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Britain Must Reject the New EU Reform Treaty

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European Union leaders unanimously agreed in Lisbon last week to move forward with a new “reform treaty” to replace the former EU Constitution. The treaty, expected to be formally signed by all EU member states at a summit in Brussels in December, is almost identical to the Constitution that was emphatically rejected by voters in France and Holland in 2005.

Like the rejected Constitution, the reform treaty is a blueprint for a European superstate dreamt up by unelected bureaucrats in Brussels. This time around, however, most of Europe doesn’t get to vote—democracy is too dangerous a concept for the architects of this grand vision of an EU superpower. So far, only the Irish government has been brave enough to stand up to Brussels and insist on a popular vote by its citizens.

The new treaty poses the greatest threat to national sovereignty in Europe since the Second World War. It will also threaten the future of the Anglo-American Special Relationship and significantly weaken the transatlantic alliance. The British Government must listen to the growing calls in Britain for a referendum on the treaty and allow the public to vote on an agreement that will dramatically undermine the U.K.’s ability to shape her own destiny.

A Blueprint for a European Superstate. Originally envisioned as a single market within Europe, the European Union (formerly the European Economic Community) is morphing into a gigantic political entity with ambitions of becoming the

world’s first supranational superstate. Already major strides have been made in the development of a unified European foreign and defense policy as well as a supranational legal structure, and with the introduction of the Euro in 1999, the European single currency and European Central Bank became a reality.

The European Constitution, drafted in 2004, was a huge step forward in the evolution of what is commonly known as the “European Project” or the drive towards “ever closer union.” With its 448 articles, the Constitution was a vast vanity project conceived in Paris, Berlin, and Brussels that dramatically failed two years ago. Since then, European Union apparatchiks have worked feverishly to resurrect the Constitution and have come up with the kind of cosmetic makeover that a plastic surgeon would be proud of.

All the main elements of the Constitution are repackaged in the new treaty. According to the European Scrutiny Committee, a British parliamentary body, only two of the treaty’s 440 provisions were not contained in the original constitution.¹ The treaty paves the way for the creation of a European Union foreign minister (High Representative) at the head of an EU foreign service with its own

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diplomatic corps, as well as a long-term EU president, both trappings of a state. As Daniel Hannan, a European MEP has pointed out, the treaty will further erode the legal sovereignty of European nation states, entrenching a pan-European magistracy (“Eurojust”), a European Public Prosecutor, a federal EU police force (“Europol”) and an EU criminal code (“corpus juris”).² In addition, countries such as Britain will sacrifice their veto right over EU decision-making in 40 policy areas.

A Democratic Deficit. Europe does not need a constitution. The European Union is not the United States of Europe. The EU is a grouping of 27 independent nation states, each with its own culture, language, heritage, and national interest. The EU works best as a single economic market that facilitates the free movement of goods, services, and people. It is far less successful as a political entity that tries to force its member states to conform to an artificial common identity.

The Constitution and its successor treaty are all about the centralization of political power in the hands of a gilded ruling elite in Brussels, not the protection of individual liberty. The Constitution and treaty are based on the principle that sovereignty should be pooled by nation states for the “greater good” of Europe, a concept that goes against the grain of modern history, as evidenced by the break-up of the old Soviet Empire.

The notion that the people of Europe should not have a vote on the treaty, with its huge implications for the future of the continent, demonstrates the utter contempt that the Brussels bureaucracy has for the average man or woman on the street. There is no doubt that if the treaty were put to a popular vote, the electorates of several countries would reject it. The whole “European Project” is fundamentally undemocratic, unaccountable, and opaque; subjected to referenda across EU member states, it

would almost certainly be consigned to the dustbin of history.

A Threat to the Special Relationship. On both sides of the Atlantic, the EU treaty is bad news. It poses a massive threat to the future of the Anglo-American Special Relationship, as well as the broader transatlantic alliance. It will further empower Europe’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), both major threats to the future of NATO. The treaty will seriously impair the ability of America’s allies in Europe to stand alongside the United States where and when they choose to do so.

An America without Britain alongside it would be far more isolated and significantly less likely to effectively project power on the world stage. For Washington, there is no real alternative to the Special Relationship. Its collapse would be damaging to America’s standing as a global power and significantly weaken its leadership of the war against Islamist terrorism.

Britain Must Hold a Referendum. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is stubbornly opposing a referendum on the treaty. This is a big mistake politically and will cost him large numbers of votes in the next election in 2008 or 2009 unless he changes course. The Reform Treaty is extremely unpopular with the British public, and the Conservative Party is wisely outflanking Brown by pledging to hold a referendum if elected.

The British people have always been uneasy with the notion of further integration with Europe and if given a chance to vote on this issue will overwhelmingly oppose any attempt to strip away more powers from Westminster. In a new *Daily Telegraph/YouGov* poll,³ 69 percent of Britons demanded a British referendum on the treaty,

1. “Q&A: EU Treaty,” *The Daily Telegraph*, October 14, 2007, at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/10/14/nbrown214.xml.
2. Daniel Hannan MEP, “Those Euro-Myths Exploded,” *The Daily Telegraph*, October 19, 2007, at <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/politics/danielhannan/october/euomythsexploded.htm>.
3. “Gordon Brown Rules Out EU Treaty Referendum,” *Daily Telegraph*, October 20, 2007, at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/10/18/neu618.xml.

including 87 percent of Conservative voters and 70 percent of Labour Party supporters. A mere 6 percent of the British electorate agreed with Downing Street's assertion that "the new treaty differs substantially from the old constitution."

With a keen eye on the polls, Brown may ultimately give in to public pressure and agree to a popular vote. A hundred Labour MPs have already called on Brown to reverse his position. If he does so, the treaty will almost certainly be thrown out, effectively driving a stake through the biggest threat to British national sovereignty and the Anglo-American alliance of this generation.

The Prime Minister should heed the words of Lady Thatcher: "That such an unnecessary and irrational project as building a European superstate was ever embarked upon will seem in future years to be perhaps the greatest folly of the modern era."⁴ The Iron Lady's instincts are right; common sense must prevail and the British people should be given the freedom to reject an Orwellian vision of Europe's future in favor of the principles of sovereignty and freedom.

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4. Margaret Thatcher, *Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 410.