

It was a month before I was born that Britain was asked in a referendum "Do you think the UK should stay in the European Community (Common Market)?". The majority decision was yes. Since then our relationship with Europe has changed with the Common Market evolving into a Union covering more than just a trading area. It is this transformation and future direction that has caused many to signal their desire for a new referendum on our relationship with Europe.

Back in 2011 I was one of 81 Conservative MPs to defy the party whip and vote for a referendum on Europe and was pleased when the Prime Minister declared his intention to hold a specific In or Out poll in 2017, subject to there being a Conservative Government. Thus far we are the only mainstream political party to do so.

There is a real need to re-define our relationship with Europe and negotiate powers back to the UK. It is not right that the Government is unable to reduce VAT on fuel for the likes of the excellent Kent Air Ambulance because of EU rules. It is not right that we cannot restrict access to benefits or housing for Eastern European immigrants to the UK without having to fight it through the courts.

There are pros and cons for being in Europe but one thing is for sure the debate is often defined by those who shout the loudest. Yet the referendum is a good way to have a public discussion on our future and give people a choice.

On 5th July, when my colleague introduces a Bill to secure a referendum I shall be supporting it. I believe in democracy and local residents deserve a say on this important issue. It is time to let Britain decide.