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Cameron plans benefits block to stem flow of EU migrants

Premier steps back from imposing quotas as figures reveal pledges dashed

GEORGE PARKER AND HELEN MARRELL - LONDON
PETER SPIEGEL - STRASBOURG

David Cameron will announce plans today to exclude EU migrant workers from swathes of Britain's welfare state, but he will step back from any move to impose a cap on numbers or quotas to contain a surge in immigration.

However, Mr Cameron will suggest for the first time that he might campaign for a British exit from the EU if his demands for a better deal in Europe "fall on deaf ears". He will say he is confident of success but will add that if he fails, "I rule nothing out".

The prime minister's long-awaited immigration speech comes after figures showed that net migration rose 45 per cent over the past year to 260,000, dashed his pledge to limit numbers to the

But Angela Merkel, Germany's chancellor, and Jean-Claude Juncker, European Commission president, will have relieved that Mr Cameron has followed their advice not to challenge the fundamental principle of free movement.

George Osborne, chancellor, urged Mr Cameron not to cut off supply of European labour, echoing concerns from business leaders that risked sending out a message that Britain was turning its back on the west.

After months of signalling, Mr Cameron will not propose any form of limit to the volume of workers coming to Britain, nor an "emergency" mechanism to impose temporary limits.

Mr Juncker told the Financial Times that, provided Mr Cameron's challenge to free movement, his speech should be listened to "without

Oil price plunges 8% as Opec throws gauntlet to US shale producers

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