

# Small EU countries will lose out from 1st November

By Dr Anthony Coughlan

The most important power-political change made by the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon, which gave the European Union its own Constitution, is that it provides that from Saturday 1 November 2014 law-making in the EU will be based on simple population size/number of citizens, just as in any State.

From that date a qualified majority for making EU laws on the EU Council of Ministers will consist of 55% of the States – which means 15 out of the 28 – as long as that 15 comprise 65% of the total EU population of some 500 million people.

With Germany and France between them having one-third of the EU's population, and half the population of the Eurozone, this provision of the Lisbon Treaty gives these two States a blocking minority on any issue if they can get one or two smaller allies. It also gives them a powerful say in pushing through whatever laws or policy measures they might wish for.

As Germany is the most populous EU State this Lisbon Treaty provision means that from 1st November Germany's voting weight in making EU laws will double from its pre-Lisbon 8% of Council votes – i.e. 29 votes for each of the four biggest States (viz. Germany, France, Italy and Britain) out of a total of 345 votes in all, a weighted majority being 255 – to 16%, because that is Germany's proportion of the total EU population.

Having a shareholding of 16% in a company of 28 shareholders can be close to a controlling interest.

Under this new arrangement the voting weights of France, Italy and Britain will rise from their pre-Lisbon 8% each to 12%

each. Sweden's will fall from 3% to 2% and Ireland's from 2% to less than 1%.

Under the new population-based system post-2014 the six largest EU States will increase their combined share of Council votes from 49% to over 70%, while the combined voting share of the 22 smallest States will fall from 51% to less than 30%.

This provision of the Treaty of Lisbon shows clearly how that treaty was a power-grab by Germany in particular, supported by France, Italy and Britain, to increase its weight in the post-Lisbon European Union.

Since the 1957 Rome Treaty the three or four largest EU States had the same number of votes as one another in making EU laws – currently 29 votes each out of a total of 345. Under the new system from 1 November Germany for the first time will have one-third more relative voting weight than Britain, France or Italy – 16% on a population basis as against 12% for the others.

Germany's population is some 82 million, France's 64 million, the UK's 61 million and Italy's 60 million. The total EU population is 500 million.

It is sometime said that voting rarely take place on the EU Council of Ministers, as if these voting weights do not matter very much. In fact a process of "shadow-voting" takes place all the time whereby Ministers look around to see whether a qualified majority or a blocking minority exists for any proposal. Small countries rarely push matters to a vote if they see that the big countries are agreed on something. Most EU legislation is thus made "by consensus" on the Council, but it is the voting weights which effectively decide whether there will be a consensus or not, and how matters will be decided when there is no consensus.

The relevant voting provisions of the Consolidated EU Treaties

as amended by the Lisbon Treaty are set out in Art.16.4 Treaty on European Union and Art.238(2 and 3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.