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# UK's closest allies warn David Cameron against treaty U-turn

Politicians across the continent condemn Conservative plans to claw back decision-making powers from Brussels

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Nicholas Watt and Patrick Wintour

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David Cameron has pledged to hold lengthy negotiations to restore Britain's opt-out from the EU social chapter. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Britain's allies in the EU have served notice on [David Cameron](#) that no support exists in Europe for his plans to repatriate certain laws to Britain.

In a sign of deep unease at Cameron's Euroscepticism, after France's Europe minister dubbed the Tories "pathetic", a series of fellow Europe ministers lined up to condemn the new Conservative approach.

The ministers from Poland, the Netherlands and the Irish Republic all warned that not a single member state would agree to reopen EU treaty negotiations – the essential first step before the Tory plans can be implemented.

Cameron attempted to back down from a full-scale confrontation with the EU on Wednesday when he abandoned plans to stage a referendum in Britain on the Lisbon treaty.

In a gesture to Britain's "European partners", Cameron said he did not want to embark on a "bust up" with the EU and would instead enter into lengthy negotiations of up to five years to restore Britain's opt-out from the social chapter abandoned by Tony Blair in 1997.

Britain's closest allies in the EU made clear to the Guardian that they are alarmed by this pledge because the social chapter has been sprinkled through EU treaties. These can only be amended with the agreement of all 27 EU heads of government at a special inter-governmental conference and after a convention attended by parliamentarians from all 27 countries – the process that took 10 years to deliver the Lisbon treaty.

The Tories will take particular note of the criticisms voiced by Mikolaj Dowgielewicz, the centre-right Polish Europe minister. Cameron hopes to form alliances in the 10 eastern European countries which have joined the EU since 2004 which are traditionally sympathetic to Britain.

Dowielewicz, who welcomed the Tory plan to abandon a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, said it was impossible to expect that EU countries would agree to re-open treaty negotiations. "We have finalised the most difficult and the most lengthy procedure of ratification that we have ever been through in Europe. Nobody wants to negotiate a new treaty. Therefore I don't think treaty changes would be feasible.

"I really hope we will not have any more institutional navel-gazing again. I really think in terms of assurances and opt-outs Britain has all the guarantees it needs to ensure there is not too much intrusion from Brussels when it comes to labour law and the oversight of the administration."

The minister added that the Tories were wrong to fear a transfer of powers from London to Brussels. "This is not a real danger because nobody wants to repatriate powers from London to Brussels. The problem is powers are repatriated from London to Beijing. Without recognising that, without having Brussels and the other European capitals on side, London will be marginalised."

Frans Timmermans, the centre-left Dutch Europe minister, was scathing about the Tory plans. "You can still hear the sigh of relief all across Europe that we have finally finished with treaty change. Everyone is so relieved that we can finally stop talking about the internal rules of the EU and can start doing something about the crisis, something about climate change issues and something about international affairs. Everybody understands that to restart that process [of treaty change] would have a paralysing effect on Europe at a time where we need European action on very fundamental issues ... There is more chance of a snowball surviving hell than the EU restarting debates on treaty change."

Dick Roche, the centre ground Irish Europe minister, echoed these thoughts. "There is a complete aversion across Europe to the idea of going through the kind of process we have just gone through for the last 10 years," he said. "If you are talking about areas that touch on free movement or the whole central core trade areas then you are entering into minefields. The only thing that happens to people who enter minefields is they get blown up and they meet with a sticky end."

Roche, who was at the heart of Ireland's negotiations with the EU after voters rejected the Lisbon treaty, warned that the Tories would not be able to embark on a simple treaty change that only related to Britain. He said that changes which eventually led to a yes vote last month in Ireland, and which did not involve treaty change and were solely related to Ireland, took a year and 78 bilateral meetings.

A leading member of Germany's liberal FPD party, whose leader Guido Westerwelle is the foreign minister in Angela Merkel's coalition government, welcomed the Tory U-turn on the Lisbon treaty referendum. But Rainer Stinner was strongly critical of plans to repatriate social and employment laws.

"If you open up the box then everybody will come and want changes," Stinner said.

Stinner was also critical of the Tories' decision to abandon the main centre right EPP grouping in the European parliament, which includes Merkel's CDU, to sit with east European rightwingers. Michal Kaminski, the Polish leader of the new group who is a member of the Law and Justice party, was a member of an anti-semitic party in his youth.

"I am shocked," Stinner said of the claims of anti-semitism. "That is very alerting news for us in Germany."

But the Tories won support from Poland's Europe minister. Dowgielewicz, whose Civic Platform government is in the EPP, said: "I don't like the discussion I have seen in the UK about Mr Kaminski. I am not a friend of Mr Kaminski but he is not anti-semitic. This is very risky to link the creation of this group with certain extremists we have in Europe. I ask all the parties in Britain to restrain themselves. It gives the wrong picture of Poland."

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