

# A brief history of the Lisbon Treaty.

In 2001, the countries of the EU recognised that we stood at a crossroads.

A number of issues had come to the fore - the attacks of September 11 had called the stable world order we had enjoyed since the fall of the Berlin wall into question, the Union was also about to welcome ten new countries in as members, swelling our numbers from 15 to 25, and there was clear recognition that the EU system needed to become closer to the people they worked to support.

So in December 2001, the Taoiseach and the other EU leaders met in Laeken in Belgium. They discussed what they saw as the challenges facing the EU, and the result of these discussions was the Laeken Declaration. This highlighted the three main areas where the EU could be reformed. They were:

<b>The EU in the world</b>	<p>After September 11 and the world events that ensued, it was agreed that EU has a responsibility to fight against injustice and ensure that global matters are settled peacefully, not through war.</p> <p>Since the Union was a system that was set up in the aftermath of World War II so countries could deal peacefully and proactively with each other, it was clear that the EU was in a unique position to do this.</p> <p>As a continent whose democratic values and peaceful aims set an example for the rest of the world to follow, the European leaders recognised that the EU had the experience and ability to play a leading role in a new world order.</p>
<b>Making the EU work faster and better</b>	<p>While this was originally set up as an economic community, the leaders of the EU countries recognised that the EU's political power and influence is important in order to solve the international problems that don't respect borders. Working as a Union, we could tackle issues such as climate change, cross-border crime, trafficking of women and children, racism and poverty that Ireland could not fight on our own.</p> <p>To add to this, the EU was about to expand to 27 countries. The systems currently in place were made for a Europe of 6 countries. Now, more than ever, reform was needed to make the EU's operating system work better on international problems.</p>
<b>Bringing the Union closer to the people</b>	<p>The heads of the EU countries also realised that the EU needed to make much more of an effort to make the Union more democratic, more transparent, but most importantly, more relevant to the people they were working for.</p> <p>It was recognised that EU bureaucracy was a barrier to inclusion and interest in the Union, and we all deserved a Union that was more open and didn't spend all its time discussing issues behind closed doors, but took more definite and visible action in order to solve our problems.</p>

## How the Lisbon Treaty came about

In order to decide how they would turn the Laeken Declaration into reality, the Taoiseach and the other European leaders set up a Convention to discuss these three issues and propose solutions to them.

The Convention on the Future of Europe first convened in December 2001 and was made up of over 100 representatives from EU governments, parliaments, opposition parties, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the candidate countries of the time.

They met and discussed a range of issues over 18 months resulting in a single document – the draft Constitution for Europe. This document was then finalised by the leaders of the European countries, led by the chairmanship of Ireland and our team in June 2004.

It was then left to each European country to approve or reject this Constitution using their national procedures. The Constitution was ratified by 18 countries, but following the rejection of the document by France and the Netherlands in 2004, other countries put the ratification process on hold.

The constitutional elements of this document caused some difficulty – people were uncomfortable with the idea of a constitutional document for the European Union. Leaders agreed that the more standard practice of a Treaty would achieve the reforms needed to streamline the Union while addressing the concerns some Europeans had with a formal Constitution.

It was decided that they would take out all the constitutional elements – like a flag and an anthem – and put the other reforms into the standard Treaty format. There is a lot of the same content from the constitution – after all, there was six years of negotiation that had agreed the other elements needed to achieve the three aims of Laeken; to make the EU work faster and better, to put the EU on the global stage, and to bring the Union closer to its people.

This Treaty was signed by the leaders of all 27 EU countries on 13 December 2007, in Lisbon, Portugal hence it being called the Lisbon Treaty (it's also sometimes called the Reform Treaty).

## Status of the Lisbon Treaty

While it is usual to say that 26 countries have ratified the Lisbon Treaty, there are in fact 23 countries that have completely ratified it and three who have not put the final pen to paper. They are:

### Germany

The German Parliament ratified the Lisbon Treaty on 23 May but on 30 June President Kohler halted the ratification, saying he wanted to submit the Treaty to an evaluation of the Constitutional Court. The Court has now ruled saying that the Lisbon Treaty is completely compatible with German law, but because the Treaty gives more power to national parliaments, the German Parliament needs to strengthen its systems to take on the new role in EU law making.

It is likely that the Bundestag will hold a special session on 26 August to debate the Court's ruling and recommendations with a final vote by both the Bundestag and Bundesrat taking place before the 27 September.

### Poland

The Polish Parliament ratified it in April, but it still awaits the signature of President Kaczynski who decided, on 2 July, to put the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty on hold. The President has indicated that he will wait until after the Irish referendum to finalise the ratification process.

### Czech Republic

President Havel has also stated that he will not sign the Treaty officially into law until after our referendum.

### The Irish referendum

It will be up to the Irish public and the Irish public alone to decide whether or not we want the Lisbon Treaty. On 2 October 2009, we will vote on whether or not the Lisbon Treaty is the way forward for us and whether we believe it's a good thing for the EU.

Our only responsibility is to make sure we vote on facts, not fiction.

If you would like to know what new elements the Lisbon Treaty introduces, please see our other factsheet: *What is in this Treaty.*