

An open and democratic Europe

We will be positive members of the European Union but we are clear that there should be no further extension of the EU's power over the UK without the British people's consent. We will ensure that by law no future government can hand over areas of power to the EU or join the Euro without a referendum of the British people. We will work to bring back key powers over legal rights, criminal justice and social and employment legislation to the UK.

The European Union has done much to reconcile the painful division of Europe and to spread democracy and the rule of law across our continent. But it should not rest on those achievements.

European countries need to work together to boost global economic growth, fight global poverty, and combat global climate change. The European Union has a crucial part to play in enabling the countries of Europe to meet these great challenges of the 21st century. A Conservative government will play an active and energetic role in the European Union to advance these causes.

We will stand for open markets, and a strong transatlantic relationship; for an EU that looks out to the world, and that builds strong and open relations with rising powers like China and India. And, like every other Member State, we will fight our corner to promote our national interests.

We believe Britain's interests are best served by membership of a European Union that is an association of its Member States. We will never allow Britain to slide into a federal Europe. Labour's ratification of the Lisbon Treaty without the consent of the British people has been a betrayal of this country's democratic traditions. In government, we will put in place a number of measures to make sure this shameful episode can never happen again.

Restore democratic control

In future, the British people must have their say on any transfer of powers to the European Union. We will amend the 1972 European Communities Act so that any proposed future Treaty that transferred areas of power, or competences, would be subject to a referendum – a 'referendum lock'. A Conservative government would never take the UK into the Euro. Our amendment to the 1972 Act will prevent any future government from doing so without a referendum.

Unlike other European countries, the UK does not have a written constitution. We will introduce a United Kingdom Sovereignty Bill to make it clear that ultimate authority stays in this country, in our Parliament.

The Lisbon Treaty contains a number of so-called ‘ratchet clauses’, which allow the powers of the EU to expand in the future without a new Treaty. We do not believe that any of these ‘ratchet clauses’ should be used to hand over more powers from Britain to the EU. So a Conservative government will not agree to the UK’s participation in the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor’s Office or permit its jurisdiction over the UK. We will change the 1972 Act so that an Act of Parliament would be required before any ‘ratchet clause’ could be used. Additionally, the use of a major ‘ratchet clause’ which amounted to the transfer of an area of power to the EU would be subject to a referendum.

The steady and unaccountable intrusion of the European Union into almost every aspect of our lives has gone too far. A Conservative government will negotiate for three specific guarantees – on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, on criminal justice, and on social and employment legislation – with our European partners to return powers that we believe should reside with the UK, not the EU. We seek a mandate to negotiate the return of these powers from the EU to the UK.