

Ireland backs EU's Lisbon Treaty



Results showed a clear swing to the "Yes" camp

Irish voters have strongly endorsed the European Union's Lisbon treaty- 16 months after their first vote rejecting it plunged EU reforms into deadlock.

About 67% voted "Yes", official results from the latest referendum showed. Irish Prime Minister Brian Cowen hailed a "clear and resounding" endorsement.

Political leaders across the EU have also welcomed the result.

The president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, said it was a great day for Europe.

He urged the leaders of Poland and the Czech Republic - the only other countries yet to ratify Lisbon - to sign the treaty as soon as possible.

The treaty - which is aimed at streamlining decision-making in the 27-nation bloc - cannot take effect until all 27 member states ratify it.

According to final results, 67.1% of Irish voters approved it, while 32.9% voted "No". Turnout in the

“ The Czech president today sent a message that in a sense was telling the Tories not to depend on a Czech delay

Gavin Hewitt
BBC Europe Editor

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three-million electorate was 58%.

The parliaments of Poland and the Czech Republic have approved the treaty and Polish President Lech Kaczynski is expected to sign it in the coming days.

But the Czech Republic's Eurosceptic President, Vaclav Klaus, said he would not sign the treaty until his country's Constitutional Court had pronounced on its validity.

Ireland was the only EU member state to hold a referendum on Lisbon, though there have been calls for referendums in several countries.

"The Irish people have spoken with a clear and resounding voice," Mr Cowen said in a brief statement to reporters. "It is a good day for Ireland and a good day for Europe.

"The Irish people showed an Ireland embracing her future with Europe," he said.

The Irish anti-Lisbon group Coir said on Saturday: "We are extremely disappointed that the voice of the people was not heard the first time around."

EU hails 'victory'

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, whose country currently holds the EU presidency, called the vote "an important victory for Ireland and for all of Europe".

He said it was just a matter of time until the EU "finally can push the button for the better European co-operation that the Lisbon Treaty will give us".

Irish opinion is thought to have swung behind the "Yes" vote this time because of the severity of the economic downturn, as well as the legal "guarantees" on Irish sovereignty that the EU pledged after the first referendum.

The legally binding "guarantees" state that Lisbon will not affect key areas of Irish sovereignty, such as taxation, military neutrality and family matters such as abortion - significant issues in last year's campaign in Ireland. But they have not yet been attached to the treaty.

The treaty is intended to make EU institutions better suited to the enlarged bloc of 27.

But opponents see it as part of a federalist agenda that threatens national sovereignty. In last year's vote, 46.6% of Irish voted "Yes" and 53.4% "No", and the rejection of the treaty plunged the EU into political gridlock.

All of the republic's major parties campaigned for a "Yes" vote except the nationalist Sinn Fein. The party believes rejecting the treaty would mean a more democratic EU.

LISBON TREATY

Creates new post of EU president
(President of European Council)

New post of High Representative for
Foreign Affairs

More decisions by majority vote, rather
than unanimity

Ratified by all member states except
Czech Republic, Ireland and Poland

Only Ireland held a referendum on it

Took a decade of negotiations

Was intended to take effect in January
2009

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