

**Submission to the
Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Ireland's Future in the European Union
from the
Irish Regions Office, Brussels**

Executive Summary

Introduction

Membership of the European Union has been of enormous importance and benefit to Ireland and we must remain a fully engaged and committed member. That we are in this position of uncertainty, so soon after the first Nice Treaty referendum, would seem to indicate the need for a more fundamental review and radical change in the way that we as a nation engage with the European Union and how the public is both informed and involved.

In this submission, the Irish Regions Office (IRO) suggests that Ireland needs to think, act and co-operate more strategically, in the sense of a less top-down and more inclusive manner, by:

- having a more systematic approach to, and being more proactive during, all stages of the EU decision-making process;
- better communicating our approach to, and position on, EU policy;
- having better coordinated engagement in all institutions and activities of the Union and extending the concept of engagement in Europe beyond the inter-Governmental approach;
- being more innovative in connecting the public with the European Union process.

Ireland's Future in the European Union – an issue of Governance

During the debate on the future of the European Union in 2002, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Affairs stated in its report that *'the reality is that all levels of Government – local, regional, national and Union – are nowadays in practice involved, directly or indirectly, with almost every area of government to some degree or other either in a consultative, an executive or a legislative role'*¹. While this is true to an extent for EU affairs, in reality the nature of the involvement has not maximised the potential contributions of all levels of government, in line with the European model of governance, in order to maintain our influence in the European Union and to inform and involve the Irish public.

Certain core EU principles need to be respected and demonstrated within all Member States – democracy, consultation, partnership, openness/transparency and participation. This assessment by the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Ireland's future in the European Union is an opportunity to look at the experiences of other Member States in the application of these principles, especially how they engage stakeholders in their membership of the European Union. This may be beyond the immediate scope of the Sub Committee's mandate and tight work schedule but is something that should be reviewed in more detail.

Furthermore, in the White Paper on European Governance in 2001², the European Commission recommended that each Member State put in place adequate mechanisms for wide consultation when discussing EU decisions and implementing EU policies. This has not really been put into effect in Ireland. Also, the Lisbon Treaty includes a Protocol on the Principle of Subsidiarity which strengthens its potential application, from the European to the local level, which would seem to further indicate the need for all levels of government to be adequately involved.

With regard to the specific issues that the Sub-Committee is addressing, we make the following points, some of which are set out in more detail in the submission:

¹ Report of the Joint Committee on European Affairs on the Future of the European Union 2002 (section 4.45)

² European Governance: A White Paper (COM(2001) 428)

Challenges facing Ireland, following the Lisbon Treaty Referendum result:

- *Demonstrate that Ireland is still an active and committed member of the European Union;*
- *Enhance our influence in EU decision-making – need a comprehensive engagement in the entire process and need to be seen to be stepping-up this engagement;*
- *Re-launch our pro-European outlook – counter accusations of being insular, maintain a ‘can-do’ attitude, work to bring forward big political ideas and reinforce our alliances with partners at all levels.*

Ireland’s future in the EU and our influence within the European Institutions:

- *Establish a National Strategy for European Affairs, setting out priorities, acting as a framework for how we consult internally, engage externally and inform the public on Ireland’s approach to the European Union;*
- *Be more pro-active in EU policy-making and adopt a more systematic, coordinated engagement in all steps of the process;*
- *Maximise our involvement in EU funded programmes and project activity - declining Structural Fund returns should not mean that we turn our backs on other funding sources or opportunities for beneficial collaboration;*
- *Be active, committed and seen to be such – in this regard we need to address Ireland’s relatively low institutional presence and visibility in Brussels.*

Role of the Houses of the Oireachtas in EU affairs:

- *Beyond its current mandate, the Sub-Committee on Ireland’s Future in the European Union should benchmark Ireland’s approach to engaging in European Affairs by reference to some other Member States, to identify good governance practices;*
- *The Joint Committee on European Affairs must be a catalyst for debate on both legislative and non-legislative proposals and work to promote a more enhanced engagement with the European Union;*
- *The Oireachtas, through the work of the Joint Committee on European Scrutiny, must be the guardian of the principle of subsidiarity as set out in the Lisbon Treaty, from the EU to the national, but also from the national to the regional and to the local level.*

Improve public understanding of the EU

- *Must take a long-term perspective, not just focus on the immediate issues of getting Lisbon adopted. Otherwise, we will only be storing-up problems for the future;*
- *Use the untapped potential of local and regional authorities as agents for informing the public;*
- *Need to reduce negative publicity attached to EU membership, such as infringement proceedings (which often result from poor governance and lack of proper engagement in the initial decision-making process);*
- *Demonstrate tangible benefits, using concrete local examples of relevance to ordinary citizen, such as the effects of legislation, successful EU funded projects, the useful transfer of best practice.*

Note:

The **Irish Regions Office** was established in 2000, with the support of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, as a Brussels based resource for the Irish members of the Committee of the Regions and their regional authorities. The activities of the office have expanded, through a collaboration of the Association of Irish Regions and local authority managers, to provide a wider range of services to sub-national authorities.

The **Committee of the Regions** (CoR) was established by the Maastricht Treaty in 1994 as a consultative body to provide representatives of local and regional government with a voice at the heart of the European Union. Ireland has nine members on the CoR.

The **Association of Irish Regions** (AIR) is the national representative organisation of the eight Regional Authorities and the two Regional Assemblies in Ireland.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Membership of the European Union has been of enormous importance and benefit to Ireland and we must remain a fully engaged and committed member. That we are in this position of uncertainty, so soon after the first Nice Treaty referendum, would seem to indicate the need for a more fundamental review and radical change in the way that we as a nation engage with the European Union and how the public is both informed and involved.

1.2 In this submission, the Irish Regions Office (IRO) suggests that Ireland needs to think, act and co-operate more strategically, in the sense of a less top-down and more inclusive manner, by:

- having a more systematic approach to, and being more proactive during, all stages of the EU decision-making process;
- better communicating our approach to, and position on, EU policy;
- having better coordinated engagement in all institutions and activities of the Union and extending the concept of engagement in Europe beyond the inter-Governmental approach;
- being more innovative in connecting the public with the European Union process.

1.3 This short submission addresses the four specific questions raised by the Sub-Committee but with particular focus on Ireland's future in the EU and our influence within the European Institutions (theme 2). It is based on positions adopted by the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions and the Association of Irish Regions previously. The submission is also based on the experiences of the IRO in providing local and regional authorities and other agencies with information on EU policies, funding programmes and other potential opportunities and providing a point of contact in Brussels for these bodies, since 2000.

2. Ireland's Future in the European Union – an issue of Governance

2.1 In considering Ireland's future in the European Union, good governance is a fundamental aspect. During the debate on the future of the European Union in 2002, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Affairs stated in its report that *'the reality is that all levels of Government – local, regional, national and Union – are nowadays in practice involved, directly or indirectly, with almost every area of government to some degree or other either in a consultative, an executive or a legislative role'*³. While this is true to an extent for EU affairs, in reality the nature of the involvement has not maximised the potential contributions of all levels of government, in line with the European model of governance, in order to maintain our influence in the European Union and to inform and involve the Irish public.

2.2 Certain core EU principles need to be respected and demonstrated within all Member States – democracy, consultation, partnership, openness/transparency and participation. This assessment by the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Ireland's future in the European Union is an opportunity to look at the experiences of other Member States in the application of these principles, especially how they engage stakeholders in their membership of the European Union. This may be beyond the immediate scope of the Sub Committee's mandate and tight work schedule but is something that should be reviewed in more detail.

³ Report of the Joint Committee on European Affairs on the Future of the European Union 2002 (section 4.45)

2.3 Furthermore, in the White Paper on European Governance in 2001⁴, the European Commission recommended that each Member State put in place adequate mechanisms for wide consultation when discussing EU decisions and implementing EU policies. This has not really been put into effect in Ireland.

2.4 Also, the Lisbon Treaty includes a Protocol on the Principle of Subsidiarity which strengthens its potential application, from the European to the local level, which would seem to further indicate the need for all levels of government to be adequately involved. The Oireachtas should be the guardian of this principle, from the EU to the national, but also from the national to the regional and to the local.

With these governance principles in mind, we address the questions posed by the Sub-Committee:

3. Challenges facing Ireland, following the Lisbon Treaty Referendum result

3.1 It is vital to recognise that at a time when an endemic lack of understanding of EU matters prevails and a growing Euro-scepticism is taking hold, there is a vital need for a *root and branch realignment of the mindset driving Ireland's relationship with the EU* in order to make it work both in the national interest and as a valued contributor towards European ideals.

3.2 Regardless of the outcome of any subsequent referendum, if we, as a nation and people, are to be considered “good Europeans” a ‘can do’ *attitude of openness and active engagement with the EU and our EU partners* needs to be encouraged and facilitated at all levels. Achieving this level of engagement would imply that our relationship with the EU needs to be both proactive (demonstrating a national willingness towards being involved Europeans) and reactive (responsive to demands and requests).

3.3 If widely applied this would allow Ireland to cast aside accusations that we are becoming insular and are demonstrating a shallow commitment to Europe, now that our Structural Funds receipts have greatly decreased and the Common Agricultural Policy is being reformed and its budget being gradually reduced. In fact, as soon-to-be net contributors to the EU budget we owe it to ourselves to maximise our use of our membership of the Union and to do our utmost to shape its development. This would suggest that our approach to the EU decision-making process needs to be reviewed, in order to have a *broader involvement of key stakeholders*, facilitating an open approach to internal consultations on EU issues and having a systematic involvement in every step in the decision-making chain, something which is not apparent at the moment.

3.4 It must be underlined, especially when informing public opinion, that the benefits of our membership of the European Union and of heightened engagement are not confined to financial returns as frequently portrayed. Our *relationship with the European Union must be more mature* than this and requires a more rounded assessment of its worth and more subtle communication of what it offers. That said, there remain ample opportunities for Irish authorities and organisations to be active in EU funded programmes and to access funding, but this also requires a more systematic and coherent approach than adopted heretofore.

In conclusion, in considering the challenges facing Ireland, following the Lisbon Treaty Referendum result, we need to:

- ***Demonstrate that Ireland is still an active and committed member of the European Union;***
- ***Re-launch our pro-European outlook –counter accusations of being insular, maintain a ‘can-do’ attitude, work to bring forward big political ideas and reinforce our alliances with partners at all levels.***

⁴ European Governance: A White Paper (COM(2001) 428)

- **Enhance our influence in EU decision-making – need a comprehensive engagement in the entire process and need to be seen to be stepping-up this engagement;**

4. Ireland's future in the EU and our influence within the European Institutions

4.0 The European Union is currently in the middle of a multi-layered process of reform and reviewing how it operates in the context of new and emerging challenges. Apart from the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, some of the key questions at present for the future of the European Union are:

- the EU Budget Review, which includes an appraisal of the future priorities of the European Union, including the future of the Common Agricultural Policy, EU Cohesion Policy and other significant policies post 2013 and the revenue sources for the EU budget;
- the future of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs post 2010;
- the future of energy security and supply and the related challenges posed by climate change, especially in the run-up to the UN Summit on Climate Change in Copenhagen in 2009; and
- the role of the European Union in the world, in terms of migration, security, trade and development assistance.

4.1 A National Strategy for European Affairs

4.1.1 These are very significant issues for all Member States, including Ireland, and require co-ordinated and well articulated responses. Are we clear on what is in this country's best interests, is there joined-up thinking in our approaches to these issues, should there be a national consultation on these key questions and is the public sufficiently informed and aware of the context within which these questions are being addressed?

4.1.2 It is clear from the Lisbon Treaty result that the public is not well informed nor does it feel sufficiently engaged in the European Union. While it is difficult to explain the details of how the EU Institutions work and how legislation is adopted, it would seem desirable that Ireland has a *national vision* to define its place in the European Union and the positions that it wishes to pursue on the future key challenges. This vision should be fluid and flexible in nature and informed by a process of public dialogue and consultation, in order to give public ownership to our place in the European Union. Key to this will be the development of a *National Strategy for European Affairs*⁵, setting out our priorities, providing a framework for how we consult internally on EU issues and how we engage externally. This would be invaluable in terms of being proactive, open and strategic but also as a tool for informing the public on our approach to the European Union and how we wish to influence it.

4.2 A more Systematic and Coordinated Engagement

4.2.1 We consider that Ireland needs a *more Systematic and Coordinated Engagement*, as valuable opportunities for: (a) policy input at an early stage from those charged with implementation – thereby feeding into better future policies which are more likely to gain the acceptance of citizens; (b) practical international exchange of knowledge, ideas and new techniques; and (c) funding; are being missed because of current systemic constraints, barriers and grey areas of responsibility. This, we suggest, also undermines public ownership of our EU membership.

4.2.2 The EU decision-making chain provides a number of opportunities to influence the EU policy-making process, from consultations and calls for submissions during the pre-drafting stages of proposals from the European Commission to the debates and negotiations in the various EU institutions, where Irish interests need to be promoted and defended. Responses from

⁵ This would be separate from the Government's current document: 'Ireland and the European Union – Identifying Priorities and Pursuing Goals' (4th Edition, 2006). The proposed National Strategy above is as much about the process of public and stakeholder engagement as it is about the text.

Ireland to the various public consultation processes of the European Commission are relatively low, which means that we are reacting to the agendas of others rather than being pro-active in shaping policy ourselves.

4.2.3 Just as the impact of the EU is all-pervasive, active involvement in the EU should not end at government level (Council, Permanent Representation) nor with high-level interaction with the European Commission and Parliament. We would suggest that Ireland should have:

- 1) A national system for consultation with key stakeholders on EU issues of strategic importance to this country, which would be used to inform the Irish position and approach to negotiations;
- 2) A forum for our representatives on the various EU institutions to meet occasionally to discuss issues of strategic importance and identify the potential for coordinated approaches.

There could be a role here for the Oireachtas in piloting these initiatives.

4.2.4 A more inclusive and coordinated involvement of Irish MEPs, and members of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), the Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and Oireachtas members involved with COSAC, would help strategically reinforce Irish engagement in the EU institutions and the key messages that represent Ireland's interests. Consultation with key stakeholders, such as local and regional authorities, very often at the sharp end of implementing EU policy and legislation, would provide them with the opportunity to keep ahead of EU developments and to engage constructively including using their wealth of experience in environmental management and other topics to pro-actively influence policy rather than simply reacting to its (often sudden) arrival. These intelligence and feedback channels need to be developed as in other EU Member States and should pay dividends by developing policy and legislation which better reflects Irish experiences and whose application is more suited to pertaining circumstances.

4.2.5 Furthermore, outside of Ireland's representatives on EU institutions, the system of *seconded national experts* to the European Commission provides an opportunity for Irish civil servants to gain valuable insight and experience of the EU policy making process. However, could this experience be better deployed once an official has completed the secondment, building on his/her acquired knowledge and contacts to the advantage of Irish interests? Anecdotal evidence, would suggest that the use of seconded national experts is more strategically deployed by other Member States.

4.3 Maximising Ireland's involvement in EU Funding Programmes

4.3.1 The various EU funded programmes are designed to support practical measures towards achieving EU policy priorities and active involvement in these programmes is one expression of commitment to meeting these priorities. There is a role in *maximising Ireland's involvement in EU funding programmes* by officials in government departments and state agencies but also by actors and agencies at sub-national levels of government.

4.3.2 A wide range of funding programmes are made available by the European Commission on a competitive basis (separate to the more familiar Structural Funds and NDP funding) – allowing organisations in different Member States to share operational experiences, exchange best practices, look at problems from different perspectives, devise joint solutions, pool resources, etc. The full extent of opportunities presented by these programmes has not been recognised by Irish organisations because, in part, of a historic dependence on more straightforward Structural Funds whose allocation is nationally determined. This limited mindset is at odds with the approach of some 'new' Member States, who although now availing of more significant Structural Funds than Ireland, would appear to already be taking a far-sighted view by also focusing on these other funding sources.

4.3.3 While generous funding is available for successful participants, the fact that most Irish authorities and agencies may not be as well connected to operational European developments, as might ideally be the case, means that there is a real risk of Ireland becoming marginalised vis-à-vis new knowledge and cutting edge developments which benefit economic competitiveness,

social inclusion and environmental management. The extent to which the responsible national bodies have the willingness to take an outward-looking perspective towards Europe or even ambitions to network in such practical cooperation is unclear.

4.3.4 There is therefore a need to facilitate and support this engagement in practical operational and resource terms. Based on the IRO's experiences we suggest:

- The European capacity of local authorities should be strongly reinforced to reflect a sense of public ownership of EU membership. Providing for more defined 'EU Officer' roles (at least one full-time-equivalent per authority) by assigning existing staff would allow for much more coherent focus on how counties and cities, individually and collectively/at a regional level, can practically use the EU to their advantage. Immediately this would enhance not only their knowledge of relevant European funding programmes but would free up capacity to define and pursue avenues of interest.
- There is a need to establish the means to centrally pre-evaluate EU funding applications from Irish organisations. The strategic compatibility of proposed actions against set national/regional policy objectives could be much better assured than is currently the case. Compliance could be encouraged by providing a central fund to support and strengthen project application development and (if approved) operational costs of appropriate initiatives. This facility is used by some EU countries and underpins higher comparative levels of project involvement and more strategic results.

These moves could yield a net dividend both in financial terms (higher quality bids assuring increased funding from the EU to match or multiply national resources provided) and added value qualitative terms (ability to access new learning and techniques, better targeting of issues etc.).

4.4 Ireland's presence on-the-ground in Brussels

4.4.1 Ireland's *presence on-the-ground in Brussels*, outside of the Permanent Representation and a handful of representative organisations, is small. This is in stark contrast to the level of representation of some other Member States and the presence that other similar sized regions and countries, such as Scotland, Wales and Norway for example, have established through multi-agency representations, which provide a single point-of-contact and allow for better co-ordination and co-operation on EU related activities. These representations also act as points to promote the culture of their regions and encourage business and trade links with other partners. They also offer state-of-the-art meeting and conference facilities which enable them to host events which provide them with a high profile in Brussels and can be used to engender goodwill with other European partners.

4.4.2 The IRO regularly finds itself tasked with signposting the appropriate agencies or even providing presentations to visiting delegations from other regions and Member States wishing to learn about Ireland and potentially develop cooperative relationships with Irish organisations. Even where these issues do not lie within the statutory competence of Irish local or regional authorities the IRO through its established links is seen as a natural port of call for such requests.

4.4.3 Similarly, wherever possible and when felt to be applicable to Irish circumstances, a feedback mechanism is operated to communicate details of interesting and innovative activities being undertaken by cities and regions and other agencies elsewhere in the EU to the appropriate Irish organisation which may be in a position to make use of this information. This includes bringing initiatives to the attention of government departments and state agencies where appropriate – particularly relating to areas for which local and regional government in Ireland has no responsibility. While we endeavour to forward this information to the appropriate actors the *information chain is neither well established nor especially transparent*, resulting in lost opportunities.

In conclusion, when considering Ireland's future in the EU and our influence within the European Institutions, we suggest that Ireland needs to:

- ***Establish a National Strategy for European Affairs, setting out priorities, acting as a framework for how we consult internally, engage externally and inform the public on Ireland's approach to the European Union.***
- ***Be more pro-active in EU policy-making and adopt a more systematic, coordinated engagement in all steps of the process;***
- ***Maximise our involvement in EU funded programmes and project activity - declining Structural Fund returns should not mean that we turn our backs on other funding sources or opportunities for beneficial collaboration;***
- ***Be active, committed and seen to be such – in this regard we need to address Ireland's relatively low institutional presence and visibility in Brussels.***

5. Role of the Houses of the Oireachtas in EU affairs

5.1 As outlined above, we consider that there is a need for a fundamental shift in how we use our membership of the European Union, our levels of engagement, our internal consultation processes on EU issues, our interaction with our partners and involvement in EU programmes and how we inform and involve the public in this process. We further consider that the Oireachtas should have a key role in the reforms that need to take place, in order to give political accountability, beyond the new provisions provided for national parliaments in the Lisbon Treaty. We further suggest that there should be monitoring of legislative but also non-legislative proposals, which often provide the initial framework of future legislation.

5.2 In the sections above some suggestions are made, which provide some opportunities for the Houses of the Oireachtas, in particular the Joint Committees for European Affairs and European Scrutiny, to take the initiative. However, we suggest that there should be a benchmarking exercise to evaluate how Ireland compares with other Member States in terms of applying good governance principles - consultation, partnership, openness/transparency and participation, in our engagement in the European Union.

5.3 Also, with the abolition of the dual mandate and in the context of European Affairs, where the EU plays a significant influence on the work and activities of local and regional authorities, there is a need for a systematic, all party dialogue between local elected representatives and members of the Oireachtas.

In conclusion, on the role of the Houses of the Oireachtas in EU affairs, we suggest that:

- ***Beyond its current mandate, the Sub-Committee on Ireland's Future in the European Union should benchmark Ireland's approach to engaging in European Affairs by reference to some other Member States, to identify good governance practices.***
- ***The Joint Committee on European Affairs must be a catalyst for debate on both legislative and non-legislative proposals and work to promote a more enhanced engagement with the European Union.***
- ***The Oireachtas, through the work of the Joint Committee on European Scrutiny, must be the guardian of the principle of subsidiarity as set out in the Lisbon Treaty, from the EU to the national, but also from the national to the regional and to the local level.***

6. Improve public understanding of the European Union

6.1 Any initiative to improve public understanding of the European Union must engage with citizens directly. There must be a commitment to a permanent engagement with the public and we must resist the attraction of a quick-fix, with potentially short-lived gains. Improving public understanding must have a long-term perspective and therefore look beyond the desire to ratify the Lisbon Treaty. For this reason, some of the proposals set out in the previous sections of this submission, which aim to improve public involvement and understanding through putting in place adequate consultation mechanisms and national frameworks for discussion should also contribute to improved understanding. Furthermore, education policies on EU knowledge need to be reconsidered with a view to maximising the next generation's understanding.

6.2 We consider that understanding and communication are two-way processes – providing clear, simple and factual information but also relaying public concerns and aspirations to policy makers and decision takers at national and European levels. In this section we recommend *better use of the untapped potential of local and regional authorities as agents for informing the public*, building on their established networks and links with local media and their experiences in implementing EU programmes and EU funded projects.

6.3 Local and regional authorities are active in Europe both in implementing EU policy and EU programmes. These authorities' EU experience, allied with proximity to the public, places them in an ideal position to give European initiatives a local dimension and make them 'real' for citizens. For example, local EU funded projects provide ready made 'good news stories' for local media sources, which give our European Union membership a human scale and demonstrate the value of co-operation with our EU partners.

6.4 Many of these authorities also publish information materials and have websites and very good access to local media. There is therefore potential for local and regional authorities to play an enhanced role in communicating the relevance of the EU, but there are some challenges for these authorities in doing so. In particular:

- The need to have access to information that is easily understandable, avoids the excessive use of EU jargon and has a clear local reference and relevance;
- The need to overcome a certain lack of awareness of, interest in and/or focus on the EU decision-making process within certain sections of sub-national government – an enhanced role could be provided here for Irish CoR members;
- A need to change the perception of what the EU is and the role that it plays. In Ireland, this must change from seeing the EU as a source of funds only to a focus on the policy-making process and the impact this has on policy and service delivery at local level;
- Little resources are available to local/regional authorities for discussing EU issues and communicating EU developments. There is little or no incentive to address this, at present.

6.5 In this regard we would like to make a number of suggestions, such as:

- The provision of EU training and awareness for all local and regional elected representatives and officials, through specific briefings on key issues, facilitating study visits, developing some EU educational tools and presentation packs for local representatives;
- To help provide some incentive, a national award for sub-national authorities' with the best, most effective EU communications actions. This could also help identify good practices;
- The use of seconded national experts (as mentioned in paragraph 4.2.5)) should also be broadened to include expertise from local and regional administrations. This would have a two-fold effect of giving valuable experience to these local/regional officials which could be used thereafter by their authorities.
- More direct consultation with local and regional government, for example Commissioners and officials visiting Ireland could meet with local and regional representatives to discuss developments of direct interest to these levels.

6.6 The public libraries service, operated by local authorities, is an important information resource and there are opportunities to work more closely with this service in making information, especially the information the European Commission provides to its Europe Direct relay network, more widely available throughout the country. This should be complemented by developing information material on EU issues, with a specific Irish perspective, as opposed to the one-size-fits – all material supplied by the Commission.

In conclusion, in terms of improving public understanding of the European Union, we consider that we:

- ***Must take a long-term perspective, not just focus on the immediate issues of getting Lisbon adopted. Otherwise, we will only be storing-up problems for the future.***
- ***Should use the untapped potential of local and regional authorities as agents for informing the public.***
- ***Need to reduce negative publicity attached to EU membership, such as infringement proceedings (which often result from poor governance and lack of proper engagement in initial decision-making process).***
- ***Demonstrate tangible benefits of the EU, using concrete local examples of relevance to ordinary citizen, such as the positive effects of legislation, successful EU funded projects, the useful transfer of best practice.***



Irish Regions Office

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- various relevant information and advisory services (legislation, funding, news) to all elements of Irish sub-national government;
- hands-on support to members of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions;
- informal and ad-hoc information on initiatives corresponding to their own circumstances, (funding opportunities etc). to bodies including local development agencies, socio-economic actors, higher education institutes which do not appear to be supplied with a dedicated EU or European service from any other source;
- a point-of-contact with EU institutions and other regions and meeting facilities in Brussels for Irish organisations.

For Further information: www.iro.ie

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