

The European Consequences of David Cameron

The Conservative Party was once a party of power, pragmatic in its policy orientation, realistic in its political behaviour and pro-European in instinct.

Today it has abused those fine traditions. It is rigidly ideological in its EU policy, unrealistic even delusional in behaviour towards EU institutions and anti-European in its gut.

This sad state of affairs would be less tragic if the Party did not now enjoy a possibility of wielding power in the near future. Uniquely

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amongst all the 27 Member States there is now the chance that a major opposition party will come into office whose effective EU stance is either withdrawal or - more brutally- to provoke a crisis of membership that will either force the UK to leave or cause the EU to fragment, possibly fatally. This is the potential crisis that dare not speak its name.

Consider: in the mid 1990s, a weaker and less anti-EU conservative government than the prospective one, nevertheless degenerated into open declarations of anti Europeanism, conducted a 'beef war' with EU institutions and adopted an 'empty chair' in the Council of Ministers. Over beef! (A legitimate health worry for our partners and not only in the EU- Canada and the US and most of the world banned it.) Senior ministers, such as John Redwood came close then to advocating withdrawal from the EU.

That was then. And what of a future Conservative government? The prospective government will be stronger than in the 1990s, united around a visceral anti-Europeanism. The Tory civil war over the EU is over: the antis have won. There are a few honourable pro-EU Tories who uphold the tradition but they are dwindling. A distinguished MEP of long service described himself as belonging to the 'Pro European wing of the Conservative Party—or rather, feather'. The wise heads and experienced Conservative Europeans are ageing- they are tolerated by the younger antis who believe that tomorrow belongs to them.

Look at the young thrusters in the Party and you see an almost universal anti-Europeanism. Amongst the MEPs- Dan Hannan, who is openly allied to the 'Better Off Out' campaign that wants the UK to leave the EU (patron Norman Tebbit). Or Douglas Carswell, MP for Harwich and Clacton, also allied to the Better Off Out campaign, who is touted as one of the Party's sparkiest thinkers, a former adviser to Cameron and described by the Sunday Times as 'One of the energetic young Tory modernisers elected to the Commons in 2005.' Nick Herbert, the shadow justice minister cut his political teeth on anti-European campaigns, (Business for Sterling). And so on. Previously maverick anti-Europeans such as John Redwood have been rehabilitated and are leading policy development. No

leading Tory politician with a future ahead of him or her sits on any pro-EU organisation such as the European Movement. (Ironic since Churchill was one of its founders.) The Conservative Party is now ideologically anti-EU and this is deeply rooted.

What of the senior players, Shadow Foreign Secretary Hague and the Leader David Cameron?

Hague's anti-European beliefs are well known. When he was leader in the 2001 election he famously campaigned with the slogan '7 Days to save the pound.' He sees the EU as somehow old fashioned, stifling enterprise and undemocratic in its structures. But specific policy alternatives to the Lisbon Treaty or to the EU have not flowed from him. Hague is very vague. One has to infer a policy.

One place to start inferring a policy was his address in October at the last Conservative Party conference. The speech deserves scrutiny. Unhappily, the one specific pledge he made on Europe—at a time of major economic crisis, increased political tensions with Russia and a new American President taking office—a moment for statesmanship one would think and clear European strategy and solidarity—is to pick a fight with the EU and effectively 'March on Brussels' over the Lisbon Treaty: 'If in the end this treaty is ratified, by all 27 nations of the EU, then clearly it would lack democratic legitimacy here in Britain, political integration would have gone too far, and we would set out at that point the consequences of that and how we would intend to proceed.'

Having opened up the possibility of a major crisis and issued a threat, Hague then backed-off from indicating the substance of what that negotiation would be about. Hardly guaranteed to win friends in the world and influence them. Others have been more direct. Norman Tebbit, celebrating the tenth anniversary of Margaret Thatcher's Bruges speech suggested: "I hope that the Conservative Party will set out a negotiating brief that the next Conservative government will take to Brussels early in its next term and that it would within two years of the next election present to the British people the outcome of its negotiations.

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“Then in a referendum the British people would decide whether to accept what was on offer or simply to leave the Union. We cannot drift on as we have been; it is not fair either to the British people or to the European Union.

“We need to show Thatcherite courage and determination to lead the country along that path.”

A variant of this scenario has also been mooted by some Conservative advisers. The government would seek major derogations from key common policies, e.g. fisheries, CAP, social chapter, and possibly competition policy. This would then be endorsed in a referendum and then presented to the other partner governments as a basis for renegotiation (read crisis.) The thinking is that the UK has in the past successfully bargained for a special deal, principally over CAP rebates under Thatcher. This would be an ambitious, larger version of that. Moreover, the UK would hold back from any deeper cooperation in foreign affairs and EDSP, on the premise that without a fully engaged UK the Union is emasculated- a massive form of ‘non-cooperation.’

Of course, such major derogations are not nearly comparable to budget payments/adjustments. They strike at the core of the idea of the EU- supranational and common institutions, rule of law, common policies, the idea of political unity. Perhaps the best the Tories could achieve would be EEA-style status- a half member lacking any meaningful input to the EU’s policy formation or leadership, yet bound by most of the Single Market legislation. The most likely outcome is that the blackmail is seen down by other EU governments, there is an almighty crisis (compounding the already exposed state of the UK’s economy outside the Eurozone) and the choice falls between full commitment or exit.

Hague’s speech is also important for what it didn’t say and for the implied foreign policy philosophy behind it. The success of the EU at bringing peace, prosperity and security to the Continent was grudgingly conceded but there was no sense that the EU had a role in wider international affairs or that key states e.g. China and Russia see an integrated Europe as either a potential partner (the Chinese

would like the EU to be more coordinated as it eases its economic relationships, one telephone number etc..) or a threat (the Russians fear EU solidarity as it offsets their potential political revival in their near abroad and counters their temporary dominance in Western energy supply. Hague's speech was highly intergovernmental and bilateral in its approach- as if the British foreign secretary alone or occasionally with the Americans could solve Afghanistan, climate change, stamp out terrorism in Pakistan etc...

There was no sense that the EU was anything more than a committee of nation-states, much like the UN- no hint that we shared common institutions and that we collectively were already acting on the world stage (conducting over 20 European missions from Africa to the Balkans). There was no sense that only via the EU could the UK deploy any credible international influence over major issues such as energy security, climate change, immigration and terrorism.

Hague's language was also revealing about how he sees the relationship between EU member-states and our common institutions. Bluntly, he denied there were any EU institutions. Everything was couched in phrases such as 'European nations 'doing stuff when the reality is that European nations can only meaningfully act within the EU framework. For example on Iran: 'Unless Iran responds positively in the coming weeks to the latest proposals, we call for EU nations to adopt progressively tougher measures against Iran, including a denial of access to Europe's financial system and a ban on new investment in Iranian oil and gas fields.' Why didn't Hague call upon the EU to adopt such measures, for the commission or the council to act- as these are the only effective ways of bringing European power to bear? Similarly, in facing down Russia in Georgia, Hague's formulation was 'The best chance of avoiding such conflicts in the future is for western nations to show what we have advocated: the strength of united resolve'. United resolve-how? Surely via the EU-- through strengthening the EU foreign policy machine and beefing up the ESDP- precisely what the Lisbon Treaty proposed and Hague opposed.

Herein lies the delusion and contradiction at the heart of the Conservative approach to the EU. Hague is clear that the world is

unstable, there are powerful economic challengers such as India and China, terrorism and security issues rear their ugly heads- yet he denies the EU any meaningful part in solving them, instead encouraging individual states to do their own thing. Or if they must collaborate, he gives no sense of how this should be done outside the EU framework.

For example, in opposing Russian aggression on Georgia, Hague urged: ‘...it should not be difficult for all the nations of democratic Europe to say this to the people of Georgia: that your right to live in peace and freedom was long-awaited and hard-won, that your democracy has every right ultimately to join the alliances of the world’s democracies, and that the bullying of you or your neighbours must never be allowed to pay.’ Sure- individual nations of democratic Europe can issue fine statements- we did that in the 1930’s- but how do we take common action? By what instruments and policies? In what fora do we meet? Where and how do we commit the resources to go beyond words to action that deters aggression? How do we ensure European solidarity and follow-through? These are the practical questions- conservative questions of pragmatism and experience that one would expect a conservative foreign secretary to answer. Hague can’t answer, because the answer is: through the EU. Hague’s ideological aversion to the EU prevents him from seeing sense and offering real solutions and hope to our European neighbours.

What of David Cameron?

The one concrete act of Mr Cameron on EU matters has been to pull his MEPs out of cooperation and association with EPP_ED members in the European Parliament—a massive snub to the parliament, a sop to extreme anti-Europeans and UKIP, a move that denies his MEPs access to key committee chairs, roles and influence. And a symbolic gesture that says: We do not share the political ambitions of our sister parties in the EU or the EU generally.

Initially, commentators thought that this move was purely tactical, a means to secure his leadership of the Party. However, Cameron has gone beyond pulling out his MEPs: he has set up an alternative right

bloc around a think tank the Movement for European Reform (MER) whose objectives are a different EU from the one on offer: ‘...leaving the EPP, the European People’s Party, Parliamentary Group in the European Parliament...The reason is simple - which is that while we agree about open markets and deregulation we don’t share their views about the future development of Europe.’ (July 2006) And the MER: “Fifty years ago, a generation joined together to lay the foundations for the European Union. It was their response to the urgent challenges they faced: a divided Continent; economies ruined by war.

Now it is our generation’s turn to lead. We welcome this opportunity, and we want to create a Europe that people can be proud of. But the Europe we are inheriting has become too inward-looking and inflexible, and is losing peoples’ trust. The EU needs to change if it is to be a force for good in the world in the 21st century.”

The details of his new EU are still to be worked out. At the last MER conference it was significant that many of the speakers were either well known Eurosceptics or mavericks. There is no worked out alternative and many of the speakers have contradictory agenda. For example, one session was framed as ‘Free and Fair Trade’- almost a contradiction in terms, inviting enemies of the EU from a hardline free-trade or managed trade/development agenda to mutually attack the EU.

Cameron’s political philosophy is classic New Tory: burnished in the heat of Thatcherism, a devotee of small government, minimal state, libertarian, and a populist anti-European: he has little experience of the Continent and perceives common EU institutions and supranationalism as either centralising, undemocratic or inefficient- probably all three.

Quite how his philosophy, his actions and his instincts will play out over the EU remains a mystery. One infers a vision for the EU, which Cameron would describe as ‘modern’ which is in fact a return to failed UK policies of the 1950s/1960s- an inter-governmental EFTA-style body that critically lacked any political clout or ability to exercise power in the international arena.

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Under Cameron, the Conservatives would oppose Britain joining the Euro, would oppose strengthening of the EU's foreign policy machine and would seek a major political confrontation over the Lisbon Treaty reforms. This at a time of heightened economic crisis; at a time when his own shadow foreign secretary said the foreign policy 'challenges may be the most serious for any incoming government since the end of the Second World War'; and major competitors and neighbours such as Russia are actively dividing and ruling us Europeans.

The European Consequences of David Cameron could be devastating to the citizens of Europe, to the safety and economic prospects of the British people and to the idea of international democracy and the EU's founding principles. I urge all Conservatives to reclaim your tradition, reclaim your senses and reclaim your strong sense of the practical common solutions we Europeans deserve. Adopting the Euro would be such a positive step.

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Nick's European experience includes work as an adviser to the Britain in Europe in Campaign and Director of the European Movement. Nick's philosophy on European integration is to focus on the practical and human part of the project. In the words of Jean Monnet, 'Nous ne coalisons pas des Etats, nous unissons des hommes.' We are not bringing together states, we are uniting people.