



Dear Simon,

The government is producing an information leaflet about the referendum. Why would that be a problem?

The leaflet is actually pretty well done: nothing too heavy-handed, reassurances about the value of membership and generally measured. It's also one of the rare occasions where the argument has been strongly framed in terms of benefits of membership, rather than the costs of non-membership.

Unfortunately, the row about the timing and the cost (9 million £) might completely overshadow the content.

Under the rules governing the referendum, there are strict limits about what information will be sent to voters. Each of the official campaign groups will be allowed to send an information booklet to voters, in addition to a balanced communication from the government that explains what the vote is about.

However, those rules only apply during the official campaign period (the 10 weeks before the vote). The announcement by the government that it will also be sending out another leaflet now, setting out its strong support for the UK to stay in the EU, has been met with much anger by Leave activists.

They complain this makes the contest unfair and that it's a waste of money (£9m). However, the government is legally free to do this and it is their policy to support membership, following February's European Council deal, so there is little prospect of it not being sent out. Whether it will actually influence voters still remains to be seen, but the British government has at least learnt not to try and give voters the full text of the European treaties: as French readers will recall, that caused more problems than it solved in the vote on the constitutional treat in 2005.

Best Wishes, Simon.