

## Cowen says negative sentiment that has developed towards Ireland can be reversed

MARY MINIHAN

TAOISEACH BRIAN Cowen has said a rejection of the Lisbon Treaty would have "consequences" for Ireland.

He said other European Union member states might struggle to understand further Irish resistance to the treaty, especially now that guarantees on issues of concern had been secured.

"I would like to deal with this suggestion that rejecting Lisbon would not have any negative consequences for Ireland.

"Certainly it would not mean we would be thrown out of the European Union. But that does not mean there would not be consequences," Mr Cowen said.

He was speaking to Fianna Fáil's Dublin South organisation at the Irish Management Institute

in Sandyford yesterday. Mr Cowen said Ireland was paying more than most other European Union countries for borrowings on the international money market because of negative sentiment towards the country.

That sentiment needed to be reversed by taking steps to correct the State's finances but also by demonstrating that Ireland's commitment to Europe was beyond

any doubt. "It's time to use the common sense that is the hallmark of the Irish character, to recognise that we need Europe and now Europe needs Ireland," he said.

"This is not about whether you support or oppose the Government, or agree or disagree with Brian Cowen," Mr Cowen said.

If voters were frustrated or angry about the current economic situation, they could exercise their vote to support the treaty and help Ireland increase its prospects of recovery, he said.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin, said Ireland was responsible for inserting

a reference to climate change into the treaty. "At our insistence, we put climate change into the Lisbon Treaty. It was Ireland that wanted that in and it was accepted. Thank God we did. That is, equally along with energy security, these are the big issues of this era," he said.

No one member state could deal with such issues alone, he said.

Mr Martin also said the treaty would be beneficial for Irish workers.

"It's illogical to vote No if you are a trade unionist or you believe in workers' rights. There's no logic to it. I don't say that arrogantly," he said.

"A Yes vote gets you the

Charter [of Fundamental Rights], a No vote you have no charter."

ESRI economist John Fitzgerald said the European Central Bank had provided massive liquidity and support for the Irish banking system.

"Ireland would not be the Ireland [it is] today were it not for membership of the monetary union," he said. "Now that we are in a mess, it has bailed us out."

Meanwhile, Prof Brigid Laffan, chairwoman of the Ireland for Europe group, said Irish political parties were "hard-wired" to fight elections but found referendum campaigns more of a struggle.

The chairwoman of the Women

for Europe group, Olive Braiden, said some women had felt ill-informed and left out of the debate last year, "and they followed the Ganley guide: 'When in doubt vote No.'"

The Minister for European Affairs, Dick Roche, and chairman of the Institute of International and European Affairs, Brendan Halligan, also addressed the gathering.

Fianna Fáil Senator Ann Ormonde, the former MEP for Dublin Eoin Ryan and Shay Brennan, who ran unsuccessfully in the Dublin South constituency in the last by-election, were among those who attended the event.

## Lisbon vote is your decision, Wallstrom tells Dublin meeting

DEAGLÁN de BRÉADÚN, Political Correspondent

THE LISBON Treaty would improve the EU's capacity to deal with the financial crisis, globalisation, climate change and migration, European Commission vice-president Margot Wallstrom said in Dublin yesterday.

Speaking at the launch of the newly founded European Chamber of Ireland, Ms Wallstrom said: "I have not come to Ireland to lecture anyone. The decision on how you vote is just that your decision."

The European Chamber represents Irish companies with strong European links such as building materials group CRH, which sponsored a lunch for the new organisation at the RDS, as well as businesses from European states operating in Ireland. Participating organisations range from the German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, to the Swiss-Irish Business Association.

"This treaty is the result of eight years of painstaking and long negotiations between 15 and then 27 member states," Ms Wallstrom said. "It's not perfect; compromises never are, but the reason we all were prepared to invest so much time and energy into it was precisely because it would equip us better to deal with challenges like the financial crisis, like the impact of globalisation, like climate change and migration.

"It was designed to enable the EU to play an effective role in these areas, while ensuring that, at

the same time, the democratic control over those decisions is strengthened."

The other 26 member states had done "everything possible" to address the concerns expressed by Irish voters last year, "and all will be watching for Ireland's decision on 2nd October".

"My hope is that the referendum will finally put an end to our internal reform process so that we can concentrate on finding common solutions to our common problems, as we have done so successfully during the entire post-war era," Ms Wallstrom said.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin said: "It is true that we will not be expelled from the EU if we vote No. However, there is a world of difference between merely being in the union and being an effective, proactive, influential member - the quality of our membership is what counts.

"There will be cold comfort for Ireland if we retain our membership but find ourselves marginalised and unable to maintain the leading part we have played throughout the 36 years of our membership.

"The reality is that our place and influence within the union will be 'changed utterly' if, after the adjustments we have secured in the wake of last year's referendum, we are still unable to join with the other 26 EU members in endorsing what is a relatively modest, pragmatic, but necessary reform package contained in this treaty.

"The risk - and it is a genuine



Margot Wallstrom, EU Commission vice-president, at the launch of the European Chamber of Ireland yesterday. Photograph: Frank Miller

one - is that our international reputation and our standing within the union will be fundamentally, perhaps irreparably, damaged by a second No vote. In that event, our partners may well conclude that it is simply not possible

to agree a set of arrangements for the EU's future which Ireland could endorse," Mr Martin said.

Also urging support, Jack Golden of CRH said: "We're almost exactly three weeks away from one of the most fundamental

decisions about the future of Ireland's relationship with our European partners. The outcome of this referendum will have a profound effect on business, employment and, more importantly, the wellbeing of future generations in

this country," he said.

The business community "can't just simply leave it to politicians and others. We need to show our support for the Lisbon Treaty and make it clear that it is in Ireland's best interest to vote Yes."

## Higgins and union official in row over website

RONAN MCGREEVY

A ROW over just two words has led to an escalating war of words between Socialist MEP Joe Higgins and a pro-Lisbon Treaty trade union official.

Blair Horan, of the Civil Public and Services Union and the pro-treaty Charter Group, said he still believed that the text of an article in the Charter of Fundamental Rights as it was printed on Mr Higgins's website was put there deliberately to distort its meaning.

Article 52 paragraph 2 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights 2000 states that "rights recognised by this charter which are based on the community treaties or the treaty on the European Union shall be exercised under the conditions and within the limits defined by those treaties".

Mr Horan said the correct interpretation of Article 52 meant that the rights outlined in the charters, particularly those in relation to workers' rights, cannot be overruled by anything contained in an EU treaty.

He said the article, as published on Mr Higgins's website, omits the word "which" and includes the word "and", which is followed by "shall be exercised under the conditions and within the limits defined by those treaties".

Mr Horan said the subtle change of wording completely changes the meaning of Article 52 to suggest that the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and other charters, are meaningless because they are ultimately subservient to European treaties.

A furious Mr Higgins called a press conference yesterday to state that the small textual change

## 'No' vote 'valid way' to get rid of Coalition

■ Voting No in the Lisbon referendum is a "valid way" of driving the Government from office, an anti-treaty group claimed yesterday, writes Eoin Burke-Kennedy.

The voteno.ie group said there was a groundswell of anger at the Government's economic strategy which was "translating into a No vote".

It said many people saw voting No as a way to remove the Coalition from power and a canvass by its supporters in north Dublin on Wednesday night found "the sentiment for No" was stronger than during the last Lisbon referendum campaign.

The group said this sentiment was well-founded as the Government's economic policies were being underwritten by the European Commission.

Launching the voteno.ie referendum campaign in Dublin yesterday, Kieran Allen of the Socialist Workers Party, who manages the voteno.ie website, said: "Each of the bank bailouts that have occurred has received the express permission of the EU Commission."

## Neutrality safe, insists O'Dea

■ Minister for Defence Willie O'Dea yesterday insisted that Ireland's policy of neutrality has been copperfastened by guarantees obtained by the Government from the other EU states ahead of a second Lisbon Treaty referendum, writes Barry Roche.

Mr O'Dea said that he could not understand opponents of the treaty claiming that ratification would lead to a militarisation of Europe and an undermining of Ireland's policy of neutrality as there was no evidence to support such a contention.

Mr O'Dea pointed out on each occasion that Ireland voted on an EU treaty such as the treaties of Maastricht, Nice and Amsterdam, opponents of ratification had argued that it would lead to "an increased militarisation of Europe" into which Ireland would be drawn.

Opponents of ratification of the Lisbon Treaty continue to make the same arguments despite the reassurances given by the Government and the fact that people can see for themselves that the previous predictions regarding militarisation have failed to materialise, he claimed.