



## Press Statement

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### **NATIONAL FORUM ON EUROPE ACCUSED OF BIAS AND ABUSING PUBLIC FUNDS**

At the opening session of the National Forum on Europe today in Dublin Castle 'No' campaigners accused the Forum of bias and using public money to influence the outcome of the forthcoming referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. Former Green MEP and leading 'No' campaigner, Patricia McKenna accused the Forum of abusing taxpayer's money to produce what she described as biased documentation.

Ms. McKenna, who is a member of the Forum's Special Observer Pillar, interrupted the Chairman, Maurice Hayes's press conference to object to the Forum's planned publication of a 'Summary Guide to the Lisbon Treaty', which she said was biased, and misleading.

McKenna said, 'A group that consists predominately of those on the Yes-side have drawn up this Guide. There has been absolutely no input, with the exception of Sinn Féin, from those on the No-side and as a result the document is flawed.'

She said, 'This publication pre-empts the work of the Referendum Commission, whose statutory job it is to tell citizens what the Lisbon Treaty referendum is about.'

'While I recognise that the "Summary Guide" is a commendable effort by the Forum Secretariat it is inevitably rather selective and consciously or unconsciously leans towards facts and interpretations that are favourable to the Yes-side. The only fair way of getting out a booklet that would be fair to both Yes-side and No-side side, would be to get reputable and expert Yes-side and No-side people together to agree a common text, and where they disagree on facts or interpretation that this should be indicated.'

'This is possible to do and has been done in Denmark for several EU treaties, but it is not here.'

‘For example: The booklet makes no mention of the important fact that under the Lisbon Treaty Ireland would lose its right to decide who Ireland’s commissioner is, even when it comes to our time to have a member on the Commission – 10 years out of every 15. Ireland’s present right to “propose” the name of the Irish commissioner and insist on having that proposal accepted if need be, being replaced by a right to “suggest” – so that the new Commission president, who will be appointed by majority vote of the prime ministers and presidents, would effectively decide who Ireland’s commissioner will be.’

‘The booklet also fails to mention the fact that a UN mandate would not be necessary for the dispatch of a EU military force and that the EU can basically go to war without a mandate from the UN. There is also no reference to the fact that the Lisbon Treaty obliges Member States, including Ireland, “to progressively improve their military capabilities”.’

McKenna said, ‘The People’s Movement, the National Platform and others will be producing a critical response to the Forum on Europe’s “Summary Guide” by the weekend and will e-mail it to the media. We appeal to the media to withhold final judgement on this “Summary Guide” until they receive this commentary shortly.’

Ms McKenna went on to say, ‘By its very nature the structure and workings of the Forum are stacked in favour of those who support the Lisbon Treaty. The steering committee, which ultimately runs the Forum, is made up exclusively of representatives from each Oireachtas party. Organizations representing the No-side of the debate, with the exception of Sinn Féin, are excluded from the decision-making process.’ The No-side are sidelined into the Special Observer Pillar of the Forum and excluded from decisions regarding publications, Forum agendas and those who are invited as speakers to the Forum.

She said that in the interests of balance and equality established by the Supreme Court judgment in the McKenna case it was essential that for the period running up to the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty the Forum should operate in a different manner. It must take account of the principles established in both the McKenna and Coughlan cases.

Huge amounts of public money are being spent on the Forum and it is essential that these funds are used in line with the law and Ireland’s constitution.

The fact that the allocation of seats in the Forum is based on first preference votes achieved in general elections and that the steering committee, which runs the Forum, is made up exclusively of Oireachtas party members, means that political parties have undue influence on the Forum.

Political parties are not even recognized in our constitution and the privileged position afforded them in the Forum is in marked contrast to the decision of the Supreme Court ruling in the Coughlan case in so far as its implications for political party involvement in referendums are concerned.

[ENDS]

**For further Information**

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