

DAVID CAMERON STATEMENT TO THE COMMONS ON EU TREATY

22nd October 2007

“The Prime Minister says he wants Europe to focus on competitiveness and climate change, and is opposed to further institutional change.

I have to say to him: people will ask why didn't he say that boldly at the start of the Inter-Governmental Conference, rather than lamely at the end?

There is one fundamental question arising from today's statement.

When a Party makes a promise in a manifesto, can it be trusted to keep it?

The Prime Minister has described the Labour Manifesto as an issue of trust.

That manifesto promised a referendum on the EU constitution.

If this Prime Minister goes back on that promise, how can he expect his promises to be believed in future?

In his statement he wouldn't even mention the referendum – that R word – once.

As his Hon Friend the Member for Birmingham Edgbaston, who helped to write the Constitution, said last week: “If Labour can't trust the people, why should the people trust Labour?”

First of all let us look at the content of the Treaty.

Will the Prime Minister confirm the following?

That this Treaty gets rid of the veto in 60 areas – including in energy, transport, and self-employment law?

The Prime Minister says he's given up the veto, but it's OK as he's got rid of the motto.

I've got a motto for him: let the people decide.

Will he confirm it means an EU President, and a Foreign Minister and EU diplomatic service in all but name?

And that it includes a new ratchet clause which allows even more vetoes to be scrapped without the need for a new inter-governmental conference?

The Prime Minister says there will be no more institutional change for ten years.

But he has just agreed a Treaty that allows institutional changes to take place every year.

The Prime Minister deploys two main arguments against holding a referendum.

First, he says the Treaty isn't the same as the constitution.

Second, he says Britain is a special case because of our opt outs and our red lines.

Let's take each of these arguments in turn.

First, the claim that the Treaty is substantially different from the Constitution.

The Irish Prime Minister says it's 90 per cent the same.

The Spanish Foreign Minister says it's 98 per cent the same.

The German Chancellor says "The substance of the Constitution is preserved. That is a fact".

Why does he think all of them are wrong and he is right?

What's more, isn't it the case that even his own colleagues don't believe him.

His new Trade Minister, Lord Jones of Birmingham, days before his appointment, said: "This is a con to call this a treaty – it's not. It's exactly the same – it's a Constitution".

His colleagues on the Labour-dominated European Scrutiny Committee say the EU Treaty is "substantially equivalent" to the constitution - even for Britain.

They say that pretending otherwise, as the Prime Minister keeps doing, is "likely to be misleading".

Next the Prime Minister says even if it's a constitution for other countries it isn't for Britain because of our opt outs and our red lines.

Will he confirm the red lines don't include the EU President, the single legal personality, the vetoes or the ratchet clause?

That's why his Hon Friend who helped to draft the Constitution described

the red lines as “red herrings”.

But even the areas the red lines do cover are falling apart.

Take the red line on tax.

The Government told the BBC this is a bit of a con and “purely presentational”, because tax was never going to be part of the Treaty anyway.

Isn't it the case that the red line on the foreign policy is only in a declaration?

It isn't legally binding - and legal advice to the Scrutiny Committee says it may turn out to be meaningless.

With the red line on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the former Prime Minister promised us an opt-out.

Will the Prime Minister confirm the Europe Minister actually had to write to the Scrutiny Committee and explain it wasn't an opt-out after all?

It was just a “clarification”.

This actually matters.

The Prison Officers' Association have already announced they will take the Government to court so they can have the right to strike that is set out in the Charter.

The red line on criminal justice has also been torn apart by the European Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman says: “We believe that the red lines will not be sustainable... we believe these will be challenged... and eventually the UK will be in a position where it will have all of the treaty... we think [these red lines] will basically leak like a sieve”.

So much for the red lines.

But even if they were totally robust and watertight, that would not affect the case for a referendum.

Because they are the same red lines as the Prime Minister's predecessor set out for the constitution.

Then, as now, the Government claimed the Charter wouldn't affect UK law.

Then, as now, the Government claimed we were protected from measures

on foreign policy and tax and criminal law.

Then, as now, the Government claimed there was no great constitutional change at stake.

So why promise a referendum then but not one now?

Isn't the answer to that perfectly clear?

The last Prime Minister, standing there, said "Let battle be joined".

This Prime Minister says let battle be avoided wherever possible - especially if it involves people having their say.

That's why he is not having a referendum.

He doesn't think he would win it.

Why does he continue to treat people like fools by pretending otherwise?

Why does he continue to put forward arguments that don't even convince his own colleagues?

Mr Speaker, this is the Prime Minister who stood outside Downing Street four months ago promising to restore trust in politics.

But he's now betraying people's trust.

He promised to listen but he refuses to give the people the chance to speak.

He promised to honour his manifesto but he is breaking one of the most important manifesto commitments of all.

He says the issue will be settled by Parliament.

So perhaps he can start his response by answering one question?

When Parliament votes on whether to hold a referendum, will he allow his side a free vote?

He has absolutely no democratic mandate to sign this Treaty without a referendum.

If he breaks his trust with the British people, they will rightly say: how can we ever trust anything he says ever again?"