

# “Unelected Euro elites are going to have even more power...”



## The Claim

Lisbon takes away our power and gives it to euro elites.

This Treaty increases the power and control of unelected EU elites and civil servants. It takes power away from our elected national governments and reduces our influence within the Union's own structures.<sup>1</sup>

There is a gang of unelected people who are ruling Europe.

The Treaty, if passed, will undermine democracy...and centralise power into the hands of a Euro elite.<sup>2</sup>

## The Short Answer

Who are these so-called Euro elites? Irish people who largely are elected (and who have had a pretty heavy influence in the EU over the years) are the ones who make our decisions.

## The Long Answer

The politicians we elect have a say in every piece of legislation that is passed in the EU. In fact, no legislation can be passed by the EU without the consent of people directly elected by the citizens of Europe.

Both of the institutions that ultimately decide to accept or reject a law are made up exclusively of people we elect – the European Parliament and the Council which is made up of our Ministers and our Taoiseach.

The Commission, the institution that is not directly elected, are the people who draft the law that our politicians approve or reject. The Commission is made up of Commissioners – we sent Charlie McCreevy for a five year term in 2004 – and civil servants. Currently, the head of the Commission civil servants is an Irish woman, Catherine Day.

So, these Euro elites that are constantly mentioned are the people who we elected. And think of it this way, Irish people have, through their MEPs, more control over the Commission than Irish people have over the HSE.

The Lisbon Treaty includes measures that make the EU even more democratic and more open by giving more power to our elected MEPs and giving our national parliaments a role in drafting EU law for the first time.



This European Movement Ireland fact sheet is part of a series of research conducted to clarify the issues in the Lisbon Treaty debate. European Movement Ireland is a pro-European non-profit organisation which does not advocate either side of the Lisbon Treaty Referendum, we advocate the facts.



## Current legal situation

There are three institutions involved in creating and agreeing European law.

Below is a table to give a clearer view of these institutions, how many members they have, who they represent, and what part they play in law-making.

Institution	Composition	Who the institution represents	Role in decision-making process
<b>Commission</b>	There are 27 Commissioners, one per EU country each nominated by their governments. Under Lisbon, there is agreement that all countries will keep their right to keep their Commissioner, under the current rules, the Commission will reduce in size from November 2009.	<b>Europe.</b> The Commissioners are to act in the interests of the Union overall, thinking of what would be good for all 27 countries.	Drafts legislation.
<b>Parliament</b>	Currently there are 785 MEPs, of which Ireland has 12 MEPs. Under Lisbon this would be changed to a maximum of 750, but Ireland will not lose any of our MEPs.	<b>The people.</b> Directly represents the citizens of the EU and our interests.	Can amend and reject legislation.
<b>Council</b>	The Council, or Council of Ministers, is in practice divided into 10 different councils dealing with different areas, such as agriculture and fisheries, finance, and transport. Each council is composed of the ministers of each country in these areas – for example, if it is an agricultural law, then Minister Brendan Smith meets with his fellow agricultural ministers to decide whether to accept the law or not.	<b>The countries.</b> As the elected authority given the power to run each country, Government Ministers and our Taoiseach agree or reject law on whether they think it is good for Ireland.	Approves legislation.

The Commission usually makes legislative suggestions and the law must then be approved by the European Parliament and the Council, in one of three ways:

*The co-decision procedure*<sup>3</sup> is the most popular way of law being decided. In the co-decision procedure, the Parliament and the Council both have to agree for a law to pass. The Commission sends its legislative proposal to both institutions. They each read and discuss the proposal twice in succession.

The *assent procedure* means that the Council has to obtain the European Parliament's assent before they decide on the law. The assent procedure is mostly used for agreements with other countries, including the agreements allowing new countries to join the EU.

The *consultation procedure* is used in nationally sensitive areas such as agriculture, fisheries and taxation. Based on a proposal from the Commission, the final decision is only with the Council of Ministers, which consults with the Parliament and two other bodies, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

The EU system is populated with a range of Irish politicians, diplomats and civil servants. Each of the European institutions contains Irish members or representatives. This includes:

- The European Commissioner nominated by Ireland is responsible for one of the portfolios in the EU's work. To date, Ireland has been in charge of a number of key portfolios such as agriculture, employment, competition and the EU marketplace.
- Ireland has 12 Members of the European Parliament<sup>4</sup>, each of whom is a member of at least one parliamentary committee that deals with particular issues e.g. agriculture, foreign affairs and the EU budget.
- Ireland has around 90 civil servants in our Permanent Representation in Brussels which sits on working groups and committees dealing with new law. This is one of our largest overseas offices in the Department of Foreign Affairs.
- There are also two Irish judges in the European courts, one in the European Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance – the same as all other EU countries.
- There is one Irish representative in the European Court of Auditors, which checks how the EU money is spent by the Commission and EU countries – the same as all other EU countries.

Further to this, there are a number of positions that are open to all, regardless of their nationality. Ireland has been very successful in securing a number of key positions. These include:

- Two of the five people who have held the position of head of the Commission civil service have been Irish including the current one (Catherine Day 2005-present, David O'Sullivan 2000-2005).
- The current EU Ambassador to US is Irishman John Bruton.
- President of the European Parliament (Pat Cox, 1999-2004).
- Vice President of the European Commission (Patrick Hillery).

The current situation is that **"the people who make the main decisions in the EU are not anonymous**, but identifiable citizens of EU countries, including Ireland."<sup>5</sup>

## What Lisbon introduces

The Council of Ministers and the European Parliament remain the final decision makers for all European law. Both of these two institutions comprise directly elected politicians.

The Lisbon Treaty strengthens the democratic process. This includes:

- **The European Parliament's law-making powers will be increased** as the co-decision procedure will be extended to new policy areas such as agriculture and fisheries, energy, environment, consumer protection and transport;
- **The Treaty strengthens the role of National Parliaments**; they will have the power to control whether the principle of subsidiarity is breached by the Commission;
- In an effort to increase transparency in the EU, **meetings of the Council of Ministers will be held in public**;
- **The European Council will be able to elect a President** for a term of two and a half years, who will give the EU its general political direction, set its priorities and provide a sense of continuity in the Council's work. This President is accountable to the Council, which is made up of the leaders of the European countries.
- Direct democracy: **a new citizens' initiative** allows one million citizens from EU countries to ask the European Commission to submit a proposal for EU law;

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cym.ie>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.voteno.ie>

<sup>3</sup> Article 251 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community.

<sup>4</sup> See results of European elections in June 2009: [http://www.elections2009-results.eu/en/ireland\\_en.html](http://www.elections2009-results.eu/en/ireland_en.html).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/idqlcwaucw/>