

Submission to the UK Balance of Competences Review of the Internal Market: Free Movement of Goods

For 25 years I was the director of companies involved in retailing golf equipment in the UK and Holland. A lot of the equipment was manufactured in Britain but this steadily declined over the years. The major manufacturers were in the US but they gradually moved from manufacturing there to sourcing it from the Far East. Although the golf equipment we sold was manufactured all over the world, we usually bought from manufacturers or distributors and therefore did not import directly ourselves. Because of the effects of tourists and our mail order sales our customers came from all over the world.

Undoubtedly the reason customers came to us were the core values of good retailing. Good choice, good service and good prices have always been the basis for good retailing. Consequently as well as our British and Dutch customers we also had customers from all over Europe, a large number from Japan and Korea, even customers from Africa and Australia. We never had customers, personal or mail order, from the USA. The reason for this was simple, the selection and prices there were better than ours. Membership of the EU therefore seemed to have very little direct effect on us. As regards our customers the basic facts of business seemed to prevail.

I think it is debateable what if any impact EU membership had on our business. The problem with regards to buying golf equipment in Europe was that the European distributors and retailers were notorious for adding huge mark-ups. This meant the customer faced poor choice and very high prices. We did move stock between the British and Dutch shops. Being a member of the EU offered theoretical benefits here, but I do think they were negligible. They did not offer the only incentive. The lower savings were greatly influenced by us running our businesses efficiently.

One experience I can recall was interesting. In the early 1980s I had the brainwave of advertising directly in France and contacted a French golf magazine, I was probably the first to do this. They were delighted to have my business and to get the best deal. I negotiated a 6 month pre-paid series. The first advert duly appeared, however no more followed. They offered profuse apologies and pathetic excuses about technical problems etc before finally admitting what I had already guessed. When my first advert appeared all their French advertisers had contacted them and threatened to withdraw their advertising if they continued to carry ours.

Global business thrives on transparency and with the basic fundamentals of quality products, price and service. Britain's future horizons, as ever, lie far beyond the constraints of the EU. The belief in 1975 that we were joining a mutually beneficial common market has in reality turned into an undemocratic political structure that intrudes into every aspect of our lives.

I agree that there are some positive benefits of the EU single market, but these are greatly outweighed by the negatives, for example the cost of maintaining a large EU bureaucracy and the over-regulation which stifles growth and initiative.

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