

Dear Colleague,

Please find below a Q&A rebutting common arguments against tonight's motion for a national referendum on the EU.

What is the case for a referendum?

Our relationship with the EU is of profound constitutional importance. Such matters should be decided by the electorate as a whole:

- 1 It is a constitutional question about where sovereignty shall be located.
- 2 It is about how we choose our rulers, not whom we choose.
- 3 It divides the parties internally, so it cannot be decided at a general election.
- 4 It has separated the political class from the public.

All three parties have previously pledged referendums on aspects of the EU.

The question as worded does not merit support.

This is not a binding resolution. The referendum question would be set by the Government in consultation with the Electoral Commission. Today's vote is about whether Parliament favours the principle of a referendum.

The British Constitution does not support referendums.

That argument is settled. There were just four referendums before 1979 including the 1975 vote on the Common Market. Since 1997, there have been a further 49. It is no longer reasonable to argue that consulting voters is incompatible with our constitution. The AV referendum was the last nail in the coffin of this case.

Is this the right moment for the debate?

The electorate have called for this debate now through the new petition mechanism and the Back-bench Business Committee. If the British people want this debate now, let us have it now.

Might a referendum be a distraction from the economic crisis?

Before the crisis, debate was avoided because the EU was not an issue. Now that it plainly is an issue, the reverse argument is being used. We find ourselves bailing out a currency we declined to join to the tune of billions of pounds, just when we cannot afford it. There is no prospect of a referendum being held in the next few months: tonight's vote is about the principle of a referendum and the call to introduce a Bill in the next Session.

Do people care enough about the issue?

In every constituency, voters are signing the *People's Pledge*, promising to support candidates who give them an In/Out referendum. More than twice as many people want a referendum on leaving the EU as wanted one on the voting system: see <http://blog.peoplespledge.org/opinion-polls/>. More people attended the People's Pledge Congress on Saturday than have been protesting at St Paul's, notwithstanding the relative coverage. On 25 September, at least 40,000 motorcyclists took part in Motorcycle Action Group's nationwide protest, "EU Hands Off Biking".

The only question that matters today is whether our position in the EU is a proper subject for a referendum. One way or another, all three parties have previously said that it is.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Baker MP