

The Conservatives Stance on the EU Manifesto

A letter to the Herald, Feb 2008

Sir,

A P Willman asks local parliamentary candidates to explain our parties' positions on the Lisbon Treaty / EU Constitution.

A P Willman rightly identifies how so much of the body of law and regulation that governs us already comes from unelected Eurocrats. I know from many a doorstep conversation that people now want an opportunity to have their say on this further extension of EU powers.

The new EU Treaty is essentially the same as the EU Constitution: There will still be an EU president, an EU foreign minister (renamed but with the same powers) with his own diplomatic service, 60 vetoes given away, new powers for the EU over criminal justice and a ratchet clause that will allow surviving vetoes to be abolished without the need for a new Treaty.

The governments of at least nine other European countries have acknowledged that the Treaty now put forward is to all intents and purposes the same as the earlier Constitution draft. The Constitution's author, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, admits that the words have been changed mainly to reduce the threat of referenda. Here, a cross-party committee of MPs have said that the claim that the constitutional concept had been dropped is 'misleading'.

The Liberal Democrats have proposed that there should instead be an 'all or nothing, in or out' referendum. I acknowledge that this is clever politics, but it is a smokescreen. Everyone knows that the Lib Dem leadership's heart is with 'ever closer union', and the 'all or nothing' proposal perpetuates the myth that if you want the advantages of trade and inter-governmental co-operation with other European countries, then you need to sign up to The Project lock, stock and barrel. You don't.

It is of course possible to argue that there should have been a referendum over Maastricht. Actually, the then Conservative government did establish the principle that there would have to be a referendum over the euro, were the government ever to recommend that. In any case, we are where we are. Whatever happened in the past, now is the chance to say things are going too far with the EU.

All three parties promised the British people a referendum on the EU Constitution. That was the basis on which MPs were elected. We cannot possibly restore trust in politics if such clear election promises are broken.

It is crazy to allow a referendum on the Welsh Assembly, or on a mayor for Hartlepool, but not on this huge question of sovereignty. My party's position is that the British people must have their say.

Sincerely,

Damian Hinds
Parliamentary candidate (Conservative) – East Hants
damian@damianhinds.info