

Notre Europe

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## Securing a « Yes »:

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from Nice I to Nice II

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## WHY I CAMPAIGNED ACTIVELY FOR THE RATIFICATION OF NICE II

### BRIGID LAFFAN

The ratification of the Nice treaty represented a critical juncture in Ireland's relations with the European Union and the wider Europe. The Nice ratification battle was as much about contemporary Ireland as it was about Ireland's relationship with Europe and the future of the European Union. It was about different conceptions of Ireland and its place in the world. I was not prepared to remain on the sidelines in a critical national debate. I was motivated by three main concerns. First, the balance sheet of Ireland's 30 years of EU membership was very positive. As a people, we were in danger of forgetting our experience of the EU. Second, the states of central Europe were looking to Ireland to endorse a treaty that would enable them conclude their accessions negotiations smoothly and in time for membership in 2004. Third, many of the assertions and arguments of the 'no' campaign could not be supported by evidence. The language deployed to characterise the EU, notably 'superstate' and 'militarist' was in many instances borrowed from the British Tory right. There was a clear attempt to demonise and misrepresent the European Union and in turn to frighten the electorate about the dynamics of integration and its future trajectory. I felt that as a scholar, the debate should be conducted with attention to evidence and not just assertion. Fourth, Nice I was characterised by a very weak campaign on the 'yes' side. The Government ran a lack lustre campaign that failed to engage or persuade the electorate. The low turnout (34%) and the energy of the 'no' campaign led to the defeat of the Treaty. For me as an Irish citizen, this was one worth fighting for.

All those involved in the Irish Alliance for Europe will remember particular instances that made this campaign worthwhile for them. My strongest memory remains a meeting of the National Forum on Europe in Castlebar in County Mayo where I was speaking on a platform with a Sinn Fein parliamentary candidate, Vincent Woods. The meeting was packed with 'no' supporters who were deeply hostile to my views and message. During the meeting, a Sinn Fein councillor left his seat while I was speaking and began to approach the podium. He yelled at me to get back to the Pale (Dublin) and leave the people of Mayo alone; 'Who do you think you are coming to Mayo telling the people of Mayo how to vote' he shouted at me. I was clearly stereotyped as a Dubliner who did not appreciate the problems of the west of Ireland. In the midst of this palpable hostility, a man stood up in the audience and said that he wanted to tell the meeting what Europe meant to him. This man left the Irish educational system unable to read and write because of dyslexia. EU funded second chance programmes gave him an opportunity to learn to read and as a result his life was transformed. For him, Europe stood for a second chance, for the simple pleasure of being able to read a newspaper or book. This was evidence of the 'living Europe' not the remote disconnected EU of so much discourse. This glimpse of the living Europe made the trip to Castlebar worthwhile.

Aristotle observed that 'one needs to be trained as a citizen as much as a craftsman needs to be trained'. The Irish Alliance for Europe was an exercise in active citizenship and we all

benefited from the training. At a personal level, involvement in the campaign with the Irish Alliance for Europe was a truly rewarding experience. It enabled me to re-connect to a broad cross-section of Irish society. I left the lecture hall and my desk and donned the yellow T-shirt. I learnt that Europe can be communicated.

## **ADRIAN LAGAN**

My involvement in the movement to secure a change in the result of the 1<sup>st</sup> Treaty of Nice referendum sprang from a set of highly personal motives.

One of these was related to what I might call 'home' issues and the other related to issues from 'abroad'.

I come from a rural part of Mayo in the West of Ireland. For decades, arguably for centuries, all that was on offer to people from Mayo was the path of emigration, with all the consequent social dislocation and despair. Our membership of the EEC and then the EU had one crucial impact- it gave us the means, the benign political and economic environment that allowed us to generate solutions to that legacy of economic underdevelopment and its hated lieutenant, emigration.

The other side was as a student of history; I couldn't accept that the Irish people would put a block in the path of the states of Central and Eastern Europe in their desire to join the EU. I found the idea that we would delay it, let alone possibly derail it; a horrendous one and I believed that it was politically vital to prevent that. I didn't want the positive image of Ireland, of which my generation had known virtually no other, to be tarnished by being seen as the barrier to a group of states that only hoped to do what we had done.

As I continually argued with opponents of the treaty during the campaign, the debate was about 2 things- letting enlargement happen and the image of Ireland abroad. If we had voted no, the headlines in the European papers would not have been 'Ireland says no to enhanced co-operation' or 'Ireland says no to changes in the structure of the Commission'. We all know what the headlines would have been and I didn't want to give anyone the excuse to write them.

Above all, I support Europe and the process of integration because for all its failings (and we should never forget them), in the big picture, it works. And it is a hell of a lot better than anything else we have tried.

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# Introduction

The Irish Government, particularly the prime minister Mr. Bertie Ahern, wanted to run the Nice referendum in June 2001 so that Ireland would be the first state to ratify the Treaty. This would get the referendum off the agenda before the 2002 national election. The Prime Minister did not think that he had a difficult or contentious referendum to fight. From his perspective, the Nice Treaty was a housekeeping treaty, largely technical, designed to facilitate enlargement. Given that the Irish electorate had ratified far more significant treaties in the past, a 'yes' vote was anticipated- see Table 1. The two Government parties were delusory in their approach and ran what could only be called a lack lustre campaign. It was left to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister to engage with the media and public on the issue. The remaining Government ministers were not active, nor were the main opposition parties. They were all more concerned with the forthcoming national election. Just three weeks were allocated to the campaign, which was clearly insufficient to engage in public education and persuasion.

By the time the Government realised that it had a problem, it was too late for remedial action. The opinion polls signalled support for the treaty albeit on a declining 'yes' vote. Although there were signs in the last week of the campaign that it might be defeated, most commentators still felt that it would be passed because all previous EU treaties were endorsed by decisive majorities. When the ballot boxes were opened on Friday the 5th of June 2001, a shock awaited the Irish Government, EU institutions and the candidate states. The treaty was defeated by 54% to 46% on a very low turnout of 34%. Ireland's European policy was loose of its moorings. In the aftermath of the referendum, the Government was faced with a difficult external and domestic environment. Externally, the Government tried to assure its partners and the candidate states that it remained committed to the Union and that the defeat of the treaty was not a 'no' to enlargement. Domestically, the Government wanted to create the conditions that would allow it re-run the referendum without being accused of ignoring the will of the Irish people. Its domestic task was far more challenging than its external one.

## I – What Went Wrong?- Analysis of voting behaviour

Immediately after the referendum a quantitative survey financed by the European Commission was carried out to explore the outcome of the referendum. This involved analysing why people voted 'yes' or 'no' and more importantly why they did not vote at all. The quantitative survey was followed a year later by qualitative research on the issues that might surface in a second referendum. The Government, in the immediate aftermath of the referendum, began to put a strategy in place to enable it to hold a second referendum.

The European Commission's quantitative survey of the attitudes and behaviour of the Irish electorate in Nice I (Sinnott R. 2001) had as its purpose to analyse the behaviour of the electorate. The key questions were why did so many stay away (65% of the electorate) from the polling booths and of those who voted what influenced their vote? The research offered considerable insight into the impact of the low turnout on the outcome. Sinnott concluded that some 53% of those who voted 'yes' to the Treaty of Amsterdam abstained in the Nice referendum whereas the abstention rate among 'no' voters was 36%. The survey identified the socio-demographic variables that influenced abstention. These were:

- Skilled or unskilled working class occupation;
- Farmer;
- Living in a rural area;
- Being young, particularly being under 25 (Sinnott, 2001,15)

The survey also provided evidence on what influenced people to abstain. The research suggested that the most significant variable was the sense of not having a grasp or understanding of the issues involved. A significant proportion of the electorate was uneasy about casting a vote for a treaty that they did not understand.

Analysing the 'no' voters was also an important part of the quantitative research. The demographic variables that were likely to lead to a 'no' vote were:

- female gender
- lower middle class (C1)
- the skilled and unskilled working class (C2 and DE)
- farmers.
- being under 35.

The impact of class (lower middle class and skilled and unskilled working class) was not unexpected because people in these socio-economic categories are less economically secure and more likely to be threatened by economic internationalisation. The report found that they may have feared that EU enlargement would threaten their jobs and drive down their wages due to additional competitive pressures. Farmers were also faced with the prospect of

substantial changes to the common agricultural policy in the context of enlargement. The survey offered little insight into the gender dimension of the 'no' vote. However, the survey highlighted a number of attitudinal effects on the propensity to vote 'no'. The most significant attitude that boosted the 'no' vote was concern and dissatisfaction with how the EU was run and a belief that the big countries had too much power in the Union. The second more significant attitude related to Irish neutrality.

In planning the 'yes' campaign, qualitative research was conducted in June and July 2002. This consisted of two phases. Phase one involved a number of focus groups of opinion leaders with the objective of:

- Exploring what went wrong in the last referendum;
- Ensuring that the same mistakes were not made again;
- Anticipating what factors would survive from Nice I to Nice II and what new factors were likely to have an impact.

This was followed by focus groups throughout the country to identify the key issues. The research allowed the 'yes' campaign to understand what were the substantive issues in the referendum and was the means by which an effective communications model and message was developed. Through the research, we were able to identify the core issues in the debate, understand the language to employ and who best would be able to communicate the messages. It was an invaluable exercise. It focussed energies and acted as a compass during the campaign.

#### **WHAT ACTUALLY WENT WRONG IN THE 1ST NICE CAMPAIGN?**

An analysis of the campaign conducted by the political parties in support of the Treaty in the first referendum illustrates the reasons for the failure first time. The key reason as demonstrated above was the low turnout in the referendum (34%). This low turnout was caused primarily by a lack of campaigning effort by the Yes parties and the Government. There was a dangerous assumption of a 'natural' majority for the Yes side, which required little mobilisation. This, along with the concession of intellectual ground to the No side, regular defeats on the public media, particularly on regional media stations and a lack of conviction and confidence allowed the No side to gain momentum. This all stemmed from a lack of organised political activity for the Yes side. While there were some nominal campaigns organised by the main political parties, they failed to mobilise the electorate. The importance of using one's vote, that is critical for political mobilisation, was not conveyed to the electorate,.

The No side were well organised, and focused a collection of resentments against both the EU and the political establishment in Ireland very effectively against the Treaty of Nice. They utilised a number of tactics very successfully:

- They employed 'scattergun' media tactics. They raised a large number of issues, many of a complex and technical nature with the precise objective of confusing voters. The tactic can be summarised in the slogan- "if you don't know, vote no"
- They organised themselves as 'concerned citizens' opposed to the political elite. This tactic, known often as playing the 'anti-politician' is extremely effective in Ireland due to the low levels of public trust and confidence in politicians as a profession and in the political elite generally
- They turned the lack of effort by the Yes side into a campaign issue. They argued with some success that the political class were taking voters for granted by not campaigning hard for a Yes vote

## II – Changing the Context: A Three Pronged Strategy

There were three main pillars to the Government's strategy for re-running the Nice referendum. These were:

- The establishment of a *National Forum on Europe*;
- Enhanced parliamentary scrutiny;
- Seville declarations on Irish neutrality.

A strategy for re-engaging the public with European issues and dealing with their concerns, began immediately after the Nice I defeat. In autumn 2001, the Government established the *Forum on Europe* involving all political parties with representation in the Irish parliament. The Forum began its work with the aid of a small Secretariat and a steering committee. In addition to the plenary, an observer pillar was established involving interested civil society groups. The Forum opened up a space for debate on Europe outside the confines of the Parliament. It held sessions on different topics with invited speakers who brought different perspectives to bear on the issues. In addition to plenary meetings in Dublin, the Forum held a series of meetings throughout the country. This widened the geographical spread of the meetings. The debate generated in the Forum was highly stylised characterised by opposition to or support for the Nice Treaty. There was very little deliberation on substance and no evidence that any of the parties were about to change their positions. The public meetings were rather partisan. Nor was there any mechanism in the Forum to judge the veracity of the claims that were made. However, the Forum tapped into a number of concerns that were clearly out there among the electorate about the European Union and Ireland's engagement with it. There were fears of large state domination and a number of EU directives, notably the habitats directive, were deeply unpopular in certain parts of the country. In addition to highlighting concerns, the Forum brought MEP's, prime ministers, foreign ministers, officials, national parliamentarians, civil society groups, and academics from other European states into the Irish debate. The active engagement of fellow Europeans in an internal Irish debate was welcomed and legitimised. It brought home to the Irish electorate that this was not just an Irish issue. The Forum contributed to the preparation for the holding of a second Nice referendum as the Government could legitimately say that it had created a forum for debate on Europe and was listening to the people. It also contributed to increasing the salience of Europe for Irish politicians. It helped educate Irish domestic parliamentarians on the nature of European governance.

The second element of the Government's response was enhanced parliamentary scrutiny of European affairs. Traditionally, the Irish parliament was a weak parliament in dealing with European issues and was dominated by the executive. New procedures were put in place in July 2002 to alter this. The parliamentary link for the new procedures is the Joint Oireachtas Committee for European Affairs, now called the Select Committee for European Affairs. All EU

related documents are deposited in the EU Coordination Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs and passed on by the Unit to the Select Committee. On receipt of these documents (estimated at approximately 10,000 per year), the clerk of the Select Committee, together with a sub-committee of the Select Committee (informally termed the 'sifting committee') sifts, on a two-weekly basis, through these documents and identifies EU legislative proposals that are significant enough to merit parliamentary scrutiny (according to certain criteria). If the sifting committee so decides, a request is made for the drafting of an explanatory memorandum or 'note' concerning the EU proposal from the relevant department. The note must be received by the EU Coordination Unit of the DFA within one month of the sifting committee's request and it is passed on to the Select Committee Secretariat.

The third element in responding to Nice I were a number of declarations made at the Seville European Council in June 2002. The first was a declaration by Ireland and the second, a declaration of the European Council. Both dealt with the common foreign and security policy. Although fears about neutrality were not the main reason for the defeat of the first referendum, the Government felt that it needed something on neutrality as a flanking measure for the Nice II referendum. The Irish declaration outlined what the Government argues was the position on the common foreign and security policy, namely that Ireland is not bound by any mutual defence commitment. It specifies three conditions, known as the triple lock, for the deployment of Irish troops overseas:

- UN Security Council or General Assembly authorisation;
- agreement of the Irish Government;
- approval of the Irish parliament.

The declaration was simply re-stating the status quo but was felt to be necessary to re-assure a section of the Irish electorate. The declaration of the European Council merely re-states the key tenets of the Irish declaration while recognising that it was up to Ireland to decide on the participation of its troops. Following the declarations, the constitutional amendment that was put before the Irish people the second time in essence provided for an opt-out for Ireland from a future EU common defence. By summer 2002, the Government was sufficiently confident that it had responded to the concerns expressed by the 'no' to Nice vote and was determined to hold a second referendum in the autumn 2002.

## III - The Second Referendum

The second referendum was scheduled for October 19, 2002. Because it was widely anticipated that there would be a second referendum, there was continuous debate on Nice from the defeat of the first referendum in June 2001 to the end of the campaign in October 2002. The Nice II campaign itself lasted about five weeks. The result was a resounding 'yes' vote of 63% to 37% against, with a turnout of 49%, which was significantly up on Nice I. The 'no' vote increased by some 5,000 votes whereas the 'yes' vote doubled in absolute terms, going from just over 450,000 to just over 900,000. This was a remarkable turnaround.

### HOW NICE II WAS WON

There were three key things to be achieved in the second Nice referendum:

#### INCREASE TURNOUT

As outlined in the previous section, the low turnout in Nice I was the main reason for the victory of the No side in the first referendum. The result in June 2001 had been No 54%, Yes 46% on a turnout of 34%. Increasing turnout required political mobilisation to disseminate key messages about how participation was important. The second campaign was therefore characterised by far higher mobilisation on the part of the government parties, the pro-EU opposition parties and civil society groups.

- The two Government parties, Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats ran effective campaigns. Fianna Fail the largest and most successful party in the state, ran a general election style campaign with a major investment of human and material resources. The campaign director was the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Brian Cowen. He was assisted by an experienced campaign team with its own dedicated campaign headquarters. The party used all of the traditional campaigning devices, posters, leaflets, meetings and the media. The Prime Minister made every parliamentarian responsible for securing a 'yes' vote in their constituency. Speaking notes and campaign booklets were prepared for each member of parliament. In addition, senior ministers joined the Prime Minister in campaigning very actively for a 'yes'. The smaller government party, the Progressive Democrats, also ran an active campaign but on a smaller scale. Two opposition parties, Fine Gael and the Labour party supported the ratification of the treaty. Fine Gael, in particular, ran an active campaign with a series of public meetings throughout the country. A former Prime Minister, Mr. John Bruton, a committed European and subsequently a member of the Convention, was responsible for the FG campaign. FG and Labour prepared posters and added to the colour and intensity of the 'yes' campaign.
- Civil society was motivated (see section below on the Irish Alliance for Europe)

- One of the key features of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nice referendum had been the absence of any sense of urgency in the campaign. This had contributed substantially to the low turnout and to the abstention of many erstwhile 'Yes' supporters, as there was no great reason for them to do so. One of the key tasks of the 'Yes' campaign on this occasion therefore was the generation of a sense of national crisis and urgency.

#### **PUTTING BOUNDARIES AROUND THE DEBATE**

In Nice I, one of the key problems had been the proliferation of issues that were raised during the campaign, many of which had not even the slightest connection with the Treaty of Nice.

This was a crucial problem and promised to be an even greater problem in Nice II due to the unpopularity of the recently re-elected Fianna Fail and Progressive Democrat government. Widespread dissatisfaction with the Government threatened to become a major issue in the referendum.

A number of things were done to prevent this happening:

- The involvement of a wide range of organisations, both opposition political parties and civil society organisations made the point that this was referendum was not about the Government- and was not a referendum on the performance of the Government. This tactic was summed up in the Labour Party's campaign poster, which said: "Hold your fire. The Government can wait. Europe Can't. Vote Yes".
- All the organisations campaigning in the referendum for a Yes vote set up a media operation which sent out press releases, organised press conferences and briefed the media regularly on the issues involved. This was vital in keeping the media focused on the key issues in the referendum and allowed the Yes groups to focus on the key messages that they wished to concentrate on. This facility also allowed rapid responses to the issues raised by the No side in the referendum, which allowed the Yes side to stay ahead of the breaking issues. This was a contrast to the 1<sup>st</sup> Nice referendum where the No side were permitted to raise issues that were at best rebutted in a half hearted and not at all comprehensive fashion. These media operations, both within the Government and between the Government parties and the other Yes groups were co-ordinated, albeit loosely, which allowed the 'Yes' campaign as a totality to effectively hammer home key messages.
- A key task of this communications operations was the formulation of a set of messages that had common themes but which were reduced to a set of understandable messages. These messages focussed around the economic needs of Ireland, the importance of remaining at the heart of the European Union, the safeguards and changes which the Irish government had brought about since the 1<sup>st</sup> referendum and also the positive case for allowing enlargement to proceed through supporting the Treaty of Nice



- A corollary of the media operation was the development of a research team, which presented intellectually coherent arguments and fast rebuttals to arguments presented by the No side. This intellectual firepower was utilised by the Yes side to great effect. It had a number of effects- it allowed the Yes side in Nice II to convince large sections of the media of the value and importance of voting Yes. It also provided considerable advantage to the Yes side in the media war that surrounded the campaign as it allowed them to respond faster and quicker to threats and opportunities.

#### **BUILDING A FRESH CAMPAIGN**

One of the key strategic objectives of the second Nice campaign was to broaden the look and feel of the campaign. In the first referendum as previously outlined, there was a lack of campaigning generally but a crucial problem was the absence of a wide front for the pro-European position. The 1<sup>st</sup> Nice campaign saw a poorly organised campaign by at most the four pro-European political parties, and in total they spent approximately €100,000 between them.

The second Nice referendum saw the following group's campaign in favour of the referendum:

- Fianna Fail
- Fine Gael
- The Labour Party
- The Progressive Democrats
- Irish Alliance for Europe
- Ireland for Europe - youth group
- Disability Alliance for a Yes Vote
- IBEC (Employers Confederation)
- Chambers of Commerce of Ireland
- ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions)
- Women for Europe
- Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association
- Small Firms Association

This is not an authoritative list- there were also a range of other smaller groups as well as more established trade and professional organisations.

The range of activity that was generated has not been authoritatively compiled but the overall effect was to create a substantial campaign with considerably higher public visibility than in the first referendum.

## THE IRISH ALLIANCE FOR EUROPE – A CIVIL SOCIETY CAMPAIGN

The Irish Alliance grew organically from a number of different sectors. After Nice I, a large number of people in Irish society were left reeling at the result. Many of these individuals were not associated with a political party and were anxious to find a campaigning vehicle that they could support in the second referendum.

There is a wide consensus among all those involved in the campaign about their motivation for getting involved in the second Nice referendum- a sense of guilt that nothing had been done the first time and an (increasingly) steely determination not to let it happen this time. Many of the already existing civil society groups in Ireland had already been energised to play a part in Nice II and were planning their own campaigns for this occasion. IBEC, the employers federation, the Chambers of Commerce and the Irish Farmers Association (IFA) to name a few were preparing to argue the case for Nice with their memberships. The thinking behind the Alliance for Europe was to act as a campaigning vehicle, bringing together and speaking for all these groups, thus gaining instant credibility for the Alliance, while not undermining the campaigning efforts of the groups themselves.

The Alliance started with a series of meetings between some of the main players in these existing organisations and with other interested parties and individuals. These meetings were exploratory in nature, designed to tease out many of the issues that would have to be resolved to get the campaign up and running. The Irish Alliance for Europe had one central job in the campaign- to create the sense that there was an alternative non-political party campaign in existence, even if people couldn't tell you that it was the 'Irish Alliance for Europe'.

The logo of the Irish Alliance for Europe was highly effective in terms of refreshing the brand image of 'Nice' as something that had to be sold again to the Irish people. The process of designing the logo and the tag lines depended heavily on the research process. From the research, professional services were employed to develop effective messages and images that would be successful in terms of the campaign. What was produced was a distinctive campaign logo, with the tag line, 'We're Better off in Europe'. The colour scheme was designed specifically in response to the colour choice of the 'No' side. If they were to be red and black, intimidating and threatening, The Irish Alliance for Europe was re-assuring, colourful, bright and more reflective of Ireland's real experience in relation to Europe- that we had nothing to fear and that the Nice Treaty was but the next stage in a process that had been extremely beneficial to Ireland. This strategy worked well and it was widely felt that these posters and leaflets were extremely effective. They complemented the posters of the other groups campaigning for a 'Yes' vote. Fianna Fail's approach was simplicity personified- clear simple messages on a plain background. The Irish Alliance for Europe positioned itself, through its logo, and through the manner it was employed, posters, t-shirts and leaflets as the young, fresh, vibrant heart of the pro-European side.

The Alliance structured itself by having a Network Council, made up of representatives of all the groups involved in the Alliance, and a Campaign Committee, which organised day-to-day activity. The Network Council met weekly during the campaign to discuss the events of the

campaign and to plan activity. The campaign was very deliberately structured to allow each group to go their own way and carry out activity as they saw fit. It fitted the idea of 'disorganised organisation' in which the visual impact of the civil campaign was not to appear too organised, too controlled and too professional.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE 'NO' SIDE**

There has been historically a very strong political consensus among the main political parties in Ireland about the value of European integration. Opposition to the project therefore has manifested itself through civil society groups and 'new' political movements. In Nice I and II they were highly effective at bringing out 'their vote'. They manifested themselves in a number of ways, which should be analysed separately first.

## **THE GREEN PARTY**

The Greens were identified by focus group research as the biggest threat to the 'yes' campaign. Identified as 'clean' and honest, a political group 'that would not lie to you', they had high markings on the honesty stakes and were therefore very likely to be believed by voters. Their campaign was a repeat of Nice I and was a great opportunity for the party to make further electoral inroads and generate excellent publicity for their main activists.

Their campaign started well but began to hit a number of problems. Their association with the right wing No to Nice campaign made many of their activists uncomfortable. Above all else, public opinion survey findings that their membership was deeply divided over the question of Nice also did not help their morale. Further, the reality that a number of their newer and vibrant public representatives were not taking a very active role in the campaign was a problem. A series of media coups by the 'Yes' side meant that the Greens were on the defensive during the campaign and the establishment of a group called 'Green Party supporters for Yes' was clearly embarrassing and damaging to their campaign. The lingering sense that European Greens were at odds with the Irish Green party also impacted on their activity. That said, they did fight a hard campaign, were well organised and the media performances of many of their key players were strong.

## **SINN FEIN**

Sinn Fein was, as always, well organised and concentrated on what they considered their core vote. There were a lot of high profile media performances for Gerry Adams and other leading figures. Certainly, their campaign was substantial but the high negative ratings of Sinn Fein among our target group of voters made their presence helpful in many ways in that they acted as a positive spur to Yes abstainers to support the referendum.

## **THE *NO TO NICE* CAMPAIGN**

A conservative, nationalist and Catholic movement, which was certainly the most active bloc of the No side. They printed large amounts of material, placed thousands of posters around the country, were innovative, determined and well -organised. They utilised their conservative Catholic connections to good effect, particularly through 'free-sheet' newspapers, distributed at Catholic masses throughout the country.

Their campaign suffered something of a setback when their leader Justin Barrett was found to have attended meetings of a far-right nature in Germany. The publicity around this event certainly helped our side and demoralised the 'No' camp generally. However, they remained intact as a campaign and the figures clearly demonstrate that they affected many people's decision.

## **OTHER GROUPS**

Afri, Alliance against Nice, Democrats against Nice, Libertarians Against Nice, Comhlamh, the Socialist Party, Dana, the Socialist Workers Party, PANA, the National Platform and a variety of others all ran campaigns of varying intensity against Nice. They were determined and continue to generate a sense of the disillusionment of unofficial Ireland about the project. In that sense, the sum of their parts was more important than themselves individually and they generated a lot of activity during the campaign.

## **SUMMARY OF THE *NO* SIDE**

The No side made a number of tactical and strategic mistakes in Nice II. They did not seek to grow their vote and that is something they will continue to find difficult. That said, 37% of the electorate were swayed by their views and they continue to tap into a sense in about 15-20% of the entire electorate that the European project is not for them and is something to be continually opposed.

This raises a major problem for the 'Yes' side in two scenarios:

- A collapse in turnout (as in Nice I)
- A Treaty, which contains a measure that would significantly alienate one of the supporting blocks on the 'yes' side (be that business or farmers or other).

## Eight Key Lessons from the Nice II Referendum

1. Any political referendum campaign needs a hook- something to frame the debate about. It could not be in our case about the technical details of the Treaty as these were too complex and not motivational. The hook was to focus on the *consequences* of a 'Yes' vote and a 'No' vote for Ireland. We concentrated on the fact that a No vote would not bring about the status quo but would damage our interests, both economically and from the point of view of our international reputation.
2. The campaign battle in any election is fought primarily on the media, especially radio and television. In a referendum campaign, with low motivation among party activists this becomes even more important. It was vital to construct a communications infrastructure that was rapid in its ability to respond, which utilised language that was not complex or technical and which was also grounded in analysis that could be subjected to a rigid intellectual critique. Robust communications structures are required to fight this media battle- it is essential that different campaigns on the Yes side are in communication with one another to agree on broad lines of communication strategy.
3. The No side must be attacked constantly to keep them on the defensive. It was vital to prevent them developing new lines of argumentation. It was also essential to expose them as having vested interests, as being extremists and ideologues and to present them as having no solutions only critiques for this crisis. It is also essential that an 'enemy' can be highly motivational- in our case Gerry Adams opposition to the Treaty was a powerful spur to the middle class to Vote Yes.
4. Research on public attitudes is vital to get a real understanding of the motivation of the public. This information informs campaign strategy at all times.
5. Broadening the visual look and feel of the campaign is essential. 'No' campaigns all over Europe utilise similar tactics and using anti-establishment language is central to their pitch to the electorate in any referendum campaign. Having a Yes campaign with students, young people, women, people with disabilities and others to the fore is an essential response to this tactic. The need to create space for these voices in the campaign is something that political leaders as well as established civil society leaders find difficult to accept but it is nonetheless essential.
6. Conducting research on the likely positions and political motivation of the groups on the No side is a very useful and important exercise.
7. Framing and shaping the debate is crucial. It is essential that a Yes campaign works extremely hard to create a sense of what is legitimate to discuss in the context of the campaign. This requires detailed media briefing, aggressive media performances and printed material re-iterating key messages such as 'This is not a referendum on whether or not you like the Government. This is a referendum about Ireland's economic future and its place in Europe'.
8. The Yes campaigns employed the tactic of 'small numbers, high visibility'. Having small groups of people with high visibility material going to areas of highest population density for both media opportunities and to canvass works very successfully and generates a sense of the existence of a real and vibrant campaign.

# Annex

**Table 1: Irish Voting Patterns in European Referenda 1972-2002**

	Percentage Votes in Favour	Percentage Votes Against	Voter Turnout
1972 EC Membership	83.1	16.9	70.9
1987 Single European Act	69.9	30.1	43.9
1992 Maastricht Treaty	69.1	30.9	57.3
1998 Amsterdam Treaty	61.7	38.3	54.9
2001 Nice Treaty	46.1	53.9	34.8
2002 Nice Treaty	62.9	37.1	49.5

Sinnott, Richard, 2001, Attitudes and Behaviour of the Irish Electorate in the Referendum on the Treaty of Nice, <http://www.euireland.ie>.

Study available in French and english on the website <http://www.notre-europe.asso.fr>

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