

Speech by HE Dr Peter Ammon, German Ambassador at the 35th Anniversary Reception of Helaba Bank at the Wallace Collection, London W1 on 9 June 2015.

“When HELABA opened an office in London in 1980, Britain had been a member of the European Economic Community for just 7 years.

Early on, British membership had to pass a referendum, which it did with a convincing majority. Since the Conservative election victory, it is clear that once more a referendum on Britain’s EU membership will be held. With its decision to hold a referendum on EU membership the British government has induced a new dynamism in the question of the UK’s affiliation with the EU. As the outcome is unsure, especially Britain but also the other EU Member States now face a period of uncertainty. Allow me to make a few remarks on the question of the UK’s EU membership:

Germany and UK share many goals in European politics, including the one of making the EU better; not least where reducing bureaucracy and increasing competitiveness are concerned.

Without the UK the EU – and also Germany for that sake – would be much poorer in political, economic and cultural terms.

We will therefore – together with the other 26 member States of the European Union – try our best at engaging this new dynamism constructively and help in finding a solution which respects the needs of everyone in the EU, including the UK.

We want you to remain in the club.

But there is no cause for complacency:

Negotiating the conditions which are essential for the UK for having a successful referendum might become a very difficult process.

It will involve all 28 member states, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

What might be difficult to stomach for the UK might be dear to another Member State.

This process will take some time and effort.

But more than anything else it is up to the UK itself whether it will turn out a success or not.

What I mean is that the biggest risk is not a lack of common interest, but a flawed assessment of what is achievable and realistic.

Of course Germany will go to great lengths to support London, even help London – but it cannot go to any lengths.

Allow me make two principal points on Germany’s view to illustrate this.

The first is on protecting the EU’s integrity and its fundamental principles.

The basic principle that the interest of one Member State can never outweigh the interest of all other Member States is the clue to peace and stability in Europe.

Secondly, we all have to acknowledge, that negotiating the UK’s EU-membership is not a bilateral process between Britain and Germany.

As much as we want Britain to stay in the Union Germany alone will not be able to deliver the solution and will not be able to deliver the EU.

I understand that expectations from all sides regarding Berlin’s general role in the EU are very high.

We do take this as a compliment and we don’t want to make ourselves smaller than we are.

But when it comes to drafting the future design of the EU, all 28 Member States as well as the European Commission and the European Parliament have to be involved.

When I look at the way ahead of us, I believe it is crucial to make sure that throughout the process we keep a positive tone;

Chancellor Merkel recently reminded us: when there is a will, there is a way!

Let me close with a personal thought:

I believe that it is in that spirit we can start a process that will be in the interest of everybody. We should not make this a zero-sum game.

I hope for a more competitive Union which is fit for the 21st century, with the UK at its political, cultural and economic center. I am glad that so many of you are making your voice heard and support that hope.”