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## The Lisbon Treaty

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# A ‘Yes’ Vote Means Death to Democracy

*The Lisbon Treaty will see sovereignty taken from the people without their consent, write five Members of the European Parliament—Harry van Bommel, Jeremy Corbyn, Jean-Paul Lecoq, Lars Ohly, and Paul Schäfer. This article was published in the May 22 edition of the Irish Examiner, and several other newspapers.*

Three years ago, an overwhelming majority of the electorates of two of the European Community’s founding member-states voted to reject the European Constitutional Treaty. In France and the Netherlands, despite solid backing from mainstream political parties and organisations representing both sides of industry, this latest step in the top-down integration of Europe failed to win support. The only democratic course would have been to consign it to history and, after widespread consultation, present the peoples of Europe with a real alternative vision of the Union of our nations.

Instead, a virtually identical treaty is to be imposed on us, with only the Irish being allowed to vote to accept or reject it. In France and most likely the Netherlands there will be no new referendum. Nor will there be a vote in the United Kingdom, despite the governing Labour Party’s manifesto pledge. In these three countries, ruling elites insist that the Treaty of Lisbon is very different from the Constitutional Treaty, and that lacking the rejected measure’s constitutional implications it need not be put to a vote.

Elsewhere, those who support the new treaty are more honest. In Germany, where a referendum has never been in the cards, Chancellor Merkel has said that “the substance of the Constitution is preserved.” José Zapatero, Prime Minister of Spain, whose voters—though on a very low turn out—backed the Constitutional Treaty in a referendum, assured the Spanish people that “We have not let a single substantial point of the Constitutional Treaty go,” adding that the new treaty was “a project of foundational character, a treaty for a new Europe.” Even [former Irish prime minister] Bertie Ahern noted that there had been no “dramatic change to the substance of what was agreed back in 2004.”

The similarity between the two texts is disguised by a structural sleight-of-hand. Instead of a single document to replace the existing treaties, Lisbon is a series of amendments to those treaties. A study by the British think-tank Open Europe has shown that only ten of 250 proposals in the “new” treaty differ from those in the text rejected three years ago,



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*Organizers from the Civil Rights Solidarity Movement (BüSo) in Dresden, Germany on May 28. The banner reads, "No to the EU Dictatorship! We demand a referendum on the EU Treaty!" The BüSo, headed by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, is rallying opposition to this disastrous treaty. At the megaphone is BüSo mayoral candidate Marcus Kürth.*

and that these are of no great significance. Left intact is an assault on democracy and on national sovereignty which will represent a major step towards the creation of a superstate. In a democracy, sovereignty belongs to the people. It cannot be given away without their informed consent. Yet this is precisely what is happening.

The loss of sovereignty is best illustrated by the handing over of veto rights. Only recently, the Dutch have been able to block an EU directive that would have had a very negative influence on their pension system. In the new treaty, veto rights in important areas such as justice and home affairs, asylum, and migration will be surrendered, while the EU will gain more powers, free once more of any national veto, over such matters as energy and climate change policy. Clearly, these are all matters which require international co-operation. Yet national cultures and attitudes vary so greatly that an attempt to impose a "one-size-fits-all" policy on the Twenty-Seven [EU members] prove counterproductive, further undermining popular support for the whole European project.

Under this treaty, moreover, the already dominant influence of multinational corporations will be reinforced. Privatisation, liberalisation, and deregulation will cease to be matters which may be voted for or against at national elections, becoming instead articles of constitutional writ. Social ownership, even of essential services, will come under ever-increasing pressure.

There is an idea, completely false, that the new treaty

will address the problem of the democratic deficit. The vaunted increase in powers for the European Parliament provides no effective substitute for those lost by national parliaments. Most of these powers have not been transferred to the European Parliament at all, but have, along with those of other institutions directly or indirectly answerable to the people, been placed in the hands of centralised, undemocratic, bureaucratic institutions. In addition, there is no real European public or political space, and no European public media. Indeed, a recent Eurobarometer survey shows that the majority of the Dutch people does not even know that Euro-MPs are directly elected. Under these circumstances, granting national parliaments the right to block EU legislation is a clear sop, especially as to do so they will need the support of either the European Council or European Parliament.

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the European security and defence policy will acquire expanded "aims and ambitions," in particular as regards Member States' military capabilities; an expansion in the list of "Petersberg tasks"—the humanitarian, crisis management, and peace-building tasks which the EU may undertake; a reference for the first time to the European Defence Agency, a body aimed at encouraging greater and more co-ordinated defence capabilities; the possibility of "subcontracting" of security and defence tasks to "coalitions of the able and willing" among the member states; and the possibility of instituting special arrangements among a group of Member States possessing greater military capabilities. The treaty directly undermines Ireland's neutrality, stating that "The Union and its member states shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or victim of a natural or man-made disaster. The Union shall mobilise all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available by the member states...."

In sum: this treaty does not differ significantly from its rejected predecessor. It is a treaty desired by the elite, not by the people. Ireland could play an important role, since its citizens, uniquely, have the right to vote. This is a plea for you to seize this opportunity and vote for all of us.

Harry van Bommel MP, The Netherlands; Jeremy Corbyn MP, United Kingdom; Jean-Paul Lecoq MP, France; Lars Ohly MP, Sweden; Paul Schäfer MP, Germany.