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Reframing the EU Reform Process -- through Song responding to the Irish challenge to the Lisbon Treaty

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Introduction

Much has been said about the Irish "no" vote and the constitutional challenge for Europe. New thinking would seem to be scarce or, worse still, of a problematic nature. This tends to confirm impressions which resulted in the "no" vote.

It is most unfortunate that the main formal response of Europe has been the request to the Irish to "vote again" -- totally disrespectful of democratic process. This sets a curious precedent in that it occurred within the same time period as the call for a second vote by Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. Is the future of democracy to be defined in terms of a "Mugabe-model"? When will it then be inappropriate to call for a "second vote" -- if many disapprove of the results of the first?

Why should the Irish -- as bearers of a democratic message -- be required to solve a problem that European officialdom repeatedly refuses to acknowledge? Where are the other options articulated by Europe, as argued by Timothy Garton Ash (*Instead of bullying the Irish, Europe should be working on plan D - and E*, *The Guardian*, 19 June 2008).

The following offers a pointer to a way of reframing the challenge completely -- through song.

Incomprehensibility of the Lisbon Treaty

Much has been made of the length and incomprehensibility of the Lisbon Treaty. It has been acknowledged that many responsible politicians have not read it.

It has however been argued that many voters are opposed to the Treaty out of ignorance -- through having failed to understand the necessity of the reforms for the desirable future development of Europe.

The fact that the complexity may well have been used to bury measures, which many would later regret, is not a matter of debate.

Role of song

If only in popular engagement in the Eurovision Song Contest, song has offered a means of giving a degree of coherence to Europe across frontiers.

Song has had a culturally vital role in articulating the spirit of a country -- as is evident in the continuing use of national anthems. Official Europe has been recently obliged to renounce its use since 1971 of a *European Anthem*, ironically as part of the proposed European Reform Treaty.

Unfortunately the style of the anthem used might be said to correspond, in terms of its lack of popular appeal, to precisely the challenge faced by the Reform Treaty itself.

This is not to deny the huge importance attached to song in reframing and giving coherence to understanding of subtle and complex

issues.

In this respect, it is appropriate to note that the German [Research Institute for Applied Knowledge Processing](#) (FAW), under the direction of Prof. Dr. Franz Josef Radermacher, reinforced an articulation of the challenge of responding to complex social problems by the use of a set of [12 songs](#) in *The Globalization Saga: Balance or Destruction*, 2004 -- as the CD accompaniment to a book (*Balance or Destruction: ecosocial market economy as the key to global sustainable development*. Vienna, Oekosoziales Forum Europa, 2004), in association with the [Global Marshall Plan Initiative](#)

Where is the CD of songs to accompany the Lisbon Reform Treaty? If the values and significance of that Treaty cannot be articulated in song, are they worthy of popular support? Worse still, **if it is not singable, is it memorable?**

Proposal: an Irish challenge to articulate the Lisbon Reform issues in song

Many European countries attach great importance to song and its capacity to carry values of significance to the aspirations of their peoples -- most notably Ireland.

If Ireland is to be challenged to solve the problems it has posed for Europe, let Ireland challenge European peoples to articulate the appeal of the Lisbon Reform proposals in song. Let those favouring particular aspects articulate them in song. Let those opposing do the same. The best songs would hold many such "voices".

This can be framed as a worthy cultural approach which many would find comprehensible.

For officialdom favouring support of the Lisbon Treaty, rather than funding yet more legal experts to articulate and explain its Articles, why should songwriters not be commissioned to articulate the merits of the Treaty? It is assumed that the envisaged Europe, that the Treaty is designed to enable, has a cultural dimension. The Treaty is assumed to be of significance to the coherence of European culture. Is this not an occasion to take this seriously?

Again, if a model of seriousness like the German [Research Institute on Applied Knowledge Processing](#) can understand the relevance of song, is there not a strong case for the European Commission to do so -- especially given its effort to position itself within an emerging knowledge society?

Curiously, on the occasion of the 6-hour visit of Nicolas Sarkozy to Dublin to listen to the views of the Irish people, 21 parties and lobby groups were each allowed to make three minute presentations (*EU reform: Sarkozy tackles Dublin over Lisbon*, *The Guardian*, 22 July 2008). This compares very closely with the average time of a CD song track or a YouTube video. Had the presentations been sung, would they have been more memorable -- and worth reproducing for wider dissemination?

Detailed arguments and research in support of this proposal

These arguments, with indication of precedents, are presented in two separate documents:

- [A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic?](#)
 - [Guidelines for consideration](#)
 - [Policy implications: a "Concert of Democracies"?](#)
 - [Cognitive engagement with complexity](#)
 - [Individual identity within global frameworks](#)
 - ["Singing the Earth"](#)
 - [Sustaining collective memory of articulations of collective intent](#)
 - [Distinctions relevant to technical considerations](#)
 - [Organizational implementation](#)
- [Participative Development Process for Singable Declarations](#): Applying the Wikipedia-Wikimedia-WikiMusic concept to constitutions

Earlier documents argue for the importance of seeking complementary modes for articulating declarations and treaties

- [Animating the Representation of Europe](#)
- [Structuring Mnemonic Encoding of Development Plans and Ethical Charters using Musical Leitmotifs](#)
- [Poetry-making and Policy-making: arranging a Marriage between Beauty and the Beast](#)
- [Aesthetics of Governance in the Year 2490](#)

Precedent: Lisbon Treaty Song and Irish competitive singing

[Libertas](#), the organization based in Ireland campaigning for the NO vote prior to the Irish referendum on the EU reform treaty, commissioned a song -- *Easy Come Easy Go*. It is sung by Belfast born folk singer [Liam Tiernan](#).

The song, and the accompanying visual images, present an argument well. It is worthy of a response in a similar mode.

It is vital to recall the extent to which Gaelic song (*sean-nós*) served as a powerful unifying symbol of language, literature, and lore for Gaelic revivalists and Irish cultural nationalists at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the epitome of Ireland as not-England. There may be every reason to believe that this view is in some way extended from "not-England" to "not-Europe". The term *sean-nós*, literally meaning "old style," has facilitated Irish discourses of authenticity and identity.

This authenticity and sense of identity has been sustained and refined through the annual *Oireachtas* competitive festival, the most important forum for unaccompanied singing in Gaelic today. Singing competitions provide the most high-profile and popular outlets for

those who sing in the Irish language. *Oireachtas na Gaeilge*, established in 1897 by the Gaelic League, offers a weekend of song which is unrivalled for the intensity of the experience. This has reinforced the radical separation of Irish and English language singing (as argued by Anthony McCann and Lillis Ó Laoire, *Raising One Higher than the Other*, 2003).

Given the possible conflation of significance, it is perhaps highly appropriate to note that the term *Oireachtas*, meaning "gathering", is used to refer both to annual competitions (as described above and of the [Irish Dance Championship](#)) as well as to the [Irish National Parliament](#). In how many countries is strategic debate so readily associated in popular culture with competitive singing and challenge by song?

Opportunity for a "Eurosong Vision Contest"?

It is perhaps fortunate that the European constitutional crisis over the Irish No vote coincides with the presidency of [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) -- of the Council of the European Union. Much has been made by the media of the role of his new wife [Carla Bruni](#) in relation to the presidency of France. Following their marriage early in 2008, she has continued to promote her career as songwriter and singer -- even from the context of the [Élysée Palace](#), the official residence of the President of the French Republic.

Her album, *No Promises* contained poems by the Irish poet [W. B. Yeats](#), and others, set to music and released in January 2007. The following album (*As if nothing happened*) was released in July 2008 --after the Irish vote.

Given the role of Nicolas Sarkozy in endeavouring to persuade the Irish people of the merits of the Lisbon Treaty, and given the role and competence of his partner as a singer, does this not constitute an unusual opportunity in international relations for them to engage together with the Irish people, and those of other nations -- through song? Might the Irish people not respond to the opportunity by inviting Carla Bruni to help promote the participation of European peoples in a new annual "Eurosong Vision Contest"?

This would uniquely reframe the approach to the future of Europe through a widely appreciated cultural mode -- setting a highly creative precedent for future communication with European peoples. Such an initiative would be all the more significant if the various hopes and concerns can be expressed through song -- eliciting appropriately comprehensible responses in that mode. This would be a clear response to the concern that European officialdom has not yet been adequately prepared to "listen" to the European people.

It could be the defining mark of the French presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Catalyst: instigating a EU Cultural Ambassador Programme?

Individual countries commonly recognize the role of "cultural ambassadors", whether formally or informally. In the case of the USA, for example, the [Cultural Ambassador Program](#) is an international initiative of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The goal is to improve global, cross-cultural understanding through programmes led by prominent Americans in the cultural and humanities fields who conduct high visibility outreach programs in priority countries and regions.

UNESCO has a broad mandate, notably covering music, human rights and the social sciences. To assist in promoting these preoccupations in the service of peace, it has a [UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador](#) programme; it also has a more specific [Cultural Ambassador Programme](#). The EU might fruitfully consider an analogous cultural ambassador programme as a vehicle through which to reframe its relationships with the Irish and other European peoples. There are indications that the EU has considered such a programme, but the only such "cultural ambassador" identified is seemingly the Swedish writer [Henning Mankell](#).

In June 2008, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner opened the "Saison culturelle de l'Europe" in the "Grand Palais" in Paris together with French Culture Minister Christine Albanel in the company of numerous internationally renowned French artists. France will provide a representative introduction of the diversity of the European cultural landscape as part of the French EU Presidency. Cooperation partners in this undertaking include the foreign cultural institutions based in Paris, several French and European cultural establishments, and a series of sponsors. In the run-up to its EU Presidency, France had invited all EU Member States to each appoint an "ambassadeur culturel", according to the French notion. These personalities are to be chosen from the circle of intellectual, artistic, and creative elite of each country and will represent their nation during the French EU Presidency. Clearly this may be formalized within the EU on a more permanent basis, as in the case of UNESCO.

Carla Bruni, as a singer, is a highly suitable candidate to engage in such a process -- possibly with the concrete objective of initiating a Eurosong Vision Contest.

In the case of the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador programme, of the many so named, the following have had reputations in music:

- [Antonio Abreu](#): peace through music
- [Mehrigan Aliyeva](#): promotion of oral and musical traditions
- [Marin Constantin](#): music and world heritage
- Miguel Angel Estrella: promotion of culture of peace and tolerance through music
- [Ömer Zülfü Livaneli](#): peace and tolerance through the music and the promotion of human rights

There is also a UN Goodwill Ambassador programme whereby the UN itself appoints such ambassadors in relation to several specific programmes such as [UNICEF](#), [UNHCR](#), [UNFPA](#), [UNAIDS](#), [UNDCP](#) and [UNIFEM](#). The UN has hosted a [Goodwill Ambassador and Messengers of Peace Meeting](#), gathering together 48 prominent personalities from the arts, film, music, sports, literature and public affairs. Other UN bodies, such as [UNIDO](#) and [WHO](#), have analogous programmes. The ASEAN countries appointed their first Goodwill Ambassador in 2005.

In the case of the appointment in support of UNDCP (United Nations Drug Control Programme), Tetsuya Komuro, a music producer, has appealed all over the world for the prevention of drug abuse, composing campaign songs to that end. West African singer and

songwriter Angélique Kidjo, was appointed as [UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador](#); her popularity and commitment to children was expected to make a big difference for UNICEF and for children everywhere. In the same spirit, Joel Madden, lead vocalist for the critically acclaimed rock band, Good Charlotte, was named a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador in June 2008. Renowned Greek singer George Dalaras was proclaimed a [UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador](#) in January 2008.

A significant consideration for the European Union is whether the role of any such ambassador is to be the bearer of goodwill, to elicit goodwill, or both. Given the potential role of Carla Bruni, should the interaction be instigated by the presidency or should she be invited by the Irish -- formally or informally? Perhaps even by the Gaelic League on some suitable occasion -- such as the *Oireachtas na Samhna* (Cork, 29th October -- 2nd November 2008)?

Responding to the challenge of cross-cultural encounters

This proposal is made in the period of two unexpected realizations of the challenge of intercultural encounter:

- **Corporate mergers:** In July 2008 it was announced that the much acclaimed [Alcatel-Lucent](#) telecom merger had been far less productive than expected -- due to "cultural differences". This follows the challenges to the much-publicized earlier merger of [Daimler-Chrysler](#) auto companies -- for similar reasons.
- **Military strategy:** Assessments of the extremely costly failure to contain the insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite considerable and repeated expressions of optimism, are increasingly recognized to be partially the result of failure to appreciate the implications of the tribal nature of those societies, whether with respect to their capacity to resist foreign intervention or their unreasonable response to subsequent national-building initiatives. This recognition has resulted in the announcement by the Pentagon of a [Minerva Research Initiative \(MRI\)](#) -- a US Department of Defense sponsored, university based, social science research program initiated in 2008.

Despite the immense investment of the European Union in interpretation and translation, it is unclear that there is appropriate effort to explore the interface between cultures -- especially with the number of member countries expected to increase beyond 27. The two examples above highlight the possible pitfalls.

It is of course a mistake to frame the Irish culture as significantly different from other cultures of Europe. On the other hand it would be a mistake to fail to recognize the cultural factors contributing to the long-standing conflict in Northern Ireland. There is therefore a case for recognizing that the Irish people attach significance to their culture which may be inappropriately considered in the formal challenge made by the European Union to Ireland to come up with solutions to the problem created by the No vote of the Irish people.

If the Pentagon has recognized the need to give attention to anthropological and cultural factors in considering future defence strategies, there would seem to be a case for the European Union to give some consideration to reframing its approach to the peoples of Europe. If the well-articulated legalities of the corporate mergers cited did not prevent disaster, why should it be expected that the well-articulated legalities of the Lisbon Reform Treaty should prevent disaster?

Beyond the stereotypical arguments regarding the "unreasonable" vote of the Irish people in every democratic constituency, are there therefore subtler arguments and sensitivities that should be encountered in a mode that the Irish respect? A proactive response by European officialdom respectful of cultural differences would look to the active roots of the Irish culture -- especially given an expression of protest in song against the male-dominated, legalistic, economic arguments presented in favour of the Lisbon Treaty.

Much has been made of the role of the striking [haka dance](#) in the sporting encounters of the All Black rugby team. It has been explained that this was a normal greeting dance between Maori tribes. Is there not a case for engaging with any traces of Gaelic cultural understanding of appropriate encounters between peoples -- given the degree to which song is such an active part of Irish popular culture? It would seem highly probable that traditional cultural attitudes frame such encounters, despite the successful modern overlays onto Irish economy and society. Aspects of these roots are evident in studies such as that of Michael Newton (*An Introduction to the Gaelic Music Tradition*, Féis Bhostoin, 2000) -- even though it focuses on a neighbouring Gaelic society. A more extensively documented study of the complex influences on song and nationalism in Ireland is made by Anthony McCann and Lillis Ó Laoire (*Raising One Higher than the Other: the hierarchy of tradition in representations of Gaelic and English language song in Ireland*, 2003).

In this spirit, might it not be the case that the Pentagon's Minerva Research Initiative will discover that mediation between tribal peoples of the Middle East may benefit significantly from traditional styles of poetic greeting that were so fundamental to appropriate encounter between tribal peoples -- and to the rise of Islam and the articulation of its insights in the rhythmic form of the *Qur'an*. It is curious that no corresponding consideration is given to the need to articulate the Lisbon Reform Treaty in chapters and verses that employ phonetic and thematic structures that assist the audience's efforts to recall the message of the text. Such considerations are presumably relevant to the European Unions's engagement in the recently launched [Union for the Mediterranean](#).

In considering how the European Union might engage meaningfully with the Irish people, given the role mentioned above of *sean-nós* singing in celebrating their identity, it is worth reflecting on the implications of some unusual features of that mode (as described in *Wikipedia*):

The interaction between performer and audience is a key aspect of the *sean nós* tradition:

- the singer may require cajoling, and this may itself be regarded as part of the recital
- the singer may occasionally adopt a position facing the corner of the room and away from the audience -- a position that has acoustic benefits and perhaps, it is suggested, some ancient significance.
- the audience is not expected to be silent throughout, but may participate in the performance through words of

encouragement and commentary. Sometimes a member of the audience will even come and hold the performer's hand in empathy with the song. Such interaction does not disturb the flow of music, and the performer will often respond to it musically.

Most songs are not gender specific, although the lyrics may suggest it is being sung from a woman's or man's point of view. However there are a few songs that men tend not to sing. Women however do not seem to have the same compunction.

Responding to a protest, notably articulated in song, by an injunction to "vote again" (until you get it right !), might be considered a typical example of the kind of mistake in intercultural communications that gave rise to the costly examples cited above. It might also be considered an insult by some in cultures with long memories.

*After so many keynote speeches about Europe,
who is able to hear the music?*



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