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Publications funded by the taxpayer are geared towards securing a Yes vote – McKenna

Taxpayer's money is being used to fund material that is designed to influence peoples' vote on the Lisbon Treaty according to the People's Movement, one of the leading groups campaigning against the treaty's ratification. At a press conference in Dublin today, former MEP and chairperson of the movement, Patricia McKenna, said that two publications funded directly by the taxpayer which take a very one-sided approach to the Lisbon Treaty had been distributed to every house. Both the Referendum Commission's guide and the Department of Foreign Affairs' Lisbon Treaty leaflet take a similar line and play up the positives while either misrepresenting the negatives or deliberately ignoring them.

Its quite astonishing that the Referendum Commission, which is supposed to take a neutral position, is focusing on why people voted 'No' last time and providing reassurances which centre on the so-called 'legal guarantees' which are not even a part of the treaty. The booklet also misinforms people on the right of each state to choose their own EU commissioner – something that even Dr Garret Fitzgerald has had to concede – and makes no reference to the fact that the current agreement to keep a commissioner after Lisbon is not a permanent guarantee and can be revisited. The commission also fails to point out that the bigger member states' voting power will increase at the expense of the smaller countries in the all-powerful Council of Ministers. This is one of the key changes in Lisbon but both the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Referendum Commission are playing it down.

The Department of Foreign Affairs is deliberately flouting the principles of the McKenna judgment which forbids the use of public money to influence the outcome of a referendum. Both their leaflet and their website are in some cases misinforming people and in others avoiding the issues.

This abuse of taxpayers' money is unacceptable and makes a mockery of the concept of a free and fair vote.

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For further information:
Patricia McKenna (chairperson) – 087 2427049