

Speech given by Timothy Kirkhope MEP at Conservative Party conference,  
Blackpool, 2 October 2007

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to thank Liam – what an excellent speech. With Liam as Secretary of State for Defence in the next Conservative government, our armed forces could have no finer champion.

I am pleased to introduce this session on Europe and foreign affairs – and I am delighted to welcome our honoured guests today.

First, Alexander Vondra, Deputy Prime Minister of the Czech Republic. The ODS party in the Czech Republic are very close partners in the European Parliament and we warmly congratulate our friends on their victory in the general election last year.

And Esperanza Aguirre, President of the Madrid Region and a friend from the Spanish Partido Popular with whom we also have close relations in the European Parliament.

I want to begin my speech today by paying tribute to our MEPs for all they do for our Party and this country in the European Parliament. I especially want to thank my Deputy, Sir Robert Atkins and our Vice President of the European Parliament, Edward McMillan-Scott.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am proud of the work we do for Britain in Brussels - fighting for a Conservative Europe.

Proud to fight for a Europe of nation states - not a federal Europe.

Proud to be leaders in creating a single European market for British business – where my colleagues Malcolm Harbour, together with Giles Chichester and Philip Bushill-Matthews lead the fight.

Proud to take forward David Cameron's agenda for a cleaner, greener environment with John Bowis heading up our team.

And proud to champion overseas development and human rights across the world from Darfur to Afghanistan - and from Burma to Zimbabwe. With my colleagues Charles Tannock, Nirj Deva and Geoffrey Van Orden, we have a formidable Conservative team in place.

And Philip Bradbourn who works so hard to protect British interests in the field of terrorism and border security.

With talk of an election in the air, I also want to mention three of my team who have been selected to fight Westminster seats at the election. Jonathan Evans will fight in Cardiff North, Neil Parish in Tiverton and Honiton and Chris Heaton-Harris in Daventry. I know they will be a fantastic addition to David Cameron's parliamentary team. I wish

Jonathan, Neil and Chris every success at the general election.

And talking of the election, I know that you will agree with me that when we win and form the new Government, we will have in William Hague a simply outstanding Foreign Secretary.

Ladies and Gentlemen, three years ago, this Labour government made a promise.

It promised a referendum on the European Constitution.

Two years ago they repeated their pledge - this time in their general election manifesto.

The pledge was crystal clear.

Let me remind you what their manifesto said:

*"We will put the European Constitution to the British people in a referendum and campaign whole-heartedly for a 'Yes' vote".*

Two years on, it's a very different story.

Gordon Brown tells us the new treaty bears no resemblance to the Constitution.

He says his red lines have been met.

There's no need to worry – he says.

No need for a referendum.

Trust me he says. "I'm not flash, just Gordon".

Well. Let's get one thing absolutely straight.

This new European Treaty is the European Constitution.

Every European leader knows it's the Constitution.

The German Chancellor said – and I quote: "The substance of the Constitution is preserved. That is a fact."

The Spanish Prime Minister said – and again I quote - "We have not let a single substantial point of the Constitutional treaty go."

Well, that's pretty clear to me.

So what does the British Prime Minister say about the new treaty?

Let me quote him. He said:

“I think most people recognise that there is not a fundamental change taking place.”

As for the Foreign Secretary? What does he say?

Let me quote him too - "The Constitution has been abandoned."

Abandoned?

Come off it!

We know. The British people know. And the rest of Europe knows.

This new treaty is the European Constitution.

Frankly, our Prime Minister is living in a parallel universe if he seriously believes the European Constitution has been ditched.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the only thing that has been ditched is Gordon Brown's promise to give the British people a referendum.

Mr Brown, you promised a referendum.

The time has now come to deliver on that promise.

I call on you today- Give the British people their referendum.

Ladies and Gentlemen, while debate on the European Constitution rightly dominates the political agenda, I say we should also be pushing Europe to make itself fit for purpose in the 21st Century.

And that is what David Cameron has pledged the next Conservative government will do.

We want real reform in Europe. Reform without any new constitutions.

A Europe that look outwards.

A Europe that reverses the tide of red tape.

A Europe that takes the lead in tackling global warming and climate change.

A Europe that tackles the grinding poverty in the developing world.

This is our agenda for a new Europe. This is our Conservative agenda for a new Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen, for the past ten years, this Labour Government has failed to take a lead in Europe. It has complacently sat back and let others set the agenda. And - Britain has paid the price.

It has been an object lesson in how not to run foreign policy.

Well, we've had enough of Labour's deception, incompetence and double-dealing on Europe.

It's time for a Government that is straight with the British people.

A Government that will stand up for Britain.

A Government that will put Britain first.

It's time for change.

Time - for a Conservative government.