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The EU fanatics have come to such a policy dead end that they really no longer care what happens to the country

It would be an affront to what is left of our national democracy and political independence if the Government attempts to ratify the "Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union"—or, more accurately, the Permanent Austerity Treaty—without a referendum.

It is planned to enact the treaty next January, while the granting of loans from the new ESM will be conditional on enactment by 1 March t 2013. EU officials acknowledged that *"we drafted the text for the treaty so that he* [*Enda Kenny*] *has a chance to avoid a referendum."*

The new treaty would put this state's budgets under permanent and detailed euro-zone supervision. It would thereby impose a financial strait-jacket on euro-zone members, and condemn this country to decades of economic and social misery.

It is also based on an economic absurdity. To have provision for a permanent balanced budget in a country's constitution or law is madness, and the total opposite of what is required for this country at the moment, which is a policy for growth and employment stimulus.

Is this the "economic sovereignty" that Kenny keeps referring to as a key aspiration of official policy? It is almost as if the EU fanatics in this country have come to such a policy dead end that they really no longer care what happens to the country, the euro or the EU as long the total bankruptcy of their position is not exposed.

The same people will be seeking to make great play of the fact that struggling euro-zone states will be allowed to apply for a bail-out under the euro zone's permanent bail-out fund, the European Stability Mechanism, only if they have ratified the "fiscal pact."

They will not, of course, tell the full story, which is that the ESM would formally subordinate Ireland's interests to those "of the stability of the euro area as a whole," and that no limits would be laid down as regards the "strict conditionality" that can be imposed on recipients of financial bail-outs from the fund, even though Ireland will be required to contribute some €11 billion in paid-up and callable capital and guarantees once this fund is set up later this year. The sugar coating for the pill will be promises of a "federalisation" or mutualisation of the euro debt.

The fiscal compact threat, the ESM and the various other elements of the new euro-zone economic architecture all lead in one direction: permanent German hegemony of the EU, plus an austerity economic regime for generations. A reduction in interest rates or an extension of the debt repayment period down the line will not be the height of political achievement that undoubtedly will be claimed for it. It will certainly not be worth the price that we will have to pay.

Are they completely mad?

The Austerity Treaty will be the final nail in the coffin of the Irish economy if it is ratified either by the Dáil or by referendum. It will also sound the death knell for the economies of a number of other European economies upon whose markets we partially depended for a revival of economic growth and job creation.

It is difficult to understand how, when many member-states failed to match the requirement of an annual budget deficit of no higher than 3 per cent demanded by the Stability and Growth Pact that the Government can now commit itself to a totally unattainable structural deficit limit of 0.5 per cent.

The SGP was adopted in 1997 so that fiscal discipline would be maintained and enforced in the EMU. Member-states adopting the euro—now an imperative under the Lisbon Treaty (with the exceptions of Britain and Denmark, which have opt-outs)—have to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria, and the SGP ensures that they continue to observe them. It demands an annual structural deficit no higher than 3 per cent of GDP (this includes the sum of all public budgets, including municipalities, regions, etc.), and a national debt lower than 60 per cent of GDP or approaching that value.

The Government, in its assumed role of austerity cheer-leader, has embraced this 0.5 per cent structural deficit limit, despite the fact that during the boom years, when revenue was buoyant, Ireland satisfied these criteria on only one occasion. The same is true of the AAA-rated Germany and Netherlands. Notably, France and Austria never managed to satisfy it! Yet Enda Kenny told the Dáil last week that "Ireland needs to see this new treaty adopted and enforced," adding that it was "in the national interest" to do so.

On the other hand, we failed in only one year to reach the 3 per cent limit since its introduction, while Germany missed on four occasions and France failed half the time. Of course there were no sanctions, but it is interesting to note that even in those buoyant periods the instincts of the Irish elite veered towards austerity—a trait that also forcefully marked the economic policy of the early Free State governments following the foundation of the state.

So, isn't it time we intervened and attempted to halt the destruction not only of our weak economy but, more importantly, of our society? All EU states, with the notable exception of Germany, will have to impose deeper austerity measures if they are to meet these targets. We will suffer immeasurably if we follow this lunatic course. It is just too high a price to pay for saving the euro.

A referendum, with its associated debate, would facilitate the Irish people in considering alternatives to membership of the euro and would allow these to be elaborated in the face of opposition from the elites. Above all, such a referendum would allow the people an opportunity to reject this Austerity Treaty, which clearly spells the end of the euro as we know it, finally ends any illusions about "Social Europe," and shreds any remaining vestiges of economic sovereignty, so vital if we are to satisfy the social demands of the population.

History rewritten?

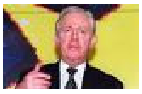
The European Commission under Romano Prodi came under heavy scrutiny back in 2003, when the Commission failed to take any action over fraud and irregularities in the EU statistical arm, Eurostat.

The "zero tolerance to fraud and mismanagement" pledged in 1999, when the present Commission took office, is being tested as some Euro-parliamentarians call for political heads to roll over the affair. But some Euro-parliamentarians are against any mass resignation, as occurred in the previous Santer Commission, which was forced to resign *en masse* in the face of claims of nepotism and mismanagement. Among the twenty commissioners who resigned was Italy's present prime minister, Mario Monti, formerly of Goldman Sachs. An independent panel at the time noted that "it is difficult to find anyone who has even the slightest sense of responsibility" in this institution. A fellow-Luxembourger of Santer, Jean-Claude Juncker, who chaired the meeting of finance ministers that announced the decision, said that Santer had "served both Europe and his country the best way possible." Juncker is at present president of the euro zone!

The secretary-general of the Commission, David O'Sullivan, was also in hot water when he said he "was not aware of the possible involvement of senior officials" but also admitted that he kept commissioners in the dark when the EU's anti-fraud office, OLAF, launched an investigation.

O'Sullivan is now chief operating officer of the European External Action Service (or department of foreign affairs), which is busy setting up embassies around the world and which eventually will have a staff of 5,400.

However, Jacques Santer has resurfaced in style. He has just been appointed to head fund-raising for the EU's new bail-out fund!



Santer's job will be to head a "special-purpose investment vehicle" designed to boost the firepower of the €440 billion temporary bail-out fund, the EFSF, in case big economies, such as those of Italy or Spain, go down the path of Greece. The SPIV is to sell debt to private firms and sovereign wealth funds, with the proceeds to be channelled to struggling EU countries.

The whole set-up already has an image problem, and efforts to get such countries as Brazil and China involved have attracted little interest. But Juncker has dismissed the idea that Santer's background will make matters worse—as one would expect him to do.

And they tell us it could only happen in Ireland!

European Trade Union Confederation opposes austerity treaty

Edited version of the statement opposing the Fiscal Compact Treaty adopted by the ETUC Steering Committee

On 8 and 9 December 2011 the European Council decided to engage in an international agreement aimed at strengthening budgetary discipline—the Austerity Treaty. The decision was followed by intensive and semi-secret negotiations aiming at reaching an agreement by the end of January 2012. The process of negotiation ignored the democratic scrutiny that should normally characterise any reform of the Union.

The ETUC deplores this undemocratic process and its undemocratic consequences at the national level.

The ETUC opposes this new treaty. The new treaty will stifle growth and increase unemployment.

(1) In the absence of sustainable investments for growth, austerity measures will not lead to the solution of the euro crisis and to employment; neither will they reassure financial markets.

(2) Casting in national constitutions or legislation a strict adherence to public deficit rules will only exacerbate the current crisis.

(3) Returning to balanced public accounts requires a long-term approach, including fair taxation policies, a financial transaction tax, combating tax fraud and tax evasion, a partial pooling of the debt, adequate intervention of the European Central Bank, and strong control over the financial sector.

(4) The need for economic governance is being used as a means of restricting negotiating mechanisms and results, attacking industrial relations systems and put downward pressure on collectively agreed wage levels, to weaken social protection and the right to strike and to privatise public services.

The new treaty is only stipulating more of the same: austerity and budgetary discipline. It will force member-states to pursue damaging pro-cyclical fiscal policies, giving absolute priority to rigid economic rules at a time when most economies are still weak and unemployment intolerably high. It will bring downward pressure on wages and working conditions, surveillance, and sanctions. Governments failing to comply with the fiscal compact will be brought to the European Court of Justice, which may impose sanctions.

The ETUC position increases the possibility that the Irish trade union movement may be united in its opposition to this treaty. Trade union members should bring this statement to the attention of their branches and executives and ask them to pass resolutions opposing the treaty. The ICTU is a constituent part of the ETUC.

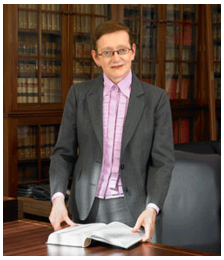
No more lies!

A referendum now!

The Government believes it has ensured that the austerity treaty will not require the support of the people by way of referendum, and that the treaty has been sufficiently watered down to avoid the need to give voters a say.

The Government's approach is completely at odds with the wishes of the people as expressed in a REDC poll for the *Sunday Business Post,* which showed that 72 per cent want a referendum, while 21 per cent do not and 7 per cent have no opinion.

President Michael D. Higgins may still refer the treaty to the Supreme Court to test whether a referendum is required. It is also open to any citizen to mount such a legal action. The treaty is the foundation stone for full fiscal union in Europe.



The position of the Government remains that the final agreement will be forwarded to the attorney-general this week for advice on ratification.

And don't forget the big lie from the minister for finance, Michael Noonan, who stated that if a referendum was required as part of the ratification process the outcome would be interpreted as a vote on continued Irish membership of the euro.

He merely follows in the footsteps of Dick Roche, who is also echoed by Leo Varadkar's claim that the people don't know what they're voting on in a referendum. Varadkar said that referendums are "by and large" never what they are supposed to be about. "I would be concerned that it would turn into a referendum on extraneous issues, such as septic tanks, bond-holders, banking crisis, or decisions being made by the Government, such as cut-backs."

And whose fault would that be?

And, not to be outdone, Lucinda Creighton tried to scare people. "It would make it almost impossible for us to continue in the euro if we voted against the treaty."

They're beginning to make Fianna Fáil look good!

Meanwhile the independent TD Thomas Pringle—a patron of the People's Movement—is writing to each member of the Oireachtas asking them to support a petition to the president requesting a referendum on the treaty if the Government rules one out. Under article 27 of the Constitution of Ireland a third of the members of the Dáil (fifty-five) and a majority of the members of the Seanad can sign a petition requesting the president not to sign a bill into law before it is approved by a referendum.

Thomas has taken taken legal advice on the process, and will publish the petition in the coming weeks. He acknowledged that he would have to secure support from some members of Fine Gael and the Labour Party in both houses but said he was hopeful of doing so. The People's Movement will assist Thomas as much as possible in achieving his objective.

The constitution states: *"A majority of the members of Seanad Éireann and not less than one-third of the members of Dáil Éireann may by a joint petition addressed to the President by them under this Article request the President to decline to sign and promulgate as a law any Bill to which this article applies on the ground that the Bill contains a proposal of such national importance that the will of the people thereon ought to be ascertained."*

How do we decide what sort of society we want?

Austerity policies are now widely regarded as having failed, and this failure is increasingly obvious in the country elected to act as Austerity's Poster Child.

The banking collapse, and the legacy bequeathed by the state's extraordinary bank guarantee of September 2008, has seen society in Ireland turned into a laboratory for IMF, Commission and ECB experimentation. Successive waves of cuts have been stipulated by the Troika in return for its loans but implemented without resistance, and arguably a degree of enthusiasm, by the two Governments of the "post-sovereign" era.

The fiscal adjustment, according to the economist Karl Whelan, is the equivalent of "€4,600 per person . . . the largest budgetary adjustments seen in the advanced economic world in recent times." With annual "adjustments" of €3–4 billion threatened until 2015, and perpetual austerity promised by the forthcoming Austerity Treaty, the euphemism of "purposeful austerity" cannot long camouflage the concerted assault on the—already minimalist—social contract and makes a nonsense of any hopes for a "Social Europe."

It is difficult to recall that 2008 promised what David Graeber called a "public conversation about . . . the financial institutions that have come to hold the fate of nations in their grip." But this promise was merely a preface to what David McNally called the "neo-liberal mutation" that insists

on states slashing spending to "ensure that working-class people and the poor will pay the cost of the global bank bail-out."

In Ireland this "conversation" never materialised. Accelerating fiscal deterioration overlapped with the political bankruptcy of the historically dominant Fianna Fáil, and the destructive cartel of bankers, developers and ruling politicians became the prime focus of public anger. The subsequent defeat of Fianna Fáil ensured that, in the words of Illan Rua Wall, "indignation burnt itself out at the ballot box, with little public reflection, let alone mobilisation, on the possibility of confronting the new Government's effortless adoption of austerity."

This relative lack of popular opposition is difficult to explain. Official narratives—both domestic and EU—have praised the "maturity" of the electorate, pitted public and private sectors against each other in a "race to the bottom," and insisted that "we all partied," a moralising patriotism employed to draw public attention from the socialisation of bank debt, and from serious consideration of alternative approaches. The current Fine Gael-Labour coalition has invested heavily in being "not Greece"; by boasting of further and faster deficit-reduction, Ireland would be rewarded with cuts in interest rates and an earlier-than-predicted return to the bond markets and thus regain "sovereignty."

Fine Gael and the Labour Party took ownership of the austerity agenda in the December budget, implementing more massive cuts to public expenditure and social welfare and stoking widespread anxiety about whether dole payments or children's allowance would be cut. This has led to some rebellion in Labour's parliamentary party, and a burgeoning campaign, led by several TDs, against a household charge. The prospect of a referendum on the Austerity Treaty, which promises permanent austerity, should act as a lightning-conductor for political opposition and community resistance.

It is clear that "austerity" primarily involves rapidly socialising as much bond-holder debt as possible before a possible default. The Austerity Treaty, if passed into law, would constitute the most revolutionary development in the Irish economic landscape in the history of the state. The strengthening of budgetary surveillance by the EU authorities, the balanced-budget amendment and the inclusion of automatic, treaty-prescribed sanctions for transgression could condemn Ireland, and other euro-zone countries, to lengthy periods of economic stagnation.

The implications of the treaty will surely outweigh political anxiety about volatile public opinion and result in a referendum. Should the Government decide otherwise, it is almost certain that a constitutional challenge will be made, though it remains far from certain that the Supreme Court would demand that the treaty be ratified by referendum, rather than statute.

The Government has already framed any such event as stark choice: staying in the euro or departing to exterior darkness. Be that as it may, what Ireland needs more than anything is that long-postponed public conversation. In particular, we need to ask not just what kind of society we want but what will be left of society if the latest neo-liberal mutation is signed into law.

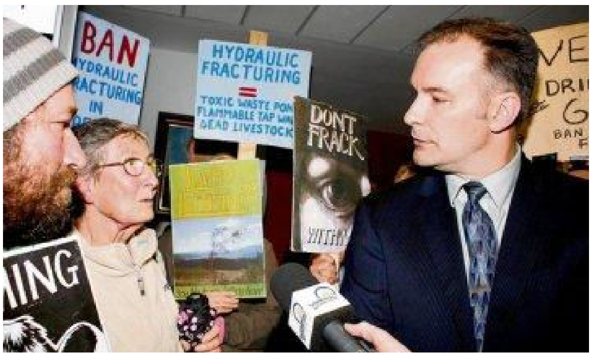
So, a referendum debate would be an ideal platform on which to begin such a debate—not a campaign of fear and intimidation against ordinary people but a debate on fundamental choices that will shape this country for generations.

Co. Leitrim’s gas reserves could provide €30 billion profit for Tamboran

while the EU Commission says there is no need for new environmental legislation!

Tamboran Resources, which has exploration drilling licences on both sides of the border in the north-west region, has said that its initial studies have confirmed the existence of a “substantial natural gas field” in north Leitrim. Tamboran is an Australian and Canadian exploration company with licences in Ireland, Australia, and Africa.

The company has already been the focus of a series of protests in the region, because it is proposing to extract the gas using hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking”—a technique that has been blamed in the United States for contaminating water supplies and other environmental problems.



Tamboran’s findings suggest that production in Co. Leitrim could ultimately reach 2.2 trillion cubic feet of gas, worth $55 billion. The statement said that if the field were commercially developed this would create six hundred jobs directly. It could also yield a substantial benefit for the state, which could get €4.9 billion in corporate, exploration and employment taxes.

The company says it intends investing €7 billion in the region, much of it in equipment essential for the fracking process. Along with this, if the find hits its commercial targets, it has pledged to create a local investment fund that will channel €2 million a year into Co. Leitrim (over twenty years?). That’s €7.4 billion in total. Adding this to the projected €4.9 billion in taxes gives €12.3 billion. Subtracting that from $55 billion (€42 billion) leaves €30 billion for Tamboran!!

And, we potentially get a ruined landscape, toxic pollution, and continuing health risk to both humans and livestock.

But, according to a new study published by the European Commission in January, there is no need for more environmental legislation in the case of shale-gas exploration, at least until it reaches commercial scale.

Shale gas is an unconventional fossil fuel that is found within natural fissures and fractures underground. Until recently, no method of safely transporting it to the surface existed. However, it is now possible by pumping water, sand and chemicals at high pressure into rock formations, in the technique known as hydraulic fracturing.

The EU report, carried out for the European Commission by—amazingly—a Belgian law firm, Philippe and Partners, says that the activities relating to the exploration of shale gas are already subject to EU and national laws and regulations. For instance, water protection issues, they claim, which have been raised as an issue by critics, are already covered by the Water Framework Directive, the Groundwater Directive, and the Mining Waste Directive. Meanwhile the use of chemicals is covered by the REACH regulation.

“It is a new technology, and we do not have a specific legislation on shale gas, because it is so new,” said Marlene Holzner, European Commission spokesperson on energy. “So the study only says that the existing regulations are applicable for shale gas, that the tool is there and has only to be applied.” She added that the study was carried out in only four countries: Poland, France, Germany, and Sweden.

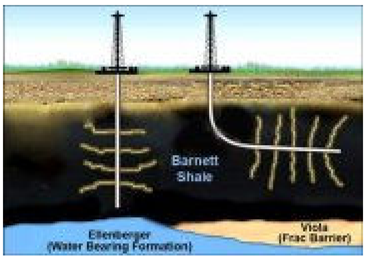
The law firm said that shale-gas activities were too small at the moment to justify specific legislation. But shale gas is an unconventional source of natural gas, and studies show different results on how safe the two main methods of extracting it from rock formations are. One is the horizontal drilling in various regions of the rock, which is needed to capture the gas pockets. The other, hydraulic fracturing, involves a high-pressure injunction of fluids, usually mixed with chemicals, into the shale rock. Both of them require seismic and drilling permits, as well as large amounts of chemicals and water.

Only after conducting consecutive tests for drilling and fracturing does a project reach the stage of planning and acquiring the necessary pipeline, followed by the decision to bring the extraction to a commercial scale.

Poland, which aims to shrug off its dependence on Russian gas, is planning to begin the commercial production of shale gas from 2014, according to the prime minister, Donald Tusk. Most of the projects are now at the phase of seismic surveys, and some projects have already entered the drilling phase, which is expected to intensify after 2014. The natural gas trapped in shale rock in Poland could provide the country with enough fuel to last for three hundred years, the US Department of Energy said last year.

However, not everyone is willing to allow drilling operations on their land, despite the economic potential. At the beginning of January, thousands of Bulgarians protested against exploration for shale gas because of fears that it could poison underground water, trigger earthquakes, and pose serious hazards to public health.

There is plenty of evidence from the United States, where fracking has been used on a large scale. Earlier this month the US Environmental Protection Agency revealed that fracking most probably explains the widespread contamination of groundwater in Pavilion, Wyoming. Altogether, more than a thousand cases of water contamination have been reported near fracking sites in the United States.



Many of the chemicals used are toxic, and some are carcinogenic. Scientists at the Endocrine Disruption Exchange found that 25 per cent of fracking fluids can cause cancer, 37 per cent can disrupt the endocrine system, and 40 to 50 per cent can affect the nervous, immune and cardiovascular systems. Simultaneously, each shale-gas well results in millions of litres of toxic wastewater. Accidents, spills and inadequate treatment of this wastewater further endanger water resources.

Beyond effects on water, the development of shale gas increases heavy-duty vehicle traffic, noise pollution and air pollution at the expense of local communities, negatively affecting tourism and agriculture.

Recent scientific studies by Cornell University and the US National Center for Atmospheric Research demonstrate that methane emissions from shale-gas development are likely to accelerate climate change in the coming decades. This is despite shale gas being a relatively clean-burning fossil fuel.

The Government should immediately stop all exploration activity in the Lough Allen and Clare Basins to allow citizens to learn about the American experience with this risky technology. It should then carefully listen to their demands, and act on them.

The Merkel solution: give up even more power!

Angela Merkel's solution to the economic crisis is more "integration," by transferring more powers from the national level to EU institutions, such as the European Court of Justice, so that the continent is "turned into a Europe that works."

"We have taken some steps closer to a fiscal union, but we can get faster, gain speed and become more decisive," she said, in reference to the Austerity Treaty. *"We will only be able to strengthen our common currency if we co-ordinate our policies more closely and are prepared to gradually give up more powers to the EU.*

"If we make loads of promises about debt reduction and sound budgeting, those need to be things that can be enforced or brought to court in the future. The point of the 'fiscal compact,' after all, is to make it possible to check on those commitments. That means giving our institutions more monitoring rights—and more bite."

However, she has hailed the Permanent Austerity Treaty as a "masterpiece" and a "tremendous success."

She was rebuffed by Michael Sommer, chairperson of the German Confederation of Trade Unions, who said: "This deal is a fraud . . . It doesn't answer the question of how to improve public revenues."

Euro-bullying

The *Irish Times* reports that the former German minister of foreign affairs Joschka Fischer (Green Party) has said there would be "extreme consequences" for Ireland should it reject the fiscal compact. Fischer said that this time Ireland would not get a second chance, and that it would spell the end of the euro.

This extreme form of bullying is based on a lie, as the Austerity Treaty is an international treaty and does not require unanimity either of euro-zone members or the EU 27. Our rejection of this treaty by itself would not spell the end of the euro, and legally there are no "extreme consequences" that can be visited upon us. In fact we could stay in the euro for as long as we wanted (or as long as it lasted).

There might be an awkward political situation, and our craven Government (remember Gilmore following Lisbon 1) might ask us to vote again, in defiance of Fischer.

It's merely a taste of things to come, and a perfect example of euro-bullying. Martin Callanan, chairperson of the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament, said last week that "this pact is effectively rendering all elections null and void across much of Europe." He may not be entirely correct, but the last time this happened . . .

The Lisbon Treaty creeps incrementally towards implementation

A ground-breaking resolution agreed upon by the European Parliament in the closing sessions of 2011 has raised an interesting prospect: that EU funds could be used to plug gaps in capability for the continent's armies.

Though far from formal endorsement, the ideas outlined in this resolution could indicate a radical new direction for an EU emboldened by the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty.

The statement, endorsed by the European Parliament's specialist committee on security and defence issues, comes in response to a detailed report put into circulation in mid-2011 regarding the effect of the financial crisis on European armies. On 14 December the so-called Lisek Resolution outlined the steps MEPs feel will be needed to rectify the

fragmentation of Europe's defence market, lack of investment, and failure to co-ordinate military cuts.

The statement calls for EU member-states to strengthen continuing initiatives in the area of defence, such as the pooling and sharing military equipment within the Ghent Framework, increasing interoperability for co-operation in EU battle groups, and the strengthening of the so-called Defence Directive.

"On 9 December 2010, the Ministers of Defence of the EU agreed on the so-called Ghent Framework, requiring [*that*] *each EU Member State will analyze its capabilities in order to identify: (1) those it will maintain on a national level; (2) those to which it will contribute through pooling with other Member States; and (3) those to which it will no longer contribute, relying on specialization and role-sharing between Member States. If done in a permanent and structured manner, such a process will lead to true cooperation—as envisaged by Permanent Structured Cooperation, the new defence mechanism in the Lisbon Treaty. The end-result will benefit everybody: more effective forces, no matter how integrated, will be available for national as well as CSDP, NATO and UN operations."*

The Defence Directive is a legislative package that promises to punish protectionism in defence contracting. It formally entered into force in August 2011 and creates a single market for defence and security equipment and services across national borders.

"This directive introduces at the European level fair and transparent procurement rules for defence and security," the then Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services, Charlie McCreevy, said. "This will make defence and security markets more open and more transparent to the benefit of all: taxpayers' money will be spent more efficiently, armed forces will get better value for money, and industry will get better access to new markets."

Reports in December suggested that only ten out of the EU 27 had met the requirements of the directive—Ireland being one of the seventeen that has not yet done so. However, the majority of member-states appear to have respected the dead-

line for introducing legislation that will enable the directives to be adopted into national law.

Analysts have speculated that on-the-spot fines for non-compliance in defence tendering, or even a case being referred to the European Court of Justice, could be used as a means of enforcement.

So, will EU coffers be opened for defence spending? Well, the most controversial aspect of the Lisek Report relates to EU funding. The recommendations deal with existing EU funding lines, and how they could address gaps in European capabilities. For instance, a report prepared for members of the European Parliament speculates that EU financial support for below-average GDP states under the European Stability Fund could be applied to struggling defence industries in those countries as well!

More directly, noting that research and development accounts for an average of 1 per cent of all European defence spending, MEPs wish to see the EU's multi-annual Research Framework Programme come to the rescue—by courtesy of Máire Geoghegan-Quinn! Noting that funds are available for counter-terrorism and disaster management purposes under the Security Research budget line, ministers call for the reinforcement and extension of security research to include a new theme for defence research with civil-military applications. Such research could include "unmanned aerial vehicles" (drones), command and control, and situational awareness capabilities.

More ambitious proposals seek to jointly fund resources on the model of the Galileo global-positioning satellite system, which is directly financed to the tune of €20 billion by the EU, at the behest of member-states. Such a scheme could be a viable and cost-effective option, especially in such areas as strategic and tactical transport or surveillance, the report notes.

Finally, the resolution agreed by the European Parliament calls for a review of the so-called Athena mechanism for EU missions. While at present used to help cover basing and infrastructure costs for member-states' military forces deployed under the EU flag, ministers imagine a greater role for this in the future. They envisage the possibility of extending the mechanism to provide common funding for actions or acquisitions, notably a common financing of equipment. In short, MEPs wish to see if Athena could be used to directly purchase military equipment for EU missions.

Though non-binding at this stage, the Lisek Resolution is a sign of the increased interest in military spending by European Parliamentarians. While constitutional prohibitions at present forbid the direct investment of EU money in arms, R&D for civil-military technology, and the use of various existing funds to support the industrial base or the purchase of equipment for EU missions, demonstrate the potential developments in this area.

The provisions of the Lisbon Treaty move on incrementally towards implementation, in a way that is scarcely noticed by the general public.

If the Government didn't agree with what was happening, all they would have to do would be not to ratify the article 48 amendment, or stand up on their hind legs in the European Council. Now that would take some courage—something our Government is sadly lacking.

Varadkar changes his tune!

"What the ECB has said to us, and what the troika has said to us, is: It's on your head. We don't want you to default on these payments, it is your decision ultimately. But a bomb will go off, a bomb will go off in Dublin, not in Frankfurt, because of the reasons I've outlined."

For Leo Varadkar, it was a mighty climb-down for the Fine Gael candidate who promised last February that not a cent more would be put into Anglo-Irish Bank and who made a frank admission that the major pressure comes from the desire of the European Central Bank to support German and French banks.

Meanwhile Senator Darragh O'Brien (Fianna Fáil) asked, "Will the leader [of the Seanad] consider the role of the Oireachtas in regard to EU scrutiny, which has been raised on a number of occasions? The Oireachtas is deficient in the work it does in scrutinising proposed EU legislation. I do not believe the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Union

Affairs does so in a detailed way, although it is no reflection on the members of that committee. As I saw on previous occasions, it is effectively a rubber stamp."

The truth will out!

A step further!

British campaigners are planning more than a hundred separate votes throughout the country by 2013, with the aim of forcing a national referendum on EU membership. The first local referendum will be held on 5 April in one of thirteen short-listed constituencies, including ultra-marginals.

The People's Pledge campaign has been seeking a referendum for some time and counts the pro-EU Labour Party MPs Keith Vaz and Natasha Engel among its campaigners. Vaz said: "We need to take this argument outside Parliament and let the British people participate in a proper discussion about our role in the EU."

We slipped up!

In our last issue we said that "article 48 is the much-discussed self-amending clause, which got a good airing during both Lisbon referendum campaigns. If this proposal is accepted and article 48 were subsequently used successfully, it would mean that, irrespective of whether a member-state was a member of the euro zone or had ratified the treaty, the provisions would be applied to them through the EU treaties!"

Article 48 states: "The European Council may adopt a decision amending all or part of the provisions of Part Three of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. *The European Council shall act by unanimity* after consulting the European Parliament and the Commission, and the European Central Bank in the case of institutional changes in the monetary area. That decision shall not enter into force until it is approved by the Member States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

Ratification of permanent austerity treaty looks dodgy in Sweden, France . . .

The ratification of the austerity treaty looks doubtful in Sweden after the Social Democratic Party reiterated its opposition to it, meaning that there is no majority in the Riksdag for signing up to the deal. And the Czech coalition government has decided to put the fiscal treaty to a referendum.

Meanwhile the Finnish minister of foreign affairs, Erkki Tuomioja, has slammed the new European fiscal pact, saying, "The whole compact is at best unnecessary and at worst harmful, and Finland has reason to oppose the whole treaty and at least remain outside it." He added that "the majority of parliament has the same view as I have."

The presidential candidate of the French Socialist Party, François Hollande, who leads Sarkozy in opinion polls, has said he will seek to reopen talks on the pact if he wins. He said he would reopen talks on the treaty to make jobs and economic growth more central. "We cannot enter a spiral of austerity with a pact geared only towards austerity," he said. "Budgetary discipline isn't enough. There is a need for growth."

In any event, Sarkozy has said that France will not be able to ratify the fiscal treaty before the presidential election, scheduled for the end of April.

France and Germany push for greater "tax co-ordination"

France and Germany have unveiled a set of joint proposals that they say would boost growth in the EU. The proposals were submitted to European leaders at their meeting on 30 January.

The document states: "European institutions and member states should accelerate the process of tax co-ordination . . . In particular, the negotiation of the European Commission proposals on Energy Tax Directive, Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCTB) and Common System of Financial Transaction Tax should be accelerated."

So what about the much-vaunted corporation tax rate? Enda Kenny promised his "European partners" some time ago that he will "constructively engage" in discussions on the CCTB. Otherwise, not a word. Keep them in the dark . . .

No wonder he got a pat on the head from Sarkozy!

First Eurovision, then . . .

Speaking at a conference in Vienna, the Israeli minister of foreign affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, said: "My vision is that Israel must be part of united Europe."

Could the present Israeli charm offensive (as distinct from a lethal one) in Irish government circles possibly be connected with this aspiration, or is that just too far-fetched?

Greeks stand up to Germans

Ireland . . . ?

The German government wants Greece to cede sovereignty over tax and spending decisions to a euro-zone "Budget Commissioner" in order to secure a second €130 bail-out. In what would amount to an extraordinary extension of EU control over a member-state, the commissioner would have the power to veto budget decisions taken by the Greek government if they were not in line with targets set by international lenders.

The new administrator, appointed by other euro-zone finance ministers, would have responsibility for overseeing "all major blocks of expenditure" by the Greek government.

"Budget consolidation has to be put under a strict steering and control system," the proposal says. "Given the disappointing compliance so far, Greece has to accept shifting budgetary sovereignty to the European level for a certain period of time. Athens would also have to adopt a law permanently committing state revenues to debt service 'first and foremost'."

This extraordinary proposal shows how Germany regards its "partners" in the euro zone, and shows what Ireland can expect as long as we remain members of the euro zone and fail to give priority within it to committing state revenues to servicing the debt "first and foremost." This is what "shifting responsibility to the European level" entails!

But at the recent informal summit at which the Austerity Treaty was agreed, EU leaders gave a mixed response to Germany's idea, with Merkel saying she hoped to avoid a "controversial" discussion in favour of a "successful" one.

The Swedish prime minister was among those most supportive of the idea. He said he understood Germany's "frustration," claiming that Greeks "do not deliver on the reforms that they have promised others . . . The experience is, you need help from outside when you need to make tough reforms." His Finnish counterpart said: "It is very natural that countries who help Greece need more information about what is happening in Greece. We just have to find a suitable compromise for Greece that is suitable for our principles and satisfies our need for additional information."

But the prime minister of Luxembourg, and president of the Euro Group, Jean-Claude Juncker, objected to having a commissioner specifically charged with keeping Greece in line. "I don't think this German proposal should be dedicated to Greece. I am strongly against imposing a commissioner with that mission only to Greece."

Austria, which normally takes a hard line, shared the same concerns as Luxembourg. "Greece has to stick to its commitments, but we do not think it's a good idea to send a special commissioner just for Greece," its chancellor said. "It would be better if the European Commission continued its monitoring [that] it does for all [bail-out] programme countries."

Merkel is under pressure from backbenchers and her Liberal coalition partners to be as tough as possible on Greece, and she did not back down from the idea. "I think we have to have a discussion on how to help Greece, not a controversy, but something that is successful for the people of Greece."

The Greek government rejected the plan, because it is contrary to national sovereignty. The former minister for the economy, Loúka Katséli, said that Greece should have control of its own finances. "There is full compliance with what we have promised to deliver. No other country has managed in two years to reduce its budget deficit by 6 per cent of its GDP."

"An bhfuil cead agam dul amach?"

The septic tank issue

"An bhfuil cead agam dul amach?" was our question at school when we needed to go to the toilet. Our Government is in such a pathetic position now that they have addressed a similar question to the European authorities.

When the minister for the environment, Phil Hogan, was bulldozing the septic tanks bill through the Dáil and Seanad he refused to spell out the criteria for a functioning septic tank. The other morning on TV3 he admitted to Pádraic an Táilliúra Ó Conghaile that he would have to consult the European Commission on the matter!

Pádraic an Táilliúra is the leader of the Connemara campaign against the septic tanks bill. He recently brought five hundred people to the gates of Dáil Éireann. Thousands more have met all over the country to express their anger. Pádraic an Táilliúra's main points are:

1. We are in favour of clean water.
2. We are in favour of proper septic tanks.
3. We demand clarity on the criteria for a functioning septic tank.
4. The state should pay for any remedial work—the cost must come out of general taxation.
5. We will nor register and we will not pay the fee.

For more information see www. mynativeland. info.

“An bhfuil cead agam dul amach?”

“An bhfuil cead agam dul amach?” a deireadh muid sa scoil fadó nuair a bhíodh muid ag iarraidh a dhul chuig an leithreas. Tá an scéal chomh truamhéalach ag an tír seo anois go bhfuil ceist den chineál céanna curtha ag an Rialtas ar údaráis na hEorpa.

Nuair a bhí an an t-aire comhshaoil, Phil Hogan, ag brú bhille na ndabhchanna séarachais tríd an Dáil

agus an Seanad dhiúltaigh sé eolas a thabhairt faoi na caighdeáin a bhainfeadh le dabhach séarachais a bheadh ag obair i gceart. An mhaidin faoi dheireadh ar TV3 dúirt sé le Pádraic an Táilliúra Ó Conghaile go gcaithfeadh sé a dhul i gcomhairle le Coimisiún na hEorpa faoin scéal!

Is é Pádraic an Táilliúra atá i gceannas ar fheachtas Chonamara in aghaidh bhille na ndabhchanna séarachais. Thug sé cúig chéad duine go dtí geataí Dháil Éireann le gairid. Tá na mílte eile ag teacht chuig cruinnithe ar fud na tíre. Seo iad na pointí atá ag Pádraic:

1. Tá muid ar son uisce glan.
2. Tá muid ar son dabhchanna éifeachtacha séarachais.
3. Teastaíonn soiléireacht uainn faoi na caighdeáin a chuirfear i bhfeidhm.
4. Má tá dabhach séarachais le deisiú éilíonn muid gurb é an stát a d’íocfadh as—go dtiocfadh an t-airgead as an gciste náisiúnta cánach.
5. Tá an t-airgead ann: tá €$1\frac{1}{2}$ billiún curtha i leataobh ag an Rialtas i gcomhair uisce agus séarachas sna blianta beaga romhainn.
6. Ní chláróidh muid agus ní íocfaidh muid an táille.

Tá tuilleadh eolais le fáil ar fheachtas Phádraic an Táilliúra ar an suíomh idirlíon www. mynativeland. info.