

## **Treaty is in the interest of us all**

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CALLING home from your holiday in Europe has just got a lot cheaper thanks to EU moves to force operators to slash so-called mobile phone 'roaming' charges. Just one of the many practical ways that EU membership helps us all.

Indeed, the EU has given us the largest single market in the world, social and environmental standards higher than anywhere else, and unrivalled standards of democracy, human rights and protection of minorities.

On global issues such as climate change, poverty in the developing world, and peace in the middle east, it is the EU that has taken the international lead.

At home, Euro funding has generated investment of around £3 billion in the Welsh economy, supporting the creation of 40,500 new jobs and 1,900 new businesses.

It is European legislation which has enshrined the entitlement to four weeks holiday pay, the right to 26 weeks of maternity leave, the provision of clearer food labelling and free medical help across Europe for holidaymakers.

But Europe has changed. Enlargement to 27 members and the new global political, social and economic landscape means the challenges we face today are very different to those of ten years ago.

The fact is that in order to build a greener, more prosperous and secure future, the EU must adapt and reform.

And so the EU reform treaty proposes a package of sensible measures to make EU institutions work better in order to ensure we can meet the growing challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This is in our country's national interest because multilateral action and a functioning Europe will mean that we can really contribute to efforts to deal with global problems. Institutional paralysis serves nobody's interest.

The reform treaty is not a blueprint for a European super-state. Nor does it mean we will lose control of our borders or of our welfare system. Our independence on foreign and defence policy will remain intact.

In fact, the treaty will enhance the EU's democratic accountability. It will reduce the size of the European Commission and include a clear set of checks and balances – including the involvement of national parliaments and increased powers for the European Parliament. For the first time, national parliaments will be able to send new EU legislation back to Brussels.

Of course nothing is yet signed and sealed – the EU reform treaty will not be finalised until the end of 2007. And this can only be after the agreement from all Member States' governments.

But let's be clear, the idea of sweeping away all the pre-existing treaties and replacing them with a "Constitution" has been completely abandoned. British opt-outs, opt-ins and clarifications mean that there is no substance to claims that this is a European Constitution in disguise. What we have is an *amendment* of existing treaties.

It is for this reason that I firmly believe there is no justification for calling for a referendum.

The UK has never held a referendum on any international European treaty. And this treaty deals far less with issues of integration than did the Single European Act signed by Margaret Thatcher and the Maastricht Treaty signed by John Major.

Britain's tradition is as a parliamentary democracy and, as with previous treaties, the reform treaty should be scrutinised and debated on by elected representatives in the Houses of Parliament.

The vast majority of those calling for a referendum are simply Europhobes who see this as an opportunity to weaken the UK's position within the EU and to build up the pressure for us to leave.

In a globalised world, this is extremely dangerous. Today, few problems stop at national borders and we are all interdependent, whether we like it or not.

The vagaries of our climate now remind us that we cannot tackle supra-national phenomenon alone. Indeed, we must make common cause with our 26 European partners to deal with everything from climate change, Russian nationalism and Iran, to energy security, migration and international crime and terror.

That is why we should engage fully as members of the EU and exert maximum influence. To make Europe work better is in Britain's interest and in the interest of every family and community in Wales and the UK.

**Glenys Kinnock is MEP for Wales**