

# EU reform: Cameron and Miliband have a duty to act as statesmen

Treaty amendment should not wait until 2015 – and Labour should co-operate, in the spirit of one-nation politics



**David Owen**

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'The sooner there is eurozone reform, matched by restructuring of the single market, the better'. Photograph: Dominique Faget/AFP/Getty Images

It is a reflection of disarray both within his own party and in the coalition that David Cameron has virtually abdicated from the debate in Europe by advocating a delay of four to five years in reaching any settlement. During this time the eurozone could falter, UK inward investment fall, jobs disappear and economic growth weaken still further. The sooner there is eurozone reform, matched by a restructuring of the single market, the better.

The period after the forthcoming Italian elections and the German federal elections this September would be best to start a negotiating process of reform. A German government, perhaps a CDU/SPD coalition, will be ready to foot the bill for helping vulnerable eurozone countries – provided others, particularly France, are ready to accept greater eurozone discipline. Cameron's timing is not prime ministerial but party political; no wonder President Obama and Chancellor Merkel have severe reservations

about his position.

In reality Washington, Berlin and London have been as one in their analysis that to guarantee the eurozone's survival there has to be much greater economic and political integration amongst its member states. There is an inherent danger, however, for those countries not in the eurozone, such as the UK, that member states could vote and act as a bloc in the single market, permanently overriding non-eurozone countries on a qualified majority vote (QMV). This was first demanded in a banking union. It could develop with fiscal union, perhaps even in a eurozone financial services union. And it could also lead to block voting on foreign, security and defence policies. These are not remote possibilities but risks that would face any government in 2015, Labour or Conservative.

Eurozone reform means the single market has to be restructured. It should include all EU and European Economic Area states, such as Norway and Iceland. Turkey, too, should be offered full membership. The key is to stop the single market requiring free movement of labour for all member states. Free movement requires a country to reach levels of economic success and prosperity that make it far more likely their citizens will be content to remain within their own boundaries. In the next few months a prudent European commission would extend the Romanian restriction on free movement from 2014 to 2018.

A restructured Single Market would need to adjust the voting formula for QMV. A single European negotiator in world trade would remain, as now.

Ed Miliband would be fulfilling the spirit of one-nation Labour – words used not just by Disraeli but by Clement Attlee in Labour's 1945 manifesto – if he declared that his party would facilitate treaty amendments in their period in opposition and prior to becoming, as they hope, the next government.

Some will ask why Labour should be so helpful to the government. The answer is that, since the 1960s, all major decisions over Europe have been taken, by and large, through cross-party agreement. International treaties need cross-party support and Labour will need Conservative support when in power.

Labour, through their friends in Europe, can play a crucial role in shaping European social democrat policy towards reform, as can the Liberal Democrats in their party's European forum. Treaty amendment should not wait until 2015. Labour, Conservatives and Lib Dems can co-operate while remaining free to urge the electorate to vote to stay in the single market or come out of the EU. Miliband, not unreasonably, wants to keep his options open for Labour's 2015 manifesto. Cameron has closed that option for his party by advocating a referendum in the next parliament.

I believe the people of this country want and deserve a referendum. They do not trust

politicians on Europe. But the crisis in Europe is too serious to be left until the next election. It has to be grappled with now. Ed Miliband has the chance to act as a statesman.

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