

Check Against Delivery

**Remarks by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin, T.D.,
at the launch of a study conducted for the Government by Millward
Brown IMS following the result of the Lisbon Treaty referendum,**

10 September 2008

It is exactly thirteen weeks ago today – on Wednesday, 11 June - that the very last of the arguments were being made on the eve of the Lisbon Treaty referendum.

It is not my intention here today to dwell on that campaign. To do so would be unproductive. Instead, I want to adopt a forward-looking approach that puts our national interests – our vital ties with our EU partners - front and centre.

In the period since the referendum, the debate on the Lisbon Treaty has not died. I see this continuing debate as a welcome sign of the Irish people's engagement with the EU and their concern about our future European role.

Following the referendum, the Government decided to commission a major research project. Its aim was to clarify why people voted Yes, why people voted No and why people abstained.

At the European Council in June, it was agreed that more time was needed to analyse the situation and that the European Council's October meeting should receive a progress report.

The results of this research will form an important input into the Government's analysis of the best way forward for Ireland.

The survey was carried out completely independently by experts in the research and analysis field. The results are being made available in line with the Government's undertaking to do so.

I am placing the survey report in the library of the Oireachtas and it will also be available on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Members of the public are also welcome to request a copy from the Department of Foreign Affairs.

I will not attempt a point-by-point summary here, as I believe it is best that we all carefully study the report and reflect on its findings. That said, there are a number of aspects worth highlighting.

First, the results show that people want Ireland to continue to be fully involved in the Union. 70 per cent of us agree that membership is a good thing, while only a mere eight per cent disagree. The referendum campaign has not shaken Ireland's belief in the Union.

Second, lack of information was a significant problem for the electorate. 42 per cent of No voters cited "lack of knowledge or information" as their reason for voting No.

The survey also indicates that over 40 per cent of voters made up their minds in the last seven days of the campaign – another clear indicator of the concerns and uncertainty that existed. There are lessons in this for all political parties.

Third, a number of other issues gave rise to very real concerns and uncertainties in the minds of the electorate.

I will not list them all here, but the main issues of concern are the composition of the Commission, the corporate tax base, workers' rights, neutrality and abortion were factors.

Also one-third of the electorate believed that the Treaty would have introduced conscription to a European army.

It is evident, however, that no single issue dominated.

Fourth, the research indicates that there are marked differences in voter behaviour between different demographic groups. Young voters were strongly opposed to the Treaty.

For instance, 59 per cent of 25-34 year-olds voted against. There were also differences between socio-economic groups. These are trends which have been identified among voters in other EU countries and lessons now need to be drawn from them– and not only in Ireland.

The environment in which we find ourselves is difficult. The global economic downturn and our domestic economic challenges are very evident. Suggestions that there is a clear and simple course to take are not grounded in reality.

What we must do, however, is first to fully respect people's concerns, secondly, to seek to understand the motivation behind them and, thirdly, to reflect deeply together on how we can best respond to them.

The clear desire of the other 26 Member States is to ratify the Treaty. That reality speaks for itself. On the other hand, they also have a strongly shared wish both for Ireland to remain fully engaged in the Union and for the Irish people's views to be respected. This highlights the challenge we now face.

It is vital that the steps we take – here at home and in conjunction with our 26 partners – are the right ones. It will not be to our benefit to pretend that it is "business as usual" for Ireland and the EU in the wake of our referendum.

The campaign was a difficult one and - without in any way diminishing the significant role played by the misrepresentation and negative tactics on the No side - we have to acknowledge that the Yes side did not manage successfully to explain the Treaty's importance for Ireland and for Europe.

People who have great goodwill toward the Union were genuinely frustrated and confused about the way the referendum campaign developed.

We want to work with others in finding a way forward for Ireland in Europe. There is a need for serious political debate on Ireland's future in the EU.

That is why I have proposed that the Oireachtas take on a central role in dealing with the consequences of our referendum result.

I have already had discussions with Opposition parties and these have made good progress. I hope that this study will provide material for a fruitful debate within the Oireachtas.

Regarding the critical EU information deficit, I intend to consult widely, including with the Minister for Education and the European Commission to identify ways in which we can improve on how European issues and structures are communicated.

The task ahead is a serious one with far reaching consequences. It demands that we embark on a calm, considered debate. Ultimately, we must come together in mapping out a future course that is best for us as a nation.

I am fully committed to Ireland remaining centrally involved in the EU - for the sake of our economic well-being and because I believe that Treaty-based arrangements between sovereign States offer the best guarantee that the interests of small countries will be taken into account.

To use a sporting analogy, we have managed over the years to maintain a proud position among the leaders in the EU league. We must maintain this leading position and not risk facing a relegation battle.

We cannot afford to see our European influence wane when it comes to vital decisions that will shape our future.

This study provides us with much food for thought. It does not provide any magic formula for charting Ireland's future. That is not its purpose.

It offers us the raw material for a vital national debate that, wherever it leads, I hope will make for a stronger Ireland in a more effective European Union.

ENDS