensure that Haughton Green can cope with the additional new properties.

I urge the Minister to familiarise himself with the “Manchester A-Z”. He will see that Haughton Green is in a cul-de-sac. It is at the end of two country lanes that are now urban roads: Two Trees Lane and Mill Lane. They are the only ways in and out of the entirety of Haughton Green, including the massive Manchester overspill estate that was built in the 1960s. Already, those two lanes are log-jammed at peak times. I urge him to think very carefully about how we pay for the infrastructure if we are going to use all these infill development sites. None of the developers for those individual sites is going to say that they will pay for a new access route into Haughton Green, with the massive capital cost that that would incur. It is reasonableness by degrees, but if we put all the developments together, it is fairly certain that the existing road infrastructure into and out of Haughton Green will not be able to cope. It is struggling as it is. If we are going to use these sites—and I have issues with a number of the sites proposed by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority—we need to think about how we do so without generating traffic chaos.

The Haughton Green Methodist chapel is a very early example of a Methodist chapel. It opened in 1810 and is the oldest place of worship in the village. In 1791—I do not know if things have changed that much—the authorities agreed that the district of Denton and Haughton was one of the most uncivilised parts of England. A Wesleyan society was established and the church remained in use from 1810 to 2010. It then moved across the road to the newly refurbished Sunday school building, and this is where the Methodist church still meets to this day.

The old Methodist chapel was bought by a speculative developer who did nothing with the old historic building, much to the frustration of local residents, and it quickly fell into dereliction and the churchyard became overgrown. It was put up for auction last year and bought by new owners. As the Minister and other Members will appreciate, when a building goes up for auction, the rumour mill starts as people wonder what is happening, and some of those rumours led to local concern.

For that reason, a month or so ago, I, together with councillors Claire Reid and Mike Fowler, and George Newton, a local community activist, met the new owners

in my constituency office. They confirmed that some of the rumours were correct and that they intended to convert the building to a community centre and a new place of worship. As the Minister will appreciate, that is acceptable for a class D1 property—it was a place of worship and will still be a place of worship—and so no planning permission is required.

I want to drill down into the community centre side of the issue. Nearby, we have the Haughton Green centre, the Oasis centre, the Green Park centre, Haughton Green Methodist church, St Mary's church and St John Fisher Catholic church, all of which have community rooms, buildings and facilities. There is no need for another community centre in Haughton Green, unless it is for a community that does not currently reside in Haughton Green, and that is where there are concerns. It has been confirmed that the Methodist church is to become an Islamic community centre and place of worship.

I have no interest in extending some of the views expressed by some of my constituents, but there is a large degree of concern, because it potentially means lots of people coming to Haughton Green to use a community building that is not for the community of Haughton Green. I will briefly detail the ward profile: Denton South has a population of 11,230; 98.2% is white; 77.7% is Christian; and 0.5% is Muslim. As sure as anything, the people using the community centre and place of worship will be coming from outside.

The church is on Two Trees Lane—one of the two lanes I told the Minister were already gridlocked. If the Methodists were coming to Haughton Green, in the year 2016, they would almost certainly not get planning permission for a Methodist church on Two Trees Lane without parking facilities. There is obvious frustration and concern among local residents about traffic, but local councillors are working to see whether traffic regulation orders can be put in place. There is also a concern about the graves. The council will almost certainly not permit the new owners to remove the graves from the churchyard. Furthermore, the new owners have put in a new mezzanine floor, suggesting it will be used by an awful lot of people. I have contacted the county fire officer to see whether fire safety regulations can invoke the need for a planning application.

I have raised those three issues, because, put together, they have left the people of Haughton Green feeling locked out of decisions about how their village is developing. Given the relaxation of planning rules and regulations, I fear this will become a growing problem across every constituency. Unless residents can buy into the planning system, unless their voice counts and unless their vision for their community matters, I fear that the disconnect between politicians and the public will just widen. That is why I urge the Minister to listen to the concerns of the people of Haughton Green. I will do my bit to ensure that their views, their voice and their concerns are raised at every appropriate level from local government right up to the Minister. If we believe in localism, we need to make sure that local people have a say in how their towns and villages develop in the future.

2.50 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): I congratulate the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) on securing the debate.

I want to pay tribute to his clear and energetic campaigning on behalf of his residents. As we have seen here today, he is fully committed not just to urban regeneration but to ensuring that we see the right kind of environment and community for his residents—something we all want to see right across the country. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that for reasons of propriety, as the Minister for Housing and Planning, I cannot comment on particular planning proposals or draft local plan documents. I am nevertheless happy to respond in general terms to the issues that the hon. Gentleman has aired today. I hope to suggest some possible ways forward for his constituents.

Having listened to what the hon. Gentleman has said, it seems to me that his concerns relate more to policy, both local and national, than to rules. This Government's expectations of the planning system are set out in the national planning policy framework. It is an important document and one of its important objectives is to promote the highest standards of architecture and design as well to ensure that the historical environment is allowed to play its part in place-making.

This is not just a matter of ensuring that conservation areas and buildings listed for their architectural and historical interest are safe. The character and distinctiveness of our villages, towns and cities are often dependent on townscape features that are not designated as heritage assets, as the hon. Gentleman outlined very well. Buildings, for instance, have clearly accrued over time and tell us about our history; they have varied texture and human-scale design; and they avoid the "sameness" that in reality spoil too many of the town centres and developments that we have seen over the last few years.

Local authorities, of course, must ensure that appropriate roads and other hard infrastructure are there to support the developments they approve, but green infrastructure matters, as well. Trees and open spaces, whether or not protected by designation, play a vital role in place-making and promote public health. New infill development that shows care and respect to a town or village's character and context can not only raise the spirits, but help to attract visitors and businesses and increase property values. The framework also makes it clear that local authorities should prioritise suitable brownfield land wherever practicable.

Whatever the development planned, it is best to make sure that the community is involved early on and is clear about its ability to get involved. Local residents have three main opportunities to have their say about future development: plan-making, neighbourhood planning and directly through planning applications. I shall touch on those in turn in the next few minutes.

Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council is in the early stages of scoping a supplementary planning document for the area. The council has already engaged planning and design consultants to lead early community engagement. I think that is a good thing, but we need to make sure that that engagement goes forward. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will urge his constituents to contribute their views through the plan-making process.

One of this Government's ambitions in determinations for localism is to make sure that local people feel empowered and if possible take the lead on the approach to designs adopted in their area. If there is concern that buildings have not been listed for their architectural or historical interest, and that they are vulnerable, a community

[Brandon Lewis]

can use its local plan to create a local list of heritage buildings so that their merit is not ignored. Local people can also investigate a new design toolkit, which has been launched by the Prince's Foundation and is entitled "Beauty-In-My-Back-Yard". I commend it as something for the hon. Gentleman and his constituents to have a look at as providing a possible basis for dialogue with Tameside council and developers.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly outlined, there is the wider context of the Greater Manchester spatial framework. The 10 authorities of Greater Manchester have a long and successful history of working together to drive economic growth. The devolution deal provides further opportunities for that. At the local level, each individual authority will have to sign up and be accountable in the local area. Each authority must consult and involve the local area so that local people will have a say over development in their areas. I encourage all the hon. Gentleman's constituents in Haughton Green to take part in the consultation, and I hope that they will consider engaging in neighbourhood planning as well, because that would be a massive step forward.

Andrew Gwynne: I agree with everything that the Minister has said so far, but local people need to know that a consultation is taking place. That is the problem that we had with the call for sites.

Brandon Lewis: That is a good point. It is important for local authorities to work hard to engage their local communities. However, neighbourhood planning allows people to have a direct say in the development of their areas. Not only can they work on the design of the plan, but every resident in the neighbourhood has a vote in a referendum. I am pleased that, so far, 88% of people have voted "yes" in neighbourhood planning referendums. If people are interested and involved, they will have confidence in the process and get behind it.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned parks and similar areas. We feel that people should be encouraged and empowered to have a say in what happens to assets of

that kind. The community right to bid allows pieces of land, and buildings such as churches, to be listed as assets of community value when that is appropriate. I should be happy to give the hon. Gentleman further details of the listing process, which is extremely straightforward and simple, and can prove very successful in protecting assets. It is necessary to ensure that the right assets are protected, and the community is best placed to do that. We need a localised, flexible and reformed planning system that is driven by communities, and enables them to make decisions that are right for their areas. The people who know best are the people who live in those areas, and that is what neighbourhood planning, and assets of community value, are all about.

The people of Haughton Green, like those elsewhere, have statutory opportunities to comment and criticise when a local plan is revised, when a spatial plan is developed, and every time a planning application is made. Even if land is allocated for development in the spatial framework or local plan, a particular planning application can still be refused permission in response to evidence and well-argued objections. That brings me back to something that the hon. Gentleman has heard me say at the Dispatch Box a few times before. We want more homes to be built, but we also want them to be the right homes, in the appropriate places and for all tenures.

There are many opportunities for local people to have their hopes and concerns reflected in our modern, reformed planning system, especially if they have volunteered to work on a neighbourhood plan that is brought to a successful conclusion and adopted following a local referendum, and there are many ways in which to secure well-loved and useful local buildings and protect them from unnecessary loss. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's constituents will take those opportunities on board, have confidence in their ability to use them, and enjoy success in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

2.58 pm

House adjourned.

Members who wish to have the Daily Report of the Debates forwarded to them should give notice at the Vote Office.

No proofs of the Daily Reports can be supplied. Corrections which Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked in the Daily Report, but not telephoned, and *the copy containing the Corrections must be received at the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Friday 4 March 2016**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF THE VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their Speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), on application to the Stationery Office, c/o the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons, from whom the terms and conditions of reprinting may be ascertained. Application forms are available at the Vote Office.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY PARTS

Single copies:

Commons, £5; Lords, £4.

Annual subscriptions:

Commons, £865; Lords, £600.

LORDS VOLUME INDEX obtainable on standing order only. Details available on request.

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies:

Commons, £105; Lords, £60 (£100 for a two-volume edition).

Standing orders will be accepted.

THE INDEX to each Bound Volume of House of Commons Debates is published separately at £9.00 and can be supplied to standing order.

All prices are inclusive of postage

CONTENTS

Friday 26 February 2016

Overseas Voters Bill [Col. 577]

Motion for Second Reading—(Mr Chope)—withdrawn

EU Membership (Audit of Costs and Benefits) Bill [Col. 593]

Motion for Second Reading—(Mr Chope)

Planning Rules [Col. 650]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
