



## ***EU Facts Update: developments in the EU (June 2008)***

### **THE LISBON TREATY**

Ireland voted against ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in a referendum held on 16<sup>th</sup> June. With a surprisingly high turnout, 53.7% voted 'No' to the Treaty while 46.3% voted 'Yes'. Campaigning was fierce because Ireland was the only member state to hold a referendum and also due to the potential for a 'No' vote to de-rail the whole process. Before it can be implemented in 2009, the Lisbon Treaty must be ratified by all 27 EU member states. As a result Ireland's rejection of the Treaty has thrown the EU into confusion over the best way for it to pursue further integration.

Asserting that the Treaty is too important to simply abandon, EU leaders have insisted that Ireland's 'No' did not represent a rejection of the Treaty's fundamental principles and that the ratification process should continue. As a result there has been criticism of Brussels for appearing to ignore the democratic vote. One suggested solution has been for the EU to allow Ireland to negotiate a series of "opt-outs" from the Treaty and then hold a second referendum, in the hope of achieving a 'Yes' vote on that basis. However, the EU's insistence that the Irish could, and should, be convinced to ratify the Treaty has been labelled as 'bullying' by some of the British media. The Lisbon Treaty remains highly contentious, especially within those member states that have yet to ratify the Treaty. For example Poland and the Czech Republic have expressed doubts about whether the Treaty will, or should, be successfully ratified.

A UK court ruled against millionaire businessman, Stuart Wheeler's challenge against the UK government's refusal to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, stating there had not been "legitimate expectation" that the government would hold a public vote. The UK bill to approve the Lisbon Treaty passed through the House of Lords on the 18<sup>th</sup> June and shortly after received Royal Assent, but ratification will not technically be complete until the 'instruments' of ratification are returned to Brussels. There is currently debate as to whether or not this should be undertaken before the outcome of the Irish vote has been established.

### **LOOKING TOWARDS THE FRENCH EU PRESIDENCY**

Slovenia handed over the Presidency of the EU to France on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008. French President Nicholas Sarkozy insisted that ratifying the Lisbon Treaty, creating a common EU Corporation tax and developing a common EU Defence and Security Policy will be priorities for the French Presidency. Italy announced that it would support France's more protectionist stance in the EU if France continues to support its proposed *Union for the Mediterranean*, which would see the creation of a new political bloc for Mediterranean countries. However Lybia's leader, Colonel Gadaffi, criticised the plans for the new Union stating "we are not starving people, nor dogs, for them to throw us bones".

### **THE EFFECT OF RISING GLOBAL FOOD AND FUEL PRICES**

Europeans continued to feel the pressure of rising global oil and food prices. There were fuel protests across the EU throughout June some of which, including a protest by fishermen in Brussels, were violent. EU leaders continued to debate proposed solutions to the growing crisis, including increasing taxes to encourage people to use less energy. However, such attempts were hindered when member states called for renewable energy targets to be reduced and made more flexible, and for different methods to be used to calculate states energy consumption.

Members also debated proposals to use alternative 'Green' energy sources. However, alerts at nuclear sites in Slovenia and the Czech Republic sparked concerns about the viability of nuclear energy sources, and the EU continues to investigate the use of renewable energies such as wind power and biofuels. For example, after calls from the UN and the UK for further studies into the impact of biofuels, the *Gallaher* report was published and seemed to support widespread suggestions that the increased use of biofuels is worsening the problem of inflated food prices because using more crops for energy production restricts the supply available to be consumed as food.

### **AGENCY WORKERS DIRECTIVE**

A new EU Directive will give temporary workers the same rights as permanent workers after 12 weeks. The UK had originally opposed the Directive, arguing that it could affect small businesses. However a compromise has been reached and in return the UK will receive an opt-out of EU rules for a maximum 48-hour working week.

### **PROPOSAL FOR A COMMON EU IMMIGRATION POLICY**

The EU proposes to establish a Common policy on Immigration, which would include the use of biometric visas, finger printing and the right to detain illegal immigrants for up to 18 months before they are deported, as well as banning violators from re-entering Europe for up to five years. However, states outside the EU criticised the proposed policy, affecting current negotiations with Ecuador, and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez even threatened to withhold oil supplies to the EU.

## **MANDELSON V SARKOZY**

Following Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty there was evidence of tensions running high as a row broke out between the UK's EU Commissioner (for Trade) Peter Mandelson and French President Nicholas Sarkozy. When asked why the Irish had rejected the Lisbon Treaty, Nicholas Sarkozy blamed Mandelson for the EU's trade policies, suggesting that they worsen starvation in the world's poorest countries and have turned the EU's population against it. However, Peter Mandelson responded that President Sarkozy was simply trying to justify France's own protectionist tendencies, including subsidising of EU farmers and the setting of high import tariffs.

## **MEPs' EXPENSES CRITICISM**

In light of on-going criticism of the way MEPs spend their expenses, UK Conservative Party leader, David Cameron, threatened to fire Conservative MEPs who refused to publicise their expenses. For example, following revelations of his misuse of an annual £160,000 staff expenditure grant, Giles Chichester resigned as leader of the European Conservative's, stating that "whoops-a-daisy I am shown up to have made a mistake". He will however remain an MEP.

The independent and EU-sceptical think tank Open Europe undertook a Transparency Initiative and requested the expenses claims of all serving British MEPs, the results of which can be found online at [www.openeurope.org.uk](http://www.openeurope.org.uk).

## **EU FACEBOOK**

The European Parliament proposed to create a new online social network, exclusively for MEPs.

## **MEMBER STATES**

**UK:** The EU Commission has declared that it will shortly begin disciplinary action against the UK over its budget deficit.

**Sweden:** New legislation allowing wire-tapping has been approved.

**Italy:** Prime Minister Berlusconi repealed plans to jail illegal immigrants, but proposed to fingerprint the country's population of Roma gypsies.

**Romania:** Promised a crack down on petty bribery, to come into line with EU Commission demands.

**Spain:** African migrants attempted to storm a Spanish enclave in Morocco during Spain's quarter-final match against Italy in the 2008 European Cup. There was also violence in Spain's separatist Basque region, and at fuel protests throughout the country.

**France:** Signed a civilian nuclear deal with Algeria, and pledged to send more troops to Afghanistan.

**Eastern Europe:** Several Eastern European states began drawing up incentive plans to lure back overseas nationals from affluent Western European states.

## **NON-MEMBER STATES**

**Bosnia:** Signed a SAA (Stabilisation and Association Agreement) pact with the EU.

**Croatia:** Signed another pre-accession chapter, moving it closer to EU membership.

**Macedonia:** Violence followed the country's snap election. Despite opposition from Greece, the EU outlined a minimal proposal for Macedonia's application to join the EU.

**Turkey:** A Turkish court overturned the country's law banning headscarves in universities. There were reports of increased numbers of torture cases in Turkey.

**Serbia:** Following long negotiations, a government was finally formed on 24<sup>th</sup> June when the Socialist Party agreed to join the pro- EU Serbian coalition. A new Serbian assembly also held its first meeting in Mitrovica, North Kosovo, in defiance of Kosovo's recent declaration of independence.

**Kosovo:** Protestors against Kosovan Independent attacked the Prime Minister's home. The UN handed over governance to the new government, and also gradually handed over policing to the EU.

**USA:** A summit with the EU resulted in little progress as the US announced stricter regulations for EU citizens travelling to the US.

**Russia:** On 28<sup>th</sup> June new Russian President Medvedev took part in his first EU summit to negotiate a new strategic partnership deal with the EU.

**Georgia:** EU diplomats were sent to Georgia following further violence in the on-going crisis between Russia and Georgia.

**Cyprus:** Hope for reunification grew as Cyprus ended its legal action against the EU, for providing aid to Turkish Cyprus.

**Iran:** The EU installed financial sanctions against Iran, including freezing the government's bank assets.

**Cuba:** The EU removed its sanctions against Cuba.

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