

OIREACHTAS EU SUB-COMMITTEE

A submission from the Church of Ireland Working-group on Europe

Having representation on the National Forum on Europe and having made several submissions to the Forum in which we have expressed our commitment to the European project, we welcome the establishment of the Sub-committee on Ireland's future in the European Union.

We note with particular interest that the sub-committee's remit includes the consideration of measures to improve public understanding of the EU and its fundamental significance for Ireland's future, the importance of which we have always stressed within the Church of Ireland and in wider society.

While acknowledging that among members of the Irish electorate who voted for rejection of the Lisbon Treaty there were those whose criticisms were based on an accurate understanding of the text, there were others who clearly voted on the basis of misconceptions as to what the treaty actually proposed.

We therefore noted with interest a declaration by the communications commissioner, Ms Margot Wallstrom, as reported in the *Irish Times* of 23 October 2008, emphasising the need, not only to provide citizens with accurate information, but also to address the matter of the manner in which their decisions are arrived at, and how misinformation should be countered.

We consider this initiative to be particularly important at a time when the future for the Irish economy holds many uncertainties. The fate of Iceland in recent weeks provides a clear demonstration of the hazards of being outside the Euro zone and EU membership. It would also appear that the Danes are reflecting on the cost of their EU opt-outs. The key importance of access to stable energy sources, combined with new uncertainty about Russian policies in the wake of the invasion of Georgia, mean that Ireland's continued active participation in EU policy-making is essential for the protection and security of our vulnerable economy. To cut ourselves off from full participation in the Union at this time seems, to say the least, very unwise.

For these reasons at this particular time, and having in mind those many other considerations that lead us strongly to value what the European Union has achieved for the continent, we believe that any future discussion of the developments set out in the Lisbon Treaty must be based *on the facts of the case*, on a carefully articulated overview of the implications of rejecting the Treaty for Ireland's future in the Union and on what the possible cost of a policy of opt-outs might be.