



## Europaudvalget

**Til:** Udvalgets medlemmer og stedfortrædere

**Dato:** 10. september 2008

### Rapport om resultatet af den irske folkeafstemning om Lissabontraktaten

Hermed omdeles til orientering et resumé af den rapport, som den Irske regering i dag har udgivet, angående baggrunden for resultatet af den irske folkeafstemning om Lissabontraktaten. Resuméet ledsages af en pressemeddelelse og en udtalelse fra den irske udenrigsminister, Micheál Martin.

Hele rapporten kan i øvrigt findes på EU-oplysningens hjemmeside [www.euo.dk](http://www.euo.dk)

Med venlig hilsen

Signe Riis Andersen  
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## Executive Summary

This report contains the results of research conducted by Millward Brown IMS on behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs following the result of the Lisbon Treaty referendum on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2008.

The quantitative research consisted of a national opinion poll of 2,101 adults aged 18+. All respondents were on the electoral register and all were Irish citizens i.e. eligible to vote in the recent referendum. The poll was conducted between July 24<sup>th</sup> and July 31<sup>st</sup> 2008. Twelve focus groups were also conducted with a cross section of voter types and demographic groupings. The focus groups were held between the 28<sup>th</sup> of July and the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2008. (See Appendix for full methodological details).

The following comprise the key findings of the research.

- Turnout for the Lisbon Treaty referendum was 53%, well in excess of the 35% who voted on the first Nice Treaty. The decisive issue was the increase in No voters as a proportion of the total electorate (from 18% at Nice 2 to 28% in June 2008), rather than Yes voters staying at home – which was the key difference between the first and second Nice referenda.
- The main reason for abstaining in this referendum was lack of understanding/knowledge (46%), which is far in excess of any other voluntary or circumstantial reason given for not voting.
- Sixty percent of Irish voters believe that Ireland's interests are best pursued by remaining fully involved in the EU. Fewer than 1 in 5 of the electorate (18%) believe Ireland's interests are best served by opting to be less involved.
- Despite the referendum outcome, Irish people remain amongst the most positive nations in terms of attitudes towards the EU – 73% consider EU membership to be a good thing. Amongst No voters, 63% think the EU is a good thing, well ahead of the EU average of 52% (Source: Eurobarometer National Report Ireland 69.2).
- Of all voters, on both sides, some 23% can be described as 'Soft' voters based on the level of conviction they had when casting their vote (they had some reservations/doubts or were not at all certain). Yes and No voters split evenly between 'Hard' (more convinced) and Soft voters. However, both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that the vote may actually have been considerably 'Softer' than this on both sides.
- The key demographic groups in terms of opposition to the Treaty were 25-34 year olds (59%), the C2 and DE socio economic groups (63% and 65%) and women (56%). Amongst the main political parties, 63% of Fianna Fáil supporters voted for the Treaty, 52% of Fine Gael supporters also voted in favour of it. Labour and Green party supporters both voted against (61% and 53% respectively) as did Sinn Féin supporters (88%).\*<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> The question asked respondents which party they felt close to, not which party they would vote for. It is therefore not comparable with a standard opinion poll measure of party support.

- Much of the Yes vote is underpinned by a strong general feeling of pro-Europeanism rather than Treaty specific motivations. A secondary reason for voting Yes is 'following advice' (22%). The main source of this advice was the government (12%).
- The main reason cited for voting No was 'lack of knowledge/information/ understanding' at 42%. There can be little doubt that this emerged as the primary reason for people voting No.
- Twenty-six percent of No voters mentioned Treaty specific elements that were of concern to them, 20% cited general issues around the referendum, whilst 16% mentioned issues specifically to do with loss of power/independence. All of these specific areas were more likely to have been mentioned by Hard No voters.
- Immigration did not emerge as a significant reason for voting No at a spontaneous level. However it is clear that No voters view immigration considerably less positively than Yes voters in terms of making Ireland a better place to live. This is backed up by the focus group evidence – particularly amongst the C2DE socio-economic group who were more likely to feel their jobs and pay may be under threat from immigration.
- No voters were far more likely to believe that erosion of Irish neutrality, end of control over abortion and conscription to a European army were part of the Lisbon Treaty, revealing key cracks in the debate.
- Loss of Commissioner was also a common concern on the No side. Focus groups revealed that many people believed that the loss of a Commissioner would mean Ireland would have no voice in Europe at all.
- At a wider level, an EU knowledge deficit is clearly present which has undoubtedly contributed to the No vote. This was evidenced in both the opinion poll and the focus group research. Knowledge of EU institutions and how they work appears to be particularly low. The difficulty of advocating a referendum that is based on the premise of institutional reform in this environment is apparent.
- The national media and discussions with family, friends and colleagues were ranked as the most valuable sources of campaign information
- Yes and No voters differ in terms of the perceived impact on Ireland of the No vote. Yes voters are much more likely than No voters to say our economic prospects have weakened and far fewer are likely to say they remain unchanged (47% versus 66%).
- Fewer voters (on either side) believe that our influence in the EU remains unchanged. Yes and No voters differ markedly on whether our influence has weakened (51% versus 20%). Just over 1 in 5 (22%) of No voters believe that Ireland's position has been strengthened – possibly due to an expectation that Ireland is in a position to renegotiate the treaty.
- When asked directly, respondents cited the issue of protection of workers' rights as being "very important" more often than any other issue (of a defined set of issues) relating to Ireland and the EU. Retaining control over public services in the future was similarly cited. Although workers' rights and public services did not feature as issues of concern in the focus groups or to any great extent in the open-ended questions, they made some

contribution to the different attitudinal profiles of Yes and No voters. However the key areas of divergence between Yes and No voters are retaining military neutrality, preventing excessive EU regulation, the rotating loss of the Commissioner and retaining full control over abortion laws. The focus groups reinforce these indications as to where the main battlegrounds between the Yes and No sides lay, with retaining full control over Corporate Tax also featuring as an issue.

- Knowledge of the EU in general and knowledge/understanding of the Treaty in particular are significant issues. Concerns over specific aspects of the Treaty loom large, particularly perceptions of an erosion of neutrality, the Commissioner issue (which many do not seem to properly understand), Corporate tax and to a lesser degree abortion. The focus group results supported these findings.
- Advocating institutional reform to voters who have such sketchy knowledge of how the EU operates is a very difficult task. Communication about the European Union needs to revert to first principles in order to help people understand how the institutions work, Ireland's role within them, and how Lisbon would affect this.

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**Minister Martin publishes Report on Lisbon Treaty referendum results**

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin, T.D., today published the report on the reasons underlying the result of the Lisbon Treaty referendum.

The report which was prepared by Millward Brown IMS also gives details about public attitudes to Ireland's future role in the European Union.

The Minister stressed that "the Government fully respects the vote of the Irish people, and I believe the public will be very interested in what the report shows about attitudes to the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union and the referendum campaign itself.

People clearly had worries about issues that came up during the campaign. These included worries about the possible loss of influence for Ireland, corporation tax and neutrality. The report also shows that the Irish Commissioner, abortion, corporation tax, neutrality, conscription and workers rights were among the main issues that gave rise to concern among voters".

The Minister remarked that the survey shows that people felt they did not have enough clear information in the run-up to voting day. This lack of information was the single biggest reason given for the decision to vote No or to abstain on 12 June. For example, more than four in every ten people who voted against the Treaty said they had voted No due to a lack of information which gave rise to genuine concerns about what they were being asked to vote on.

The Minister said the results also show that people want Ireland to continue to be fully involved in the Union. 70 per cent agree that membership is a good thing, while a mere eight per cent disagree. The divisive referendum campaign has not shaken Ireland's belief in the Union.

The Minister said he was very encouraged by the fact that people want Ireland to be fully involved in the EU despite the difficult and often confusing campaign.

"I recognise that there are lessons here for the political system. People clearly expect to be provided with clear information when we ask them to vote in referendums.

We need to address people's concerns as we move forward. I am hopeful that informed debate about Ireland's future role in the European Union can go a long way toward reassuring people about the important issues that are now at stake for us. We all need to work together to address the challenges facing Ireland in Europe in the wake of the referendum result," the Minister said.

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**Press**  
**10/09/08**

**Check Against Delivery**

**Remarks by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin, T.D.,  
at the launch of a study conducted for the Government by Millward  
Brown IMS following the result of the Lisbon Treaty referendum,**

**10 September 2008**

It is exactly thirteen weeks ago today – on Wednesday, 11 June - that the very last of the arguments were being made on the eve of the Lisbon Treaty referendum.

It is not my intention here today to dwell on that campaign. To do so would be unproductive. Instead, I want to adopt a forward-looking approach that puts our national interests – our vital ties with our EU partners - front and centre.

In the period since the referendum, the debate on the Lisbon Treaty has not died. I see this continuing debate as a welcome sign of the Irish people's engagement with the EU and their concern about our future European role.

Following the referendum, the Government decided to commission a major research project. Its aim was to clarify why people voted Yes, why people voted No and why people abstained.

At the European Council in June, it was agreed that more time was needed to analyse the situation and that the European Council's October meeting should receive a progress report.

The results of this research will form an important input into the Government's analysis of the best way forward for Ireland.

The survey was carried out completely independently by experts in the research and analysis field. The results are being made available in line with the Government's undertaking to do so.

I am placing the survey report in the library of the Oireachtas and it will also be available on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Members of the public are also welcome to request a copy from the Department of Foreign Affairs.

I will not attempt a point-by-point summary here, as I believe it is best that we all carefully study the report and reflect on its findings. That said, there are a number of aspects worth highlighting.

First, the results show that people want Ireland to continue to be fully involved in the Union. 70 per cent of us agree that membership is a good thing, while only a mere eight per cent disagree. The referendum campaign has not shaken Ireland's belief in the Union.

Second, lack of information was a significant problem for the electorate. 42 per cent of No voters cited "lack of knowledge or information" as their reason for voting No.

The survey also indicates that over 40 per cent of voters made up their minds in the last seven days of the campaign – another clear indicator of the concerns and uncertainty that existed. There are lessons in this for all political parties.

Third, a number of other issues gave rise to very real concerns and uncertainties in the minds of the electorate.

I will not list them all here, but the main issues of concern are the composition of the Commission, the corporate tax base, workers' rights, neutrality and abortion were factors.

Also one-third of the electorate believed that the Treaty would have introduced conscription to a European army.

It is evident, however, that no single issue dominated.

Fourth, the research indicates that there are marked differences in voter behaviour between different demographic groups. Young voters were strongly opposed to the Treaty.

For instance, 59 per cent of 25-34 year-olds voted against. There were also differences between socio-economic groups. These are trends which have been identified among voters in other EU countries and lessons now need to be drawn from them – and not only in Ireland.

The environment in which we find ourselves is difficult. The global economic downturn and our domestic economic challenges are very evident. Suggestions that there is a clear and simple course to take are not grounded in reality.

What we must do, however, is first to fully respect people's concerns, secondly, to seek to understand the motivation behind them and, thirdly, to reflect deeply together on how we can best respond to them.

The clear desire of the other 26 Member States is to ratify the Treaty. That reality speaks for itself. On the other hand, they also have a strongly shared wish both for Ireland to remain fully engaged in the Union and for the Irish people's views to be respected. This highlights the challenge we now face.

It is vital that the steps we take – here at home and in conjunction with our 26 partners – are the right ones. It will not be to our benefit to pretend that it is "business as usual" for Ireland and the EU in the wake of our referendum.

The campaign was a difficult one and - without in any way diminishing the significant role played by the misrepresentation and negative tactics on the No side - we have to acknowledge that the Yes side did not manage successfully to explain the Treaty's importance for Ireland and for Europe.

People who have great goodwill toward the Union were genuinely frustrated and confused about the way the referendum campaign developed.

We want to work with others in finding a way forward for Ireland in Europe. There is a need for serious political debate on Ireland's future in the EU.

That is why I have proposed that the Oireachtas take on a central role in dealing with the consequences of our referendum result.

I have already had discussions with Opposition parties and these have made good progress. I hope that this study will provide material for a fruitful debate within the Oireachtas.

Regarding the critical EU information deficit, I intend to consult widely, including with the Minister for Education and the European Commission to identify ways in which we can improve on how European issues and structures are communicated.

The task ahead is a serious one with far reaching consequences. It demands that we embark on a calm, considered debate. Ultimately, we must come together in mapping out a future course that is best for us as a nation.

I am fully committed to Ireland remaining centrally involved in the EU – for the sake of our economic well-being and because I believe that Treaty-based arrangements between sovereign States offer the best guarantee that the interests of small countries will be taken into account.

To use a sporting analogy, we have managed over the years to maintain a proud position among the leaders in the EU league. We must maintain this leading position and not risk facing a relegation battle.

We cannot afford to see our European influence wane when it comes to vital decisions that will shape our future.

This study provides us with much food for thought. It does not provide any magic formula for charting Ireland's future. That is not its purpose.

It offers us the raw material for a vital national debate that, wherever it leads, I hope will make for a stronger Ireland in a more effective European Union.

ENDS