



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

The LISBON TREATY:

Ratification of the Lisbon Treaty continued to dominate European politics throughout May. Whilst the number of member states to successfully ratify the Treaty rose to fourteen, there was opposition:

UK: Conservative businessman Stuart Wheeler began legal proceedings against the government's refusal to hold a referendum on the Treaty.

Sweden: Unions demanded an opt-out to allow them to protect the labour Market.

Poland: ratified the Treaty despite calls for an amendment to protect national sovereignty.

Austria: ratified the Treaty despite calls for a referendum.

Slovakia: ratified the Treaty despite the oppositions attempt by to use the Treaty in a national argument about a media bill. The EU criticised this use of the Lisbon Treaty.

Ireland: Campaigning continued ahead of the Irish referendum to be held on 12th June

Debating of the Treaty's contents began, including:

- The new *European External Action Service (EEAS)* Diplomatic service. Debate concerned who should be involved and what the service's legal status will be.
- Possible candidates for the new High Representative on Foreign Affairs were suggested, including UK Foreign Minister David Milliband.
- Possible candidates for the New President of the EU council were suggested, including Tony Blair. There was also a proposal for candidates to take part in a televised debate.

OTHER NEWS

CAP 'health check': As part of a review all EU spending the Commission evaluated the Common Agricultural Policy which provides financial support for farmers. It was hoped that the 'health check' would recommend reform to ensure EU policy does not result in higher global food prices. However, although the review proposed to reduce CAP payments to farmers and to concentrate funding for the environment, the review was criticised for being too limited and CAP remains a controversial EU policy.

Environment: The EU Parliament voted in favour of making it a crime to cause damage to the environment. There was concern that the Commission's proposed to further restrict emissions could lead to power cuts because not enough energy is currently generated by 'green' sources.

Immigration Policy: Schengen zone countries agreed on the amount of time illegal immigrants can be held in custody. Parliament was awarded co-decision over "safe" countries to which illegal immigrants can be returned. French President Sarkozy called for an "immigration pact" with tougher "readmission" measures, refugee status to be applied for in advance, biometric visas and language lessons.

Energy: There was international disagreement about the use of biofuels after concern that despite being an environmentally friendly substitute for fossil fuels, biofuels makes food more expensive. There were fuel price protest in UK, Bulgaria, Spain and France.

Temporary Workers' Directive: The UK originally opposed the Directive to give equal rights to temporary workers, arguing that it could affect small businesses, but a compromise was reached with the EU, in return for an opt-out from EU rules about maximum working hours.

Proposed reforms for the European Parliament: Under current rules, political groups must comprise 20 MEPs from a fifth of all member states. Labour MEP Richard Corbett proposed to that groups should be composed of more MEP's to reduce the formation of single issue groups. However, opponents assert that changing the rules will simply exclude smaller groups from receiving funding.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Mediterranean Union: Details for France's proposal for a new union for Mediterranean states were considered amid speculation that France intended to provide a new union for Turkey to join instead of the EU. African Unions called on African nations to scrap EU trade rules because they damages their economies.

Proposed Eastern Union: Poland and Sweden suggested establishing a new 'Eastern European Union' of states in the Eastern EU.

Russia: European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) negotiations were finally reopened with Russia after Lithuania agreed to lift its veto. Greece signed a deal with Russia to establish a gas pipeline, which some criticised suggesting it would undermine the EU's attempts to establish gas pipelines for the entire region.

Serbia: Tension continued following Kosovo's declaration of Independence. Serbia held a snap election which was seen as a crucial battle between pro and anti-EU parties. The ruling President Tadic (Pro-EU) won re-election by a slim majority and negotiated to establish a coalition government, possibly with the Socialist Party, which used to be headed by Milosevic.

Kosovo: The legal status of the EU-Lex operation to police Kosovo's transition to independence was challenged by Serbia and Russia, who said it should be the responsibility of the UN.