

## EU PHRASEBOOK

Four times, European voters have said 'No' to European Union treaties: in Ireland on 7 June 2001 (Nice Treaty), France and Holland on 29 May and 1 June 2005 (European Constitution), and again Ireland on 12 June 2008 (Lisbon Treaty). Four times, European leaders responded by effectively saying, *No doesn't really mean no*.

This phrasebook - by the civil liberties campaigning group, the Manifesto Club - documents 27 different ways in which politicians from all 27 EU countries sought to avoid or neutralise these no-votes. Politicians said: 'people didn't understand the treaty', 'No voters are ungrateful', or 'There is no Plan B'; they treated the vote as an obstacle around which to manoeuvre. By documenting these linguistic twists and turns, this phrasebook seeks to expose politicians' contemptuous attitude towards the public - and to say in plain English (or French, or Dutch) that no *does* actually mean no.

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MANIFESTO CLUB

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27 WAYS TO SAY  
NO DOESN'T  
REALLY MEAN NO

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MANIFESTO CLUB

27 WAYS TO SAY:  
NO DOESN'T *REALLY* MEAN NO

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## THE SOLUTION

*After the uprising of the 17<sup>th</sup> June  
The Secretary of the Writer's Union  
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee  
Stating that the people  
Had forfeited the confidence of the government  
And could win it back only  
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier  
In that case for the government  
To dissolve the people  
And elect another?*

BERTOLT BRECHT

## FOREWORD

Four times, European voters have said 'No' to European Union treaties: in Ireland on 7 June 2001 (Nice Treaty), France and Holland on 29 May and 1 June 2005 (European Constitution), and again Ireland on 12 June 2008 (Lisbon Treaty). Four times, European leaders responded by effectively saying, *No doesn't really mean no*.

For most people, a vote is a question asked, and an answer received. Yet European and national politicians from all 27 European countries treated the 'no' votes not as answers, but as obstacles to be negotiated. They deployed a variety of creative phrasing and reasoning to indicate why the vote did not really count, and how it could be avoided.

Their response recalls Bertolt Brecht's poem, 'The Solution'. After each no-vote, politicians said that the vote did not mean that the treaty had failed, or that European leaders had failed. It was the voters who had failed; the voters had, said one European official, failed to come to the 'right decision'. The voters had forfeited the confidence of their governments, and could win it back only by redoubled efforts.

The phrases European politicians used in the aftermath of these no-votes are curiously revealing. The response of leader after leader reveals the upside-down world of European politics: not a political

structure obliged to reflect the will of the people, but instead, the people are called upon to reflect the will of the political structure. The people are asked to affirm: they are asked to say ‘yes’. Politicians’ language lays bare the inverted political reasoning that has become second nature across the continent.

By their words we shall know them. In their topsy turvy world, rejection of the text was taken as confirmation of its validity. The Irish vote was ‘not really against the treaty’, they said, since people voted on issues that had ‘nothing to do with this treaty’ (see *Phrase 1* in this book). The French voted not ‘about text, but rather about a context’, and therefore their vote was not really a rejection of the constitution. Dropping the text is unthinkable. Leaders had ‘invested so much political capital and time and energy’ in the document, and they are ‘not now going to rewrite’ (*Phrase 7*).

European leaders had ‘jointly declared’ the treaty ‘absolutely necessary’. It had been a ‘unique historic responsibility’ for voters to be given the chance to pass it (*Phrase 25*). The fact that they did not was ‘disappointing’, an ‘unexpected shock’, and ‘very, very, very troubling’. Indeed, in the case of the Irish people in particular it was ‘a real cheek’, given that they ‘have counted a lot on Europe’s money’ (*Phrase 8*).

It is not the treaty that had failed; it was the voters. The votes were described as a ‘block’ to the policymaking process, or an ‘obstacle to the timetable’. There was a danger that the rejection of the text could prevent the ‘necessary reforms from taking place’. In response,

EU leaders need to (after Brecht) find ‘a solution’, to what they call the ‘Irish problem’. They need to ‘move on’, ‘find a way forward’, and get the European project ‘back on track’. They need to see how ‘the process can be opened up again’, and hope that a ‘pragmatic management of the crisis’ could ‘lead to a solution’ (*Phrase 24*).

In fact, European politicians concluded, the no-votes were actually a block on European democracy. Their desired reforms had sought to democratise the EU, and so the no-votes – which went against these reforms – were therefore a block on democracy. As a result, the vote was a ‘great disappointment’ for ‘all those who wanted to achieve greater democracy’ in the EU. Yet they say that they will not allow the no-vote to stop these necessary democratic reforms; they will ‘not give up’ in their attempt to make the EU ‘more democratic and more open and more effective’ (*Phrase 5*).

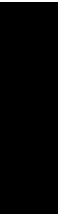
Leaders cannot allow a vote to obstruct the planned reforms. ‘A no vote is destructive’, they said, it is an attempt to ‘stop Europe at the red light’, and could lead to a very ‘negative atmosphere’. Indeed, asks one Spanish MEP, have the Irish not considered ‘the problems they have created?’ (*Phrase 12*). Luckily, European policymaking is a ‘long-term strategic process which cannot be hindered by any single referendum’. In 2001, politicians affirmed that a vote ‘cannot block the [EU’s] biggest and most important project’; in 2008, they said that Europe ‘cannot afford

## 27 WAYS TO SAY: NO DOESN'T REALLY MEAN NO

- 1 *The vote was not a rejection of the treaty*
- 2 *People didn't understand the treaty*
- 3 *The treaty is necessary*
- 4 *People should vote again*
- 5 *The referendum was undemocratic*
- 6 *The vote is disappointing*
- 7 *Politicians have worked hard on this deal*
- 8 *No-voters are ungrateful*
- 9 *There is no plan B*
- 10 *No votes damage the national interest*
- 11 *No votes damage the economy*
- 12 *No votes damage Europe*
- 13 *No votes could cause another Holocaust*
- 14 *Voters are afraid of Europe*
- 15 *No voters are neocons/catholics/communists/b\*\*\*\*\**
- 16 *We respect the vote*
- 17 *We will analyse the vote*
- 18 *We will find a way to get them to say yes*
- 19 *Anti-EU campaigns are populist*
- 20 *... all voting is populist*
- 21 *We must stop no-votes spreading*
- 22 *Europe must not lose faith*
- 23 *We need to explain Europe better to people*
- 24 *The European process must go on*
- 25 *Countries have a responsibility to vote yes*
- 26 *If they don't vote yes they will be excluded*
- 27 *The vote hasn't changed anything really ...*

# PHRASE 12

*No votes damage Europe*



*A No vote is destructive.*

JEAN ASSELBORN, Luxembourg foreign minister,  
25 May 2005

*Have the Irish given any thought to the problems they have created and how fragile Europe is when it's divided?*

ÍÑIGO MÉNDEZ DE VIGO, Spanish MEP,  
8 October 2008

*EU governments can no longer afford to procrastinate – Europe's security is being jeopardized.*

LORD GEORGE ROBERTSON, member of European Council on Foreign Relations, after the Irish no-vote  
29 July 2008

*Everyone wants to know if Europe will move forward, if France will help it go through the green light, or if France will stop Europe at the red light.*

JEAN-PIERRE RAFFARIN, French prime minister,  
before the French vote, 17 May 2005

*The member states have invested so much political capital in the Lisbon Treaty and it is very unlikely that they will give up that easily. There is a risk that this would lead to a negative atmosphere.*

MARGOT WALLSTRÖM, European Commission vice-president, 14 June 2008

*If there is a No vote there will be 10 naked flag-poles and who will be responsible? Us.*

ALAN DUKES, former Fine Gael leader, before re-run of Irish Nice Treaty vote, 21 October 2002

*It would be perceived as a weakness of France, and of Europe. Outside of the EU, in the US, in China, people would say: Europe is not even capable of agreeing on a Constitutional treaty ... It would be very bad.*

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO, European Commission president, before French vote on European Constitution, May 2005

*An unpleasant development for the progress of European integration.*

ANNA PSAROUDA-BENAKI, Greek Parliament president, responds to the French 'no' vote, June 2005

*A referendum now would bring Europe into danger. There will be no Treaty if we had a referendum in France, which would again be followed by a referendum in the UK.*

NICOLAS SARKOZY, French president, at meeting of MEPS, 14 November 2007