

## Written answer from Irish Foreign Minister Brian Cowen on the Treaty of Nice (27 March 2002)

**Caption:** On 27 March 2002, Irish Foreign Minister Brian Cowen answers parliamentary questions on the future of the Treaty of Nice.

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## Written Answers — Nice Treaty (27 March 2002)

**Mr. M. Higgins** asked the **Minister for Foreign Affairs** if he will make a statement on whether the Government has made commitments to the European Union during the recent summit in Barcelona to hold the Nice treaty before Christmas 2002.

**Mr. Durkan** asked the **Minister for Foreign Affairs** if, in his opinion, a protocol in respect of Irish neutrality will be sufficient to ensure the ratification of the Nice treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**Mr. Durkan** asked the **Minister for Foreign Affairs** if he has entered into any understanding or arrangement with his EU colleagues in regard to the future of the Nice treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**Mr. Durkan** asked the **Minister for Foreign Affairs** if, in the aftermath of the Barcelona Summit, he expects developments to assist in the ratification of the principles of the Nice treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. Cowen):** I propose to answer Questions Nos. 93, 102, 103 and 104 together.

The statement made to Dáil Éireann on 20 March by the Taoiseach, as well as my own reply to Priority Question No. 23 of today's date, together confirm the content of discussion which took place at the Barcelona European Council in relation to Ireland and ratification of the Nice treaty.

All member states are committed to the ratification of the Nice treaty by the end of 2002 so that enlargement can proceed on schedule. Beyond that, no formal undertaking was given to EU partners in relation to the precise timing of a second referendum, although the Taoiseach referred to the general recognition and expectation which exists that such a referendum would be held in the autumn. Neither was any formal understanding or arrangement reached with EU partners concerning the treaty itself beyond a reiteration of the Government's full commitment to enlargement of the Union and to treaty ratification.

A protocol to the Nice treaty is not feasible. Rather, the Government will seek a declaration from the Seville European Council which will confirm that Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality is not affected by the Nice treaty. Our partners indicated they would be positively disposed to this approach, and this is reflected in the Barcelona conclusions.

The Government has also recognised that other concerns arose during the referendum campaign and is working actively and constructively to address these. The establishment of the National Forum on Europe has encouraged an important, wide-ranging and overdue debate on issues relating to the European Union and Ireland's role in that Union. The Government has brought forward proposals to improve significantly scrutiny by the Oireachtas of EU affairs. When fully implemented, these measures will put Ireland's scrutiny arrangements on a par with the best in Europe and will contribute significantly to a fuller understanding of Ireland's role and influence in EU decision-making. The Government is also examining ways in which the communication to ordinary people of how Europe operates and affects their lives could be significantly improved. Through its national representative, Mr. Ray MacSharry, it is engaging constructively in the European Convention on the Future of Europe that recently got under way. The Government takes the view that one of the most fundamental questions that must be addressed is the sense of disconnection between the EU and many of its citizens and that the convention provides an important and timely forum for addressing this challenge.