

***Speech by Professor Danuta Hübner
Commissioner for Regional Policy***

"Why Europe needs the Lisbon Treaty"

College of Europe

Parma, 3 July 2008

Introduction

The Treaty of Lisbon has enjoyed a lot of interest in the media. It has been the subject of many speeches. It has attracted a lot of political time and attention. And yet, there is still a sense that many people are unsure of its purpose. It is a fair question to ask: do we really need the Lisbon Treaty, or is it just an optional extra?

I want to explain to you today why in my opinion Europe needs the Lisbon Treaty.

The Irish no-vote and the Treaty ratification

Most of you probably know the present state of the Lisbon Treaty ratification process. Currently, 19 Member States approved the Lisbon Treaty. One has said "no". The remaining 7 countries, including Italy, are in the course of ratifying the Treaty or will almost certainly ratify it in the coming weeks or months.

On 12 June 2008, the Treaty was rejected by the Irish people. This was a democratic choice, deserving of respect. But, let me also say, a respect that we must also show to Member States who have said "yes".

At the recent European Council of 19-20 June, Irish Prime Minister Brian Cowen stressed that Ireland has no wish to halt the progress of the European Union. Indeed, the fact that those who voted "no" expressed commitment to the EU is one reason why careful analysis is needed.

That is why it was agreed by all to give Prime Minister Cowen time to consult widely both internally and with his European partners in order to agree a way forward, without Ireland being isolated. Ireland will come back to this issue at the Council's meeting of 15 October 2008.

The Union has been confronted with similar situations before. We have had so far 15 referenda on Treaty's changes. Even after the French and Dutch negative referenda on the Constitution, in 2005, the Union has shown itself resilient and determined. This is why the Commission remains confident that notwithstanding the recent Irish no-vote, we will all together – and in the first place with the Irish people – find an acceptable and fair solution enabling the new Treaty to enter into force. I am

confident that this time again we will find the resourcefulness and creativity needed to overcome the difficulties.

A post Irish referendum survey, carried out by "Eurobarometer", clearly shows that over half (52%) of the people who did not vote in the referendum said this was due to a lack of understanding of the issues. Almost a quarter (22%) of the "no" voters presented, as a reason to explain their preference, the lack of information: "I don't know about the Treaty and would not vote for something I am not familiar with". Furthermore, some of the other reasons mentioned by "no" voters clearly shows a lack of information about the real content of the Treaty. 12% were afraid of losing Irish identity, 35 years after joining the Union.

This brings me to the fact that there is a strong need of informing people about the Lisbon Treaty itself and its advantages.

Added value of the Lisbon Treaty

The Lisbon Treaty has not emerged without a purpose. On the contrary, it responds to very specific challenges. The Treaty offers a framework for a more democratic, transparent and effective Europe; a Europe of enhanced rights, values, solidarity and security; a Europe improving its visibility and capacity to act on the global stage.

That was why it won the support of 27 Heads of State and Government, who signed it in Lisbon last December, why it has already has the backing of 19 Member States for ratification, and why the European Council last month confirmed that ratification should continue in other member States.

(1) Academics and analysts of the European integration process have for years, and particularly after the Nice summit, been saying that the European Union is afflicted by a democratic deficit. The new Treaty does not claim to rectify all shortcomings linked to this but it does contain innovations that are intended to improve the situation considerably. The new Treaty would introduce a **more democratic and transparent Europe** with a strengthened role for the European and national Parliaments; greater openness in the decision-making process; more opportunities for citizens to intervene; and a clearer sense of who does what at the European and national levels.

Let me remind you some concrete examples.

- With the new Treaty, the co-decision procedure, involving Council and EP, would become the rule and will be extended to around 40 areas, including key topics such as freedom, security and justice, agriculture, and trade. It would cover approximately 90% of European legislation.

- The influence of national parliaments would be strengthened by the Commission's new obligations to send them information on initiatives and legislative proposals. This procedure would monitor compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, hence involving the national parliaments in the European legislative process.

- The Treaty introduces a clearer division of competences and powers, with areas of exclusive competencies, where the Union can act alone; fields of shared competencies with the Member States; and areas where the role of the Union is limited to supporting or coordination measures.

- For the first time in the history of the European integration a European Citizens' Initiative would be created, allowing 1.000.000 citizens (which is equivalent to 0,2% of the European population) from across Europe to call on the Commission to bring forward an initiative of interest to them.

(2) The new Treaty would usher in a **more effective Europe**, with quicker decision-making processes; an improved ability to act in areas of major priority for today's Union; simplified and fairer voting rules; and streamlined institutions.

Some examples ?

- The Union could take decisions easier and faster in the field of security. Europe will be more effective in combating terrorism, tackling crime and human trafficking, and managing migratory flows. In the area of freedom, security and justice, in almost all relevant issues QMV will be used.

- The Treaty facilitates the Union's ability to act in areas such as energy policy, public health, civil protection, climate change, research, and technological development.

(3) The Treaty would establish a **Europe of rights and values, solidarity and security** with clarity on the Union's values and objectives. Key to this is the Charter of Fundamental Rights, bringing together civil, political, economic and social rights which the Union must respect. The Charter of Fundamental Rights would become legally binding on the Community institutions. UK and Polish citizens will be unable to invoke its provisions directly before their national courts, but all judgments by

the European Court of Justice on matters referred to it by national courts will be generally applicable to all European citizens.

- The Treaty sets out, right at the beginning, the values on which the Union is based: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are what define Europe today, and the Union is open to all European countries which respect its values. They have real legal value, too: as in the current treaties, penalties could be imposed on any Member States which was found to fail to comply with these values in a serious and persistent manner.

- The Lisbon Treaty makes possible for any Member State, in accordance with its own constitutional rules, to withdraw from the Union. This is an unmistakable indication that being part of the Union is voluntary. From my own personal history, I know that this is an important symbol – there is no question of coercing Member States to join or stay in the EU.

- An innovation in the Treaty is a solidarity clause in the area of energy allowing for help in case of shortage of energy supply. In the case of difficulties of energy supply of one or several Member States, other Member States will be expected to step in. This is a very practical demonstration of solidarity.

(4) The Treaty creates conditions to enhance **Europe's role as an actor on the global stage** by bringing together Europe's external policy tools, both in policy development and policy delivery. The Treaty strengthens Europe's voice in relations with partners worldwide; brings more

coherence between the different strands of EU external policy, and harness Europe's economic, political and diplomatic strengths to promote European interests and values worldwide.

The Reform Treaty contains three important institutional innovations with a sensitive impact on the Union's external action: a full-time and "*permanent*" President of the European Council, appointed for a renewable term of 2 ½ years, the High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the external action service.

- The tasks of the new permanent President of the European Council include chairmanship of the European Council, but also extend to the external representation of the Union on issues concerning the Common Foreign and Security Policy. This means that for the more "diplomatic" issues covered by the common foreign and security policy, the President of the European Council would be the face of Europe. For other areas of external relations – trade and investment, overseas aid, negotiating in areas like energy, climate change or visas, humanitarian aid – the President of the European Commission would continue to be the partner for President Obama/McCain or President Medvedev.

- The Treaty creates a new post of High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who has a second "*hat*" as Vice-president of the Commission. In essence, the post brings together the functions of the current High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, and those of the Commissioner responsible for External Relations. The goal is to boost the overall coherence of external policy, and use all the available instruments to the best effect.

The High Representative would have particular responsibility for Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy, would chair the Foreign Affairs Council, and represent the Union on Common Foreign and Security Policy at Foreign Minister level – including at the United Nations, where the EU has a common position. At the same time, as Vice-President, he (or she) would be responsible for the coordination of the external action of the Union, as well as playing a full part in the College of Commissioners. He (or she) would also be able to call on a new External Action Service. The result should be a real bonus to the EU's effectiveness worldwide.

A changing Europe

The new rules and improved institutional frame, as proposed by the Lisbon Treaty, are not perfect. But they are a major change for better. Europe cannot afford to use yesterday's structures for today's and tomorrow's problems. Lisbon Treaty is an ambitious Treaty that will help the Union to go forward in a more effective way and be more efficient in addressing the big issues – climate change, energy, migration, financial stability. The Treaty of Lisbon offers foundations and tools.

Over its first 50 years, the Union has come a long way. It has grown from 6 Member States to 27. It has widened its initial focus on peace to become a remarkable motor for democracy and reconciliation across the whole continent, the latest example being the re-unification of Europe. It has moved from a simple coal and steel community to the biggest Internal Market ever created. The Union has developed, broadly and deeply, contributing to many aspects of daily life, from trade to transport, from environment to health and from security to foreign affairs.

It has developed institutions and structures of its own. It has its own Parliament - the biggest directly elected multinational parliament in the world, representing 500 million citizens, its own Court of Justice, and, for many countries, a single currency.

It is time to be proud of what Europe has done and does. Italy was amongst the first countries which expressed its trust, more than 50 years ago, in a new Europe. The European Union is a successful and unique form of integration between people, regions and States. Europe is respected by the rest of the World for its ability to combine peace with diversity, a strong currency and economic strength with the highest social, environmental and cultural standards. Being proud of Europe does not mean that we can afford to rest on our laurels, but it certainly gives us the strength to look into the future without fears and to invest in modernising it in order to better tackle today's realities and future challenges.

Last year we celebrated 50 years of the common Europe. We have 50 years behind us based on determination of those who have trust in the Union and who make the Union work every day. I am convinced that today we need the same trust and determination that drove forward the founding fathers of European integration to the implementation of their unprecedented vision.

Thank you.