

## Opinion & Analysis

# Don't sign an EU contract you can't even understand



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The Lisbon Treaty is unintelligible and for that reason alone should be rejected

**H**AS ANY one actually read this 272-page tome, the Treaty of Lisbon? It takes 12 hours. And because the contents are so impenetrable, you will need to go through it several times. I doubt whether any of the 54 ministerial dignitaries who signed it has read it even once. For what minister can set aside 36 hours for study?

The progenitor of this oeuvre is France's former president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, whose committee drafted its doomed forerunner, the Treaty Establishing A Constitution For Europe, or TEACoFEe – a 'tea-coffee-or-whatever-you're-having-yourself' mishmash designed to please and annoy everyone in equal measure, which was thankfully rejected in the French and Dutch referendums.

Perhaps Jean-Claude Juncker, long the prime minister of the Luxembourg Colossus, was right after all when he famously said, in relation to those pesky referendums: "If it's a Yes, we will say 'on we go', and if it's a No, we will say 'we continue'."

For the Lisbon Treaty is but a slightly modified version of the TEACoFEe – still 90 per cent the same, according to Bertie Ahern and others. A few provisions have been changed, largely cosmetic things like removing the EU anthem, but the phraseology and architecture have also deliberately been made much more difficult to comprehend.

Astute as ever, D'Estaing proclaims that:

"Public opinion will be led to adopt, without knowing it, the proposals that we dare not present to them directly ... All the earlier proposals will be in the new text, but will be hidden and disguised in some way ... What was [already] difficult to understand will become utterly incomprehensible, but the substance has been retained."

Karel de Gucht, Belgium's foreign minister, helpfully adds: "The aim of this treaty is to be unreadable ... The constitution aimed to be clear, whereas this treaty had to be unclear... It is a success."

It's certainly that. To achieve unreadability a very simple technique has been used. At the beginning of the treaty, after seven sheets of pompous signatures, it states "AMENDMENTS TO THE TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION AND TO THE TREATY ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY", ie the treaties of Maastricht (1992) and Rome (1957).

Thereafter, each clause begins with phrases such as "Article x [of these treaties] shall be amended as follows", with instructions to delete, insert, modify and/or renumber Article x. Consequently, you can't possibly understand the import of the amendment without simultaneously studying the other two treaties.

Even the proposed new 2½-year "President of the EU Council" doesn't get his/her own clause, just an "insertion" of a new Article 9B

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into those previous treaties.

Lisbon is thus an abomination that no serious commercial business would ever contemplate signing. If it represented an honest endeavour, it would have incorporated the contents of all three treaties into a single, unambiguous, easy to comprehend document.

But that wouldn't have met De Gucht's demanding standard of unreadability. And, frankly, that's the single biggest reason to vote No. Would you sign a contract for, say, employment or to buy a house, if you didn't understand a word it said? Yet the

threat of a No is of course precisely why no one (but the Irish) is being permitted a referendum this time around.

As a result, the constitutionally unavoidable Irish referendum is going to become a huge battleground, where well-funded Yes and No camps across the length and breadth of Europe are going to be slugging it out - albeit covertly - within Ireland. For only Ireland can stop Mr Juncker's relentless, unprincipled march.

The principal Yes arguments don't really stack up. Apparently the treaty's main raison d'être is to make running the EU smoother with the advent of the recently joined members (also the excuse for Nice, incidentally).

But, as studies and publications, notably the *Economist*, have pointed out, decision-making has actually become more, not less, slick since the last dozen members joined, with new rules and regulations being adopted 25 per cent faster.

People sometimes voice little details for voting Yes, such as that Lisbon mentions "climate change". Well, yes, but only to add "in particular combating climate change" to Article 174 about "deal[ing] with regional or worldwide environmental problems". This hardly embraces Al Gore's absurd climate changeology cult.

But the Yes camp's main argument is that Lisbon is part of the mighty EU locomotive,

which is always advancing towards some mythical nirvana, and you either get on board or get left behind at the station. Therefore, naysayers are voting against the train, want to remain at the station and therefore abhor, almost treasonously, the very existence of the EU.

This is nonsense.

The EU is not the plaything of eurocrats, MEPs, commissioners and other Brussels bigwigs, though they often behave as if it is. It is a club of the 490 million citizens of the 27 constituent countries. So, if some of them are able under club rules to go against the Brusselarians, the EU remains just as much the EU as it ever was.

Your golf club doesn't stop being your golf club just because members vote down the committee.

Thus no thinking citizen could possibly vote to support the execrable Lisbon Treaty. It is un-understandable and unnecessary. Our major political parties support it because their leaders don't want to be embarrassed among their peers in Brussels. But that is no reason for anyone else to vote Yes.

Ireland has an historic opportunity and duty to save the EU from itself.

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