

# Will Ireland put the Lisbon Treaty to the vote again?

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In today's programme from the series "NOW – INTERACTING WITH THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT", radio Bulgaria, Portal EUROPE and the European Institute will offer you viewpoints on the future of the Treaty of Lisbon in the context of the French Presidency of the European Union.

After the Irish "NO" to the Lisbon Treaty, France, which took over the presidency of the EU, to last until the end of the current year, faced the difficult issue of making the right move that would make continue the process of reforms in the European Union. One of the hypotheses is for Ireland to carry through a new referendum. However, many people oppose that possibility, explaining their stand with the idea that pressing Ireland to repeat the referendum would only increase negative attitudes in view of the treaty as well as the chances for the final result to come to the same rejection. Yet, is it admissible for a small percentage of the European citizenship to be hampering a project concerning the nearly 500 million population of the European Union? Isn't the negative answer of the Irish a sign of ingratitude and lack of rationality?

In fact if we look at surveys, we would realize that for the Irish membership to the EU is a high value. Ireland has been among the poorest countries of the continent but as a result of European integration and its ability to make the best of European funds, it is now standing on one of the top positions of European charts in view of per capita Gross Domestic Product. No doubt this is the Irish Wonder.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy whose country took over the presidency of the EU until the end of the year preferred to define the Irish negative vote as an incident. Sarkozy was the politician who launched the idea for endorsing the treaty for reforms of European institutions as a concise version of the rejected European Constitution. The Lisbon Treaty in itself is necessary and crucial for the functioning of the EU. All other states, except Ireland due to an obligation derived from its Constitutional regulations, have turned to the procedure of parliamentary ratification.

During his visit to Dublin in summer, Nicolas Sarkozy said he respects the result of the referendum but stressed he hails the decision of the other Union members to continue with the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon, despite the Irish "NO". The most plausible way out of this crisis was found to be the conducting of a second referendum in Ireland. However, sociological drills show that the majority of Irish people do not like the idea.

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What does France have to do in order to open the way for the Treaty of Lisbon? Radio Bulgaria has taken the opinion of French political analyst Francois-Frison Roche.

“The Lisbon Treaty was rejected on the part of nearly 800 thousand Irish people, and of course we can only regret that their “NO” has blocked the in some way another 480 million Europeans, he said. Now, however, this “NO” has to be very seriously analyzed as it showed that the expectations of European citizens should be taken into account with greater care. I think that a growing number of Europeans have their fears when it comes to new accessions. I also think that there is a certain discrepancy between what European elites consider something fruitful on the one hand and the public, which demands more concrete answers to their expectations. I think that the Irish “NO” does not put under question what we call the building up of Europe. The Lisbon Treaty was generally good considering it was increasing the powers of the European Parliament for a truly more efficient Europe; but that doesn’t seem to be very clear for part of the citizens and that is regretful. I think that a solution would be found with the respective measures to be taken in view of the Irish so that Europe can move forward. I don’t think we should emphasize on European or Brussels-based bureaucracy. That administration is doing a good job after all. Perhaps things should be better explained to the citizens if we want to continue in a peaceful space and economic prosperity; we will have to turn our back to national egoism and think globally, even though we would obviously have to act on a local level so that people can appreciate the true meaning of this building up of Europe.”

Mr. Frison Roche, how do you see the role of European Parliament Members? What do people expect of them?

“The role of MEPs is constantly growing because the citizens rely on these representatives to better control the decisions made on the part of the Council of Europe. In fact that was the major intent of the Lisbon Treaty because that treaty increases the powers of the European Parliament, allowing it to control common agrarian policy; or through mediation, to promote this new right to petitions. In future European MEPs would have the growing opportunity to make clearer the European vocation of the 27 member-states. This is how they would be able to help for overcoming this national egoism and demand for the European Commission to do a better job locally, so that the citizens can embrace the priorities of the European Union.”

Radio Bulgaria has asked several citizens of the capital Sofia for their opinion on the results of the Irish vote. Here are the answers to the question: “Would you, as Bulgarians prefer that Brussels decides on more things than the government in Sofia?”

“I think that each country should preserve its sovereignty and identity, said Hristo Hubanov – a university student. That could not be an obstacle for common European legislative norms that everyone should comply to. I can also say that at the moment, within the framework of the EU international law stands above national law. That is, EU member-countries take into account first the clauses from international contracts and only then comply with the regulations of their country’s legislature. However, that does not mean Bulgarian laws are less significant than common European ones.”

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“I think that each people should decide for its own development, is the opinion of Angel Goev – ethnology scholar. When a given people is member of another, larger union, it should by all means observe the rules of that larger unit because it is no good for everyone to do whatever one wants. Yet, I think that we, Bulgarians should make our own choice and be allowed self-rule, however in harmony with outer requirements.”

“My opinion is that even though we are member of the European Union and as such we should observe all clauses partaking to the harmonization of our legislature to that of the Union, I prefer to have our Bulgarian identity and national sovereignty preserved, adds Svetla Panayotova – a teacher. That is why I think the government of Bulgaria should not have to take into account all recommendations from Brussels. I think that just like in other countries referendums are carried out on various issues and in problem situations, in Bulgaria, too, we should have this opportunity.”

Is the voting of the Lisbon Treaty for a second time on the part of Ireland necessary and is it possible juridically? We asked for his comment on the matter the Ambassador of the Republic of Ireland – H.E. Geoffrey Keithing.

“The situation in Ireland is that in order to ratify the Treaty we need to have a Referendum. And we are the only member state that felt this was necessary under the terms of our constitution. And, if we want to ratify the Treaty there is no other choice but to have a second referendum. Now juridically there is no problem but obviously politically there is a problem. Because what you are saying to people who have made a democratic decision is: “Vote again and vote differently.” So, obviously the question will have to be different the second time. And you cannot, I think, in all conscience but forward the same question a second time.”

Is the idea for the Lisbon Treaty to come into force without the Irish “Yes” and to function in 26 instead of the 27 EU member countries realistic? And if not, would that mean that Ireland would have to consider stepping out of the Union?

“Well, I think that under the present circumstances it’s inconceivable that you can ratify the treaty without a member-state. You would be looking at altering the fundamental nature of the Union. And certainly, I don’t think Ireland wants that. I mean that we have been active members of the European Union for 35 years and we want to be at the center of things, we don’t want to be outside it. As you know all opinion polls in Ireland consistently show a very high level of support for the European project.”

What is in your opinion the way to reform the EU?

“Personally speaking, I was a supporter of Lisbon. I saw that even though some of the measures were quite modest, its way for it; it made decision-making easier; it improved the democratic accountability of the Union by strengthening the European Parliament on the one hand and also strengthening the role of national parliaments. It also made a stronger voice for Europe or proposed a stronger mechanism for dealing with really important international issues. You know at the moment we

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are dealing with the terrible situation in Georgia. And you have to ask yourself "Could the European Union have responded more effectively with different structures. There are other big issues that we can only deal with collectively, such as climate change and how do we respond effectively to these challenges. There is another issue that Lisbon addressed. And that's the question of enlargement. And there are very good not only strategic but also political reasons why you would want to enlarge the Union – to bring stability to Central and Eastern Europe, to bring stability to the Western Balkans. And you know, these are historic issues, which we have to think over and have the courage to address. And I think that Lisbon is the mechanism of doing that."

So you view the enlargement of the EU as a positive trend of development?

"Yes, absolutely, but enlargement brings difficulties as well. I mean we joined the European community and we brought the number up to 9. And we increased over the years to 15, than now we are 27. And we have other candidate countries that are negotiating their accession. And obviously it is very difficult to increase if you don't change your structures for making decisions. And that's why there was a very clear logic in what Lisbon was proposing."

We contacted on the phone Mr. Jeff Lovitt CEO of the PASOS non-governmental organization /Policy Association for an Open Society/ based in Prague, the Czech Republic. We asked Mr. Lovitt how are things standing up to date concerning the Czech ratification of the Lisbon Treaty? Until recently there were juridical obstacles and there were also opponents to the further ratification process.

"Yes, the constitutional court is deciding on the constitutionality and the effect of the Lisbon Treaty. Within the political forces I'd say there is a kind of fairly healthy, not Euro-skepticism but sort of concern to keep the level of bureaucracy in Brussels at a minimum; but at the same time to be very positive towards elements of the Lisbon Treaty such as a common foreign policy. And certainly the government itself is in favor of the Lisbon Treaty. President Klaus is well known as being much more Euro-skeptic, but he is not a key player. The only issue would have come if he had exercised his veto. But if the Constitutional Court ruling goes in favor and the two chambers of Parliament vote in favor, than I don't think he would be vetoing it."

It is expected that negotiations with Ireland concerning the Lisbon Treaty would take place in the first half of 2009, that is, during the mandate of the Czech Republic in the rotation of the European Union presidency. What are the attitudes in that respect?

"I think the Irish referendum has ironically helped the Czech presidency in terms of the type of flexibility it would have as a whole. Because it was considered it would be a pretty much technical presidency; because there wasn't any anticipated implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. But also a new European Commission has to be put in place as the elections, of course, of the European Parliament. So it seemed very much that it would be a very technical, bureaucratic presidency. And I think actually this gives a bit more space, which is very positive, as one of the first year after Slovenia – the first of the new EU members to hold the presidency. We heard just a week ago the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs Alexander Vondra after a meeting with his counterparts from France and

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Sweden, basically saying that the Czech presidency would focus as much as it can on issues such as energy, security and Eastern neighborhood, particularly in the light of the crisis between Russia and Georgia. So, on the one hand, of course, as you say, there would be the necessity to sort out the future of the Lisbon Treaty, whether the Irish can find some way of accommodating themselves to it; or if not – the Lisbon Treaty is dead! But from the positive point of view it means that the Czech presidency can do a lot, as a lot of the new members are very concerned to make sure there is more focus on some of the trouble spots around the EU, particularly the Caucasuses.”

Dear listeners in our next programme we would like to introduce any comments and questions you may have on our series dealing with the work of the EP. The subject next time would be – the assistants of the European Parliament Members: what is their job, how much do they get paid for their work and how can a person become such an assistant.

This feature is broadcast by Radio Bulgaria, RFI-Romania and Ivelynes Radio – France on the project “Now – Interacting with the European Parliament”; carried through by the European Institute. Your questions, comments and suggestions are most welcome at our station as well as on our e-mail address [info@europe.bg](mailto:info@europe.bg) For more details look up the website [www.parliament.europe.bg](http://www.parliament.europe.bg)

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