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The EU Lisbon Treaty: Gordon Brown Surrenders Britain's Sovereignty

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Prime Minister Gordon Brown's decision to reject a referendum on the new European Union Reform Treaty (Treaty of Lisbon) should be viewed as one of the biggest acts of political betrayal in modern British history. Despite a rebellion by 29 of its own backbenchers, the Labour-led government defeated a Conservative proposal to hold a popular vote on the Lisbon Treaty by 311 votes to 248 in the House of Commons on March 5. Brown's refusal to support a referendum represented a stunning reversal of the government's 2005 manifesto pledge to hold a plebiscite on the European Constitution.

The Commons vote flew in the face of fierce public opposition to the Lisbon Treaty and mounting calls for the British public to have its say. In a series of unofficial mini-referenda held across several marginal seats in early March, 89 percent of the more than 150,000 voters who took part voted against the treaty, with just 8 percent in favor.¹ These votes reflected consistently high levels of opposition to the treaty in virtually all major polls on the issue in the U.K. in the past few months.

Most British voters have already concluded that the Lisbon Treaty is almost identical to the old European Constitution, which was emphatically rejected by electorates in France and Holland in 2005. If ratified in all European capitals, the treaty will come into force in January 2009, and the implications for the future of Europe are immense. 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 biggest threat to national sovereignty in Europe since the Second World War, would threaten the future of the Anglo-American Special Relationship, and would significantly weaken the transatlantic alliance.

A Blueprint for a European Superstate. Like the rejected constitution, the new Reform Treaty is also 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, as democracy is too dangerous a concept for the architects of this grand vision of an EU superpower.

Originally envisioned as a single market within Europe, the EU (formerly 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 security policy as well as a supranational legal structure. With the introduction of the euro in 1999, the European single currency and European Central Bank became a reality.

Drafted in 2004, the European Constitution was a huge step forward in the evolution of what is commonly known as the "European Project," or the

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drive toward “ever closer union.” With its 448 articles, the constitution was a vast vanity project, conceived in Paris, Berlin, and Brussels, that dramatically crashed to Earth three years ago. Since then, European Union apparatchiks have worked feverishly to resurrect the constitution, coming up with a cosmetic makeover that would make a plastic surgeon proud.

The new treaty contains all the main elements of the constitution, repackaged in flowery language. 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.²

The Reform 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 diplomatic corps) as well as a long-term EU president; both positions are trappings of a fledgling superstate. As European Parliament member Daniel Hannan 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”).³ In addition, countries such as Britain will sacrifice their veto right over EU decision-making in 40 policy areas.

A Democratic Deficit. Europe doesn’t 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 interests. 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 European 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. They are also 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 witnessed with the break-up of the old Soviet Empire.

The notion that the people of Europe should not have a vote on a treaty with 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. If subjected to referenda across the EU, it would almost certainly be consigned to the dustbin of history.

A Threat to the Special Relationship. For both sides of the Atlantic, the Lisbon Treaty is bad news. The treaty poses a massive threat to the future of the Anglo–American Special Relationship as well as the broader transatlantic alliance. It will further entrench Europe’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), both major threats to the future of NATO, and 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 friendless and significantly less able to 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 would significantly weaken her leadership of the war against Islamist terrorism.

A Future British Government Must Hold a Referendum. The next British government, which must be elected by 2010 at the latest, should listen

1. Toby Helm, “Poll Shows Overwhelming Support for EU Referendum,” *The Daily Telegraph*, March 3, 2008, at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2008/03/02/neu102.xml.
2. “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.
3. Daniel Hannan, MEP, “Those Euro-Myths Exploded,” *The Daily Telegraph*, October 19, 2007, at <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/politics/danielhannan/october/euromythsexploded.htm>.

to the growing calls of the British people for a vote on the Lisbon Treaty. The public should have the final say on an agreement that will dramatically undermine the U.K.'s ability to shape her own destiny. If, as is highly likely, the public rejects the treaty, Britain should withdraw from its provisions and seek a broader renegotiation of its relationship with the European Union.

The next Prime Minister, if Brown is replaced, should heed the words of Lady Thatcher, who wrote in her seminal book *Statecraft*: "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 have 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.