



EU Facts Update: developments in the EU (April 2008)

LISBON TREATY

- **Slovakia:** There was an on-going row within the coalition government because of a controversial press bill which some criticised would damage free speech. However, the country ratified the Lisbon Treaty on 11th April.
- **Austria:** ratified the Lisbon Treaty on 10th April after a referendum was denied.
- **Portugal:** ratified the Lisbon Treaty on 24th April.
- **Denmark:** ratified the Lisbon Treaty on 25th April.
- **Germany:** Parliament's lower house clear the Lisbon Treaty in mid-April
- **Poland:** Parliament's lower assembly ratified the Lisbon Treaty on 2nd April, ending a long row between Prime Minister Donald Tusk and the opposition party led by the Kaczynski twin brothers.
- **UK:** The House of Lords ruled against calls for a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty.
- **Ireland:** There have been suggestions that the EU is employing tactics in an attempt to influence the outcome of the Irish referendum. For example, a debate on the EU budget has been postponed for a further two months to avoid controversial which could compromise the chances of a 'yes' vote. Prime Minister Bertie Ahern announced that he will resign in May. He had been accused of fraud, and many have claimed he will resign to avoid damaging the government's aim to ratify the Lisbon Treaty in June. However, a leaked email from the Irish government on 15th April, criticising French President Sarkozy as "completely unpredictable" could affect the up-coming Lisbon Treaty referendum.
- EU member states began to discuss the details of the *Lisbon Treaty* on 14th April, including the specific powers of the new full-time EU president.

FUTURE EU ENLARGEMENT:

- **Macedonia:** will hold an early election. The country faced problems when trying to develop international relations. For example, it has been having disagreements with Greece because it wants to officially adopt the name 'The Republic of Macedonia'. Macedonia is currently the name of a region in Greece. Macedonia was also not invited to a NATO summit in early April and not being recognised by NATO could affect the country's attempt to join the EU.
- **Turkey:** On 8th April the Turkish government agreed to reduce a law which makes it legal to "criticise Turkish identity". When EU Commission President Barroso visited Turkey for the first time he emphasised that the country needs more reforms because it has "a long way to go" if it is to join the EU.
- **Serbia:** The country's pro-Western President Tadic signed a deal to move towards joining the EU. However, the country's Nationalist Prime Minister declared the deal was illegal and that the next government would annul it.
- **Bosnia:** A police bill was reformed on 11th April, which advanced Bosnia's bid to join the EU.
- An EU Parliament report published by Members of the EU Parliament on 9th April called for EU enlargement to slow down.

EU MEMBER STATES:

- **UK:** The amount the UK contributes to the EU budget will rise from £3.3bn to £6.4bn in 2008.
- **Italy:** Silvio Berlusconi won Italy's general election on 15th April. He has been the President of Italy twice before. He offended the Spanish leadership on his second day in office by criticising the female dominated cabinet as "too pink".
- **Spain:** Socialist Prime Minister Zapatero was re-elected on 15th April and selected a new, female-dominated cabinet.
- **Slovakia:** Applied to join the euro in 2009. It will be the 16th member of the eurozone.
- **Cyprus:** The island's hopes of reunification were encouraged on 4th April when an ancient Street in the divided city of Nicosia was opened for the first time in 40 years.
- **Hungary:** On 23rd April, a minor Party within Hungary's ruling coalition pulled out of the government. Resulting in a minority government headed by the Socialist Party. The country's largest opposition party called for Prime Minister Gyurcsany to resign or call an election.

BEIJING OLYMPICS:

- A majority of MEPs voted on 11th April to urge EU leaders to boycott the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing unless China agrees to speak with the Dalai Lama.
- The *Olympic torch relay* passed through London on 6th April. Lots of people protested against China's record of Human Rights abuses and its treatment of protestors in Tibet. The torch passed from London to San Francisco, where protest continued.
- EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson criticised calls for an Olympic boycott as "grandstanding and gestures", which could damage the West's relations with China

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:

- French President Sarkozy announced plans for an EU summit in July to discuss the proposed "*Union for the Mediterranean*". Countries including Libya, Syria and Israel have been invited to attend together, with hopes of securing peaceful relations.
- **Kosovo:** A new constitution which was approved by the EU on 3rd April was adopted by Kosovo on 11th April. It will come into force in June. However, the EU's initiative sent to police Kosovo's transition to independence was criticised by Russia who argued that it is illegal, asserting it will only deal with the UN in Kosovo.
- Member states were criticised because the amount of development aid being given to poorer countries has dropped, despite promises to increase support.

EU SECURITY POLICY:

- **NATO Summit- Bucharest 4TH April - :**
 - 26-nations of NATO agreed to support a controversial US missile defence shield in Europe. The Czech Republic agreed to host parts of defence shield.
 - Greece successfully stopped Macedonia from receiving an invitation to the summit
 - NATO will enlarge after the invitation of Croatia and Albania
 - The summit failed to agree on coherent plans for Georgia and the Ukraine to join NATO
- **EU police and justice mission to Kosovo:**
 - Russia questioned whether the EU's mission in Kosovo was actually legal and asserted that it would only deal with the UN. As a reaction Spain refused to participate in the mission until the issue was resolved. The mission was intended to last until the new Constitution comes into force in Kosovo in July 2008.

ENERGY POLICY:

- The EU agreed a deal for Turkmenistan for a supply of 10 billion cubic metres of natural gas each year. It is hoped the deal will reduce the EU's dependence on Russia for its energy supplies.

ECONOMY:

- The Commission published its economic forecasts for 2007-2009, predicting:
 - Slower growth,
 - record-high inflation
 - growing public debt
- It was announced that the scheduled debate on budget reform will be postponed so that member states have more time to submit suggestions for reform. Some people argued that the real intention was for the debate to be delayed because critical debate could result in a 'No' to the Lisbon Treaty in the Irish referendum.

ENVIRONMENT:

- On 9th April, a European Parliament committee supported plans to make acts that damage the environment illegal.
- The Commission launched an enquiry because of criticism that the increased use of biofuels could worsen the problem of rising global food prices. For example, Gordon Brown disagreed with the Commission president about biofuels, arguing whilst using biofuels to replace fossil fuels may appear environmentally friendly; it actually increases the cost of food. The EU's target is to ensure 10 per cent of its road fuel is biofuel by 2020. There are fears that increasing food prices could lead to more EU protectionism, which would have consequences for external trade.

OTHER NEWS:

- The EU is funding £6.6m research to develop robots with personalities.
- In the Netherlands, civil servants and MEPs revisited their secondary schools as part of an 'EU Back to School' scheme on 14th April to bring 'Europe closer to home'.
- An EU's satellite navigation system called 'Galileo' will be working by 2013.
- New measures were proposed on 8th April to allow mobile phones to be used on aeroplanes.
- MEPs called for a euro-passport to make it easier for artists to travel across the EU.
- FIFA, the International Football Association, wants to limit the amount of foreign players who can play for a football team at any one time. However, limiting the number of non-national players would contradict EU rules that forbid clubs from restricting the movement of workers.
- It has been suggested that the EU Parliament should "filter" written questions from MEP's to get rid of "silly" questions. However, a filter system could restrict MEP's attempts to ensure accountability.
- Despite criticism and cynicism about MEP's expenses, the EU Parliament voted against making an auditor's report available to the public