

Lisbon Treaty - Aid and Trade: Report on Wed. 23rd Global Development Meeting

Wednesday 25 June 2008, by [CURRY Liz](#) (Date first published: 24 April 2008).

Comhlamh hosted a meeting on the implications of the Lisbon Treaty for Global Development. This was a really good discussion with a very high level of informed debate. Presentations were given by no and yes advocates and specialists in trade, aid and development. The format was 10 minutes for each speaker followed by clarification questions and then a general question and answer session. The purpose of the discussion was to bring up issues around the impacts of the Lisbon Treaty, particularly on Global Development, including aid and trade.

This meeting wasn't a no or yes meeting but a place for people to discuss the issues that are rarely being touched on in the mainstream media where the Treaty debate has been limited to sure the treaty is only making the EU more efficient and there's nothing to worry about or fears over tax harmonization. Obviously I'm campaigning on the No side but will attempt to report what each speaker said as best I can. Anyone who was there please feel free to amend or add.

Barry Finnegan from the Campaign against the EU Constitution kicked off the discussion. He said that the main changes in the Lisbon Treaty are trade in services, including health and education, (opens these up for privatization) and removes all barriers on Foreign Direct Investment (which means governments cannot stop or limit the influx of money from any country for any reason.) Barry said that if the Treaty goes through that we will lose our current veto on health, education, and audio visual and cultural services. Up to now changes in these areas have required unanimity which the Treaty changes to Qualified Majority Voting. This is significant because these services have up to now been protected from privatization. On trade Barry said that trade liberalization is prioritized over development goals so that where the two clash, liberalization wins out as it is at the Treaty's core. (The EU Commission has exclusive powers to negotiate trade deals which is done by majority vote which means that the Irish government cannot veto a trade deal.) Barry responded to a question on trade deals saying that Ireland can't form bilateral trade deals. We are not allowed to. (I think this means we could not have a special trade relationship with a developing country or offer fairer trade terms.)

Deirdre De Burca, the Green Party EU spokesperson said she is voting yes primarily because she believes a strong EU is needed to combat climate change and deal with migration and that the EU has the most progressive environmental policies compared to the U.S. Japan or the emerging economies such as Brazil and China. She said that the Treaty is flawed and that are definitely aspects that are not satisfactory, including trade provisions and the promotion of militarization but that on balance she believes the Treaty to be in the national interest. When asked she defined national interest as the interests of all groups, women, business etc. She accepted that we lose a veto on services except where a country can prove that competition would severely disrupt the government's ability to provide services. She said that if the Green Party were in opposition that they would probably be campaigning against the Treaty but pointed out that this was her personal

opinion. She welcomed the formalizing of the European Council as a institution of the EU. This body formulates strategy and policy direction. She pointed out positive effects that membership of the EU has had so far, including environmental legislation that our own government would have been slower to adopt. She said when deciding how to vote that we should look at the EU's track record. She said that it is better to be on the inside to reform the EU, which she said is in need of reform.

Olive Towey from Concern pointed out that the EU is the single biggest aid donor in the world , giving 60% of the total aid and is Africa's biggest trading partner. Olive gave a powerpoint presentation on specific clauses in the Treaty, including Article 10A relating to 'consistency and coherence' between development goals and other EU areas such as trade. She was asked about the wording of the clause which 'takes development into account' but does not make this mandatory or give it primacy over economic interests.

She said that these clauses give a legal basis for challenging conflicts of interest. She did not know offhand what enforcement mechanisms there are or if a case could be taken to the European Court of Justice.

Aoife Black, Trocaire's EU Policy officer, spoke next saying that the Lisbon Treaty places poverty reduction as a primary objective which gives it a legal basis. EU aid has sometimes been undermined by trade policies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy. or by foreign policy interests or by African Partnership Agreements whereby aid can be tied to buying goods, including weapons, or further trade liberalization. In the Treaty member states have to co-ordinate their aid.(this has been a key NGO demand as aid has been haphazard and not always delivered promptly.) However, the term 'independence' has been left out of the Treaty, which would forbid tying aid to foreign policy objectives. She said that NGOs are currently fighting for a separate Development Commissioner.

The next speaker was Andy Storey from AFRi who said that the free movement of capital and trade liberalization are constitutionally enshrined in the Treaty in which case it doesn't matter whether or not that is coherent with development objectives. Economic, services and Foreign Direct Investment liberalization are mandatory while development goals are not. Andy spoke about militarization saying that the Treaty edges closer to a common defence policy. Article 28A states that there is an obligation of aid and assistance if a member state is attacked. There is also a widening of tasks that EU forces can get involved in including military advice and assistance and helping to combat terrorism including in a third state.(Does that include non-EU states?) He said that the possibilities for military interventions are wide and pointed to Chad as an example of the implications as Irish peacekeeping forces have been sent working with French forces that have been propping up the regime there. This is politically sensitive and he thinks rebel groups are unlikely to differentiate between Irish and French troops. Permanent structured co-operation is his third concern as subsets of EU countries could get involved in military interventions without the support of the rest of the EU and without a UN mandate. Ireland would not be able to veto such missions or prevent EU resources being used in them. Article 28A makes it mandatory for member states to increase military funding although there is no provision for fining states who don't comply.

The last speaker was Conall O'Caoimh. His presentation can be viewed at www.slideshare.net. Conall is a trade specialist, who talked about a democratic deficit in the EU which he says will widen if the Treaty is passed. Article 10A states that there will be a progressive abolition of restrictions to international trade. These include non-tariff barriers. Developing countries are not exempt. They are in fact being asked to remove all trade barriers and remove regulations allowing only businesses that work in partnership with local companies to operate. Conall said that the Commission proposes trade agreements and the EU Council says yes or no . The EU parliament and national governments are excluded from decision making but are periodically informed.(while commissioners come from each country currently they are government appointed not elected.) Similarly only the Commission can propose laws while the EU Parliament writes the legislation but

can't propose laws. Cpnall says he wouldn't have a major issue with the loss of veto on health and education if there was a corresponding strengthening of accountability but he thinks the Treaty provides less accountability not more. Comhlamh lobbied for the EU parliament to have a role in negotiating trade agreements but this was dropped in the final version of the Treaty. He pointed out that a passerelle clause means that areas that are exempt from liberalization can later be out to QMV.

The other speakers then added comments. Barry Finnegan asked why we would want to tie ourselves to a free trade agenda when we don't know what the future holds, saying he wants governments to be free to choose to change economic policies. He asked if Irish aid could be tied to EU aid and if so would we have to attach conditions. Aoife said the independence of our aid policy, which is untied aid, would not be affected by the Treaty. However we would not have control over the money we put into a common EU aid budget. She said that the 'coherence' clauses will ultimately be down to political will.

Deirdre said that the EU is looking for a 20% reduction in emissions and must have the power to do so. However She said that it is harder to exercise democratic control at EU level than at international level and that it will be difficult to see how the militarization of Europe will be used. Conall added that the EU has done a good job of social policy over the last 50 years but that it wasn't allowed to make foreign policy or military decisions and based on its record regarding Kosovo, Chad and its lack of action on Palestine that he is not confident. He also said he thinks the EU development agenda is shrinking as it moves from 'soft' to 'hard' power. A speaker from the floor asked why Deirdre de Burca has changed her mind about the Treaty form when she campaigned against the Constitution. She replied that being in government has changed her mind and that she is looking at the Treaty from a different perspective, that of the national interest and that she also believes it is necessary to combat climate change. Jean from the Debt and Development Coalition suggested that the issues raised at the meeting could be brought together and circulated both around the development community and to a wider audience. A few people volunteered.

(on a personal note a few of us were discussing the likely outcome of the referendum. i asked 2 people at random who were having a few pints watching the football knew how they're voting hoping that they wouldn't say what referendum? The first guy said he's voting no and the second said he's Fianna Fail. off the record a speaker said that of all the meetings they've spoken at about 70% of the audience has been concerned or is intending to vote no despite, or maybe because of the lack of information and debate.)
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