

29 May 2008

**OSCE requested to carry out Election Assessment Mission
of Lisbon Treaty referendum**

No Campaigners on the Lisbon Treaty referendum campaign are calling for the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) to be brought in to observe and carry out an assessment of the Lisbon Treaty referendum campaign in Ireland.

Former Green Party MEP, Patricia McKenna, announced the call for OSCE involvement at a press conference in Dublin today, Thursday 29th May. Ms McKenna, who in 1995 won a Supreme Court challenge against government interference in the referendum process, said that her organization, the People's Movement, together with PANA, had written to the Minister for Foreign Affairs asking that the OSCE be invited to observe the current campaign.

She said "There is growing disquiet among all groups on the No side about the fact that this campaign is neither fair nor balanced. I believe that in the interests of democracy and transparency it is necessary to for the Minister for Foreign Affairs to issue an invitation to the OSCE without further delay."

McKenna pointed out that this would not be the first time an Irish government had issued such an invitation. In 2007 the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs invited the OSCE first to conduct a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) in Ireland in March 2007, and subsequently invited the OSCE to carry out an Election Assessment Mission for the elections that were held on 24 May 2007. The OSCE also carried out a similar Election Assessment Mission for the General Elections held in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 5 May 2005.

"Since the government considered it important to invite the OSCE to observe the 2007 general elections it is obvious that this referendum campaign, in comparison to that election,

is an even more important candidate for observation. This campaign involves much more deep-rooted distrust on both sides and the views of an outside neutral body would be invaluable. The one-sided nature of the campaign, media bias, imbalance in funding and the outside involvement of politically powerful vested interests are all valid reasons to justify the need for outside monitoring.”

Ms McKenna said “already preliminary studies carried out by some groups on the No side show a massive imbalance in media reporting and that style and treatment of reporting, particularly in some sections of the print media, was clearly designed to undermine the No arguments. Furthermore the funding available to both sides is heavily stacked in favour of the Yes side by a margin of at least two to one.”

“The Peoples Movement and PANA believe that the OSCE should observe the forthcoming referendum in Ireland on the Lisbon Treaty. The retrograde steps taken by the government to thwart a fair referendum ever since the McKenna judgement in 1995 has led to ever more imbalanced referendum debates here, putting our democracy and constitution at risk. As the Irish Supreme Court has recognised, referendums are critical opportunities for the citizens to legislate without parliamentary or government interference. Looking at the current campaign where the odds are stacked heavily against one side it cannot be said that Irish citizens are being enabled or allowed to legislate in a fair and transparent manner.”

Retired Commandant Edward Horgan of PANA, who has observed elections in other countries, said “The current debate is characterised by a gross lack of balanced information, due to a diminution in the role of the Referendum Commission after the No vote on the Nice Treaty. It is also worsened by a heavily imbalanced media. It further suffers from continuous interference by outside interests, most especially those who stand to gain power through the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty.”

Mr. Horgan went on to say “The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has observed many elections. It has also observed a number of referendums, most notably the 2004 referendum in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the 2006 referendum in Montenegro on independence from Serbia.”

“The OSCE observed the most recent Irish elections in May 2007. The current referendum is in some ways more important, more controversial and indeed, is unique in the EU as regards the Lisbon Treaty, placing the process here under huge external and internal pressure.”

“Ireland as member of the OSCE has signed up to certain democratic standards. We fear that these standards are not being upheld in the current referendum process. We have therefore

requested that the minister for Foreign Affairs issue an invitation for an OSCE Election Mission. If this request is not met the only message we can take from that is that our government have something to hide and that they fear a fair and balanced campaign.”

Focusing on the Lisbon Treaty itself, Councillor Declan Bree, a patron of the People’s Movement, and member of Sligo Borough Council and Sligo County Council, said that despite the lack of resources the Peoples’ Movement was involved in a vigorous campaign throughout out the country with leaflets and posters. Mr Bree said “The Treaty of Lisbon if ratified would create a new federal European Union which would be politically and constitutionally profoundly different from the EU which we are members of today.”

“While the same name, ‘the European Union’, would be used before and after the referendum the fact is that if the Lisbon Treaty is ratified, the new European Union would be a fundamentally different constitutional/political entity from the European Union that we are currently members of.”

“The European Union we are members of today is generally a descriptive term for the various areas of co-operation between its 27 member states. If the Lisbon Treaty is ratified it would give the new Union which it would establish the constitutional form of a supranational European federation. That federation would have all the powers of a fully developed state apart from the power to force its member states to go to war against their will. If the Treaty is ratified it would make us citizens of this new European Union for the first time, as against our being notional or honorary EU ‘citizens’ at present.”

“The constitutional amendment to ratify the Lisbon Treaty would then make the laws, acts and decisions of the new European Union superior to the constitution and laws of Ireland and would effectively turn Ireland into a province of this new EU federation, which would be run on the most undemocratic lines. Ireland would become a province, not a nation, once again, in the precise and literal meaning of the word ‘province’” concluded Councillor Bree.

[ENDS]

For further Information:

Patricia McKenna – 087 2427049

Edward Horgan – 085 1026631

Declan Bree – 087 2470802

Text of letter below.

Mr. Michael Martin,
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Iveagh House
Dublin 2

Dear Minister,

The OSCE ODIHR website refers to “the commitments agreed upon by all OSCE participating States in the 1990 Copenhagen Document” and emphasises the fundamental principles that are central to a democratic tradition, including: universality, equality, fairness, secrecy, freedom, transparency, and accountability.

We note that for the General Elections in the Republic of Ireland in May 2007, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs invited the OSCE first to conduct a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) in Ireland in March 2007, and subsequently invited the OSCE to carry out an Election Assessment Mission for the elections that were held on 24 May 2007.

It is noted also that the OSCE carried out a similar Election Assessment Mission for the General Elections held in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 5 May 2005.

The full report of the OSCE EAM to the Republic of Ireland is available at:
http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/09/26187_en.pdf

The executive summary and introduction to this report is included below.

On behalf of the Peoples Movement and the Irish Peace and Neutrality Alliance, which are two civil society groups active in the current referendum campaign, we wish to ascertain whether an invitation has been issued to the OSCE to provide an Election Assessment Mission for the Lisbon Treaty Referendum.

If no such request has been issued, then we formally request that the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs send an immediate request to the OSCE to carry out an Election Assessment Mission for the forthcoming Lisbon Treaty Referendum. The purpose of this EAM should be to evaluate the equality and appropriateness of funding arrangements and media coverage for campaigning for this referendum, and also to ensure that the counting process is conducted in a transparent and fair manner.

Yours truly,

Signature: _____

Date:

Patricia McKenna, on behalf of the Peoples' Movement

Signature: _____

Date:

Edward Horgan, on behalf of the Irish Peace and Neutrality Alliance

Copies to:

Mr. John Gormley, Minister for the Environment,
Department of Environment, Customs House, Dublin 1.

Mr. Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, OSCE Secretary General
Wallnerstrasse 6, 1010 Vienna, Austria.

Mr. Alexander Stubb, OSCE Chairman-in-Office
Wallnerstrasse 6, 1010 Vienna, Austria.