



DELEGATION URGES **YES** VOTE ON LISBON TREATY



Cllr. Connie Hanniffy at the CoR with Mr. Gerry Finn (Director of the BMW Assembly)

The Irish CoR Delegation is urging voters to send a clear and positive message about Ireland's role within the EU by supporting ratification of the Lisbon Treaty on Friday, October 2nd.

Cllr. **Connie Hanniffy** President of the Irish Delegation is convinced of the need for Ireland to maintain its influence by re-inforcing its commitment to the EU. 'Workers, farmers, consumers, businesses - large and small, environmentalists and all sectors of society have benefitted over the years from Irish membership of the EU. This second vote on the Lisbon Treaty cannot be seen in isolation but must be seen in the wider context of our continuing membership of the EU. I would particularly appeal to young people, not around in the pre-EEC Ireland of 1973, to attempt to understand the differences between now and then. Nowadays we take for granted the strong single currency, the free movement of people, goods and services, the equal opportunities and environmental legislation and the recognition of our role in influencing the EU position on wider issues such as global warming and world trade. These advances should not be taken for granted'.

Cllr. Hanniffy adds that 'Ireland's involvement in the EU has been good for Ireland and good for the EU and this must continue, to safeguard the long-term interests of Irish people'.

While the Lisbon Treaty is a compromise achieved after much negotiation, Cllr. Hanniffy believes that it goes some distance to make the EU more efficient, more democratic and more transparent and better able to address current challenges like cross-border crime, climate change and energy security.

While EU financial transfers to Ireland may have been forgotten in some quarters, in these very difficult economic circumstances we continue to greatly benefit from being part of the strong EU and euro currency projects.

Cllr. Hanniffy underlines that Ireland needs a more refined relationship with Europe and the Government needs to be candid with the electorate and clearly acknowledge that Irish representatives, particularly its Ministers, play a key role in the decision-making processes. Similarly, while the detail of implementation of EU legislation is mostly left to Member States, too often there has been a tendency to apportion responsibility for certain decisions to 'Brussels'.

DECISIVE IMPACT

'From my work with **Offaly County Council, the Midland Regional Authority and the BMW Regional Assembly**, I have seen the EU's decisive impact on the local and regional level in Ireland, shaping their structures as well as their responsibilities. However, I am encouraged that the new Treaty includes a guarantee that the EU will not act where a task can be better achieved at the local or regional level and it also imposes a new obligation on EU institutions to minimize the administrative burden of new EU laws. The Commission will also be required to consider the financial implications for all levels of governance of proposed legislation and we must endorse these benefits', adds Cllr. Hanniffy.

To conclude, Cllr. Hanniffy considers that 'the additional guarantees obtained by the Irish government have changed what Irish people will be voting for on October 2nd and I firmly believe that the Lisbon Treaty now strikes the right balance for the great majority of Irish people'. These legal guarantees address concerns expressed in relation to taxation, the right to life, education and the family as well as to defence and neutrality issues. In addition it was confirmed that all Member States would retain the right to nominate a Commissioner.



Mr. Pat Cox Director of Ireland for Europe and former President of the European Parliament to discuss the Lisbon Treaty with Irish CoR members

IRISH CoR MEMBERS ADDRESS OIREACHTAS EU COMMITTEE

MORE INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL RECOMMENDED

Mr. John Perry T.D., chairman of the Joint Committee on European Scrutiny invited representatives of the Irish CoR Delegation to address the Committee in March.

Cllr. Paul O' Donoghue, Cllr. Connie Hanniffy, Cllr. Denis Landy and Cllr. Declan McDonnell along with then Delegation chairman **Cllr. Seamus Murray**, made presentations. CoR members provided background on the role and function of the CoR and the Irish Delegation in particular; addressed the growing importance of subsidiarity (i.e. decision-making at the lowest appropriate level); and promoted efforts to enhance the involvement of the Irish local and regional authority levels in EU affairs.

Key recommendations proposed by the CoR members included:

- At the pre-legislative stage – there is a role for the Oireachtas in establishing a more structured mechanism for **consultation with local government** on proposals from the European Commission that have implications for that level.
- Allied to this, the system for **transposing EU legislation** into national law needs to take a more inclusive approach. This is currently done with little or no consultation with local and regional authorities. Transposition needs to be timely but must also better reflect the administrative consequences.
- Ireland needs to be more proactive in our responses to EU consultative activities and in shaping EU policy. While the Permanent Representation and the various Government Departments do a good job in defending the nation's interests, there needs to be more public discourse and more opportunities for input into our positions on key policy issues for instance by developing national strategies on key issues with national stakeholder consultations such as that planned on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

- In terms of improving public understanding of the EU, local authorities could be better used to demonstrate **tangible benefits of EU membership**. Using local examples of relevance to the ordinary citizen, such as the effects of legislation, successful EU-funded projects, the useful transfer of best practice, can be the best way of making the EU more relevant to people's everyday lives.
- There is also the potential to make better use of local and regional authorities as information channels for informing the public on EU issues that have a practical and local impact. Local authorities operate the Library Service and run websites which are key information resources for large sections of the community. These resources could be better exploited such as by expanding **Europe Direct**, a service providing information on the EU, now available in seven libraries nationwide.
- It is essential that each local authority has a designated European Officer that can at minimum, serve as a point of contact for dealing with EU affairs but also as a resource to improve understanding and debate on EU issues within councils. This would over time, help to improve understanding and raise the level of political debate on EU affairs at local/regional levels.
- The Delegation would welcome a **'Group Ireland'** approach that would bring together Irish MEP's, Irish members of the CoR and the Economic and Social Committee and members of the Oireachtas European Committees and other relevant stakeholders to discuss policy issues, to share insights and to develop common positions to enable Ireland to maximise its influence within the whole EU institutional architecture.
- Making non-sensitive briefings and analyses of EU legislative proposals prepared for Oireachtas

committees more widely available, at least to Irish members of the European institutions would assist in better reflecting Irish positions throughout the EU institutions.

- Irish members of the CoR would welcome efforts by the Oireachtas to raise the profile of EU matters and to provide more regular slots for debate on EU affairs in plenary sessions of the Dail and Seanad. As acknowledged by the 'Donohoe Report' on Ireland's Future in the EU, European matters do not play as prominent a role as they should in Irish politics, media or public discourse and the Delegation re-iterated that Committee's call to improve the level of debate, participation in and reporting of EU affairs.

Very Positive Response

The presentation met a very positive response from the Committee chairman and members. The Committee found that the 'Group Ireland' approach of most interest and highlighted this when forwarding the recommendations to Minister of State for European Affairs, Mr. Dick Roche T.D. On issues within its own remit, the Committee agreed that there is scope for greater co-operation with the Delegation and the CoR in monitoring subsidiarity, which would need to be stepped up should the Lisbon Treaty be ratified. Since the meeting, the Committee has made its scrutiny reports on EU issues available to Irish CoR members and this has aided the better representation of Irish interests in the CoR.

The encounter has also established a base for further co-operation between the Committee and the Irish Delegation. Transcripts of all meetings of the Oireachtas committees, including this one are available online at <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/Committees.aspx?Dail=30>

RECENT WORK OF THE IRISH CoR DELEGATION

Ireland has nine members (and nine alternates) on the CoR with all Irish Regional Authority areas represented. While members are from different political parties, the Delegation generally works in a unified manner in representing issues of interest and importance to Ireland. There are statutory links between the Irish CoR members and their regional authorities who are invited to comment on all CoR draft opinions to better enable Irish members reflect Irish regional interests. Through the Brussels office, the Delegation maintains regular contacts with the Irish Permanent Representation and within the political groups, there are also direct links with Ireland's MEP's.

Since its inception, the Irish Delegation has been very active and for its size has a high profile within the CoR, with for example, recent Irish rapporteurs on the CAP Health Check and the Small Business Act for Europe. **Cllr. Constance Hanniffy** is chair of the Economic and Social Policy Commission while **Cllr. Paul O' Donoghue** is chair of the UEN-EA political group and is active within the influential Conference of Presidents of the political groups.

As well as acting as rapporteurs on behalf of the Committee of the Regions, Irish members also contribute to the policy and political debates and amend draft opinions at the committee and

plenary stages and represent the Committee at inter-institutional fora. For example, Irish members have had amendments recently adopted to CoR opinions on the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, on BioWaste, on Fisheries Control Systems, on Agricultural Product Quality, on the European Economic Recovery Plan, on Maritime Energy and on Multilevel Governance to ensure that Irish regional interests are heard and considered by decision-makers.



Cllr. Patrick McGowan



Cllr. Fiona O'Loughlin



Cllr. Constance Hanniffy



Cllr. John Lahart



Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald



Cllr. Denis Landy



Cllr. Paul O' Donoghue



Cllr. Declan McDonnell



Cllr. Cathal Crowe

CoR SEEKS SUBMISSIONS ON MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE WHITE PAPER

In June, the CoR adopted a White Paper on Multilevel Governance launching a consultation to invite the views of local and regional authorities, associations and other stakeholders on implementing multilevel governance. With widely differing sub-national governance structures in the EU, multilevel governance in this context means coordinated action by the EU, Member States and local and regional authorities based on partnership and aimed at drawing up and implementing EU policies.

The substantial CoR White Paper is in three main sections—building Europe in partnership; encouraging participation and reinforcing the effectiveness of Community action. The White Paper emphasises the importance of the democratic dimension to EU, the role of decentralised communication, the role of local and regional authorities as partners. Among many recommendations are calls for local / regional action plans, territorial impact analysis and the establishment of European territorial pacts.

It is expected that the wider sub-national governance issue will be the subject of significant discussion here given the **Bord Snip Nua** proposals to rationalise local government structures with the abolition of town councils and regional authorities and to reduce the number of local authorities to 22. The **Multilevel Governance White Paper** can be accessed via the **CoR website** and **submissions** are invited before **November 30** to the **CoR's Forward Studies Unit** (governance@cor.europa.eu)

IMPACT OF JUNE LOCAL ELECTIONS

Local elections held on June 5th saw 17 of the 18 Irish CoR full and alternate members stand for re-election. The only member not returned at the polls was Delegation Chairman **Cllr. Seamus Murray of Meath Co. Council**. **Cllr. Murray had been a part of the CoR since its inception in 1994 and had been awarded with a commemorative medal to record this fact as part of the of the CoR's 15th anniversary celebration at the April plenary session. At Cllr. Murray's final Delegation meeting, new Chairman Cllr. Hanniffy put on the record members appreciation of how Cllr. Murray had represented his Council, his region and his country at the CoR with distinction and great commitment over the 15 years. Cllr. Fiona O' Loughlin (Kildare Co. Council) has recently been nominated by the government to take the place vacated by Seamus Murray. Cllr. O' Loughlin has particular expertise and experience in the education, community and voluntary sectors and has worked extensively with the Special Olympic movement.**

Alternate member **Cllr. Noreen Ryan** choose not to stand for re-election to Limerick Co. Council and following the elections, **Cllr. Declan McDonnell** was elected as the Mayor of Galway City Council.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO VOTE **YES** TO LISBON

Benefits of EU Membership

- The Single Market – Irish people can live, study, work and retire anywhere in the EU.
- The EU has greatly facilitated the expansion and diversification of trade for Irish producers and exporters.
- Membership of the EU is a major factor in attracting inward investment.
- Membership of the strong currency, with pegged exchange rates before that, has stabilised the country in very difficult international financial markets.
- The ECB has helped to maintain liquidity and solvency during the financial crisis.
- The relative and absolute standard of living of Irish people has greatly increased since our accession to the EEC and EU.
- CAP and rural development transfers of over €40 billion to Ireland over the years.
- Similarly, Structural Funds transfers of €17 billion to Ireland have been invested in much-needed public infrastructure.
- EU Social Policy has improved workers rights and equality legislation in Ireland.
- Ireland is better able to face international challenges of energy security, global warming and cross-border crime as a member of the EU.
- Similarly as part of a strong negotiating bloc, Ireland is better positioned to influence global issues such as world trade talks.
- 'Red herrings' put forward by anti-EU campaigners at referendum have not materialised and cannot do so while Ireland is a committed member of the EU. However, a real threat to Irish economic independence would arise if we were outside the EU and outside the euro zone. This has been exemplified recently with the changing attitudes in Iceland to EU membership.

Benefits of the Lisbon Treaty

- It is democratic. The Lisbon Treaty is the latest in a series of Treaties that has helped the EU 'update its rulebook' in adapting to its growing membership and changing policy concerns. As it deals with the internal workings of a complex series of institutions, it is not a simple text to read but it was arrived at following a lengthy democratic process and was agreed by all the 27 Member States. It was then up to each Member State to ratify the Treaty in its own way, in Ireland it was decided to do so by referendum.
- It will help to make the EU work more efficiently. Qualified majority voting (i.e. scrapping vetoes) will be extended to more policy areas. The rotating six-month Presidencies of the European Council will come to an end with the establishment of the new 2.5 year position of President of the European Council and there will also be a new position of High Representative for Foreign Affairs.

- The Lisbon Treaty should improve the transparency of EU decision-making and make it more democratic. MEP's will have greater powers and National Parliaments will have a greater say in scrutinising EU legislation. In addition, a new Citizens Initiative where one million citizens from a number of member States, will be able to call on the Commission to bring forward policy proposals.
- The Charter of Fundamental Rights is given binding legal force which will enhance the civil, political, economic and social rights of European citizens.
- Implementation of the Lisbon Treaty should bring a conclusion to the debates on the workings of the EU's institutions and instead allow greater focus on economic, social and environmental policies to improve the lives of European citizens.
- The additional guarantees obtained by the Irish government will ensure that all Member States will keep their Commissioner and vital Irish interests in the areas of taxation, defence and ethical issues are secure as they remain subject to national vetoes.
- As clearly reported by the Oireachtas sub-committee on Ireland's Future in the EU; Ireland's standing and influence in the EU have diminished following the earlier Lisbon referendum affecting our ability to influence policy, such as the shape of the upcoming EU budget. It has made our EU future less certain which could damage the ability to attract foreign direct investment.



Members of the Delegation with Minister for European Affairs Mr. Dick Roche T.D.

Lisbon Treaty Implications for the CoR and the Local/ Regional Authority Level

Implementation of the Treaty will have some implications for the Committee of the Regions and the local and regional authority level. Respect for regional and local self-government becomes a fundamental principle and the new protocol on services of general interest recognises the role of local and regional authorities. The CoR will have the right to bring an action to the Court of Justice of the EU in case of breaches of the subsidiarity principle. In addition, the term of the CoR will mirror that of the European Parliament.

IRISH DELEGATION SECRETARIAT

Patricia Potter, Director of the Dublin Regional Authority is Secretary to the Irish Delegation.

Visit the Committee of the Regions website at: www.cor.europa.eu

DUBLIN OFFICE

John Crowley
Dublin Regional Authority,
Mainscourt 23 Main St., Swords, Co. Dublin

Tel. (01) 807 4482
Email: jcrowley@cor.ie

BRUSSELS OFFICE

Robert Collins
Irish Regions Office,
11 Rond-Point Schuman, B-1040 Brussels

Tel. 00 32 2 233 1122
Email: robert.collins@iro.ie