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Cameron Out of Touch With EU Reality, Cable Says

By Ian Wishart Jan 20, 2015

U.K. Business Secretary Vince Cable said [David Cameron](#) is out of touch with the reality of European Union membership and his aim of clawing back powers will be difficult to achieve.

The prime minister's desire to win more control over immigration may well be frustrated because other EU leaders don't want a change, Cable said.

Cameron's "strategy is actually quite dangerous -- it is assuming that the other 27 countries will automatically agree to British requests," Cable told the Lisbon Council policy group in Brussels today. "Anybody who is expecting that our relationship with [Europe](#) can be fundamentally renegotiated is just utterly unrealistic."

The Conservative leader has promised a referendum on Britain's membership of the 28-nation bloc by the end of 2017 if he wins May's general election. Before the EU vote he wants to renegotiate the terms of U.K. membership to give national authorities more power over issues such as welfare payments to migrants.

Cable, a Liberal Democrat member of Cameron's coalition government, said the Conservative prime minister risks "raising expectations" that would be difficult to fulfill.

Merkel's Opposition

"Immigration has become a toxic issue in many of our countries and the U.K. is as bad, if not worse, than some others," Cable said. "Politicians

have to stand up and be willing to defend free movement within the European Union -- freedom to work is absolutely fundamental,” he said.

European Commission President [Jean-Claude Juncker](#) said on Jan. 16 that certain “red lines,” including the EU’s migration rules, could not be crossed by the U.K. because “lawmakers won’t change the treaties to satisfy the will of certain politicians.”

German Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#), who discussed the issue with Cameron earlier this month, said she isn’t willing to change the principle of free movement within the EU.

Cameron has said that he wants Europeans coming to the U.K. to be ineligible for welfare payments until they have been a resident for four years, and to have a job offer before they arrive in Britain. This would require approval from the EU’s other leaders.

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