

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

IRELAND will propose a "solution" at next month's EU summit to the inconvenient truth of its vote against the Lisbon Treaty. But in reality a decision has already been made: Ireland will vote again on Lisbon in October or November next year.

Of course it won't be an easy sell. The anti-treaty Libertas group in Ireland has formed a coherent opposition to what it considers "bullying" by Brussels. But in many ways the wind is now beginning to blow in favour of a yes vote second time round.

First, some cosmetic changes will be made, such as ensuring Ireland can keep its EU commissioner. Then information campaigns will be rolled out, so that voters "understand" the treaty, which apparently they didn't last time. More importantly, there is the recession. Now that its property bubble has burst, Ireland is expected to be hit hardest of all EU countries by the downturn. As French president Nicolas Sarkozy has said, if Ireland wants a helping hand, it must recognise the need for EU reform!

It's not as if Ireland hasn't re-voted before. As pro-Lisbon Irish lawmaker Proinsias de Rossa pointed out at a recent European parliament constitutional affairs committee meeting, Ireland waited 16 months before voting again on the Nice Treaty. Why should Lisbon be any different?

ELSEWHERE in the EU Eurocrats are finding it easier to blackmail countries into ratifying the Lisbon treaty - especially if they are like Croatia, have dodgy records and are desperate to climb aboard the EU gravy train.

Croatia, which is badly affected by organised crime and is waiting to join the EU, is effectively being blackmailed into signing the treaty when it becomes the union's 28th member state. As the Belgian daily *De Standaard* reported earlier this month: "If the Lisbon treaty has not been ratified by the end of 2009, it will be integrated into the accession treaty for Croatia." Hey presto!

HUTTON STEW

NEWs that the lightly armoured Snatch Land Rovers, blamed for the deaths of 38 soldiers, were still being used in war zones more than a year after the Ministry of Defence promised their withdrawal has angered relatives.

Sue Smith, the mother of Phillip Hewett, who died in Iraq in 2005 when a roadside bomb struck the Land Rover he was driving, last week instructed her lawyers to write to defence secretary John Hutton to renew demands for a public inquiry.

As Jocelyn Cockburn, Mrs Smith's solicitor, told Hutton, the inquest into her 21-year-old son's death was held jointly with that of two comrades, Lt Richard Shearer and Pte Leon Spicer, who died in the Snatch with him - and lasted barely three hours. Any attempts to explore the wider policy decisions involving the deployment of the Land Rover in the Al Amarah region, known to be high-risk and volatile, was swiftly stamped on by the coroner, who ruled it outside her remit.

Mrs Smith then launched a novel civil case against the MoD alleging negligence and a breach of her son's right to life under human rights legislation. The MoD usually falls back on a defence of crown immunity over those in war zones, but in May the high court ruled that the human rights act may indeed offer some legal redress to soldiers "wherever they may be".

Croatia's interior and justice ministers were recently arrested following the murder of a prominent lawyer's daughter; and two journalists, Ivo Pukanic and Niko Franjic of the leading Croatian daily, *Nacional*, were killed by car bombs in Zagreb. President Stipe Mesic admits that it is "the rule of law and safety of citizens versus criminals, terrorists and mafia"; but the European Commission says it trusts the Croatian authorities to bring the criminals to justice.

Critics, however, fear the EU will make the same mistake with Croatia as it did in allowing Romania and Bulgaria to join too soon. Corruption in the latter, for example, remains endemic and widespread. So widespread, in fact, that when the EU's anti-fraud body Olaf tried to find out where its millions had gone in Bulgaria, Olaf was itself investigated by the country's National Security Agency (DANS). DANS was purportedly set up to fight crime but now collects internet and phone records of MPs and journalists without court orders. Welcome aboard!

DOWN in Strasbourg at the Council of Europe (CoE), meanwhile, the world's first international treaty on government openness is being thrashed out... behind closed doors.

The 47-member CoE, not to be confused with the EU, is busy finalising its convention on access to official documents. But with a vote due on 27 November, the decision-making process is still shrouded in secrecy.

The CoE's parliamentary assembly was highly critical of the draft treaty, which lacked key elements such as time limits for replying to requests for information or an independent body to handle complaints (as, for example, the information commissioner does in the UK).

The CoE's rapporteur group on the treaty met to discuss the CoE parliament's opinion on 12 November but refused to reveal its conclusions - even after the Spain-based campaign group Access Info submitted an information request to know who had attended the meeting and what the group had recommended to ministers.

While the US and other allies in Iraq and Afghanistan were well stocked up with the wide range of medium-weight fighting vehicles necessary for insurgent combat, such as Cougars, Vikings, Jackals and Mambas, the MoD was not. In fact it sold off 14 Mambas to a private military firm in Iraq in 2004 - the year before the death of Pte Hewett and his comrades - for £44,000.

Hutton signalled to the Commons defence committee last week, meanwhile, that he would be prepared to look "very seriously" at holding an inquiry into why Snatches are still in operation.



GREEN GROW THE BIGOTS, O

ENVIRONMENTALISTS who read the leaked BNP membership list are in for a shock. Among the far rightists listed as collectors of "lurchers", "World War II militaria" and "medieval longbows" is one Keith Bessant, whom the BNP describes as a "former Green Party parliamentary candidate".

So he is. Bessant was one of the West Country's leading Greens, standing in Cheltenham in the 2001 and 2005 elections. A party spokesman said he had gone over to the BNP because its climate-change policy "was more radical", a statement which was strange for what it left out.

The Greens missed the opportunity to say that Bessant had turned from a lovable environmentalist into a bigot. But that may be because the bigotries of anti-semitism and homophobia are not exactly hanging offences in the party.

In June, police searching for a missing German woman, Natalie Bracht, arrested Tony Gosling, a Green candidate in Bristol, and his partner. They searched his home before releasing them without charge. Northumbria detectives said they were worried about Bracht's mental health and the safety of her five children after she covered their faces with headscarves and vanished from her Sunderland home. She has since turned up safe and well in Germany.

Gosling admitted to meeting Bracht briefly. She told him that Mossad was behind the 7/7 bombings, which had "nothing to do with Muslims", and added for good measure that South Gosforth Reformed Synagogue in Newcastle hid a "Masonic/Zionist cell".

She confided in the right man. Gosling said that although he could not confirm her story of a Jewish conspiracy in South Gosforth, it was important to bring her accusations to a wider audience.

Previously, Gosling had announced that he kept "an open mind" on whether the forged *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* that Hitler used to justify the Holocaust were indeed forged. "Many Jewish people believe *The Protocols of Zion* to be anti-Jewish hate material," he said. "In fact, their authenticity has never been entirely proven or disproven."

Gosling told the *Muslim News*, meanwhile, that the introduction of books about gay relationships into Bristol schools "personally disgusted" him. "It's the gay mafia in full swing."

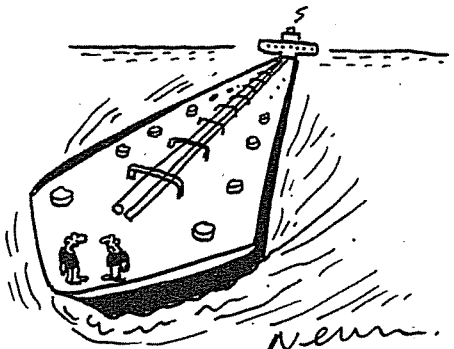
Green conspiracy theories are used to explain not only the 7/7 Islamist attacks but also 9/11. Martin Deane, Green candidate in Hull, announced: "Having clocked up a few hundred hours now looking at evidence on the internet, I believe at the very least there is culpable US government complicity in the events of 9/11."

The Hull Green Party's website links to 9/11 "truth" reports that blame the attacks on the CIA and, of course, Mossad. Deane campaigned with fellow activist Justin Walker to get his party to demand a reinvestigation into the 9/11 attacks. The motion was defeated - but by the less than crushing margin of two votes.

Walker left the Greens when he went a conspiracy theory too far and embraced David Icke, the former sports presenter and green leader, who believes the world is controlled by giant lizards rather than Jews. The Green establishment might "demonise" Icke, Walker said in an open letter, but "closed minds, my friends, do not get to the truth!"

The gay rights group Outrage is demanding that the party cleans up its act, while Jewish Greens are so nervous that they have established a splinter group, Greens Engage.

Perhaps the gay and Jewish greens should not be too surprised by the crossover between the Green Party and the BNP. After all, the first European government to preach environmentalism was the government of Nazi Germany.



'Ratbiter'