

‘No’ vote could undermine ‘blue card’ scheme

By Viktor Posudnevsky

IT IS “too early to say” if Ireland’s ‘no’ vote on the Lisbon Treaty could undermine the future of the ‘blue card’ scheme here, the Department of Justice has said.

The department has told *Metro Éireann* that it was not yet prepared to judge how Ireland’s rejection of the Lisbon Treaty would affect the implementation of EU common immigration policy in Ireland.

In particular, no new decisions were taken in relation to the ‘blue card’ scheme for skilled migrants, which was announced last October.

The proposed ‘blue card’ would enable holders and their families to live, work and travel within the European Union.

Applicants would be required to have a recognised diploma, at least three years’ professional experience and the offer of a job which could not be filled by an EU citizen. The card would give holders a renewable right to live and work anywhere in the EU, with permanent residency automatic after five consecutive years. The proposal to introduce the scheme was announced last October by the European Commission.

If it’s passed in the European Parliament, the ‘blue card’ will be adopted throughout the EU with the exception of Ireland, Britain and Denmark, which have negotiated special provisions and can decide whether or not to opt into the scheme.

A major survey published by the European Commission in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty referendum stated that immigration was one of the factors that made Irish people vote ‘no’. It is likely that Irish politicians would take this into consideration and oppose schemes that would make it easier for more migrants to come into the country.

Immigrant Council of Ireland senior solicitor Hilka Becker commented that Ireland has already opted out of a number of pan-European agreements. “The ones Ireland did opt in for were nearly all restrictive measures,” she said. “I believe, in line with its previous decisions, Ireland will decide to opt out of this scheme.”

However, Becker expressed similar scepticism concerning the possibility of the scheme being passed by the European Parliament. “The indications I am getting from lawyers’ meetings are not so positive,” she said.

The European Commission has said that its ‘blue card’ proposal is designed to meet EU skills shortages in areas such as engineering, information technology, pharmaceuticals, healthcare and education, which have been exacerbated by Europe’s aging population. It is estimated that an extra 20 million workers will be required by the EU in the next 20 to 30 years.

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