



**The Spoofer's (Improved) Guide  
to the Lisbon Treaty**

Is that your final answer?

Yes

Best of three?

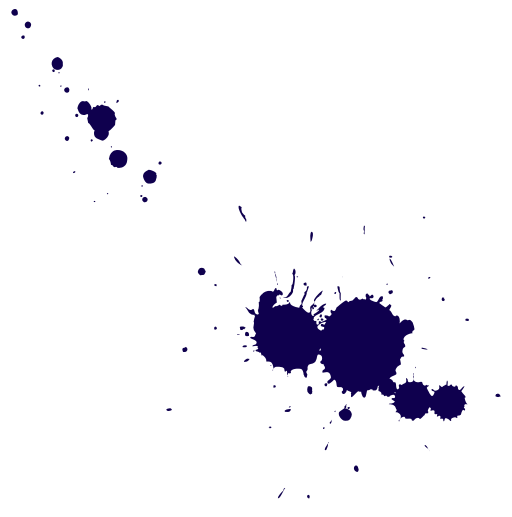
No

There's a referendum?



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# The Lisbon Treaty in less than 150 words including a gratuitous mention of Evel Knievel.

The Lisbon Treaty is designed to make the EU system, which was designed for six countries, work for more than thirty.

It took eight years to painstakingly negotiate, with every country including Ireland carefully adding their own 'ifs and buts'.

It gives every country a Commissioner.

It ensures the Dail's control over Irish taxes, conscription and abortion.

It helps the EU fight climate change.

It makes life harder for terrorists, sex traffickers, drug dealers and paedophiles.

If we vote No, we will remain in the EU, with the right to sit in the Council, the Commission and the Parliament.

If we vote No, there is less chance that all the decisions that affect us will be discussed in the Council, the Commission and the Parliament.

There is no mention of conscription, Euro-armies, cloning Euro-Superbabies or any pictures of Evel Knievel. So here's one we threw in. Love that jumpsuit.



**BE A GOOD CITIZEN:  
CUT THIS PAGE OUT AND  
BLU-TACK TO YOUR LOO  
DOOR FOR GUEST READING**

# Foreword: Why would you bother?

I used to be a Eurosceptic. When I was a teen and one of those weird teens who actually took an interest in politics when I should have been interested in, I don't know, breasts (which I'm very interested in now, funnily enough), I looked at what was then the European Community and thought: Who are these people to be interfering in our country?

Then I went on a school trip to the former Nazi concentration camp in Dachau, Germany. I came away thinking that countries needed to figure out a new way of working together to stop this crazy shit happening again. If only we had some sort of organisation that could coordinate small countries with common values and objectives, and some sort of treaty to base it on...

So why write this guide? Because I was so underwhelmed by the Yes side in the last referendum. We were so bad at communicating our message, and at replying to the, let's face it, tinfoil-inside-my-hat-to-stop-Martian-radio-signals threats coming from elements of the No side. So I decided to do something about it. I wrote *The Spoofer's Guide to the Lisbon Treaty* to explain what I understood and felt about an EU that wasn't the evil monster that the No side were claiming. I put it together with some friends and sent it out, where, judging by the emails I got back from Ireland and the continent and the US, it struck a chord with people.

Here's the new version. Those of you who read the old one will recognise a lot of it, but there's also some new stuff in it. It is a biased guide, in that I am biased and support the Treaty, but I'd like to think that it's not slavish about it.

I think we should vote Yes. Our core issues have been addressed in the guarantees, but more importantly, Ireland needs to be where decisions are made. If we vote No, we won't be. That's pretty much it, really.

Jason O'Mahony

July 2009

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# Why the hell do we need the EU and this Treaty?

There are decent, informed people who take an interest in current affairs who would gnaw off their own arms before they'd read anything about an EU treaty. That's fair enough, this is dry dry stuff. Complicated? Yes it is. This is the phone book and guide to programming your video<sup>1</sup> wrapped up together.

And yet, it matters. We live in a world in which a crazy bastard living in a cave in Afghanistan can decide to destroy two towers in Manhattan, and cost people their jobs in American companies in Kildare and West Dublin. The world is interconnected, and that means that a small country like Ireland has to make choices.

If only we had a mechanism, a system designed to allow us to do things like this every day on every issue that matters to us.

Turns out we do.



People think the EU is complicated. It is, because life is complicated. I don't know how an iPod works<sup>2</sup>, or Air Traffic Control, or my microwave, but I do know how they make my life better. The EU is complicated because it comprises 27 different countries, with different languages and cultures and viewpoints, and that's what makes it complicated. It attempts to accommodate everything from Irish attitudes to abortion to Danish attitudes to holiday homes to Austrian attitudes to nuclear power. It even includes someone's attitudes (I'm not joking here.) on protecting the rights of animals in space. Ridiculous? Possibly. Democratic? Definitely.

So, what to say about the Lisbon Treaty? Is it dry? Dry? It's so dry that batches of it should be stored around Europe for use during floods. Tedious? Call it tedious and you'll get sued by Tedium for character assassination. It's boring, but what did you expect? It's a treaty. What child ever ripped off the wrapping paper on Christmas morning and went "Oh! The Treaty of Versailles! You shouldn't have! I'm going to activate the stability destroying reparation mechanisms against Germany right now!" Actually, if you do know a child who did that, go and hide in a cave somewhere.

<sup>1</sup> Does anyone still own a video anymore?

<sup>2</sup> Most specifically in relation to the functioning of Mr Jobs's white music machine, I would like to know why when on shuffle does it keep on playing Bananarama's 'Love in the first degree'. It was on a compilation album I swear.

It is boring. What do you expect when 450 million people through 27 governments sit down and agree, in arse-numbing detail, how to run a continent and face the challenges of climate change and drugs and bio-technology and cloning and sex trafficking and what to do about Swedish soft rock duo Roxette<sup>3</sup>.



Consider how many buttons are on your television remote control, and that's just for a telly. Bet you didn't read the instructions to that either, and that's in your house.



I believe in the European way of solving problems. It is slow and boring but it works, and in this pamphlet, we're going to try and explain to you how it works without giving you a nosebleed, and why you should vote Yes to the Treaty. Is it perfect? No, not by a long stretch. But it moves us along the road just that little bit further, and that's got to be worth something.

We have a treaty as thick as a phone book because our views and opinions would fill a phone book. We talk and talk and talk in Europe, which, admittedly, can be a pain in the arse, but bear in mind: We used not to talk much at all. In 1870, 1914, and 1939 we hardly spoke a word to each other. How did that work out?



<sup>3</sup> Who actually namecheck themselves in their early 1990s hit Joyride. Namecheck themselves? That's like Hitler chanting his own name during the Nuremburg Rallies. If only he had, then maybe the response would have been "This Hitler, he's a bit up himself, isn't he?" As opposed to "This Hitler and his plans to crush this International Jewish Financial Conspiracy he speaks of. How may I subscribe to his pamphlets?" If only.

## No means no, surely?

Some people say, “Hey Beardy, we believe in the EU too. But this Treaty is a different matter. We already voted on this thing and we voted no. What part of no do our leaders not understand? I mean, it is only two letters. We voted no. No means no, right?”

No does in fact mean no, and as a result the Irish government was unable to ratify the Lisbon Treaty, and so the Treaty did not become law. In other words, the decision of the Irish people was respected. That’s not true! Some say. If they respected our decision, why are we voting again? Well, here’s why.

In the same way that the world has the annoying habit of turning, things in European politics just did not stop when we said no. Firstly, we were asked by our European partners, who along with us had spent eight years and thousands of hours of patient diplomacy and negotiation on this Treaty, why we did not like the document.

When they asked us why we threw it out, the top three issues we brought up<sup>4</sup> were the fear that this Treaty would bring abortion and conscription into this country and the potential loss of our Commissioner. Our European partners were a bit confused.

And this is why:



They’ve been aware of our sensitivities about abortion for decades, which is why there’s been a statement in EU law for the last eighteen years stating that abortion is a matter for Irish people to decide. That statement is not changed by the Treaty, nor has the EU ever brought in a single piece of law that has ever questioned that statement. So for our European partners, associating abortion with the Lisbon Treaty is to them like associating quantum mechanics with the disappointing second album and subsequent career of Terence Trent D’Arby.<sup>5</sup>

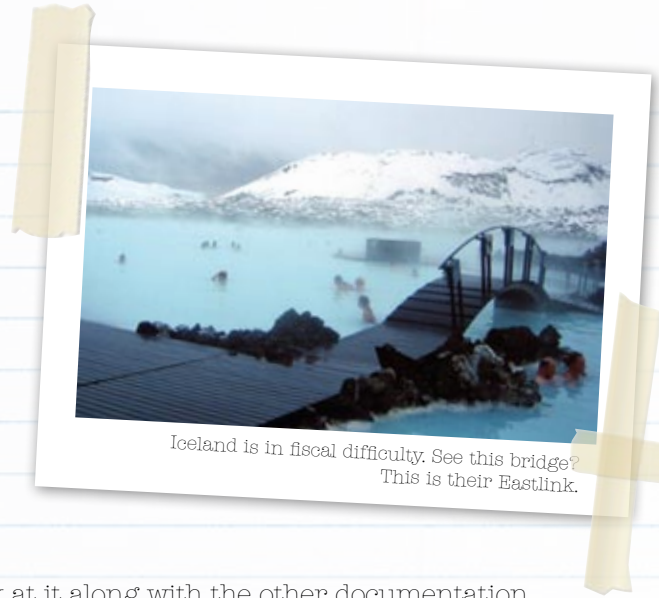
Conscription? A) There’s no mention of it in the Treaty, and B) there’s no EU army to conscript into.

As for our concern about the Commissioner: Now....this was something they could do something about and a couple of other countries were not too happy about either. So all countries agreed that if Lisbon ever became law, all countries would apply the rule in the Treaty that all countries would keep their guy at the Commission table.

<sup>4</sup> The one I’m not including here is in fact the top answer to the survey after the Lisbon Treaty, which was the ‘I didn’t understand it/it’s so complicated’ argument. Laziness is not really an ‘issue’ that our European mates can help us with.

<sup>5</sup> Who added the apostrophe to his name himself, by the way. I’m making a hand moving gesture here now. Although “If you let me stay” is a catchy tune and in a round about way relevant way to Ireland’s EU travails. But I digress.

Once we got a number of legal guarantees confirming that the issues we've imagined to be in the Treaty are in fact our imagination (abortion and conscription), plus the agreement on the Commissioner, our European mates have basically said, "So, we've heard you, we've dealt with your concerns that you flagged with this document that took us eight years to negotiate, would you mind having another democratic look at it along with the other documentation we've all agreed, to make sure?"



So, can we vote no a second time? Of course we can. Will it be respected? Yes it will. As long as the Irish people choose not to ratify the Lisbon Treaty, it will not be ratified. If we vote no a second time, the Treaty will remain exactly where it is now. Un-ratified.

However, whereas we expect the rest of Europe to respect our decision, they want us to also respect theirs.

We cannot be forced to ratify the Lisbon Treaty. That's not just Irish law, that's EU law. But if we vote no a second time, we are in effect telling the other countries that this is the end of the line for us. Not that we are leaving the EU, but that we have gone as far as we are going.

The rest of the EU won't like that answer, but they'll accept it, and make their own arrangements without us. Why? Because we told them we were no longer interested. Shocking and all as the concept is, they will actually believe us. If there is anyone who thinks that Ireland is better served by the great majority of our allies having private discussions without us about the future of Europe, then let's hear from them.

In 1916 we fought and defeated the most powerful empire in the world for the right to speak for ourselves at the table of nations. The EU assured us of that place, and now we seem eager to relinquish it, just as other small countries like Iceland seem very eager to take our place. (Or, in the case of Iceland, is it place?)

This October, we get to decide our future, and despite what the cynics tell you, our decision will be respected.

**Perhaps we are only realising that now?**



So what is in the actual treaty in Chicken Nugget sized portions.

With pub friendly translations.

*Okay, breathe. Breathe. This is may not be pleasant but read on if you really want to know what is in this legal sucker. You'll get through it.*

**A new, full-time, President of the European Council elected by Presidents and Prime Ministers for up to five years**

*The guy who has to come up with the big plan, and answers to the prime ministers.*

*Finally, a European leader whose name your ordinary Jacques-in-the-Rue might actually know<sup>6</sup> and might be worth assassinating<sup>7</sup>.*

As mentioned before, a face that we in Europe might actually recognise, never mind the leaders of other countries. A longer term will also give him/her a chance to actually shape a longer term agenda, as opposed to: a) having to run their own country at the same time, and b) not having to leave office just after figuring out where the loo is and where they store the extra paper for the photocopier.

**A new, single, High Representative for Foreign Affairs**

*The bloke who rings around all the EU countries to see can we all agree on a common position on dealing with stuff outside the EU. Or at least, what pizza toppings we're all happy with at the next meeting of Europe's foreign ministers.*

*This seems to be blindingly obvious, so blindingly obvious that we didn't do it for years, and instead had foreign leaders wondering, as Henry Kissinger said, "Who do I ring to speak to Europe?"*

<sup>6</sup> Good thing.

<sup>7</sup> Generally speaking, not so good.

### **A new External Action Service**


*The back up to the guy above. Basically the civil servants who know where Hillary Clinton's phone number is kept. And the pizza menus.*

The EU's diplomatic service. Finally, the EU has someone who can decide, amongst other things, when exactly the EU's ambassadors can spoil their guests with large pyramids of Ferrero Rocher. In fairness, this could be quite useful for the tiny number of us still travelling around the world rather than going to Trobolgan on our holidays. Fancy getting stuck in Mongolia without consular assistance? Well, these punters will be able to help you if you happen to be in a country where there is no Irish Embassy, that is, anyone who didn't occupy us, give us hard cash, or buy cows off us.

### **A new, simpler, more democratic voting system in the Council of Ministers**

*This is where your eyes glaze over, so I'll try and be very clear: The Council is where our national ministers vote on policies, and the plan is to try and ensure two things. One, that every country gets a say, and two, that the size of a country matters.*

To get something passed, it has to have a majority of countries and a majority of the populations on board. That was to stop all the small countries, who make up 21 of the 27 countries, ganging up on the big 6. It was also to stop the big 6, with 340 million of the 500 million people of the EU, ganging up on us. Just to confuse things, there is something called a blocking minority, whereby a certain number of countries get together and stop a proposal.



### **A new, legally binding, Charter of Fundamental Rights**

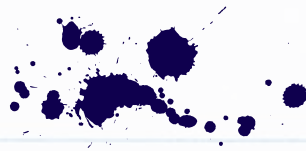
*What you can and can't do under EU law, and what they can and can't do to you.*

Someone has had the novel idea of putting all the rights we have under the EU into a single text, which is a good idea. However, these rights only apply to those areas of life covered by EU law, which means that you can't, for example, be executed by the European Commission. We can all rest easy in our beds, so.

### **Legislation to be decided on in public**

*Voting in public. Yes, it is that simple.*

Amazingly, the Council of Ministers meets in private at the moment. Under the Treaty, they will have to vote in public. It means that they will agree things in secret side meetings, but at least they will have to vote in public. Or not vote. Either way, they will have to explain their position, that is, if any national media can tear its eyes off Jordan's new boobs or the latest episode of I'm A Celebrity, What Do You Mean You Have Never Heard Of Me?



### **New European Parliament powers.**

Contrary to common belief, the European Parliament does actually matter. Sure, it is full of weirdos, from Dutch MEPs demanding voting rights for swans to Hungarian Nazis, uncrowned Emperors and a Mussolini, but that's the European tradition of representing everybody. This isn't the House of Commons, or the US Congress. Everybody gets a voice here.



The chants are a bit insular: "They are all a pack of weirdos in row C seats 17 through 23, so they are, so they are!"

In Ireland's case, we get to send the occasional competent individual (Pat Cox, Proinsias De Rossa), the more than occasional loon (take your pick) and the odd fella doing a lap of honour who suddenly realises he can now afford to spend five years stinking of either stale Guinness or piss, or a mixture of both. It's anybody's guess which of the three represents the Irish people the most.

The Parliament, nevertheless, is one of the few things in the world that scares the European Commission, primarily because it once sacked the bastards. Whilst the rest of us are going about our daily lives, parliament is thinking full time about everything from how Europe should be run to where all our money goes to standardised rules for adult pleasure devices. You know, to stop people accidentally electrocuting themselves.

Some Eurosceptics think parliament has no power. Curiously, the biggest companies in the world spend millions lobbying parliament every year. I wonder who is right?

### **A new role for national parliaments in the European legislative process.**

*Letting our local lads have an early go at proposals, or at least, the right to, so they can't go on bitching later that no one let them have a look.*

When our TDs aren't busy voting themselves pay rises and fiddling social welfare for constituents who don't deserve it, the idea is that occasionally they might look at EU legislation before it is passed, and flag concerns about it.

Obviously, we're talking about proper parliaments here, like the Danish Folketing or the Bundestag. Our guys will be far too busy conning their constituents by telling them every boreen can have a cancer treatment centre to have any time to actually legislate or God forbid read anything. And in case any TD on the European Affairs Committee is reading this, I'm terribly sorry, I know some of you are doing fine work, but for the love of Christ try to tell someone!

### Recognition of the European Defence Agency.

*Where we can try and make EU armies buy all their socks from the same fella and save a few quid.*

The EDA was in fact set up in 1994 to make sure that Europe's taxpayers get value for money for their taxes spent on national defence. Defence procurement is notoriously poor value for money, as national weapons manufacturers tend to avoid scrutiny under the guise of 'national security'. The Lisbon Treaty gives this agency formal recognition in EU Treaty law.

The purpose of the EDA is to help countries coordinate defence force purchases, research and development to ensure that Europe isn't duplicating research. The EDA also co-ordinates training between EU armed forces, ensuring that they use similar communications systems, ammunition, etc, so that they can cooperate if on, say, UN missions. It has no say whatsoever over conscription or control over where Irish troops are sent. It's currently working on trying to get EU maritime surveillance agencies to work together, stopping drugs getting into Irish waters, that kind of thing. Sounds like a crowd of dossers, so.



EDA headquarters. Now with extra white cats, and a brand new death ray. Solar powered, obviously.

There are certain paranoiacs in the Irish neutrality lobby that lie awake at night believing that the EDA operates out of a underground base with a giant holographic map and Robert Vaughn-types (The Jack Bauer of his day. Only smarmier.) knocking off Europe's enemies whilst seducing various sexually promiscuous air hostesses.<sup>8</sup> The neutrality lobby have a serious problem with the EDA because it has something to do with weapons, and they would prefer if the money was not spent protecting children in refugee camps in Chad.

<sup>8</sup> I wish. If this was the job of the EDA, I'll be there in a shot.

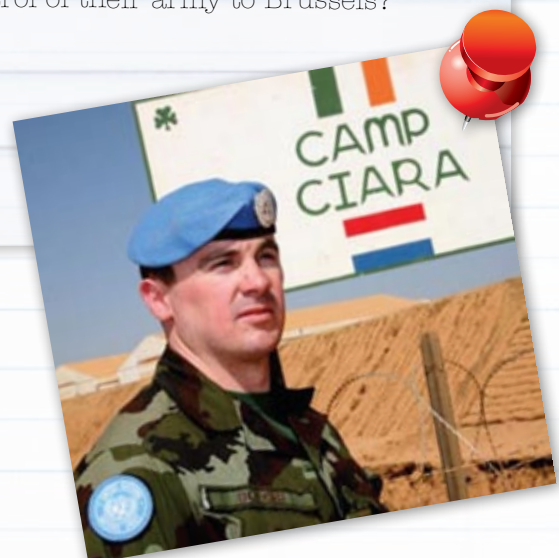
# And just because we're Irish... The Extra Legal Extra Guarantees. With 57% more legal guarantee.

*Also known as The Irish Hangups Charter.*

When we voted No, the rest of the EU asked us why and we told them. After they pointed out the bleeding obvious point that nearly all the stuff we are whining about is actually protected in the Treaty already, they agreed to repeat all the stuff in separate legal guarantees that will be attached to the Treaty as legally binding statements, and then attached to the next Treaty as actual protocols, which is a legal way of saying "No, seriously, we mean this, right? Cross our heart and hope to die!"

The guarantees are:

- Recognising that abortion, education and family issues are none of the EU's business, but in fact our business. Which means that the EU respects our right to deal with issues like abortion and religious control of schools, under our constitution in the fine, sensible and mature way that we have dealt with them up to this point. Lucky us.
- The EU can not make changes to taxation policy with our say so. We will retain control, as will all member states, on the final say on any extension of the EU nose into national tax affairs.
- We get to make our own decisions on defence spending and on if, where and when we send our troops, if anywhere. That's it really. Seriously, do you think the Brits would hand over control of their army to Brussels?



# A load of lies you are going to be told about the Lisbon Treaty.

“Lisbon/EU will bring in abortion...”

The amount of attention this issue gets in Ireland would make one think that abortion is mentioned on every second page of the Treaty. The fact is, there are five countries in the EU that have specific sensitivities with the abortion issue.

Because of our history with this matter, the EU inserted a protocol into the Maastricht Treaty, which we have carried with us to every new treaty<sup>9</sup> which recognises that the EU recognises that abortion in Ireland shall be dealt with by Article 40.3.3 of the Irish constitution.

So, in layman's terms. The EU cannot force us to legalise abortions in Ireland. Other EU citizens always regard the Irish linkage of the EU and abortion to be odd, like linking the space program with raspberry jam. They understand, the Irish want to deal with abortion themselves, and fair enough, that's what the EU treaties say.

**Fact: Only the Irish people can legalise abortion in Ireland. Not the EU.**

“We're going to lose our Commissioner.”

The way eurosceptics talk about the Commission, one has images of Commissioners appearing in hooded robes, sacrificing a goat to the God of Bureaucracy<sup>10</sup> before watching a British patriot getting spanked by Margot Wallström.

There is a certain hypocrisy about eurosceptic attitudes to the Commission. They pretend not to recognise that any single market, which is usually the bit they like about the European Union, needs someone to actually draw up and apply rules.

In any given EU member state, government bodies carry out the same regulation that the Commission does at European level. Hell, even Bring-and-Buy sales have someone who actually sits down and plans, normally over a nice cup of tea and a chocolate digestive, where Mrs Fingerbottom's flans will be sold, and where the racier well-thumbed Mills and Boons will go, and how money will be collected, and how things will be priced. Why would the same not apply to a single market of 500 million people?

<sup>9</sup> We have a protocol on abortion. The French have one on the area of Mayotte. See how European Union Treaties start to get a little on the bulky side?

<sup>10</sup> Three goats, actually. You know the way everything has to be in triplicate.

Commissioners are appointed by national governments, and every member state has one. They do take a pledge to put 'the European interest' ahead of their national agendas, but that is taken in a 'Let's-all-accept-that-Lois-Lane-can't-see-that-Superman-is-Clark-Kent-without-the-glasses' kind of way. Commissioners of individual nations do keep an eye on the national interest, despite the guff, and that's the way most Europeans want it.

The Irish government has managed to convince the rest of the EU to permit each country to keep its Commissioner, even if it means we could end up with the Commissioner with Special Responsibility for Photocopying, Getting Black Toner Powder All Over Their New Marks and Spencer Shirt, Shouting "Get In You Little Bastard!" At The New Toner Cartridge, And Collecting Muffins. That's the way they Irish people want it.

**Fact: Every EU member state will have its own Commissioner.**

**"Lisbon will force Ireland to go to war."**

Ireland, an island nestled snugly between the US on one side and continental Europe on the other, has been conveniently excused from having to seriously consider the issues. Instead, we can, from our position hundreds of miles behind the frontline, pontificate and lecture others as to their 'militarist' failings. We can point at Estonia, which went from Soviet occupation to racing into NATO faster than one could say "That Putin's a card, isn't he?". We lecture them, accusing them of moral impurity for joining NATO and supporting a common European defence, therefore wanting to spend monies on weapons of war rather than kidney dialysis machines. Yet many of the same people who lecture the Estonians and others for supporting a common defence were the first to raise rifles in defence of Derry from the B-Specials, and point fingers at the South for not "militarising" and joining a common defence in the North. Go figure that one.

The irony of the whole neutrality issue is that the rest of Europe, rather than being outraged at our demands that they don't defend themselves, just tolerate our weirdness. They let us opt in and out of defence issues as the whim takes us, and don't even comment on our surreal 'triple lock' law which even the other five neutral countries in the EU don't have<sup>11</sup>.

You may have noticed that I haven't mentioned conscription yet. It's true. I haven't mentioned the old children's cartoon 'Dangermouse' either, and that's because neither is mentioned in the Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty is not making 'Dangermouse' compulsory either.

**Fact: Conscription is decided by the Oireachtas, not Brussels.**

<sup>11</sup> See, because we need a UN mandate before we deploy any Irish troops abroad, and because a UN mandate doesn't happen without the approval of the five countries that permanently sit on the UN Security Council, we've basically handed over the control of our defence forces from the Irish people to the White House, 10 Downing Street, the Elysee Palace, the Kremlin, and the Office of the President of the People's Republic of China. Another Irish solution to an Irish problem, me thinks.

**“We will be outvoted by the big countries.”**

In the mid 1980s, the European Economic Community had a unique problem. How do you count votes? In a democracy, it seems simple. Whoever has the majority of the people wins, but that is a problem in itself, because in a Europe where 4 of the 15 EU countries<sup>12</sup> had the overwhelming majority of the population that literally meant Europe being run out of a Mini<sup>13</sup>. The smaller states kicked up, pointed out that the EU, as well as aspiring to be a democracy, is also a confederation of nations, and that had to be recognised. Countries like Ireland suggested that every country should have equal votes, which the Germans showed interest in as long as every country paid the same amount into the EU coffers. The Irish, essentially being asked to put their hand in their pocket and buy a round, excused themselves and hid in the toilet until closing time.

Basically, the big countries wanted someone to recognise that most Europeans actually live in their countries, whereas the small countries wanted to ensure that people had to actually pay attention to them. Thus, the beautiful construct that is Qualified Majority Voting was invented. QMV is, to people like me who refer to mathematics as “sums”, complicated. Basically it’s a system that makes sure that the small countries don’t gang up on the big countries and vice-versa. Oh here’s the big thing about QMV;

It’s hardly ever used.

I’ll pause now to allow you to wipe the Coke, cocoa, coffee or a selection of fruit juices off the screen.

That’s right, it is hardly ever used. In the EU, although every country keeps their QMV votes in their back pocket as a final result, in the great majority of cases proposals tend to go through on the consensual nod, with much haggling and “I’ll show you mine if you show me yours” in the corridors before meetings. Surprisingly, the EU isn’t big on forcing things on its member countries.

In the Lisbon Treaty it is proposed to change the system to a simpler double majority, which means that any proposal will need a simple 55% of countries representing 65% of the population to get through. Irish Eurosceptics went ballistic at this proposal, because it meant that Ireland, with a massive 0.8% of the population of the EU, would only get a tiny 0.8% of the vote. Meanwhile, Germany, with a piddly 14% of the population, was getting a massive 14% of the vote. The bastards.

**Fact: Ireland does not rely on the size of its population to negotiate what we need within the EU. How the hell do you think a country with 0.8% of the population negotiated €30 billion in aid?**

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<sup>12</sup> That would be France, Germany, Italy and the UK just in case you were wondering...

<sup>13</sup> Or a Renault 2CV.



**“Them over there will be able to wrestle our 12.5% tax rate from our hands...”**

If there were ever a phrase designed to trigger narcolepsy, tax harmonisation would be it. And yet, it deals with the most fundamental function of government, the ability to take a chunk of your paycheque.

Every now and again, some Eurocrat will announce the need for tax harmonisation, that is, that tax rates be decided in Brussels and applied in a uniform way across the EU. There will then follow, at least in Britain, Ireland and many of the central European member states, an hysterical debate about how the EU wants the right to break into your house and steal all the money down the back of your sofa.

The reality is this:

Those who support tax harmonisation say that in a globalised economy globalised companies need to be subject to a globalised tax system. Purely coincidentally, they also tend to be high taxing high spending economies like France that need large amounts of tax revenue, and don't like being undercut by relatively low tax economies like Ireland and Estonia. Obviously, this was before the credit crunch and us maxing out the national credit card on a load of lousy banks.

Those against tax harmonisation say that tax competition is healthy between countries, and anyway, the high tax economies should deal with the reasons they are high tax economies (i.e. their high public spending) rather than try and drag everyone up to their level.

Ireland is firmly and passionately committed to the second argument. Until we start to lose investment to countries that can undercut us. Then we'll probably be firmly and passionately committed to the first argument, but it'll be our choice.

**Fact: Ireland's taxes are decided by the elite people we elect to the Oireachtas, not Brussels. Bet you feel better already.**



Taxes? Don't worry about it. They'll continue to be decided by our elite Irish public officials. Like these.



Boo! (It's a Dutch cow. They go boo, supposedly. And French dogs go woah-woah. Ah Europe.)

**“Won’t someone please think of the farmers/ fishermen?!??”**

The CAP was a noble achievement to help Europe feed itself after the Second World War; and it worked. Europe is awash with either food itself, or money being paid to people not to produce food. It is one of the curious ironies of the EU that farming gets treated so radically differently from other parts of the economy.

Farmers make up 6% of the population of the EU, yet get over 40% of the €170 billion EU budget. In Ireland, out of a population of over 4,200,000, there are 109,100 farmers. And yet we regard CAP as the absolute keystone of our objectives in the EU. We don’t have guaranteed prices for computer software producers or house builders or the retail sector; who employ more people.

Take fishing. We are, quite simply, fishing faster than new fish can be replace the catches. We can all get into a row about whose trawlers are whose and where they should fish and who is getting whose quotas, but the reality is this: fish stocks have to be managed and that means stopping fishermen from fishing, causing massive financial heartache to them.

The same can be said for farmers. They want to stop cheap imports coming in from Brazil and other developing nations, which helps them but hurts those countries, and makes food products in the EU more expensive. We can dress it up in technical terms and demand increased quotas and better payments and blame the EU, but food production can’t escape either the laws of economics or physics, despite the protestations of Irish politicians and the IFA.

Lisbon doesn’t touch the CAP or CFP. People just like to use the opportunity of a European referendum to wedge this issue onto the agenda. In fairness, they do come up with the best stunts. Who doesn’t enjoy a Friesian cow being wedged into the Dáil?

**Fact: We can have as much CAP and CFP as consumers are willing to pay for, and fish are able to spawn.**



**“But this Treaty will supercede Irish law and we won’t be able to make a decision ever again....”**

Every now and again, eurosceptics wheel out this old chestnut, polish it up and sell it anew, with feigned gasps of outrage. They declare, normally very slowly that “Brussels wants to be able to overrule national laws!” They then dance into a jig about whether this is what the men of 1916 took over a postal sorting office and a biscuit factory for; and how our children will put down their iPhones in the future to curse us for selling them out, shaking their heads at our lack of vision as they spend their money on ring-tones of frogs in crash helmets.



Tories tend to be obsessed about domination, be it from Brussels or when queueing to avail of Madame Whiplash's special Tory MP discount Spank-a-thon.

What is so annoying is that it is a half-truth. Yes, it is true that EU law overrides national laws in the areas that national governments agreed that it be overridden.

But what is so surprising about that? The central committee of the GAA does the exact same thing, as does every collection of soccer clubs, rugby clubs, tennis clubs and curling clubs<sup>14</sup>.

The decisions are made by the European Court of Justice<sup>15</sup>, which is the highest court in the EU, and rules solely on issues outlined in the EU treaties. This is also the exact same thing that national governments do to local authorities, except that the EU is far more restricted in what it can do to its constituent parts than the British or Irish governments can do to local government<sup>16</sup>.

The other annoying part of this half-truth is the idea that somehow this is new. The EU has been run this way since 1963, and yet the eurosceptics keep ‘revealing’ it as if it were a new development. It’s like a Tory MP declaring that he has discovered a genuine military document outlining a plan to launch an invasion of Britain from continental Europe. The document could be the real thing. Oh the humanity! Of course, the fact that it would have been written 69 years ago in 1940 would be only a minor detail.

**Fact: Of course EU law overrides national law. The same way Irish law overrides Leitrim County Council. We can’t have farmers allowed marry sheep just because some county councillors in Leitrim say so.**

<sup>14</sup> Presumably, they must regulate how quickly people can and indeed must polish the floor.

<sup>15</sup> This is not to be confused with the European Court of Human Rights which isn’t part of the EU. Eurosceptic tabloids love to ‘accidentally’ mix up the ECHR with the ECJ and run stories about bicycles winning the right to marry or badgers winning the right to contest municipal elections in Hilversum.

<sup>16</sup> The Tories in the UK, for example, when they were lecturing Brussels about evil centralising super-states, abolished the Greater London Council because they couldn’t win a GLC election. In other words, the greatest Tory fear was that the EU might run Europe the way the Tories ran Britain.

### “They’re taking our rights off us.”

In 2000, the EU set up a convention with the idea of getting all the rights that EU citizens and persons resident in the EU were entitled to under EU law, and writing them down in one single document. The British government, forever terrified that the British people might actually find out what they were entitled to<sup>17</sup>, insisted that those rights could only be applied in areas where EU law applied. For example, the death penalty is prohibited in the EU, which means that the guy who draws up the banana straightening regulations isn’t allowed execute you if your banana is too bendy. Which is nice.

So basically, the Lisbon Treaty introduces more rights, but these are only relevant to when Ireland is applying European law.

**Fact: Mmmmmm. Rights. Who doesn’t like rights? They’re the custard of the legal system. Hitler didn’t like rights. Or custard. Probably.**

### “This is just not democratic enough for us democratic Irish...”

You have to feel sorry for Eurocrats sometimes. They’re people too, and they get depressed, especially when they get called such nasty names. In particular, the EU gets slammed for not being democratic.

Sick of being accused of this, the EU has been democratising at a furious pace since the first direct elections to the European Parliament. The same said Parliament has been getting more and more power and control over decision making within the EU. In fact, despite the sneering in the Eurosceptic media that the Parliament is just a talking shop, over 4570 lobbyists are registered with the parliament with varying estimates running in hundreds of millions spent on lobbying by business, unions and other social partners. So the question is, why would these people spend so much of their money on a parliament with no power?

The Parliament has been getting more and more power in each new EU Treaty, and has reached a stage that it actually sacked the all powerful European Commission in March 1999 over a very shady scandal involving French dentists<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly coming from a country with an invisible constitution, stealth taxes, and a socialist party that hides its socialism.

<sup>18</sup> You don’t see that on The West Wing.



Hitler: Didn’t like custard. Wasn’t mad about bagels, either. Nazi bastard.

So are people happy then? The answer, surprisingly, is that less Europeans have voted for the democratically elected Parliament as it gets more powerful. There are good reasons. Unlike in most elections, voters aren't electing a government with clear winners and losers and clear competing policy platforms. And then there is the distance issue. Brussels is far away in the eyes of most. But most importantly, the democratic deficit may be the product of a general lack of enthusiasm for politics. The European Parliament isn't the only parliament suffering from a lack of respect. The US Congress has even lower poll ratings than former President Bush did, and let's be honest, people with an enthusiasm for national policy issues are becoming just as rare as those with a passion for Europe. There are people going into DVD shops and saying to the guy behind the counter; "Give me a copy of Blokes Having Sex With Harpsichords Volume Nine" but you don't see many asking for "The Very Best of Oireachtas Report. Now with extra Michael Ring."

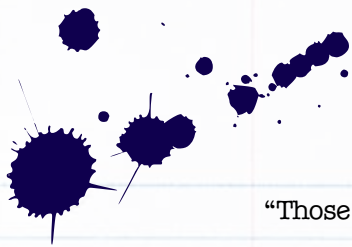
Convincing Europeans that 750 MEPs speaking over 20 languages in over 90 political parties are worth paying attention to won't be easy. Me, I think that we could always drop a few lions into the odd plenary session. Now that would be good telly.

**Fact: Participating in European Democracy is like putting extra insulation in your attic. You know you should, but not right now. Sure, CSI: Miami is just starting, and I reckon that this episode Horatio is going to put his hands on his hips and say something pithy. Just wait!**



Horatio 'speaks-so-low-as-to-make-even-a-phone-call-to-the-local-Chinese-takeaway-sound-dirty' Caine.





“Those declarations the Government keep going on about aren’t worth the paper they’re written on.”

Following the Lisbon referendum, the government, after conducting loads of opinions polls, came to the conclusion that there were certain issues that people were really concerned about. They were neutrality, taxation, the right to nominate a Commissioner, and abortion.

This didn’t surprise the government, as it had negotiated special protections for Ireland on all these issues during the Treaty negotiations. However, the fact that these protections were put into the Treaty, as opposed to being on big day-glo yellow labels on the cover of the Treaty became one of the reasons that caused the people to have the electoral version of a mickey fit, and throw out the Treaty.

So now, the government has had to go back to the EU and get what can be best described as the DO NOT PUT WET CATS IN THIS MICROWAVE concession, and get the bleedin’ obvious stated in a separate set of legal declarations as well as in the Treaty itself.




The big gain is that we stopped the EU reducing the number of EU Commissioners and ensured that every country gets one. This means, by the way, that the Irish people have become the first people in the entire European Union to argue that there are not enough politicians and that we need more.

Some of the opponents of the Treaty have not been impressed. Mary Lou McDonald said in December 2008 that, “declarations are not legally binding...They are exactly what they are called, political declarations made by politicians with no legal status or force.”

It’s a good job, by the way, that George Washington or Padraig Pearse were never advised by Mary Lou, because neither the 1916 Proclamation or the Declaration of Independence were legally binding, just political declarations made by politicians. Still, it would have made for a good night in the GPO, as bullets flew back and forth and Pearse shouting out, “Is anyone here a solicitor? Ah good. If you could just sign here. And here. And initial here, here, and here.” Or good job Gerry Adams didn’t listen either, for that matter, as he took the non-legally binding Downing Street Declaration to certain gentlemen with a penchant for balaclavas and fertiliser (no, they weren’t gardeners into S&M) and got a ceasefire from them.

Sometimes, when it suits their agenda, it seems that Sinn Fein have no problem with a non-legally binding declaration.

**Fact: Accepting a declaration assumes a certain level of trust from the people making it. If we don’t trust the rest of the EU, why do even the NO side want us to remain inside?**



## My final two cent.

See, Europe isn't the bogeyman. Change is.

When people lash out at the EU, they're actually lashing out at the rapidly changing world Europe is trying to manage.

Fishermen blame the EU for the Common Fisheries Policy. But their problems won't end with an abolition of the CFP. The fact is we are depleting our fishing stocks far faster than nature can replace them, because technology has allowed us to. Someone has to manage that change, to ensure we have fish in the future.

Farmers complain of cheap imports, and blame the EU for letting them in. At the same time consumers complain that we won't let enough cheap imports in, as do those looking for fair trade for the developing world. Someone has to manage those conflicting demands.

Factories producing CO<sub>2</sub> in China can cause ice to melt at the North Pole, and flooding in the Netherlands and coastal areas all across Europe. Someone has to try to manage the solution.

Modern transport has allowed for rapid mass migration and indeed massive cross border crime from drugs to sex trafficking to terrorism. Someone has to manage our response to this.

Europe is not the problem. It is the response to problems that our parents, never mind our grandparents, never even dreamed they would have to deal with. Climate change? Climate change was opening a window to cool a room. Al Quaeda was something you might expect to find on the menu at a Middle Eastern restaurant, possibly served with Naan bread. Yet now we face problems all greater than single nations, a concept in itself which is relatively new. As a result, we all feel disturbed that our traditional ways, with our national laws and national cultures and national borders can't deal with these challenges that are just on a scale more vast than anything individual peoples have ever had to deal with before.

We know that drug dealers cooperate across borders, that diseases cross national borders, that floods and forest fires cross national borders, and yet why do we get so upset when Europe tries to suggest a cross-border solution? Is it because Europe, unlike drug dealers, terrorists, or global warming, actually consults us, whereas the other forces just impose their will upon us whether we like it or not?

The issues that mobilise our people, of jobs and health and safety and security, are all issues that are no longer affected just by what happens within our national borders. Our lives are shaped by forces thousands of kilometres away, and that leaves us with a choice.

We can choose to do nothing, and stay with what we know and feel comfortable with, and just wait for those forces to overwhelm us. Or we can decide to create new ways of managing and shaping those forces to serve us, not the other way around. The reality about the European Union is this. If we didn't have it, we would have to invent it, and that is the unspoken fact the Eurosceptics will never tell you.

The Lisbon Treaty helps us do this. It is boring. It is complex. But is certainly nothing to be scared of.

European nations can stand alone and choose to fight the future, or we can, as a European Union, choose to control it. That is the choice.

## About me.



When not in the semi finals of "The Yeti Factor" Jason O'Mahony works in the construction industry. He was once a candidate for the Progressive Democrats, where he received small arms training, learnt counter-insurgency tactics, and also how to make a really nice avocado and rocket salad. He narrowly escaped just before the Dessie Star exploded, shaking his fist and vowing revenge.

Jason O'Mahony is surprisingly good with a bow and arrow. His freelance writing and blog, [www.jasonomahony.ie](http://www.jasonomahony.ie), keeps him from patrolling the fogbound streets of Dublin in a cape and top hat. Most nights, anyway. [omahonyjason@gmail.com](mailto:omahonyjason@gmail.com)

## Want to know even more?

[www.eumatters.ie](http://www.eumatters.ie) - actually not a bad website from the Government...

[www.irelandforeurope.ie](http://www.irelandforeurope.ie) - the official Yes campaign

[www.womenforeurope.ie](http://www.womenforeurope.ie) - Mna na hEoraip

[www.irelandsfuture.ie](http://www.irelandsfuture.ie) - A politician-free Yes to Lisbon website

[www.europeanmovement.ie](http://www.europeanmovement.ie) - Not biased either way, just the facts if you want them.



## TOP GRUMPS CARDS:

Those who are agin' this Treaty and usually every Treaty the EU makes. Yours to cut out and swop with your friends.

### Sinn Fein



TOP GRUMPS #845

Sinn Fein used to be against the EU, but have now changed to wanting to reform it to look pretty much like Commonwealth. And despite trying to blow them up, Sinn Fein and the British Tories are practically swapping bodily fluids with their mutual opposition to Europe. Oooh, the irony!

Sinn Fein say the EU is too pro-business, except when it allows companies to locate in Ireland, where it is not pro-business enough. They also believe that the EU is militaristic and wants to use weapons to achieve its political ends. We'll let that sit quietly there, as one leafs through a copy of Black Pots and Kettles Monthly.

### The John Charles McQuaid Sub Committee for the Saving of Souls.



TOP GRUMPS #666

I'm not talking about genuinely committed Christians, but the gang of right wing nut jobs who aren't just concerned about abortion. They also keep changing their name, and pretend to be just a group of concerned citizens, whilst sticking to their core beliefs.

They're not really too enthused about modern Ireland, with your homosexuals sauntering about, and your Muslims, and women working and not knowing their place, and Protestants strutting about as if they were actually Irish. They hate the EU, with its foreign ideas about stopping husbands beating their wives, you know, interfering in the traditional Irish ways, like.

### Joe Higgins



TOP GRUMPS #112

Joe wants a workers collective to run everything, and the EU is not a workers collective, so he is agin' it. Basically, he wants the world run to the same ethos and efficiency as Dublin Bus. Good luck with that one, Joe.

### The Easy Answers Brigade



TOP GRUMPS #39

Finally, there's the various non aligned 'citizen groups' who are in a strop with the government, the EU, the laws of economics, the planet Venus, Padraig Pearse refusing to be not dead, etc. You see their letters in the Irish Times, always along the lines of "Sir, What part of No does the EU not understand? I demand that the other 495 million people in the EU should agree to whatever I want immediately! Yours sincerely, Tristan Hoax-Feckington." One can't help wondering what sort of simple lives they lead to expect such simple solutions? Do they maybe spend their time between EU referendums holding dress parades for long lines of garden gnomes, delivering hour long political diatribes to foot-high Papa Smurf wannabes. Still, at least the gnomes don't answer them back. Or maybe they are plotting too...

### Patricia McKenna



TOP GRUMPS #4

Patricia McKenna's position is odd. She wants to save the planet, yet doesn't want to support any of the institutions, like the EU, that are needed to do it. Kind of like being in favour of fire prevention but against fire engines. I'm not sure what her solution is, other than maybe by mass osmosis we will all stop our nonsense, give each other a hug and start growing rhubarb. The Maeve Binchy approach, I believe it is called.