


EU banks on 'unreadable' treaty

By George Jones, Political Editor

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 Giuliano Amato: EU banks on 'unreadable' treaty

The revived EU constitution has deliberately been made "unreadable" to help fend off demands for a referendum, according to the former Italian prime minister, Giuliano Amato.

Giuliano Amato has been a central figure in the process of reviving the EU constitution

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Mr Amato, who is now interior minister in Italy, has been a central figure in all stages of the year-long process of reviving the constitution, heading the 16-strong group of politicians that helped prepare the new EU treaty.

In comments posted on YouTube yesterday he said "EU leaders had decided that the document to be drawn up by an intergovernmental conference should be 'unreadable'.

"If this is the kind of document that the IGC will produce, any prime minister - imagine the UK prime minister - can go to the Commons and say 'Look, you see, it's absolutely unreadable, it's the typical Brussels treaty, nothing new, no need for a referendum'.

"Should you succeed in understanding it there might be some reason for a referendum, because it would mean that there is something new."

His remarks are embarrassing for Gordon Brown and will be seized on by politicians demanding that Labour should live up to its manifesto commitment at the last election to allow the British people to vote in a referendum on the constitution.

Neil O'Brien, director of the think-tank Open Europe, said: "This is an extraordinary admission from someone who has been close to the negotiations on the EU treaty. The idea of just changing the name of the constitution and pretending that it is just another complex treaty shows a total contempt for voters."

Mr Brown yesterday made a slip when he said he had discussed the EU "constitution" with Bertie Ahern, the Irish prime minister, when they met at Stormont.

His officials quickly sought to explain that Mr Brown had meant to refer to the EU treaty rather than the constitution, which he has insisted is not being brought back in its original form.

Mark Francois, the Conservative Europe spokesman, said the remarks "gave the lie" to attempts by Mr Brown to pass off the revival of the constitution as just a reforming treaty. "Many other European leaders have admitted what the Government failed to tell our people - that this is the old constitution by another name."

Mr Francois said the Labour government should "go back to their pledge and grant the British people a vote in a free and fair referendum".

"Gordon Brown in a Freudian slip referred to the EU constitution yesterday - even our own Prime Minister can no longer keep up the pretence," he said.

Diana Wallace, a Liberal Democrat MEP, said she wanted her party to call for a referendum. In a letter in the Yorkshire Post she wrote: "I, for one, believe that even pro-Europeans should embrace a referendum and I hope and expect that the Liberal Democrats as a whole will call for a vote on the mini or reform treaty, or whatever it is finally called."

She said those who refused such a popular debate and vote did the European cause no good in the longer term.

"If we are to have a positive relationship with the EU, we have to be completely transparent about it. We should be discussing the future direction with people and, hopefully, bringing them with us, through the ballot box."

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