

# A Foreign Secretary who supports withdrawal from the EU?

David Cameron's recent reshuffle saw Philip Hammond replace William Hague as Foreign Secretary. Since resigning as party leader following the disastrous flop of the half-heartedly eurosceptic Conservative General Election campaign in 2001, Hague has given up all pretensions at euroscepticism. He has appeared in print on a number of occasions supporting Turkish EU membership – a disastrous move that would allow over 80 million people the right to come to the UK – and was quick to snuff out as “unrealistic” the demands of 94 Conservative backbenchers for our Parliament to have the power to reject EU legislation.

Hammond, then, is a definite improvement on his predecessor, for last year, he stated that if presented with a choice between withdrawal and EU membership on its current terms, he would vote to leave. Following his recent appointment, he was asked if his views had changed since then. He replied that the current relationship between our country and the EU is “simply not acceptable” and that he would still vote to leave if there was no significant return of powers to Westminster.

So this all sounds like good news, especially as it is inconceivable that he made this statement without clearance from No. 10. However, before we get too excited, there are a couple of very serious caveats. Firstly, this reshuffle comes less than a year before the General election. If the Conservatives win, will Mr Hammond remain in his post? It is widely believed that George Osborne would like to take over as Foreign Secretary – a man who has yet to make a statement that he would ever support withdrawal. Could it therefore be that Hammond's appointment is mere window dressing? – a confidence

trick to lure UKIP voters back to the Tories next year? Given “Cast Iron Dave’s” slippery reputation, this cannot be ruled out, especially given that the reshuffle also saw the removal of two convinced eurosceptics – the Environment Secretary Owen Patterson and Welsh Secretary David Jones.

Secondly, even if Mr Hammond did continue in his post in the event of a Conservative election victory next year, would the scope of renegotiations required to satisfy him be the same as those demanded by the many voters who backed UKIP in last May’s European Parliamentary elections? Where does he stand on restricting free movement of people, for example? Or the total repatriation of justice and home affairs to our judiciary? Did he tacitly support the 94 backbenchers who wanted our parliament to regain power to block EU legislation which was damaging to the UK’s interests? We need to know the answers to these questions before getting too excited.