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Letter from Brussels October 2009

So the Irish have now convincingly voted yes to the Lisbon Treaty, the Polish President has signed up for his country, which just leaves the Czech Republic to ratify. Actually the Czech President has been refusing to sign, which I find interesting in that most anti-Europeans accuse the EU of being against democracy and here we have a President refusing to accept the will of the Parliament. Some might ask why there was such a big turnaround in Ireland. I think there are four reasons: Firstly, this time around the debate concentrated on the Lisbon treaty and the future of the European Union and not on other issues like legalised abortion or Irish neutrality which have nothing to do with the Treaty. Secondly, the yes campaign was far more active. Thirdly, many Irish resented the foreign interference that bankrolled the no campaign, especially from the UK and US. Fourthly, many Irish recognised that without the European Union helping them, the economic crisis in the Emerald Isle would have been far worse than it actually was, with a great danger of the country simply being bankrupt. At the end of the day, the Irish people by a massive 2 to 1 margin realised that they needed to be at the heart of Europe, and not as our Tories would have us on the periphery. Speaking of the British Tories, it didn't take them long after the Irish result to start falling out amongst themselves followed by contradictions as to what Cameron might do. Fact is the Irish people did a job of pulling the European rug from under Cameron's feet.

More rights for our passengers

Some of you may remember the demise of XL Airlines that left a lot of people stranded, mainly on Mediterranean Islands unable to get home. Interestingly enough, 77 Airlines have gone bust in the European Union since 2000 leaving a trail of misery from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean and from Eastern Europe to the Canary Islands. In many cases passengers have been left stranded and without compensation for the costs they incurred or the misery endured. Now I have submitted to the European Parliament a resolution to end this state of affairs. Now if you book a package holiday your rights are protected by European law under the Package Travel Directive. If you book via a travel agent you will be protected by ABTA and ATOL, but if you book flights only on-line you have no protection if the airline concerned goes bust. It is this loophole in the law that I want to close. There is a lot of support from MEP's on this matter, but for me it is important that we ensure that passengers who book flight only deals on non-scheduled airlines, have the same protection as everybody else should they find themselves booked on an airline that has gone bust.

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