**European Union Studies**

**Dr Stefan Auer:** To me it sounds like Ireland is a part of central Europe, it just doesn’t know it yet.

**HE Mairtín O Fainín:** Maybe we should have been in the Balkans or somewhere like that.

**Auer:** Now I’d like to invite our audience to join in with questions or comments.

**La Trobe student:** Want to know what you think about the argument that small states are overrepresented in the EU.

**O Fainín:** Well as a small state we’d never – you mean we have too much power?

**Student:** There is the argument that small states – the representatives represent much less people but have the same amount of say.

**O Fainín:** That’s a necessary part of a collection of independent sovereign states is that you don’t, that it wouldn’t be dominated by some of the larger states. A lot of what we built into the Lisbon Treaty is to ensure that four or five large states couldn’t dominate all the rest. You wouldn’t get a union of sovereign states if it was a straightforward population issues, and then the larger states would dominate all the smaller states. That’s a necessary part – that’s a concept really that’s used all over the world. It’s used in the United States for individual states, it’s used here in Australia – you don’t give less authority to Tasmania than you do to New South Wales or to Victoria than you do to New South Wales. There’s a concept of distinct degree of sovereignty in each unit, and each unit is important in its own right irrespective of how many citizens are there.

**Auer:** But it is a real question, I’m just thinking that is probably the wrong person to ask because you are representing a small state so you are not going to say...

**O Fainín:** ...you want to ask a German that because...

**Auer:** ...you have too much power, because it is contested of course...

**O Fainín:** In the Lisbon Treaty we set out to ensure that our own interests would be preserved and be looked after in the Lisbon Treaty and part of that is ensuring that a small number of large states could not dominate the Union. And that’s what we’ve done – we have a combination of a majority of member states which would be 15 out of 27 to pass legislation, to pass decisions, plus 65 percent of the population as well. It’s the combination of both that’s necessary.