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Ireland's Europe Minister Dick Roche shows concern at Irish voters being alerted to the Conservative Party commitment to a UK referendum on the Lisbon Treaty if Ireland stands by its No-to-Lisbon vote of last year

Yesterday's *Irish Examiner* carries a letter from the country's Europe Minister Dick Roche criticising a correspondent who said that on the Lisbon Treaty Ireland should wait for a new British Government to be elected in the UK by next summer, committed to holding a UK referendum on Lisbon and recommending a No vote to it so long as Irish voters do not allow Lisbon to be ratified before then.

Ireland's Europe Minister Roche has spent the last year pressing various Governments in other EU countries - Sweden, the Czech Republic etc - to complete their ratification of Lisbon as quickly as possible so as to isolate his own country politically and put maximum pressure on Irish voters to reverse last year's rejection of Lisbon in the referendum re-run the Irish Government intends holding in October.

The Minister's letter shows his concern that if Irish voters become aware of the Conservative commitment to a UK referendum on Lisbon if it is still unratified when they come to office, it will make it harder for him and his fellow Yes-side campaigners to threaten Irish voters with isolation if they stand by last year's vote in the Lisbon re-run.

Hence he dismisses the *Irish Examiner* letter-writer he criticises, whom he sneers at as a closet British Tory. "Perhaps he hankers after the union we left in 1922", Minister Roche writes.

The Europe Minister refers to a second referendum being held on the Lisbon Treaty "*modified for Ireland by a series of legal guarantees currently being negotiated*", even though nothing in the Treaty will be "modified".

None of Minister Roche's so-called "legal guarantees" will change the Lisbon Treaty one iota - not even by a comma - for any such change would require the ratification process for all 27 States to start all over again.

If Lisbon comes into force it will be interpreted thereafter by the EU Court of Justice, like all previous European Treaties, and will have the status of constitutional law for the legally new Federal EU which the Treaty would establish and its 500 million new citizens.

What Minister Roche and his Irish Government colleagues are up to is merely spoofery and spin, aimed at persuading Irish voters that the Lisbon Treaty is being changed when no such change is happening.

The reality is that people all over Europe want to be consulted in referendums before they are made subject to the supranational Federal Constitution which Lisbon embodies and turned into real citizens of the new Federal EU the Treaty would bring into being, organised on most undemocratic lines.

The EU Prime Ministers and Presidents decided among themselves on no account to have referendums on the Lisbon version of the EU Constitution after the French and Dutch rejected the original "*Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe*" in 2005. A referendum in Ireland cannot be avoided because of the country's Supreme Court judgement in the 1987 Crotty case.

By standing by their No vote on Lisbon Irish voters would be opening the way to enabling the British people as well as their fellow countrymen and women in Northern Ireland to decide democratically on the hugely important EU Constitution.

The people of at least one other EU State - the UK - would thereby be allowed to have a say on the constitutional revolution in the EU and its Member States which ratification of Lisbon would entail.

There is now a race in time between the ratification of Lisbon, which would greatly increase the power of the Big States and the Brussels Commission in the EU, and the coming to office of a new Government in Britain by next summer.

Labour's Gordon Brown broke Tony Blair's promise to give the British people a referendum. Last autumn some 30 Labour MPs defied their party whip and voted with the Conservatives in favour of a UK referendum. Britain's Liberals supported the Gordon Brown Government in refusing it.

David Cameron's policy is to hold a referendum on Lisbon in the UK and recommend a No vote to it to the British people - so long as the Irish do not change their No vote of last year and thereby bring the Lisbon Constitution into being first, and the new undemocratic EU it would establish for all 27 EU States.

Below for your information is a copy of an *Irish Times* article on this topic which was written by British Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague after Ireland's

No-to-Lisbon last year. It sets out his party's position on this matter. See in particular its last paragraph.

Irish Times article, Saturday 26 July 2008, page 14

NO OUTSIDER HAS ANY RIGHT TO TEL THE IRISH HOW TO HANDLE LISBON

William Hague

"The result of the Irish people's verdict on the Lisbon Treaty is still reverberating across Europe - and how could it not? With people in every other European country denied any direct say on the treaty, Irish voters had to speak for every European.

The hope that they would give voice to concerns held across the Continent was felt acutely on the other side of the Irish Sea, where in a breach of an election manifesto promise, the Labour government has denied British voters any say on the Lisbon Treaty at all, either in a referendum or at a general election.

The Irish people not only spoke for those who were not given a voice; they also spoke with courage. It was no surprise to Ireland's well-wishers that threats that Ireland would suffer should the "wrong" answer be given were counterproductive, but it is shocking that in today's Europe senior figures in European governments should seek to influence another nation's democratic decision with bullying language.

It is now incumbent on politicians across Europe to appreciate the meaning of Ireland's vote and to absorb its lessons. The Irish public has, if anything, been inundated with commentary from those outside Ireland who were unhappy at the result. Now that Irish voters have made their choice, it may also be useful if those outside Ireland who thought the Irish people came to the right decision were to set out their understanding of what has happened and made some suggestions for what Europe should do next. This is one attempt to do that.

First, it is clear that Ireland's No was not a No to Europe, any more than the French and Dutch rejections were; it was a pro-European No. There is no evidence that this vote represented a rejection of the EU or its ideals: a continent united in peace and co-operation.

Second, it has been claimed that the No was simply the result of an inexperienced public's inability to see through the treaty's complex legal language to the shining merits of its content.

That so many among Europe's political elites' first response has been to dismiss the referendum result as an outrage from a country supposedly ungrateful to its Brussels benefactors and whose voters' decision must shortly be reversed is deeply troubling. It is an extremely patronising view.

Nor does it strike me as a healthy democratic reaction. When voters reject a cherished proposal it is wiser for politicians to ask, not "why have the people got it so wrong", but "how have we got it wrong". If the argument is that treaties are too complicated for voters - in other words that referendums on EU treaties are only justified if the voters say Yes - one might as well argue against elections on the grounds that most voters aren't experts on tax law or the finer points of education policy.

Neither is blaming Lisbon's failure on popular incomprehension a strong point for the treaty's supporters. How good can a treaty be if, after months of national debate, its merits cannot be comprehensibly explained? Would any of us in our normal lives sign up to a document we did not understand?

Third, it is apparent that a vast number of people in Ireland, as in many other European countries, do not want the extension of EU power and the weakening of individual countries' voices in Europe, like that of Ireland.

Lisbon would mean exactly that, whether it is the bigger role for the EU in defence, including a mutual defence commitment, its new powers over foreign policy or Ireland's smaller voting share and loss of a guaranteed EU commissioner. On that point it is worth noting that the current treaties require unanimous agreement for any new arrangement on the number of EU commissioners. So talk of Ireland automatically losing a commissioner unless Lisbon goes through is wildly misplaced.

It is equally true that the majority of Irish voters are not alone in rejecting a more federal future for Europe. In Lisbon's earlier guise as the EU constitution it was rejected by the French and Dutch. Polls showed that voters in up to 16 EU member states would have rejected Lisbon had they been given the chance to vote.

This leaves us with the question: what next?

Of course, the straight and simple answer is that No means just that. The EU is a union of democratic sovereign nation states and if the electorate of one EU country rejects a treaty then that should be that. It is a matter for the Irish government whether the Irish people are asked to vote again, and it is a matter for the Irish

people what their response to such a move should be. No outsider has any right to tell the Irish how to handle the matter. That being the case, there must be no question of any punishment of Ireland.

Moreover, the rejection of Lisbon does not actually present any real problem for the EU. Contrary to all the froth about an enlarged Europe's desperate need for the EU constitution/Lisbon Treaty to work efficiently, the quiet truth is that the EU is in fact working perfectly well under the current treaties.

Meanwhile, it is looking increasingly likely that at the next British general election, now less than two years away, the British people will choose a new government. **If Lisbon remains unratified by all EU members states, a Conservative government will put Britain's ratification of the treaty on ice and hold a referendum, recommending a No vote to a document we believe represents an outdated centralising approach to the EU. So the chances are growing that Ireland's voters will not be alone in saying No to Lisbon for long.**

(emphasis added in bold)

William Hague is a former British cabinet minister, who later led the Conservative Party from 1997 to 2001. He is currently shadow foreign secretary.