ERF

european reform forum

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BACKGROUND

For well over a decade there has been the voice of those arguing consistently for democratic and economic reform in Europe and for political co-operation between sovereign nation states. Against this there has been the conventional wisdom of the British and European Establishment, including that of all major political parties. These have mostly pressed for more political integration and less sovereignty for the nation states or have been reluctant to embrace sufficiently deep-rooted reversals of the structure, assumption and policies of the failed European project and existing Treaties.

The time has come for the reversal of the burden of proof on the existing Treaties and as to what will work. This opportunity will enable a positive and constructive analysis, based in reality, to be conducted. A new arrangement can then be devised based on public approval, not assertion, and to which the failed political elite will have to respond.

Since the Referendums in France and the Netherlands, Europe is now truly at a crossroads. The United Kingdom is about to assume the Presidency of the EU on 1 July.

Having signed and argued passionately for the most integrationist Treaty of all, establishing a Constitution for Europe and which has now failed, the Prime Minister is now, following the collapse of the Summit in Brussels, arguing for his version of European modernisation – another doomed Third Way. It is clear he is not prepared properly to examine the real causes of the failure of the European project. These are embedded in the undemocratic structure and architecture of the existing European Treaties. These Treaties are obsolete and are encouraging instability and social tension with low growth and high unemployment. They were conceived to deal with the aftermath of World War 2 and are unsuitable for the global and domestic challenges of Europe in the 21st century.

The Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and Peter Mandelson, in speeches last week, all argued with breathtaking nerve for a Europe based on competitiveness and the social agenda. They blithely ignored the fact that the vast accumulation of Treaty obligations and social regulations and directives prevent competitiveness. They cannot have it both ways and the social agenda and the European legislation that flows from it will either have to be repealed by agreement between all the 25 Member States (which is to say the least unlikely) or by unilateral change via the Parliamentary sovereignty at Westminster and the other Member States who agree. This would be the basis for a different kind of Europe based on associate status a la carte, with a number of Member States congregating around associate status structure. This would be back to the drawing board and would be somewhat less than the Single European Act and a bit more than the Common Market.

The European Reform Forum has been assembled to address these issues during the UK Presidency. It will take evidence in public partly in the House of Commons from (amongst others)

politicians, businessmen, economists, lawyers, historians, academics and administrators from all sides of the debate in the UK, in Europe and internationally. Along the lines of a Select Committee, it will specifically and individually examine the existing European Treaties, subject by subject, and will make recommendations by the end of the Presidency, based on the evidence, for realistic change and reform.

The Forum includes participants whose longstanding public contributions over the past years on European matters have been proved by events:

Lord Blackwell (former advisor to John Major and current Chairman of the Centre for Policy Studies),
Roger Brooke (former Chairman of the Audit Commission and businessman),
Bill Cash (MP for Stone and former Shadow Attorney General and Shadow Minister for Constitutional Affairs),
Professor Tim Congdon (economist and former adviser to the Bank of England),
Janet Daley (broadcaster and journalist),
Rt. Hon. David Heathcoat-Amory (former Minister for Europe and UK representative on the Convention on the Future of Europe),
Martin Howe QC (European lawyer and author),
Hon. Bernard Jenkin (former Shadow Secretary of State for Defence),
Ruth Lea (Director of the Centre for Policy Studies),
Professor Patrick Minford (Professor of Economics at Cardiff Business School and author),
Lord Rees Mogg (former Editor of The Times),
Andrew Roberts (historian and author),
Rt. Hon. Lord Tebbit (former Chairman of the Conservative Party and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry),
Rt Hon Lord Waddington QC (Chairman of the European Reform Forum and former Home Secretary and Chief Whip),
Rt. Hon. Lord Weatherill (former Speaker of the House of Commons),
Sir Oliver Wright (former Ambassador to Denmark, Germany and the USA),

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PRESS RELEASE

Immediate

CALL FOR REFORM OF THE EXISTING EUROPEAN TREATIES: EUROPHILES AND EUROSCEPTICS AGREE

Universal call from both sides of the European debate for amendment of the existing Treaties and reform of the European Union

The Prime Minister made his last statement to the House of Commons as President of the European Union on Monday, 19 December. Now he has made his statement to the European Parliament today.

With the failure of the European Constitution, to which Blair was committed and which the Government passed on Second Reading, the question now turns to the need to reform the existing European Treaties.

The European Reform Forum, under the Chairmanship of former Home Secretary the Rt Hon. Lord Waddington GCVO, DL, QC, has conducted an in-depth analysis based on evidence given from distinguished economists, politicians, commentators and analysts from all sides of the debate since July and is now publishing its report to coincide with the conclusion of the Blair Presidency of the EU.

The overriding conclusion shared by those from both sides of the European debate is that the existing Treaties require reform, which will mean amendment of the Treaties themselves. This is to be contrasted with the insistence of the German Government to reintroduce the European Constitution in its own agenda for its presidency, which begins on 1 January 2007. The President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, today has even called for a European tax policy. This conclusion contradicts that the evidence received by the Forum.

Attached are the conclusions of the Forum combined with a summary of quotations from the witnesses calling for amendment of the existing Treaties and reform of the European Union.

"I make a preliminary observation that this is the most important matter that I have ever been engaged in well over 40 years in politics and in five political careers, some of which were of more dubious worth than others. The stakes are enormous and the need for clarity and a right way forward is immense, and the penalties for getting it wrong are vast."

Rt Hon Lord Howell of Guildford,
Conservative Spokesman on Foreign Affairs in the House of Lords

The European Reform Forum has been established by a cross-section of senior Parliamentarians, economists, businessmen and commentators. It was created to conduct an evidence-based inquiry in public into the operation of the existing EU Treaties. The remit of the ERF's inquiry can be summarised as examining the case for maintaining the existing EU Treaties, and to test the Prime Minister Tony Blair's assertion that it is possible to promote competitiveness in the UK and Europe while also supporting the EU 'social model' and not renegotiating the Treaties.

Ends

Notes for Editors:
Copies of the European Reform Forum's full report are available at **http://www.european-reform.org**

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