

Abstract

The Irish government held a re-run of the Lisbon Treaty referendum in October 2009 and overturning the previous year's No vote, it was passed with a 67% majority. How was this achieved when other member state governments have been loath to hold referendums on the EU after the recent No votes of the 2000 Danish referendum on the Euro, and the 2005 French and Dutch referendums on the European constitution? This paper will argue that civil society groups played an important role in gaining public support for the Treaty. These groups tailored their arguments and campaign tactics to directly appeal to specific segments of Irish society that had voted No in the first referendum. They did this by emphasising how the EU, and by extension the Lisbon Treaty, had and would benefit them. The wider argument of the paper is that political parties and governments are not the most effective vehicles to put forward pro-European arguments to the electorate. Levels of party based competition are too high and public cynicism towards the political system too ingrained for this to happen. The lesson from Lisbon is that advocacy for the EU must be taken out of the hands of the politicians, and into the arms of specifically created civil society groups.

UACES Communicating European Citizenship

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Opening:

This paper seeks to examine the campaigns of the two Irish referendums on the Lisbon Treaty to learn how European citizenship can be effectively communicated to the electorates of member states. There is the obvious qualification that these campaigns took place during the course of referendums, however this does not diminish the several important elements about the effective communication of the EU that emerge from this analysis. Most obvious amongst these points is the role of civil society groups. For the first Lisbon referendum a wide ranging coalition of amongst others mainstream political sphere, trade unions and the Catholic Church put themselves forward to argue the benefits of passing the Lisbon Treaty for the Irish people. They were not believed and the Lisbon Treaty was soundly rejected by 53.4% of the electorate. Instead the electorate chose to believe the arguments of a collection of far left, anti-war, traditional Catholic values and conservative civil society based groups. How could such a situation develop whereby a majority of voters in a strongly pro-EU country, 74% support for membership, could ignore the cues of the majority of political parties and the leading groups in civil society? The answer lies in the campaign tactics of these No groups in effectively communicating a negative interpretation of European citizenships in a clear and coherent manner to Irish voters. The Yes side in the first Lisbon Treaty abjectly failed to achieve any degree of effective communication of the benefits of the Treaty to voters. The initial section will examine the first Lisbon referendum campaign will allow us to understand how Yes campaigners in European referendums have failed in their efforts to communicate Europe to its citizens.

For the second Lisbon referendum however pro-Lisbon campaigners learnt from previous mistakes and the success of No campaigners. Rather than relying on political parties and sectoral interest groups pro-Lisbon activists formed specific civil society groups to communicate the benefits of Lisbon to distinct segments of Irish society. The Lisbon Yes side appealed to the identity of individual voters and how voting in favour of Lisbon would benefit them. This significant shift in tactics paid substantial dividends as 67% of voters ratified Lisbon including particular groups, young people and women, who had voted strongly against the Treaty the first time. The success of the second Lisbon Yes campaign therefore offers a successful model of how existing structures of communication for Europe can be changed to actively promote the benefits of European integration for individual citizens. How this was achieved will be discussed in the final section.

The focus on political parties as communicators of Europe to citizens has been raised by Mair. He highlights the “depoliticisation” as he sees it, of Europe by mainstream political parties with the resultant effect that when Europe becomes a salient issue parties are either

unable or unwilling to communicate Europe to citizens.¹ Moreover Hobolt has stressed the importance of analysing the “supply of information [that] determines the extent to which individuals have the opportunity to form attitudes towards the issue of European integration”.² Combining these two arguments it can be seen that the presence, or as it may be absence, of political parties in communicating Europe through campaigning is important towards citizen comprehension and support of European integration. We would expect therefore that any substantial change in voter behaviour can be linked to changes in party campaigning on Europe. The central argument put forward by this essay is that the failures of political parties in campaigning for European treaties in Ireland have meant that civil society groups have become the most efficient means of communicating Europe to Irish citizens. While it is acknowledged that the example of the Irish Lisbon referendum is indeed a single case study of a singular event it does however provide further analysis for the development of the points of Mair and Hobolt; a key goal of this paper.

First Section: Lisbon I Why and How Civil Society Groups were Effective

Table 1: Breakdown of Main Campaigners on No Side, Irish Lisbon Referendum

Name	Pol. Party/Group	Issues of Contestation	Focus of Contestaion
Sinn Féin	Political Party	Sovereignty/Workers Rights	Commission, Council
Socialist Party	Political Party	Workers Rights	Commission, Council, ECJ
Libertas	Group	Sovereignty/Tax	Commission, Council
Cóir	Group	Sovereignty/ Abortion/ Catholic Values	Commission/ECJ
People’s Movement	Group	Sovereignty/Workers Rights	Commission/ECJ

¹ Peter Mair, (2007) ‘Political Opposition and the European Union’, *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 42., No. 1, pp. 7-12

² Sara Hobolt (2009) *Europe in Question: Referendums on European Integration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 29

People Before Profit Alliance	Group	Sovereignty/Workers Rights	Commission, ECJ
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Calculated by counting the number of references to each group/party in articles relating to the Lisbon referendum in *The Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Examiner*, *Sunday Business Post*, *Sunday Tribune*.

Table 1 lists out those No campaign groups that were perceived to be the most active from a tabulation of the three main daily broadsheets and two broadsheet Sunday newspapers. What is evident from this table is that civil society groups outnumbered political parties in the significance of their role in the No campaign. What *Table 1* does not show however, is the extent to which the civil society based No groups dominated the campaign itself through their early, extensive, and expansive strategy. The issues of the campaign were set firmly by the civil society groups how they were able to achieve this against the influence of mainstream pro-European political parties and sectional groups will now be discussed.

The Libertas group were very important as they started their Lisbon referendum campaign before the government had even announced a date for the referendum to be held in the first place. The origin of the Libertas campaign comes from their leader, multi-millionaire businessman Declan Ganley. His opposition to Lisbon originated in the proposed harmonisation of taxes by EU Commissioner Kovacs which clashed with his interests as an entrepreneur. Ganley saw proposals for tax harmonisation across the EU as an attempt by the European Commission to impose bureaucratic control over business in Europe. Moreover this was compounded by his belief that the EU was actively challenging Europe's Christian heritage and trying to replace it with a secular society.³

Libertas highlighted these arguments came to dominate the agenda of the entire debate and were specifically addressed by the government in their strategy for getting Lisbon passed after the rejection. Libertas provided mainstream voters who opposed the treaty but were uncomfortable with falling on the side of supporters of the terrorist Irish Republican army (IRA), extreme left policies, and traditional Catholic values. with an 'acceptable' form of Euroscepticism. Libertas appealed to their concerns about the direction Lisbon was taking the EU whilst also crucially coming without domestic policy baggage. Since the first rejection of the first Nice Treaty referendum in 2001, high profile individuals within the three largest parties have expressed concern about the EU project but party loyalty always prevented any widespread party revolt on Europe⁴. Libertas emerged as a non party political flag of acceptable dissent on Europe for disgruntled Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil voters to rally around. Ganley was keenly aware of this latent No vote and he targeted it specifically but he admitted that Libertas had underestimated the sheer numbers of mainstream voters who were ready to come out and vote No. They focused on Ireland's relationship with Europe and not on domestic issues to attract these voters⁵. Libertas did this by specifically raising the corporation tax issue, hitting a nerve with the Irish middle class who rely on multinational corporations for employment and have benefitted greatly from a low taxation regime⁶.

³ Author interview with Declan Ganley, 14th August, 2008.

⁴ Holmes, *EPERN Briefing Paper No. 16*

⁵ Author interview with Declan Ganley, 14th August, 2008.

⁶ Author interview with Naoise Nunn, Libertas campaign manager, 14th August 2008.

In addition to their billboard campaign, Libertas engaged in media launches, handed out leaflets, organised meetings, and toured the country in a campaign bus. The media focus intensified on Libertas and its leader, Ganley, as their emergence became perceived as the 'story' of the campaign.⁷ As a non-political civil society group Libertas were able to tap directly into mainstream voters concerns about Lisbon, unencumbered by political party loyalty. Taking this organisational form as a single issue civil society group allowed Libertas to focus on getting their specific anti-Lisbon arguments across with maximum media exposure and not to be distracted by domestic politics away from their campaign.

In contrast to the high media profile campaigning and expensive billboards of Libertas were the more grassroots and direct campaign of C oir⁸ and the People's Movement⁹. Although each group represents extreme opposite ends of Irish society, right and left wing respectively, they are both linked in their opposition to further European integration specifically to the increasing authority of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to make decisions that impact at a national level.¹⁰

C oir had extensive experience of campaigning against EU referendums in its previous incarnation as Youth Defence. In its reincarnation, C oir broadened out its membership to include individuals not previously associated with Youth Defence and in fact became an umbrella group of anti-abortion and fundamentalist Catholic activists numbering some 2,000 members.¹¹ Its members broke with the Catholic Church in that they favoured direct action against both individuals and institutions that would allow the legalisation of abortion, and additionally gay marriage, in Ireland. Their actions centred mostly on holding protest rallies outside family planning clinics and protesting against individual politicians who advocated liberalising of laws on abortion and gay marriage.¹² Despite their Catholic background C oir avoided direct references to abortion and instead focused specifically on the issue of sovereignty and the loss of Ireland's guaranteed commissioner: "The New EU Won't Hear You, See You or Speak for You" was an typical example of their campaign rhetoric.¹³

The People's Movement, which began campaigning against the Maastricht Treaty, experienced an increase in membership as Labour and Green Party members disaffected at their respective party leaderships pro-Lisbon stance volunteered to campaign against Lisbon.¹⁴ Their perception was of an inherent neo-liberal bias in the policies of the Commission and rulings of the ECJ. The origins of their campaign began with the large protest in Dublin in April 2006 when over 30,000 people took to the streets to protest against Irish Ferries firing some 300 Irish workers in favour of cheaper Eastern European labour,¹⁵ a move that they believed was sanctioned under EU law. From then on the People's Movement

⁷ Michael Clifford, 'The stature of Libertas and all things Ganley', in *The Sunday Tribune*, 17th May, 2009.

⁸ C oir, the Gaelic word for truth, the group is made up of anti-abortion and fundamentalist Catholic campaigners.

⁹ A left wing pro trade union and Irish republican group.

¹⁰ Author interview with Frank Keoghan, Chairman People's Movement, 31st March 2008; Richard Greene, 'C oir's anti-Treaty stance has been vindicated by succession of events', in *The Irish Examiner*, 4th September 2008.

¹¹ Greene, 'C oir's anti-Treaty stance has been vindicated by succession of events'

¹² Elaine Edwards, 'McDowell heckled at 'civil partnership event'', in *The Irish Times*, 26th May 2006.

¹³ Available at C oir website, http://www.lisbonvote.com/info/POSTER_MONKEYS.pdf, accessed 4th May 2009.

¹⁴ Author interview with Frank Keoghan, Chairman People's Movement, 31st March 2008.

¹⁵ Jack O'Connor, 'Stronger and better enforced labour regulation is needed', in *The Irish Times*, 10th October 2006.

sought to campaign against any future EU treaty on the grounds of protecting workers rights and preventing a “race to the bottom” in terms of working conditions that an expansion of the Single Market or of new EU legislation might bring.¹⁶

Both C oir and the left wing People’s Movement began to organise volunteers to drop leaflets, print and place posters, and hold discussion meetings by February 2008. They engaged in these tactics specifically as they recognised the effectiveness of direct campaigning on the electorate from their success in Nice I. In contrast to the actions of these No groups, the main Yes campaign, ‘Alliance for Europe’, was not formed until late April 2008¹⁷, by which time civil society groups had taken advantage of this situational opportunity and set the agenda of the Lisbon campaign.

Garry et. al. have shown that an early, energetic campaign with a clear message was vital in encouraging mainstream voters to come out and vote Yes after they absented themselves for the Nice I vote¹⁸. The People’s Movement and C oir not only motivated their respective sections of Irish society but through their rigorous campaigns ensured that voters were exposed to their arguments for voting No to Lisbon. If we acknowledge that these No groups had a better campaign than the Yes side, then applying Garry et. al.’s analysis of Nice I to Lisbon it is obvious that the nearly three months of extra campaigning done by these two groups contributed towards the surge in No voters. Added to the strategy of Libertas to allow Eurosceptic voters of mainstream pro-European parties to feel comfortable in voting No, then the impact of these civil society based anti-Lisbon campaigners can be viewed as very important to the outcome.

While no definitive causal link between the relatively high turnout and corresponding large No vote and the activities of Libertas, C oir and the People’s Movement can be conclusively proven, their relevance to the campaign as a whole is without question. The issues first articulated by Libertas in the first Lisbon referendum campaign have formed the basis of the government’s strategy for the next vote on Lisbon¹⁹. The poster campaigns of the People’s Movement and C oir were the focus of extensive criticism by the mainstream political parties as their effectiveness became apparent²⁰. While the Irish Alliance for Europe and Government figures were quick to dismiss Sinn F ein and Socialist Party arguments against Lisbon as purely “political opportunism”, they found it much more difficult to refute the claims of civil society based anti-Lisbon campaigners and thus much more difficult to convince the electorate to vote Yes to Lisbon²¹. The civil society No campaign presented itself as free from political influence and instead focused specifically on the issues they thought important about Lisbon. Unable to accuse them of political opportunism the Yes side found it difficult to deal with their diverse range of issues. As will be discussed in the following section the public believed the arguments of the civil society groups and dismissed the pro-Lisbon party arguments as irrelevant. The factors underlying this failure of political parties in the Yes campaign will now be examined in greater detail.

¹⁶ Author interview with Frank Keoghan, Chairman People’s Movement, 31st March 2008.

¹⁷ Pat Leahy, ‘Yes side must now place catch-up,’ in *The Sunday Business Post*, 4th May, 2008.

¹⁸ Garry et. al., (2006) ‘“Second Order” versus ‘Issue Voting’ effects in EU Referendums:’, *Geary Discussion Paper Series*, Dublin: UCD

¹⁹ ‘Government lines up a number of Lisbon opt-outs’, in *The Irish Examiner*, 22nd November, 2008.

²⁰ ‘Labour criticises ‘alarmist’ no vote poster campaign’, in *The Irish Examiner*, 15th May, 2008.

²¹ Connor Sweeney, ‘Mandelson criticises Lisbon Yes campaign’, in *The Irish Times*, 20th June, 2008.

Second Section: The Failure of Parties to Communicate Europe in Referendum Campaigns

The situational opportunity for anti-Lisbon civil society campaigners of a weak and divided Yes campaign can be demonstrated by the destabilisation of Government and political party leadership on the EU issue in Ireland. 37% of Fianna Fáil voters, 48% of Fine Gael voters, and 61% of Labour voters voted No despite their parties Yes position²². The Green Party, despite being a member of government, was officially neutral on Lisbon and although the party's elected members campaigned widely for a Yes vote, 53% of Green Party voters voted against the Lisbon referendum. Sinn Féin as the only anti-Lisbon party in the Dáil saw the vast majority of its supporters, 88 %, following the party line²³.

Table 2: % of No voters, breakdown by party support

<u>Party</u>	<u>% Supporters voting No on Lisbon</u>
Fianna Fáil	37
Fine Gael	48
Labour	61
Green Party	53
Sinn Féin	88

Milward Brown IMF, (2008) *Post Lisbon Treaty Referendum Research Findings*

The mainstream political parties were joined on the pro-Lisbon side by business groups, trade unions, and institutions such as the Catholic Church. This appears to be a wide representation of society, and a strong enough coalition to sway the mainstream in favour of Lisbon. The lateness of its full mobilisation and failure to articulate Yes arguments based on the Treaty itself negated any positive impact the coalition's efforts may have had. Thus, we can understand why 70% of those who voted believed that Ireland's corporation tax would be affected by Lisbon despite all the main business groups arguing that it was not²⁴. Likewise 45% of No voters were convinced of the potential for abortion to be made legal in Ireland by Lisbon due to the arguments of the C6ir group and were not swayed by the arguments of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, who told all Catholics that they could vote for Lisbon with good conscience should they wish²⁵. A similar situation was present in the Danish vote on EMU membership in 2000 where "a united front of politicians, business leaders and trade

²² Milward Brown IMF, *Post Lisbon Treaty Referendum Research Findings*

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Gene Kerrigan, 'Brace yourself for bullying and threats', in *The Sunday Independent*, 22nd June 2008.

²⁵ Milward Brown IMF, *Post Lisbon Treaty Referendum Research Findings*.

unionists” was not enough to persuade the Danish voters to vote Yes to the Euro²⁶. Here Qvortrup believes that the Yes side managed to squander a substantial lead in the opinion polls due to a lacklustre campaign brought down by political manoeuvring between the parties making up the Yes side.

Domestic issues, based around national party competition, were used as arguments for a Yes vote. “Depoliticised” European arguments were not employed, with the result being a failure for the Yes sides in all cases to rise above domestic party squabbling.²⁷ Participants in the Milward Brown survey who voted No to Lisbon, recalled the Nice II Yes campaign and its focus on largely European issues. There was much dissatisfaction, among such voters with the failure of the Yes side to list specific reasons why Lisbon was “good for Ireland and good for Europe”; ultimately, one No voter concluded, “there was not one issue contained in the Treaty which was used to ‘sell’ Lisbon to me”²⁸.

The total failure of the Yes side to communicate Europe is obvious. For mainstream political parties the referendum was an opportunity to promote candidates for elections the following year, not for selling European integration to the electorate. This failure was duly noted by voters who when presented with rival arguments from civil society groups advocating a No vote on the basis of Lisbon’s negative impact on various groups in society, accepted the arguments of the civil society groups. For political parties and sectoral interest groups the benefits of expending resources and time on campaigning for Europe were negligible. The anti-Lisbon groups on the other hand were formed specifically to oppose the Lisbon Treaty and were thus far more committed to campaigning. These single issue groups triumphed, the established political parties and groups failed. The next section will discuss how this failure was turned around by the pro-Lisbon side for the second Lisbon Treaty.

Third Section: Pro-Lisbon Side Turns to Civil Society

As discussed in the previous section political party cues on Europe were ignored by the majority of voters for Lisbon I, therefore a Yes to Lisbon campaign based on party allegiance became unviable. Holmes argues that the first Lisbon campaign was characterised by a “dearth of co-ordination” on the Yes side.²⁹ Political commentators and certain European politicians were openly and strongly critical of the Yes campaign for its failure to develop any momentum and to counter the perceived false claims of the No side.³⁰ For Lisbon II the pro-Lisbon parties and civil society groups came to the conclusion that a campaign that went beyond party politics and focused specifically on the benefits of European integration and its furtherance under the Lisbon Treaty for specific groups in Irish

²⁶ Mads Qvortrup, (2004) ‘How to Lose a Referendum: The Danish Plebiscite on the Euro, in *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 4, pp. 195.

²⁷ Peter Mair, (2007) ‘Political Opposition and the European Union’, *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 42., No. 1, pp. 7-12.

²⁸ Milward Brown IMF, *Post Lisbon Treaty Referendum Research Findings*.

²⁹ Holmes, (2008) *EPERN Briefing Paper No. 16: the Referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon in the Republic of Ireland*, Sussex European Institute:

³⁰ Noel Whelan, ‘Yes side needs non-political body to counter Libertas’, *The Irish Times*, 22nd, November, 2008

society, was the only means by which a Yes vote could be secured. In the immediate aftermath of the rejection of Lisbon, pro-European activists came together to plan out how the succeeding Lisbon referendum would be won. For them the period between the two referendums was spent fundraising and supervising the formation of various groups to contest the second referendum.³¹ This plan identified three specific groups in Irish society that were being crucial to swinging the vote in favour of Lisbon. Women and young people, both of whom had voted No in decisive numbers (58% and 59% respectively) last time, and pro-Europeans who had abstained in the first referendum.³² To effectively communicate the benefits of voting in favour of these Lisbon to these groups a new approach and a new medium was needed.

This approach was a focus on individual identity. Encapsulating this approach was the foundation of various pro-Lisbon civil groups such as Women for Europe, Generation Yes, the Charter Group, We Belong, Lawyers for Europe, Ireland for Europe, and Business for Europe amongst others. These groups were, respectively, targeting: women, young people aged 18-30, workers, un-politicised members of the public, legal professionals (who would also provide 'expert' analysis of EU legal texts and Irish treaties), latent pro-Europeans, and small and medium businesses.³³

Generation Yes employed new media such as the Facebook social networking site, a Youtube channel and Twitter to get their pro-Lisbon arguments to young people. The group largely ignored the mainstream media in their campaign, focusing instead on generating support for Lisbon amongst 18-30 year olds through viral new media campaigning, and in the direct organisation of canvassers in Dublin and other urban centres around the country. The group had over 5,000 Facebook members and claimed to have spent 3,630 hours canvassing.³⁴ Women for Europe did not engage in grassroots activism by canvassing and leafleting. Their focus, on the other hand, was on organising information meetings across the country addressed by high profile women from the EU sphere such as EU Commissioner Margot Wallström and Irish Secretary General of the EU Commission Catherine Day. The group was led by high profile and well respected feminist activists. Their message was that EU membership had brought significant benefits to Irish women and that Lisbon was an extension of these advances.³⁵ Using well-respected public figures in an open forum setting in locations not normally used to such a format was a key tactic of the group. This allowed them to reach women in rural areas and explain the EU and Lisbon in an accessible manner, whilst also attracting maximum local media coverage.

Ireland for Europe and We Belong, while being separate groups had a very similar approach. An increased turnout from the traditionally pro-EU segment of the electorate was a

³¹ Pat Leahy, 'How Lisbon battle was won', *The Sunday Business Post*, 4th, October, 2009

³² Milward Brown IMF, *Post Lisbon Treaty Referendum Research Findings*

³³ Mary Fitzgerald, 'Team Yes – who's who, how they are funded and what their strategy is', *The Irish Times*, 14th, September, 2009

³⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/#!/GenerationYes?ref=ts>

³⁵ <http://www.womenforeurope.ie/index.php/about-us/who-we-are>

key element of the Yes side's strategy. Both groups used high profile figures to appeal to the wider public that is generally positively inclined towards the EU and convince them to turn out and vote for Lisbon. Ireland for Europe brought individuals such as Nobel Prize winning poet Seamus Heaney, Chairman of BP Peter Sutherland and former rugby player Denis Hickie (who go members of the extremely popular national rugby team to come to Yes rallies) to appeal to pro-Europeans amongst the upper and middle classes to come out and vote Yes. These groups, while not ostensibly against Lisbon, had increasingly abstained from EU referendums. We Belong used local Gaelic sport stars, soap opera actors and the national football team manager to sell its argument - that a Yes to Lisbon meant Ireland 'belonging' at the heart of Europe - to a middle and lower middle class segment of the population that had not turned up to vote, and had been drifting toward the No side in successive referendums. For both of these groups the key tactic was the use of popular public figures without ties to political parties. Their focus was to make Lisbon firmly about Ireland's relationship with the EU, which 79% of the Irish public is positive towards, and not making it a referendum on the political elite.³⁶

US multi-national corporations, most notably Microsoft and Intel, who have large operations in Ireland, joined these civil society groups on the Yes side. The chief executives of their Irish operations gave media interviews and advertised in the national media on the importance of a Yes to Lisbon vote to secure future foreign direct investment in Ireland. In a typical blaze of publicity Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary announced that his company would spend €500,000 on a Yes campaign. His rationale for doing so was: that EU competition law had forced the Irish government to change laws that allowed Ryanair to grow, that membership of the Eurozone and ECB support was the only thing keeping Ireland financially solvent, and that the securing of a Commissioner and national competency over taxation meant that the interest of Irish business was in a Yes vote.³⁷

Such a diverse coalition of interests did not have an overarching national executive but in the background key individuals from each of the pro-Lisbon parties acted as coordinators between the individual Yes groups to ensure that contradictions or arguments did not get in the way of a single unified Yes message. That message was of the necessity of Ireland passing Lisbon to ensure that the country stayed at the centre of the EU to help in the solving of the economic crisis. Such elements were missing for the majority of the pro-Lisbon campaign in 2008.

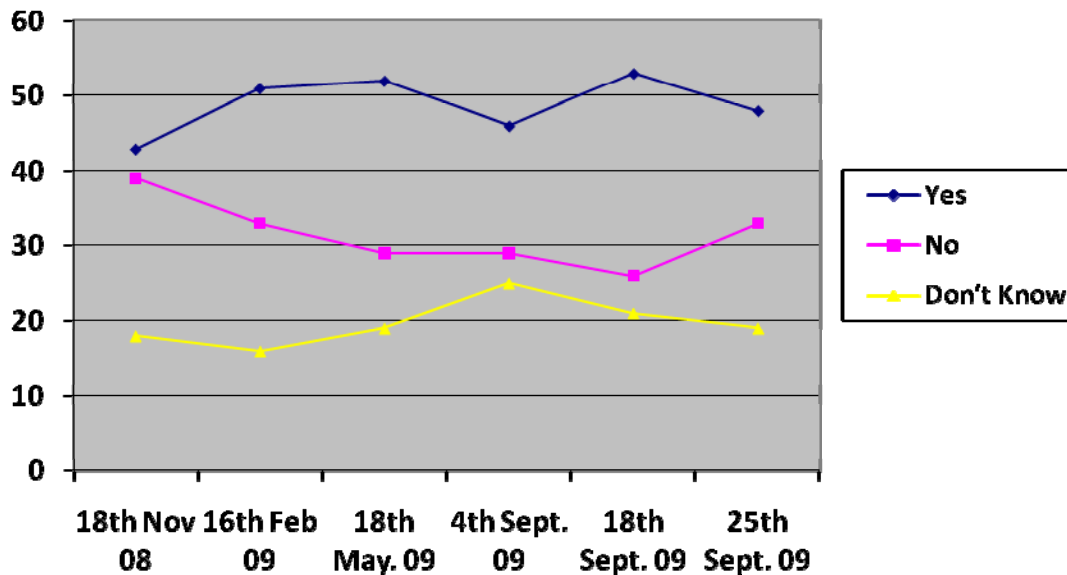
The Yes campaign's arguments were not wholly based on the text of the Lisbon itself. While several MEPs and national parliamentarians raised the issue of the increased powers for the EP and new role for national parliaments provided for by Lisbon, their arguments were on the margins of the Yes side. This was part of a larger pro-Lisbon effort to make the discourse of the campaign about Irish membership of EU and how rejecting Lisbon again would send Ireland to the periphery of Europe from whence the country came from in the dark days of the 1950s and 60s. The strategic goal of the Yes side was to make the

³⁶ Fitzgerald, 'Team Yes – who's who, how they are funded and what their strategy is',

³⁷ Ibid.

referendum not on Lisbon but on Irish membership of the EU. To move away from trying to sell a largely bureaucratic Treaty that 60% of all voters had a low knowledge of and shift the emphasis to what the electorate could plainly understand: Irish membership of the EU, which even 63% of No voters thought a good thing, compared to an average of 73% for the electorate as a whole. the Irish public is enthusiastic about and fully aware of the benefits.³⁸

Figure 1: Opinion Poll results on voting intentions on the Lisbon Referendum



Source: TNS-MRBI Irish Times 18/11/08, 16/2/09, 18/5/09, 4/09/09, 18/09/09, 25/09/09.

Looking at the opinion poll data from *Figure 1* the number of voters intending to vote No averaged at about 31%, well within the margin of error in relation to the actual No vote of 33%. The Yes side averaged 48% in the opinion polls but finished with 67.1% of the vote. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that those voters who were undecided, averaging around 20% in the polls throughout the campaign, went almost wholesale to the Yes side.³⁹ The post Lisbon II EU Commission survey conducted immediately after the outcome found that some 29% of voters said that they changed their vote from No to Yes due to “increased information and communication”. Indeed some 67% of voters found the Yes side more convincing. This was a total reversal of the situation in 2008 where 67% found the No campaign more convincing⁴⁰.

³⁸ Sinnott et. al. (2009), ‘Attitudes and Behaviour in the Referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon’, Report Prepared for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Geary: Dublin,

³⁹ TNS-MRBI Irish Times 18/11/08, 16/2/09, 18/5/09, 4/09/09, 18/09/09, 25/09/09

⁴⁰ Milward Brown IMF, *Post Lisbon Treaty Referendum Research Findings*

Table 3: Top 5 Reasons for Voting Yes and No: Post Lisbon II Analysis

TOP 5 REASONS FOR VOTING YES
EU has been/is good for Ireland 51%
The treaty is good for Ireland/ it was in the best interest of Ireland 44%
It will help the economy 33%
Maintain Irish influence in Europe 11%
The treaty is good for the EU 17%
TOP 5 REASONS FOR VOTING NO
To protect Irish identity 30%
I do not trust our politicians 20%
To protest against the Government's policies 12%
To safeguard Irish neutrality 11%
Increasing unemployment 10%

Source: Lisbon Treaty Post – Post Referendum Survey Ireland 2009 Analytical Report, *Flash Eurobarometer*, October, 2009

More generally, as *Table 3* shows, the report also found that the most common reason cited by Yes voters for their decision was that the “EU has been good for Ireland and Ireland has got a lot of benefit from the EU”, mentioned by 51% of voters. Additionally, 44% of Yes voters said the Treaty was good for Ireland while 33% believed that Yes vote would help the Irish economy. Interestingly, just 9% of Yes voters highlighted the Irish economy as a reason for backing the Lisbon Treaty, despite the argument of No campaigners that the economic crisis benefited the Yes side.⁴¹ It would appear that the strategy of the Yes campaign outlined earlier, that of targeting specific groups in Irish society who had voted No to Lisbon I, was successful. Breaking down the Yes vote further it can be seen that 64% of women voted Yes, compared to 42% in 2008. While young people constituted the largest segment of No voters amongst the Irish electorate, 62% of them voted Yes, as compared to 41% in 2008. From these figures it can be seen that the swing of 20% from the No to Yes side was copied across all sections of the electorate. It was not one particular group in Irish society who tipped the balance in favour of the Yes side, but a move across almost every segment of society by 20% to the Yes side.⁴² The broad organised coalition of Yes parties and groups undoubtedly were the key to this shift. But perhaps more importantly 21% of voters felt “more engaged” with the debate on Lisbon II than Lisbon I.⁴³ The tightly organised and highly specific campaign

⁴¹ Flash Eurobarometer, (2009) *Lisbon Treaty Post – Post Referendum Survey Ireland 2009 Analytical Report*, Brussels: Eurobarometer

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

of the Yes civil society groups were key to this re-engagement with Europe from the electorate.

Conclusions

Mair has spoken of political parties absolving themselves of the responsibility of communicating EU issues to citizens.⁴⁴ While Hobolt believes that the “supply of information” is a crucial factor in determining public attitudes towards European integration.⁴⁵ This paper has shown that the reduced role of political parties and the creation of single issue coordinated pro-Lisbon civil society groups was at the centre of the Yes victory for the second Lisbon referendum in Ireland. The unsuitability of political parties as the main communicating agents of European integration and citizenship as originally raised by Mair is therefore beyond doubt. Civil society groups formed to provide a supply of information on Europe to specific groups in society appear to be the most effective replacement for political parties in effectively communicating European citizenship.

Much of the debate in relation to European referendums, in particular those of the Danish Euro referendum, the French vote on the European constitutional treaty, and the first Irish Lisbon referendum, has focused on the outcome as a vote of no confidence on an unpopular government. A priority for the Yes side was in getting the electorate to view the referendum as between themselves and the EU, and not between them and the government. They achieved this goal by presenting their pro-Lisbon arguments in the form of an ‘identity’ appeal, not one based on party political allegiance. Women, young people, and latent pro-Europeans were marked for specific campaigning by individual civil society groups who tailored their tactics to suit the needs of each identity. In the background was an over-arching organisational structure that co-ordinated these civil society groups and the political parties, so as to maintain a unified message and conflict free campaign. During the course of the campaign the Yes side succeeded where it had failed in the Lisbon I campaign. Firstly it countered the claims of the No side before they gained traction amongst voters (67% of voters found the Yes campaign more believable). Secondly they managed to set the agenda for the campaign. For Lisbon I the main reasons cited for a No vote were those of anti-Lisbon campaigners. As can be seen in *Table 3* the clear and simple message of the Yes side of the importance of EU membership to Ireland encouraged people to vote Yes.

Vital to the victory for the Yes side was the realisation that a campaign based solely on political party allegiance led by politicians was doomed to failure. A new approach in communicating Europe to Irish citizens, that approach took the form of civil society groups.

⁴⁴ Mair, ‘Political Opposition and the European Union’, pp. 7-12.

⁴⁵ Hobolt *Europe in Question: Referendums on European Integration*, p. 29