

# EU polls would be lost, says Nicolas Sarkozy

By Bruno Waterfield in Brussels

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Referendums on the new European Union Treaty were "dangerous" and would be lost in France, Britain and other countries, Nicolas Sarkozy has admitted.

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The French president's confession that governments could not win popular votes on a "simplified treaty" - drawn up to replace the EU constitution rejected by his countrymen two years ago - was made in a closed meeting of senior Euro-MPs.

"France was just ahead of all the other countries in voting no. It would happen in all member states if they have a referendum. There is a cleavage between people and governments," he said.

"A referendum now would bring Europe into danger. There will be no Treaty if we had a referendum in France, which would again be followed by a referendum in the UK."



Nicolas Sarkozy addresses members of the European parliament in Strasbourg yesterday

The comments confirm suspicions that the real reason why Britain, and all other EU countries, apart from Ireland, were refusing to hold popular votes was because governments were afraid they would lose them.

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Nigel Farage, the leader of the UK Independence Party, accused Mr Sarkozy and Gordon Brown of following "an utterly cynical political plan". "Not only does he stop his own people from having a say but he is trying to block Britain from having the referendum which our government promised," he said.

Mark Francois, the Conservative Europe spokesman, said: "President Sarkozy is right to say that there's a cleavage between people and governments in the EU. In Britain that will only get worse if Gordon Brown persists in breaking his solemn manifesto promise on a referendum. That is why the British people should have their say."

Speaking earlier in front of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg, Mr Sarkozy made public comments that would further alarm Downing Street. Mr Brown, when signing the new EU Treaty last month, promised that he would oppose any further European integration for at least a decade.

But the French president told MEPs: "It would be a mistake to think that with the simplified treaty we have sorted everything, we can sleep easy and that no other issues are pending."

He is planning to use his turn at the EU's rotating presidency, in the second half of next year, to call for new European powers in highly sensitive areas such as defence, which will dismay Mr Brown.

The president said: "Now we have got to resolve the political issues and to broach them without fear. We have got to debate them without taboos. Budgetary policy, trade policy, monetary policy, industrial policy, taxation, all policies, any policies."

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