

Lisbon only the start of the battle, says Klaus

Brussels might be congratulating itself on forcing through the Lisbon Treaty, but that is not the last battle it is going to have to fight, according to President Vaclav Klaus of the Czech Republic.

The last hold-out against the treaty after Ireland's volte-face, Mr Klaus told Czech television that Lisbon will merely serve to encourage the Eurocracy's efforts to sideline national politicians and rule Europe unencumbered.

"They are permanently dealing with only one thing: the strengthening of their powers," the President told Prima Television, adding that the Czech presidency of the EU in the first six months of 2009 had shown him that the EU was in a worse state than he had expected it to be.

He said he was convinced that there

would be further attempts to extend and deepen the reach of Brussels into national sovereignty, and these would have to be opposed.

The creation of a new EU president and foreign minister marked a new phase in the Eurocrats campaign to reduce the influence of national leaders on European policymaking, he said.

He accused some leaders of abetting this process by spending too much time dealing with domestic affairs while visiting Brussels and paying too little attention to what happened in EU meetings.

Speaking to law students in Prague, Mr Klaus said that his ideal scenario would be to return the EU to its condition before the Maastricht Treaty of 1993 – it was Maastricht that had fundamentally changed the functioning of the EU and set it on the path

towards its current and growing limitations on democracy and freedom in Europe.

He revealed that he had considered resigning from the presidency when he realised that he would not win his battle to stop the Lisbon Treaty. He had not done so because of the realisation that it was actually Maastricht that had really damaged any European ideal.

After a series of legal challenges to Lisbon by Czech senators fearful of a dramatic loss of sovereignty, Mr Klaus refused to proceed to ratification of the treaty until 8th November last year, having gained at least a Czech opt-out from the EU Charter of Fundamental Human Rights. He said he had been concerned that the charter might open the way to property claims against the country by German former residents of Czechoslovakia.

Voters the big parties are ignoring

Labour and the Conservatives began this new, election year with carefully selected highlights of what might be appearing in their manifestos when the campaign proper begins. The Lib Dems found it necessary to announce that they would make no back-door deals in the event of the hung Parliament that figures prominently in the commentators' speculations. But has any of the main parties thought seriously about what could really influence the outcome of the election?

A Populus poll of 8th November 2009 showed that support for minor parties is now running at 14 per cent, while in the polls for the two months before the 2005 election, these parties obtained about 7 per cent of the projected vote in the polls and actually obtained 8 per cent at the election. So support for these parties, which excludes Northern Ireland but includes Scots and Welsh nationalists (static in the polls), the Greens, UKIP, BNP, and so on, looks to be about double what it was in 2005.

If we deduct the 2.2 per cent vote obtained in the 2005 election by the Scots and Welsh nationalists from each

of the 2005 polls and the 2009 polls, we can see the support for the other minor parties has risen from about 5 per cent of the vote in 2005 to about 11 per cent now.

This trend was confirmed by the Angus Reid poll on 6th November for Political Betting. It put the minor parties in Great Britain (excluding Northern Ireland) at 18 per cent of the GB vote. Of this, UKIP had 6 per cent and the BNP 4 per cent, while for all the minor parties, exclusive of the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists, the total was 15 per cent – a record? Apparently, 2.6 million people are intending to vote UKIP or BNP, on this poll's evidence.

What these polls highlight is that there are now two groups of floating voters. The first of these is the traditional million-plus swing voters, who switch among Labour, the LibDems and the Conservatives. The second group is those who are willing to vote for one of the new parties.

With Labour polling at 29 per cent and the LibDems at 18 per cent in the Populus poll, these two parties have seen a loss of 12 per cent of the total vote compared with the 2005 election

total. The Conservative vote is up from 33 per cent to 39 per cent – so the Conservatives are projected to have an extra 6 per cent of the vote while the minor parties are also up 6 per cent.

In other words, the Conservatives are gaining only 50 per cent of the votes shed by Labour and the Liberal Democrats and the other 50 per cent is going to minor parties. Six per cent of the vote is 1.5 million voters (actual voters on a 60 per cent turnout) so there is likely to be as big a swing parcel of voters willing to vote for the minor parties as the traditional parcel of swing votes in the middle of the three major parties.

When you consider the effort put in by the major parties to attract the two parcels of swing voters, it is hard not to think that 95-plus per cent of the efforts of the Conservatives and the Labour Party are trying to attract the traditional one million plus swing voters in the middle. This seems old-fashioned, a pre-1970 approach. Why is the second parcel of voters – an extra one and a half million since 2005, and now three million in total – being ignored by the main parties?

Article by Anthony Scholefield