



Global Highlights

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GeoPolitics and Europe

Will Europe Ever Be Able To Take The Call?

➤ Henry Kissinger's famous question "when I want to speak to Europe who do I call?" will have to wait a while longer for an answer. The rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in the Irish referendum a few days ago has left politicians, lawyers, academics and political commentators floundering to answer an immediate and even simpler question "what happens now?"

➤ The Treaty of Lisbon, it will be recalled, attempts to incorporate the previous texts which govern the European Union (EU) into a single Treaty and, supposedly, streamline the decision making process. In addition, it would give Europe a more permanent President and a minister to represent Europe in the world. The Treaty was Europe's 'plan B' after proposal for a Constitution failed to take off. So it is now looking for a 'plan C' and three options are possible.

➤ **Stop Now**- one option would be to now abandon Lisbon just as the Constitution was abandoned after its rejection by French and Dutch voters in 2005. Since then the EU has continued to function reasonably well under the existing rules and it has incorporated 12 new members without great difficulty. The problem for many is that whilst Europe can tick over under the existing arrangements it is effectively root bound. There will, for example, be no further growth or development in important areas such as enhancing Europe's global role. The 'stop now' option is the one which politicians in Paris and Berlin – the traditional power houses of the EU - are determined to avoid.

➤ **Full Steam Ahead** - a second option would be to carry on but without the Irish on board. At the moment it seems that the other 26 EU member states (with the possible exception of the Czechs) are determined to go ahead with ratification which might make it possible, in theory at least, to go ahead without the Irish. The problem here is that it is at best legally dubious. The EU is an organisation which is made up of 27 member states and the Lisbon Treaty itself is clear that for the new rules to take effect it must be ratified by all 27. Nowhere does it mention leaving states behind and the Irish clearly cannot be bound by rules to which they have not agreed. In any event this option would be political dynamite. There is no tradition in the EU of simply dumping states which object to particular changes and it would be particularly ironic to start now when the object of Lisbon is to promote greater cohesion in Europe.

➤ **Vote Again**- if changes were made to Lisbon it would be possible to ask the Irish to hold a fresh referendum (as they did after initially rejecting the Nice Treaty). But this would entail revisiting all the negotiations which were held during the 7 years it took to arrive at the Lisbon Treaty, and might well involve all 27 countries starting again to ratify the outcome. Any one of them might reject the new document – above all the Irish – and so the whole Sisyphusian process would start all over again. This is most politicians' nightmare scenario. A possible variant on the 'vote again' scenario would be for the other 26 to quickly re-ratify a new, identical Treaty to Lisbon but one which gives the Irish several opt-outs. The Irish would then be asked to agree this – or leave the EU. This, however, again assumes that the 26 would re-ratify and that the Irish would subsequently vote 'yes'. At best this formula would diminish European cohesion and lead further toward a multi-speed EU. At worst, it could result in the expulsion of a country that is in the Euro-zone.

➤ According to the original timetable the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty would come into force from January next year. That now seems to be a remote possibility and few are betting on what will happen next.