

Lisbon – another EU attack on democracy

Written by John Redwood

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JOHN REDWOOD, DEC 23 2009

The mood in the UK towards the EU is currently one of angry resignation. We are angry because Lisbon has been such a dishonest and anti democratic process. The British people by an overwhelming majority opposed the transfer of more powers to the EU institutions under the Lisbon treaty. They were promised a referendum so they could formally express their view. Two of the three main political parties making this promise in the 2005 General Election ratted on it once elected, so the public will was thwarted. We are currently resigned, because Parliament ratified the Treaty against our will and we know in the short term there is nothing we can do about it.

We were thrilled when France and Holland voted the constitution down. What part of “No” don’t they understand, we bellowed across the Channel? Why can’t they get this democratic thing? If you ask the public you accept their verdict. Sometimes the people know best.

We were elated again when the Irish voted down the revised constitution or “Lisbon treaty” as it had to be called, to pretend something had changed to appease French and Dutch opinion. We were livid when they were made to vote again. Some of us think the Irish should have another referendum, so at least it can be the best of three.

It would be wrong to think UK resignation will grow into acceptance and acceptance into enthusiasm for a more integrated Europe. On the contrary, each anti democratic power grab creates more outspoken Eurosceptics. Each refusal to give us our say creates more cynicism and disagreement with what will happen next. The UK is fed up of being taken for granted, and being expected to pay the bills for an oversized bureaucracy it does not love and often does not want.

I appreciate how differently things look from the continent, and how differently people think who receive the hospitality and whisperings of presumed power in the corridors of Brussels. The EU enthusiasts think the UK will do what it always has done. It will grumble about the new powers for the EU. It will try a little to disrupt them. Then it will acquiesce, and one day will accept them fully. The Euro enthusiasts think that the UK will go in the same direction as the centralising states, only at a slower pace with more huffing and puffing.

That is not what I hear on the doorsteps of England. The sudden propulsion of the withdrawal party, UKIP, to third place in the European elections last time showed how the anti EU mood is firming. The Conservatives romped home in first place on a very Eurosceptic prospectus. English people see how the EU project is taking a crow bar to break up the United Kingdom. The EU’s policy of encouraging separate identity and government in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast is helping destroy the Union of the four countries.

The EU wish to break England up into a series of Euro regions is perhaps the most hated EU policy of all, as England wishes to have its own national identity as the other three parts of the UK press for more independence and more use of their national symbols. The fact that the EU will not welcome and encourage England is part of the cause of stronger English Euroscepticism. There is now a growing band of English nationalists as a result of the EU’s playing around with our identity. These English nationalists would like Scotland, Ireland and Wales to split from England. Their ideal would be that Scotland Wales and Ireland retain the EU membership so England can be set free of both the Union of the UK and more importantly the Union of the EU. Then England could follow her historic and natural instincts of being a free trading low taxed country dealing with the five continents and oceans of the

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world, building alliances within her English speaking global family.

What do I think will happen as a result of the Lisbon treaty? I fear more of the same. The EU seems determined to be an area of low growth, falling population and too much government. Every time there are choices to be made the EU chooses more regulation over more freedom, more public spending and taxing over less, more regional and Euro government over less, slower growth and a smaller private sector over faster growth and a larger private sector. The EU nations are weighed down by huge public debts, by politicians and quango heads who do not understand markets, people who do not realise what a battle it is to be competitive in this modern world. As the working age population on the continent plunges and as the rule books lengthens each month, there is a blind belief that the growing power and success of India and China can simply be ignored. The EU looks in on itself, growing older and relatively poorer whilst congratulating itself in an orgy of self importance.

We are told that now the EU has its own Foreign Minister it can strut the world stage and have more power and influence. I don't think so. Without credible military forces that will be difficult. Look at the reluctance to either put serious forces into Afghanistan or to face up to the US and tell them we need to get out. The EU has had no influence on the war in Afghanistan and clearly does not intend to have any. Or take the recent climate change conference, where "soft power" might have been deployed. The only deal to come out of the conference comprised the US, China, India South Africa and the USA reaching an agreement. The EU was not even in the meeting that called the shots. The other countries simply had to respond to the US-Chinese initiative.

I don't think the EU is serious about wanting to create a successful economy, open to talent, enterprise and innovation. I think it is a government construct which one day will presume too far and sow the seeds of its own undoing. The EU is playing around with strong emotions of identity and belonging. It has crossed the UK all too often, refusing to understand the UK's wish to be part of a common market and be friends with EU countries but not to be part of a common government, a single currency and all the rest. If the EU wants to stabilise its north western frontier, it would be well advised to sit down and negotiate a new deal with the UK which England can accept. That deal would mean the UK opting out not just of the single currency, but also of the more obtrusive elements of the single government now emerging. We do not want a common army, a common defence policy or for that matter a common fishery or a common criminal justice policy. If the EU wants the UK to go along with closer integration for the core countries, the core needs to understand the UK's wish for some more freedom and flexibility to follow our genius, which has always been different from the continental one.

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