
Published at: 22-06-2008



We publish here an article by Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament, which has been published in major newspapers across Europe over the last two days. Following the Irish "no" to the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, the piece underlines the will of the European Parliament to "devote all its energies" to overcoming the challenges posed.

On 12 June 2008 the citizens of Ireland voted No to the Lisbon Treaty. A detailed analysis will be needed of how this result came about and what caused the Irish, who have benefited from the European Union more than almost any other country, to vote this way.

At first glance it seems that many of those who voted No did so from a particular angle - and indeed from often contradictory angles. Some business people favoured a No because they saw economic freedom as under threat; others, such as some trade unionists, because the treaty was not socially-minded enough. Yet others even believed that abortion would be made easier by the treaty or that the Irish tax system would be put in question. As General de Gaulle once said, in a referendum answers are given to questions that were not asked. I would not go as far as that, but there is a kernel of truth in that statement. What really motivated the Irish people, why they did not believe the European Union was going into the future on the right path with this treaty, remains to be analysed in detail.

What is certain today is that the outcome of this vote confronts the EU with one of the most difficult challenges in its history - albeit not the first one. The Lisbon Reform Treaty, derived from the Constitutional Treaty, which itself was drafted by a Convention meeting in public and comprising members of national parliaments and the European Parliament, grants the EU more democracy, greater ability to act and greater transparency.

It strengthens the European Parliament, gives national parliaments more responsibility in determining the course of European policy, allows citizens of the European Union a power of initiative in relation to the European Institutions, and guarantees local self-government.

The Lisbon Treaty is the answer to criticisms that citizens have made of the European Union's shortcomings. This Treaty brings the European Union closer to its citizens. We must make it perfectly clear that the adoption of the Reform Treaty is an absolute necessity, to enable the European Union to defend its values and interests in the 21st century. Without the reforms made possible by the Lisbon Treaty, the accession of further countries to the European Union is hardly conceivable. We call upon the EU summit on Thursday and Friday in Brussels to take all appropriate steps to make the Reform Treaty a reality.

After the vote in Ireland: Quo vadis Europa?

What next? First, the ratification process must continue without reservation, since 18 countries have already approved the treaty. Ratification by other countries of the European Union is just as valid and must be respected just as much as the vote in Ireland.

We expect that at the EU summit in Brussels on 19-20 June the Irish Government will give an initial assessment of the outcome of the vote in Ireland and put forward proposals as to how we can jointly progress beyond this difficult phase in European politics. The Irish Government must have the first say in this matter. Not just because this is the custom but out of respect for the Irish vote. Therefore any speculation or conjecture as to possible solutions ahead of the summit would be inappropriate.

The European Parliament will devote all its energies and display maximum commitment to overcoming these challenges. We expect the same of the European Commission and of the governments of all European Union Member States. We equally expect the European Parliament to be fully involved in the process. It remains our goal to see the Lisbon Treaty enter into force before the elections of June 2009 to the European Parliament.

Hans-Gert Pöttering.