

ARTICLE FOR HOT PRESS ON LISBON TREATY

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Voting yes to the Lisbon Treaty on 12th June is not seen as sexy. It's hard to sell the arguments in favour - they do not have the simplistic appeal of the 'No' side. Time and again we hear the catchy refrain from those opposing it – 'if you don't know, vote no'. From a certain particularly fervent section of the 'No' camp, we even hear outright lies: 'it will bring in abortion and euthanasia' .. and so on.

In fact, the more I hear from the 'No' campaigners, the more convinced I become about voting yes. I think that their arguments lack rational basis, and I certainly don't believe that the Treaty has anything like the substantive significance that they suggest. The truth is that it is mainly a procedural document, designed to make the EU work more efficiently with 27 states or more. The current structures were developed for a smaller number of countries. It makes sense to adjust them to ensure adequate representation for any new states that have joined or may join in future. That's the mundane reality – it's all about making procedural changes necessary to facilitate EU enlargement. But as somebody who believes passionately in the idea of more inclusive Union, that in itself is enough to vote yes.

There is however another aspect of the Treaty that should also inspire passionate support - the Charter of Fundamental Rights. This Charter encapsulates a broader definition of rights than our own Constitution, including socio-economic guarantees like the right to healthcare. Many of those opposing the Treaty argue that the EU favours the free market too strongly. Yet in each member state, including Ireland, the excesses of the free market have been significantly curbed by EU regulations; on the environment, on gender equality, on health and safety, and on workers' rights, for example. Adoption of the Charter would enable development of greater social protections for citizens – and would move us towards the left-wing vision of a 'social Europe'.

So the Lisbon Treaty represents a valuable opportunity to take the EU further in this direction, as well as making key structural changes so that more states may join in future. Personally, I would love to see the Union expand to include the Balkan states, and former Soviet republics like Georgia and Ukraine. This would present extraordinary opportunities for greater peace, progress and prosperity for many deeply disadvantaged peoples. That may not be sexy or easy to sell, but that's why I'm voting yes on 12th June.