



The Lisbon Treaty – strengthening the role of regions



Gerry Finn with Constance Hanniffy, the new head of the Irish delegation to the CoR

Gerry Finn, director of the [Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly](#) and Secretary to the Association of Irish Regions, discusses what is at stake for the regions as Ireland prepares to vote once again on the Lisbon Treaty on 2 October.

As Irish voters prepare for a second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, it is important to remind ourselves of what the Treaty means for regional and local governance in the EU.

The guiding principle of the Lisbon Treaty is to create the basis for a more efficient and transparent approach to determining and implementing policies at an EU level, consistent with the subsidiarity principle, i.e., that decisions are taken and policies are implemented as close as possible to the citizen. The Treaty, which streamlines the distribution of powers between the European and national levels, also brings the regional and local dimension into the EU legal framework.

From a regional perspective, the Treaty establishes territorial cohesion as a key objective of the EU and requires that all policies adopted are coherent with this objective. The publication of a Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion in 2008 seeks to develop and embed the concept and ensure that EU policies enhance the capacity of all regions to make the best use of their territorial assets, in a balanced sustainable manner.

The new Treaty recognises for the first time, the principle of local self-governance and the role of local and regional administrations in delivering public services, which was further endorsed by the Solemn Declaration by the Heads of State and Government in June 2009. Thus, local and regional governments across the EU and their representative associations, will have a more meaningful input into EU policy-making. After all, many of the policies and laws agreed at EU level are put into effect by local and regional governance structures rather than at national level. In Ireland, for example, EU regional policy is largely administered by regional and local administrations and a greater sub-national input into the framing of European policies such as this by Irish regional bodies would be a positive development.

The new Treaty includes a guarantee that the EU will not act where a task can be better achieved at the local or regional level. Further to this, the role of the EU Committee of the Regions is further strengthened under the Treaty and it gains the authority to apply to the Court of Justice to review policies that might undermine the subsidiarity principle. The Treaty also imposes a new obligation on EU institutions to minimize the administrative burden of new EU laws and the European Commission will be required to consider the financial implications for all levels of governance, of all

proposed legislation.

In conclusion, it can be clearly stated that the Lisbon Treaty will promote better governance in Europe and will ensure that actions at EU level are justified and restricted to areas which cannot be better managed at local, regional or national level. It will also ensure that EU actions do not impose disproportionate burdens on public administrations and that local and regional administrations are properly consulted at European and national level. It also enshrines territorial cohesion as a core objective of the EU to be pursued across all EU policy domains. In this and other respects the Treaty does strengthen the role of regions in the EU and should be actively supported by Irish Regional and Local Authorities.
