

29 May 2012

Clarke dismisses calls for referendum on EU

Cabinet minister Ken Clarke has dismissed suggestions that Britain should hold a referendum on its membership of the European Union.

The justice secretary said the people behind an in-out vote were “a few extreme nationalist politicians”, claiming the electorate was not as deeply eurosceptic as Brussels critics suggest.

Discontent with Europe has grown in recent times as the eurozone debt crisis rumbles on, having a chilling effect on the prospects of the British economy.

Prime minister David Cameron has come under pressure from Tory backbenchers to promise a referendum to counter the position of the UK Independence Party.

However, Clarke said holding a referendum was a “ridiculous” notion which would not halt the complaints of “frenzied” eurosceptics.

Holding a referendum would “throw absolute confusion” into the UK’s position in the EU and disrupt efforts to retain faith in the markets of the economy, Clarke suggested.

“I can’t think of anything sillier to do,” he said.

But Jonathan Davis, managing director of Jonathan Davis Wealth Management, suggested that Britain could adjust its relationship with the EU to become a trading partner without damaging the economy.

“I am all for open markets and I am all for us being part of the European Union, but not under the aegis of Brussels,” said Davis.

“If I had an opportunity I would move back from the loss of sovereignty to Brussels and simply become a trading member of the EU, similar to Norway and Switzerland.”

When asked if such a move would hurt businesses, Davis said: “Absolutely not, it would have no effect whatsoever. We are not part of the South East Asia bloc, yet we trade with Australia, Korea, China and Japan.

“It is nonsense you have to be a member of the Brussels club in order to be a full trading member of the EU.”

However, Davis said leaving the EU would not prevent Britain from being affected by financial problems in other countries due to the nature of the global economy.

Britain last held a referendum on its position in the EU in 1975, but Clarke said eurosceptics immediately ignored the “yes” result.

Clarke said: “It would settle nothing. Particularly it would settle nothing with the more frenzied eurosceptics who keep believing that European bogies are under the bed.”

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