

# If you care about climate change, vote Yes to Lisbon



**JOHN GIBBONS**

Ireland owes Europe a great deal, and Europe also offers leadership on global warming

**T**HERE'S AN old Irish saying that no good deed should go unpunished. As Ireland heads to the polls, our EU neighbours are left watching, waiting – and wondering what on earth they did to make so many Irish people apparently distrust them so much.

Was it the farm subsidies, or perhaps the support in building our infrastructure? Maybe they offended us by giving us free access to the vast European markets, and then allowing us to slash corporate tax rates to give US firms low-tax access to these same markets?

Or was it the generous cohesion funding to help us take on large-scale environmental and conservation projects? All this, and no strings attached. Honestly. To date, some €60 billion has flowed from Brussels to Ireland – that's €15,000 for every man, woman and child in the land. This is money our fellow Europeans took out of their pocket and put into ours. Why? Because of a genuine belief that Europe should be a union of equals.

The Lisbon Treaty has taken seven years of painstaking negotiations to agree. We alone have it in our gift to unravel the whole thing by tomorrow night.

It brings to mind the scene in Monty Python's *The Life of Brian* when the rabble of would-be revolutionaries ask: "apart from the sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, roads, fresh water system and public health, what did the Romans ever do for us?"

While much of the Lisbon Treaty is taken up with attempts to streamline the working of this vast union, it also represents a critical change in emphasis in the vital areas of climate change and energy security. The anti-Lisbon lobby has made much of the fact that there are just six words in the treaty specific to climate change.

This misses the point entirely. For the first time, Lisbon places tackling the climate crisis as a vital EU priority. Its Energy Title also firmly underpins the legal basis for enshrining energy efficiency and renewable energy as key priorities. Placing this on a legal footing is essential, as it is a critical bulwark against individual states trying to "opt out" when the going gets tough.

On these issues, "politically and legally, Lisbon really matters", says Joseph Curtin of the Dublin-based Institute of International and European Affairs. He believes an Irish No will unhinge EU attempts to have a strong, unified position heading

into the critical Copenhagen Conference on climate change at the end of 2009.

Minister for the Environment John Gormley told me this week how at a recent Council of Ministers meeting in Luxembourg, his French counterpart described Copenhagen as "the most important conference in the history of humankind". He added: "I think that puts this in perspective."

Gormley is also anxious to point out the central role played by this Irish Government in insisting on climate change being written into the heart of the treaty. It would be ironic indeed if the Irish electorate torpedoed the climate-centric provisions its Government managed to secure.

Another man who knows how much Lisbon matters is former US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton. He is one of the most notorious of the Bush administration's neo-conservatives and a pro-Iraq war hawk. Bolton took the opportunity to lecture Ireland to vote No tomorrow during a recent visit to Dublin.

His big concern is that Lisbon may actually give Europe a defence capability that is not dominated by the US via Nato. "I think there is a risk it would undercut Nato," is how he put it. Bolton is openly opposed to all institutions, be they the UN or EU, that are not subservient to Washington.

Crucially, Bolton has also been at the heart of an administration that has done its utmost to scuttle every concerted international effort to tackle global warming. Although he denies it is being funded by the US military, Bolton's position chimes closely with Libertas, the self-appointed anti-Lisbon lobby group.

It is a rich irony that Sinn Féin, the only parliamentary party opposed to Lisbon, now finds itself in bed with the US-extreme right. At least Sinn Féin can claim an electoral mandate, albeit a modest one, with four of the 166 seats in Dáil Éireann. Still, that's precisely four more than the combined forces of Libertas, Youth Defence and the various other No groups can muster.

Declan Ganley of Libertas stated during a recent TV3 debate with Labour's Eamon Gilmore that children as young as three could end up being detained if we adopt the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

My youngest child is three, but somehow, I don't see her being taken away and forced to wear lederhosen by faceless Eurocops. The real bogeyman she and her generation face is a world degraded by untrammelled human activity and threatened by climate chaos.

The choice tomorrow is simple: if you care about climate change and sustainability, vote Lisbon. If you want to punish politicians, there will be other opportunities. Lisbon is too serious – for us and for Europe – to be hijacked by a ragbag domestic coalition of extremists, opportunists and egoists. The EU isn't perfect, but it's been good for Ireland. It's also our best, perhaps last, hope for global leadership to draw us back from the ecological abyss.

John Gibbons is founder of Climatechange.ie and the blog, ThinkOrSwim.ie

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