

Be you Euro-sceptic or Euro-fan, if you are living in the Canary Islands or own property here, that has been made a lot easier courtesy of the institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Younger readers may not realise the changes that have been made in recent decades courtesy of what was once the EEC, now termed the European Union. Ease of travel, the right to work in any EU country, the right to avail of social security services – dole, health access, state sponsored education, recognition of diplomas and degrees and work-related certificates, or the basic right to live and look for work in another country – all made easier by your country's membership of the EU.

Just consider the plight of the many thousands of illegal immigrants who try and move to Spain, or the UK, or Germany, or any number of EU countries. While some may be political asylum seekers, the vast majority are in search of a better way of life, a job, rights to the very things we take for granted. And prior to joining the EU many of our new neighbours, particularly those from former Eastern Europe, were among the swathes of those trying to cross borders illegally.

As the EU has grown in stature and in size, there have been changes in the institutions of the Union, moves to make the parliament and the Commission less unwieldy, more responsive, to move these bodies into a modern model of a functioning Union. That's no easy task, given the population of the Union (499.7 million in 2009) and the needs of those people and the member states they belong to. Many groups in member-states have worried that increasing the powers of bodies in Brussels takes too much indigenous control away from national parliaments and are concerned that decisions that have, hitherto, been the remit of their elected governments, or the people (depending on individual constitutions and how referenda work in each country) will now be made by unconnected parliamentarians abroad. The pro-EU groups contend that rather than denude national administrations, the strengthening of the European bodies works to underline new democratic and judicial rights, further protects human and civil and societal rights and is for the good of all EU citizens.

The devolution of powers in the areas of finance, defence, social protections



THE EUROPEAN UNION

Embracing Lisbon

□ By Clio O'Flynn

Whether we like it or not the EU is an integral part of our lives.



– I am thinking here for instance, of the issue of abortion in Ireland – have, in sensitive situations, had specific protections built in to allow individual states to retain certain powers and laws or introduce derogation clauses into EU legislation so that their country is exempt from a particular law.

After years of negotiating and wrangling, and more than a few hiccups along the way, the Lisbon Treaty

finally came into being on December 1st last year, and though it's very early days, the loudly heralded negatives that the anti-treaties would have had us believe were just around the corner have yet to surface.

The Treaty of Lisbon amends the current EU and EC treaties, without replacing them. It provides the Union with the legal framework and tools necessary to meet future challenges and to re-

1. President of the EU, Jose Manuel Barroso, visits the Social Partners in Ireland during negotiations

2. The Lisbon treaty was finally ratified by all member states and came into being in December 2009

3. The Canary Islands and other representatives of the ultra-peripheral regions during a meeting with Regional Policy member Danuta Hübner

spond to citizens' demands. There is a strengthened role for the European parliament, with important new powers regarding EU legislation, the EU budget and international agreements. In particular, the increase of co-decision procedure in policy-making ensures that the European Parliament is placed on an equal footing with the Council of Ministers, representing Member States, for the vast

bulk of EU legislation.

In parallel to the increased role for the parliament, the treaty should also see increased involvement of national parliaments, and there's a new tool in place to monitor that the Union only acts where results can be better attained at EU level (subsidiarity).

As the Union expanded in recent years decision making was perceived as becoming unwieldy, so under the Lisbon Treaty qualified majority voting is extended to new policy areas. From 2014 on, the calculation of qualified majority will be based on the double majority of Member States and people, thus representing the dual legitimacy of the Union. A double majority will be achieved when a decision is taken by 55 per cent of the Member States representing at least 65 per cent of the Union's population. This was a thorny issue, especially for some smaller states who thought their sovereignty over certain issues would

be under threat, but those fears appear to have been eased.

The issue of the effects of what might be seen as a greater centralisation of powers is of direct relevance to the Canary Islands. The Regional Policy statement of the EU points to the fact that, "historically, economic activity, as well as the capital stock and qualified human resources, have, with a few exceptions, been concentrated in the most central areas of the Union...Recent studies of the effect of integration on regional balance in the EU have emphasised the need for accompanying policies to prevent a possible widening of disparities between the stronger and weaker areas. This conclusion is based on the recognition that economic location is characterised by important externalities, some positive, some negative, and that there is no reason to think that market forces alone will strike the right balance between positive and negative effects and so result in balanced economic development across the EU as a whole.

"To give practical content to the concept of centre-periphery, an index of accessibility has been developed, which measures for each region the time needed to reach other regions weighted by their economic importance. It should be emphasised that this index involves a good deal of estimation and that it represents the position at the present time rather than what it might be in the future, given the current development of infrastructure in peripheral regions (partly financed by the Structural Funds) and, perhaps more importantly, given the implications for the concept of accessibility of the development of the information society." With the Islands classified as ultra-peripheral regions their place in the greater picture is given relevant priority given what is perceived as their "structural handicaps" and relative accessibility. Their classification at Region Objective 1, making them eligible for structural funding, has also been beneficial, with nearly €11 billion received between 2000 and 2007. The status has also allowed the regional government to create and operate the ZEC zone.

The position of the Canaries, along with the other ultra-peripheral regions - Guadeloupe, French Guyana, Martinique, Reunion, the Azores and Madeira (as defined by Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of

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