

# Lisbon Treaty and European politics is an Irish joke

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The impression given by the [media coverage](#) was that many of the people who voted against the [Lisbon Treaty](#) in the [Irish referendum](#) did so because they didn't understand it. The vox pops repeatedly said that they were so confused about the detail that they thought it best to reject it.

The people who do think they know what it meant are those on the Europhile and Eurosceptic wings. In a sense, the detail is irrelevant to them because they have prior positions in favour or against integration and vote accordingly.

So put that all together and it is clear that the media and governments failed to explain what the Treaty was about. Or rather, the different versions of what it was about were so confusing and contradictory that the unprejudiced citizen could only make a decision out of fear, distrust and ignorance.

Regardless of what you think about the EU, this does seem to indicate that conventional political communication isn't working. I don't think you can blame the media. Thanks partly to the Internet, all the information was out there. You can't force people to attend seminars before they vote. If highly informed and intelligent folk couldn't agree what this was about, never mind which way to vote, then how could the humble journalist or citizen?

Referenda on this scale are clearly a joke. The sight of a nation made rich in great part thanks to European subsidy voting against integration is darkly funny too. But so is the claim for democratic legitimacy for the Lisbon Treaty.

I once spent 18 months as a BBC European politics producer in a period when that issue brought down governments and wrecked political parties. In those days Ever Greater Union was seen as an irresistible force of nature. If you stood in its way you would be swept aside.

I don't think it has the power to do that anymore. In the UK the largely euro-sceptic printed media has chimed with public sentiment in a way that the pro-Brussels British broadcast media did not.

The interesting question is not how to revise the Lisbon Treaty in to something that the Irish will accept. Nor can we simply say let's leave Europe where it is. With 27 members in a rapidly changing world it needs reform not rejection.

Personally, I felt that the Lisbon Treaty had elements in it, such as a permanent President, that would have helped increase accountability. It would have given the EU someone that the public could relate to. Perhaps that could have been the beginning of a tangible political relationship with the citizens. If so, perhaps that is exactly why the sceptics prefer the current confusion, ignorance and illogicality that the Irish vote has left in its wake.

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