



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

LISBON TREATY

The Lisbon Treaty is being ratified by the 27 EU member states throughout this year. The Treaty remains controversial within many EU countries because it has been estimated that 99% of its content is identical to the failed EU Constitution. However, Commission President José Manuel Barroso has stressed that the new Treaty is crucial for fighting terrorism and generating a common EU immigration policy. Gordon Brown has resisted calls for a referendum on the Treaty by asserting that the UK parliament would debate the Treaty extensively, however throughout February there was **criticism that UK MP's weren't being given enough time to properly debate the Treaty in Parliament**. Labour MP's who were in favour of a referendum on the Treaty were threatened with expulsion from the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). Also, on 14th Feb, Europe Minister Jim Murphy claimed it would be too expensive for Britain to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. In mid-February the UK pledged 10,000 troops for an EU army but asserted that it will not publicly support an EU army before the Lisbon Treaty comes into force.

Romania ratified the *Lisbon Treaty* by a huge majority on 5th February. However, on the 8th the **Slovakian** parliament postponed their vote indefinitely because of disagreements. On 20th February **Germany** announced that it might not be able to ratify the *Lisbon Treaty* in time because a law allowing EU reform needs to be amended first. However, German Chancellor Angela Merkel vowed it would be ratified in time.

NEWS FROM EU MEMBER STATES:

Italy: An early election will be held in April because attempts to establish an interim government had failed.

Cyprus: Demetris Christofias, leader of the communist party, was elected President on 18th February. He has called for new attempts to reunite the Island, which is currently divided between the Greek ruled south (an EU member state) and the Turkish ruled North.

Czech Republic: President Václav Klaus was re-elected on 15th February. He is Euro-sceptic.

Armenia: Prime Minister Serge Sarkisian won the presidential election on 20th February; however his main opponent argued the election was unfair.

Bulgaria and Romania were ordered by the EU in early February to do more to fight corruption and organised crime.

NEWS FROM COUNTRIES OUTSIDE THE EU:

- **Russia:** Relations between Russia and the EU were tested when Poland agreed to host a US missile defence shield on 3rd February. Then, on 13th February, Russia said it may target missiles at Ukraine if it joins the US defence shield. Also, following concern over the fairness of Russia's presidential election on 2 March, Europe's main election watchdog says it would boycott the election.
- **Serbia:** President Boris Tadic, was re-elected on 3rd February. He is a pro-Western and pro-free market reformer. He had campaigned for Kosovo to remain in Serbia, and for Serbia to join the EU.

EU POLICE AND JUSTICE MISSION: KOSOVO

Despite strong opposition from Serbia, **Kosovo's** parliament declared independence on Sunday 17th February 2008. Some EU member states also opposed Kosovo's independence arguing that it set a dangerous precedent for separatist movements in other EU member states, for example Nationalists in the Basque region of Spain want independence. The EU deployed 1,800 policemen, prosecutors and judges on a civilian mission to police Kosovo's transition to independence. However, there was **violence** and unrest. For example, Serb protesters torched police crossing points. On 25th February the EU withdrew staff from Northern Kosovo - a region with a majority Serb population- but asserted that it was only a temporary withdrawal. The EU has pledged €1 billion over the next four years to support the new state.

EU PEACEKEEPING MISSION: DARFUR

The EU deployed a *peacekeeping mission* to the Darfur region of Chad on 13th February. It had been intended that the mission would start earlier, but fighting in Chad's capital N'Djamena led the EU to delay it.

FUTURE EU ENLARGEMENT

- **Turkey:** The debate over Turkish accession to the EU intensified Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan vowed to prepare the country for EU membership. Progress was made in February when Turkey's parliament voted to end the ban on women wearing Islamic headscarves in universities. However, the issue of EU enlargement remains highly contentious; for example, French President Nicholas Sarkozy opposes Turkish membership.
- **Moldova:** On 22nd February, Sarkozy called for Moldova's accession to the EU.

ENVIRONMENT:

On 6th February the EU launched a '*Clean Sky*' research project costing euro 1.6 billion to develop environmentally friendly airplanes.

OTHER NEWS:

- *Prince Charles gave a speech to the EU Parliament* on 15th February. He emphasised the dangers of climate change, urging the EU to take a leading role to combat it.
- On 19th Feb a report by the British Chambers of Commerce's announced that the *cost of European regulation in the UK has risen* 16 per cent in one year and by £47bn since 1998.
- Towards the end of February 2008 there were accusations of *fraud in the EU Parliament*. An internal audit found that £98.4 million a year (£125,000 per MEP) has been mishandled because some MEP's were misusing money given to them to pay their staff.