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Introduction from An Taoiseach Brian Cowen TD

Fianna Fáil is deeply committed to the European Union and the great ideals which it represents. It has always been an enabler of Irish sovereignty and we believe that it will play as important a role in our future as it has in our past.

The elections to the European Parliament represent a potentially very significant moment in the relationship between Ireland and the EU.

At a time of unprecedented crisis both here and internationally, we believe that Ireland should remain true to its Euro-positive tradition – that it should send to the European Parliament people committed to constructively working with others.

The European Parliament, as a political institution, is growing in power and MEPs are taking decisions which positively affect our daily lives.

Over the next five years the Parliament will deal with a range of issues which are vital to our national and collective European interests. This document reviews some of these areas and outlines Fianna Fáil's record of action and approach to the future.

Each of our candidates combines a lengthy record of deep engagement with European issues together with service to their communities. They are ready to be active and effective on our behalf.

I urge you to support and vote for our Fianna Fáil candidates in the forthcoming European Parliament elections on June 5th 2009.

An Taoiseach Brian Cowen TD
Leader of Fianna Fáil

Message from Mr Micheál Martin TD, Fianna Fáil Director of the European Parliament Elections 2009.

The European Parliament is the only directly elected body of the European Union.

Direct elections first took place to the European Parliament in 1979.

As a direct result of the Single European Act 1986, the Maastricht Treaty 1992, the Amsterdam Treaty 1998 and the Nice Treaty 2001, the European Parliament has secured substantial political powers across a range of policy areas.

The European Parliament has an equal power with the EU Governments (via the Council of Ministers structure) in bringing forward new EU laws under what is known as the co-decision procedure. This legislative structure covers very wide areas of policy-making including the fields of consumer protection, environment, transport, economic affairs, legal affairs, employment law, structural funds and food safety. New EU laws first come from the European Commission to the appropriate committee within the European Parliament. That is why it is so important that we elect effective MEPs who can represent our interests within the European Parliament as new EU directives and regulations are being amended and enacted. Moreover, we must continue to strive to communicate to the people of Ireland the nature and importance of decisions taken in Europe in a simple and concise manner.

The European Parliament is centrally involved in deciding how the annual EU budget, which is worth €130 billion per annum is spent by the European Union.

The European Parliament must approve all international trade agreements entered into by the European Union. No country can join the European Union until the European Parliament has approved the final accession agreement between an applicant country and the European Union.

This June, the people living in the 27 different member states of the European Union will elect 735 MEPs to the European Parliament. This is a political institution that is growing in stature and in international prominence.

MEPs, elected by the Irish people, will be taking decisions that will have a positive effect for our people, our country and the European Union.

The Fianna Fáil Party is an active and committed pro-European Party. We always have been and we always will be.

Fianna Fáil's candidates in this election are of the highest calibre and will represent our country and the European Union within the European Parliament with a sense of purpose, understanding and commitment.

Bíonn tionchar dearfach ag cinní Parlaimint na hEorpa ar Éirinn agus ar mhuintir na hÉireann. Vótáil ar son Fhianna Fáil ar an 5ú Meitheamh seo chugainn



**Micheál Martin TD.
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Fianna Fáil Director of the European Elections 2009**

Economic Growth and Recovery

Fianna Fáil in Government is working closely with the European Commission and within the Eurozone structure on the issue of reducing our budget deficit.

The European Commission has approved the recent plans as set out by the Irish Government to deal with our budget deficit, in accordance with EMU rules, over a five year period, as opposed to a two year timeframe.

Ongoing measures which the Irish Government have sought to introduce reforms and re-structuring to our banking and financial systems continue to be approved by the European Commission in a spirit of Co-operation.

The European Central Bank continues to be very supportive to Ireland at this difficult time.

Stimulating the Irish Economy

Supporting Irish economic recovery

The future interest of the Irish economy is best served by our country being at the very heart of the European Union project. Ever since we joined the European Union in 1973 one of our strongest selling points to investors around the world is the fact that we can access the European internal market. Our membership of the European Union is one of the significant reasons for 1,000 foreign companies being located in Ireland.

Backing the development of a smart economy in Ireland

Ireland must stay at the leading edge of developing and supporting new technologies if we are going to continue to maintain employment and entice new companies to locate in our country into the future. Ireland is home to many multinational companies which are world leaders in the areas of information technologies. There are also hundreds of thriving indigenous Irish companies involved in the research and technology sectors.

We must be to the forefront in developing and supporting new technologies as part of the Government's economic strategy. This is vitally important if we are to remain competitive.

Policies pursued by the European Union support the development of the smart economy in Ireland.

The European Union has put in place a programme known as the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7) 2007-2013. This initiative provides 52 billion to companies in Europe to support the development of new technologies.

In the first twenty months of the operation of this FP7 programme, 353 Irish projects secured over 83 million in funding under this FP7 initiative. This means that Irish companies are drawing down over 1 million a week in financial support from the European Union to support a variety of different technology related initiatives in Ireland.

Funding under FP7 provides financial assistance to a number of sectors including the fields of technology, research, transport, health, energy, social services, education and humanities, agriculture, food and fisheries.

Securing financial support and expertise under the 7th Framework programme for Research and Technological Development 2007 - 2013 compliments the work of the Innovation Fund set up by the Irish Government. These two programmes support the early stage development of intensive small and medium sized businesses involved in research and technology issues. These initiatives will help to maintain Ireland as a leading innovation hub in Europe.

Supporting the smart economy is a central component of both the EU Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth and of the European economic recovery plan. This is a vital element of the EU strategies to maintain jobs in the workplace, create new jobs and restore competitiveness.

2009 is the European Year for Creativity and Innovation, which highlights the importance of the technology sector to the European Union.

The EU Economic Stimulus Package

EU leaders at their Summit meeting on March 19th 2009 agreed the terms of a new European economic stimulus package.

The European Union agreed to provide 110 million to Ireland to assist in the construction of a new electricity Interconnector between the east coast of Ireland and Wales. This project is an essential piece of infrastructure for a number of reasons:

- It will connect our grid to a much larger energy market and help to reduce the cost of electricity.
- It will protect the future of our energy needs by establishing an important new supply route.
- It will add to the integration of EU energy markets which positively serves our strategic political and economic interests.

European Investment Bank support for key economic projects

Between the years 2004-2008 Ireland received 2.32 billion from the Luxembourg based European Investment Bank in support of a series of economic projects in Ireland.

These monies secured from the EIB have helped to upgrade several sections of the Irish motorway system, construct the Huntstown power plant in North Dublin, modernise the Aer Lingus Airbus fleet, develop the new passenger pier at Dublin Airport and construct new research and training facilities within the Irish third level sector.

The European Investment Bank will continue to play a very positive role in supporting economic development in Ireland in the coming years.

The EU Globalisation Fund

The European Commission administers a programme called the EU Globalisation Fund. This initiative is worth 500 million for the year 2009. It provides financial support to regions where over 1,000 job losses have taken place due to a company deciding to re-locate their businesses to take account of changing global conditions. In many ways, this programme is a key response of the European Union to the fact that we now live in a globalised world.

Following the job losses in the Mid West region of Ireland after the decision of the Dell Corporation to lay off 2,000 workers, the Irish Government is now in negotiations with the European Commission to draw down financial support from the EU Globalisation Fund to support the economic and social regeneration of the Limerick region.

Investing in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Ireland

European Investment Bank support for Irish Businesses

The European Investment Bank (EIB) signed agreements with three Irish banks on March 25th 2009 which makes available 310 million to Irish small and medium sized enterprises.

These cheap subsidised loans have given a boost to the Irish SME sector, which is the bedrock of the Irish economy. These monies are providing more credit for many SME companies who have had difficulties in recent months in securing adequate credit.

The EIB has changed its rules concerning its loan arrangements and this element of flexibility makes it easier to draw down EIB funding into the future.

This policy of flexibility has been matched by enhanced transparency concerning the monitoring and evaluation of these loan arrangements. It is a strict requirement on intermediary banks (i.e. Irish banks using EIB loans) that SMEs are fully informed of the role of the EIB in the specific loan arrangement and its impact on their financing conditions.

Fianna Fáil is confident that the EIB will make more agreements with Irish financial intermediaries this year to support the Irish SME sector which accounts for 55% of all employment.

To extricate ourselves from the economic problems that we face, will require implementing a series of economic initiatives across a range of different sectors. Drawing the maximum finance possible from the European Investment Bank is one such important step.

We must ensure that the SME sector survives and comes out stronger on the other side of this economic recession.

Reducing red tape in Europe for Businesses

It is a key priority for the EU institutions to cut red tape for SMEs by 25% by the year 2012.

Unnecessary administrative costs for businesses at a European level must be eliminated.

We fully support the provisions of the 2008 Small Business Act, which puts in place a 30 day payment period to companies being paid by public bodies in Europe.

We support new EU proposals, which reduce the costs for registering European wide trademarks from 1,600 to 900.

In February 2009, the European Commission brought forward proposals that abolished financial reporting obligations for the smallest companies in Europe. These new rules will lighten the regulation which applies to small businesses.

Fianna Fáil welcomes the publication of a code of practice by the European Commission giving national contracting authorities in Europe guidance and practical advice as to how to improve SME participation in contract award procedures. This code addresses typical problems that SMEs face when they participate in public tenders, and it proposes practical solutions which include the following:

- Fixing the right size of the contract.
- Setting sufficient time to draw up tenders.

Fianna Fáil supports the initiative of the European Commission whereby a single access point will be set up for the citizens of Europe so that SMEs can be advised on the whole range of EU initiatives to support the SME sector in Europe.

Financial Markets

Bringing confidence back into the European Financial Markets

There is now a global recognition that there is need for sweeping changes in the governance of the international financial markets. The global economic downturn has exposed many deficiencies in the present regulatory system for the financial services sector.

The European Union is to the forefront in putting in place a new architecture to govern the regulation of the financial markets in Europe. But the operation of the financial markets is interlinked around the world. That is why it is so important that common standards and rules will apply to the operation of the financial markets all over the world, including in America, Europe, China and India.

We must have regulatory and supervisory systems in place for the financial services sector that are rigorous and can withstand the toughest of scrutiny. We must strengthen European Co-operation in the field of financial stability oversight. We must improve how EU supervisors should co-operate in a global context. That is why it is so important that international organisations, such as the G20, have agreed at a global level to substantially improve the regulation of the global financial markets. Confidence and stability in the EU financial markets system are the over-riding political priorities for all EU legislators.

New Rules to Supervise Financial Markets in Europe

We welcome the publication of the independent report of the high level group on financial supervision in Europe, carried out by the former head of the French Central Bank, Jacques de Larosière. This group was set up by the European Commission as part of the EU response to the turbulence on the international financial markets. This EU report recommends a number of important new changes for the future regulation and supervision of the EU financial markets system.

The de Larosière group's mandate primarily covered the following issues:

- The organisation of the supervision of financial institutions and markets in the EU.
- The strengthening of European co-operation on financial stability oversight, early warning and crisis mechanisms.
- EU supervisory co-operation in a global context.

The de Larosière report contains 31 different recommendations including the following key proposals:

- The establishment of two new pan-European bodies that will monitor risk and co-ordinate the supervision of financial institutions in Europe. Existing national supervisors within the 27 member states of the European Union will continue to carry out the day-to-day supervision of financial markets within their respective countries.
- The establishment of a new European Systematic Risk Council that will gather information on all macro-economic risks in the EU.
- The establishment of a European System of Financial Supervisors, that will co-ordinate the future supervision of the EU banking, insurance and securities markets.
- The introduction of new regulatory and supervisory procedures for a number of key aspects of the financial services sector including credit rating systems, hedge funds, investment funds, deposit guarantee schemes, capital requirements for banks, accounting procedures, securitised products and the derivatives markets.

EU leaders at their March 2009 meeting agreed that the European Commission should bring forward draft legislation based on the de Larosière report. These proposals will require careful examination in the weeks ahead. EU Finance Ministers will be tasked to bring proposals based on these documents to the June European Council meeting of EU leaders.

The Lisbon Treaty

The European Union needs to update and modernise its decision making procedures. This modernisation of procedures will simplify decision-making processes within the EU institutions and it will help the Union tackle global problems such as climate change, international crime and energy security in a more structured way.

The Fianna Fáil Party fully accepted the decision of the Irish people as expressed in the Lisbon Referendum of June 2008. The Fianna Fáil Party has sought to address the concerns of the Irish people as expressed in this referendum result. The factors underpinning this result were complex and required detailed examination and reflection.

At the meeting of EU leaders in December 2008 an agreement was reached that in the event of the Lisbon treaty being ratified, all member states of the European Union will retain the right to nominate one member to the European Commission. This specific agreement demonstrates the ability of the European Union to reach consensus on complex institutional issues in Europe.

Our European partners are working very closely with us, in a spirit of openness and determination, in an effort to address the key concerns of the Irish people as expressed in the Lisbon Referendum in June 2008. The Irish Government is at present engaged with our European partners in seeking clarity on a range of political issues. We have received commitments that our positions in relation to tax, common security and defence policy, as well as family and ethical issues will be subject to firm and unambiguous legal guarantees. These were issues that caused worries for many people.

We have also secured a re-commitment by the EU on the principles of workers' rights, social progress and public services. If the Lisbon Treaty is ratified, this commitment will be re-enforced by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which contains important support for workers' rights.

We are now working with our EU partners to finalise the actual texts of these specific, explicit and unequivocal guarantees. It is our political objective to ensure that re-assurances and clarity will be given to people in a meaningful way so that we can address the key concerns that the people had at the last referendum.

If we secure the legal certainties and assurances that we seek, and if we are satisfied with the content of these legal guarantees then the Fianna Fáil Party is committed to supporting a second referendum on the revised Lisbon Treaty arrangements. Those who oppose the holding of such a referendum are opposing the democratic right of the people to pass judgement on what is on offer.

The Lisbon Treaty reflects our values and supports our interests. It will result in a more efficient union, a more democratic union, a union that supports workers' rights and a pro-competitiveness agenda. It will strengthen the role of national parliaments in the decision-making process in Europe.

We believe very firmly that the Lisbon Treaty is a necessary adjustment to the Union's rules so that today's larger Union can act in a more effective and accountable manner.

We see its extension of democratic oversight within the Union as important progress and believe that the European Parliament needs the Treaty's reforms.

Within the Parliament we will continue to take a positive and active position in relation to the constitutional and administrative arrangements of the Union.

Promoting a Strong Social Agenda in Europe

Equal Opportunities

Ireland has clearly made great political and economic progress as a member of the European Union. But we should remember at all times that the European Union is to the forefront in supporting a range of social policies.

Economic, employment and social policies are interlinked and mutually productive. For example, European policies in the field of social development work in tandem with the EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

The European Union has always been based on shared values - human dignity, freedom, solidarity, equal opportunities and responsibility. As globalisation quickens the pace of change, it is essential that the European Union acts to preserve these values at all times.

One of the founding principles of the Treaty of Rome is a clear legal commitment to abolish discrimination in European society. Discrimination in Europe is prohibited on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, age and sexual orientation. Anti-discrimination legislation in Europe is one of the most advanced in the world.

Not everyone starts life from the same point. Therefore it is crucially important that we create and promote a policy of equal opportunities for all - especially in policy areas such as access to healthcare, education, pensions, social security and the labour market.

Fianna Fáil supported the designation of 2007 as the European Year of Equal Opportunities, which very successfully highlighted around Europe the key social policies being promoted by the EU institutions and EU Governments. Fianna Fáil has also supported the successful initiative for 2010 to be designated the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Of the 78 million Europeans who are at risk of poverty 19 million are children. Population ageing and low birth rates are two major challenges that Europe is facing into the future.

The Challenges of an Ageing European Population

Life expectancy in the EU has risen by eight years since 1960.

The European Union must take account of an ageing population and we believe that ageing concerns must be mainstreamed into policy decisions to ensure the sustainability of social and economic policies at an EU level.

We support the principles as set out in the European Commission's 2006 document *The demographic future of Europe - From challenge to opportunity* and welcome the policy of the European Union institutions to work in partnership with Member States to address the common challenges of an ageing Europe.

An ageing Europe also brings clear benefits of experience, knowledge and expertise. We must continue to encourage trans-European dialogue on ageing by putting forward European-wide lifelong learning and third-age information technology programmes.

The Operation of the European Social Fund in Ireland

Since joining the European Union in 1973, Ireland has received over 7 billion in financial support under the European Social Fund. These monies have primarily been used to help combat youth and long-term unemployment.

Under the EU Human Resources Operational Programme for Ireland 2007-2013, the European Union is providing 375 million to Ireland under the European Social Fund. The overall budget of this programme is 1.36 billion. These monies are being used to provide training courses for those who are unemployed, for people with disabilities, for early school leavers and for the marginalised in our society.

We live in an age of globalisation. To respond to the challenges and opportunities which globalisation creates for the Irish workforce the European Social Fund in Ireland is also supporting lifelong training courses which can be adapted to the realities of a globalised jobs market.

Addressing the Gender Pay Gap

Fianna Fáil supports the EU-wide campaign launched by the European Commission in March 2009 to help tackle the gender pay gap in Europe. Equal pay for equal work is one of the core principles of the European Union.

The 2009 European Commission report on equality between men and women confirms that, while progress has been made on the issue of gender equality, significant gaps still remain in several areas. The employment rate of women in the European Union has been steadily rising over the last number of years (58.3% for women as against 72% for men), but women still work in sectors where wages are lower. More than 40% of women work in health, education and public administration, whereas the figure for men in these sectors is half of this figure.

The European Commission campaign aims to raise awareness of these pay gaps and how the problem can best be tackled. This campaign is seeking to promote best practices on the issue of pay with employers, workers and trade unions around Europe.

Bridging the Digital Divide

Developments in information technology have revolutionised the way Europeans work, do business, spend their money and communicate. However, there is a danger that the opportunities that new technologies offer might create a divide between groups in society.

Fianna Fáil in Europe is pursuing a policy agenda to ensure that vulnerable social groups, including the elderly, those in remote areas and those on very low incomes, fully benefit from the opportunities that are available from new and evolving technologies.

The Social Partnership Model in Europe

Fianna Fáil supports the social dialogue model in Europe. This process brings together representatives from European employer bodies, trade unions and public authorities with the aim of discussing policy making in Europe in the field of social affairs. This social dialogue model is broken up into 36 different committees and these groupings are charged with bringing forward joint action plans and recommendations on the reform of European Social Policy. This model is very similar to the social partnership structure in Ireland.

The European Anti-Poverty Network also provides strong advice and input on many aspects of EU social policy making.

EU White Paper on Sport

The European Commission is playing a more important role in promoting sporting policy today than was the case in the past.

In 2007 the European Commission published an EU White Paper on Sport. This White Paper has formed the basis of the European Commission sporting policy that is being currently implemented.

Key issues being addressed by the EU White Paper on Sport include:

- Promoting volunteerism in sport in Europe.
- Developing public health strategies in the areas of public fitness to tackle problems such as cardio-vascular disease, obesity and diabetes.
- Encouraging increased engagement in sporting activities among the less well off and the disabled.
- Addressing the role of the EU in regulating and distributing sporting media rights, including in the new media areas of mobile communications and interactive services.
- Developing strategies to combat doping in sport.
- Introducing new initiatives to tackle racism in sport.

If the Lisbon Treaty is ratified, sports policy in Europe will be subject to co-decision rules. This means that there will be a legal basis for sport in the EU treaties and this would make it easier to activate financial support measures for new sporting initiatives at a European level.

Tackling Mental Health Problems

We support the role of the European Commission in pursuing initiatives to promote best practice in the field of mental health.

Health services are not a treaty-based competence of the European Union institutions. However, where the European Commission has the support of the 27 Member State Governments it can implement programmes in the health field.

As a pan-European body, the European Commission is ideally placed to assess the best practices used in individual EU Member States in areas such as mental health policy. Other countries in Europe can then learn from and replicate these best practices.

Fianna Fáil supports the European Pact for Mental Health and Well Being, which was launched in June 2008.

There are five policy areas where the European Commission is seeking to put in place best practice in Europe:

- Mental health in youth and education.
- Mental health in the workplace.
- Prevention of depression and suicide.
- Mental Health in older people.
- Combating social stigma and social exclusion.

In improving awareness of the gravity and extent of mental health problems, the European Commission can play a valuable role in highlighting this serious health issue.

It is estimated that there may be as many as 210,000 people suffering from depression in Ireland.

EU Public Information Campaigns

The EU is to the forefront in promoting a number of public information campaigns including:

- Addressing global health risks through international co-operation.
- Highlighting the dangers of Aids.
- Promoting organ donation and transplantation.
- Raising awareness of the dangers of smoking.
- Tackling obesity, particularly among young people.
- Encouraging better eating habits.
- Combating rare human diseases.
- Marketing the benefits of the E111 European Health Insurance Card around Europe.

International Crime and Promoting Justice for all our Citizens

Organised Crime

We live in an internal market comprising a population of 500 million people from 27 different member states. One of the founding principles of the European Union is the right to move freely from one member state to the next. That is why it is of such fundamental importance that the EU Governments and the EU institutions intensify their efforts to promote police co-operation. There are 1.2 million police officers within the European Union alone.

Organised crime is international by nature and it requires a concerted and united international response if it is to be effectively tackled. Organised crime has evolved at a time of increasing globalisation and expanding international trade so the range of organised criminal activities has broadened and diversified. Organised criminal groups have built up large-scale international networks and amassed substantial profits from the illicit trafficking in drugs, trafficking in human beings, trafficking in weapons, counterfeit products, international fraud, cybercrime and the sale of child abuse images. The proceeds from these crimes are laundered and re-injected back into the legal economy, which further helps organised criminal activity.

The European Union has introduced a new framework whereby each of the 27 member states of the EU have had to set up an asset recovery office. These offices will operate in a structure that is similar to the Criminal Assets Bureau in Ireland and it will help national authorities around Europe to identify, trace, freeze, confiscate and seize the assets of criminals.

All stakeholders in Europe are working in the fight against organised crime via the EU Crime Prevention network.

We promote the exchange of information, in accordance with data protection rules, among police and judicial authorities in Europe within the competence of international organisations such as Eurojust and Europol.

We support the need to constantly review anti-money laundering legislation in Europe, so that these laws can be updated to take account of the rapidly changing nature of international crime.

Combating International Drug Trafficking

The M.A.O.C-N Initiative

A new EU programme was set in up in September 2007 called the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre - Narcotics, known by the acronym M.A.O.C.-N programme.

This programme, which is headquartered in Lisbon, brings together the police, naval, intelligence, customs and revenue services from all the countries based along the west coast of Europe. All these services are now working together and sharing information so as to halt cocaine importations coming from South America and from West Africa into Europe.

Some of the most high profile drugs seizures which have taken place in Ireland over the past two years have been as a direct result of this successful M.A.O.C-N programme.

EU support programme in Afghanistan

At least 90% of all the heroin that is sold in Ireland comes directly from Afghanistan. That is why we support ongoing EU programmes to promote economic development and good governance in Afghanistan. Between 2007 and 2010, the European Union is supporting a range of different projects in Afghanistan at a cost of 700 million.

One of the key programmes that the EU is backing is the promotion of alternative livelihoods in rural Afghanistan so as to tackle opium production in this country. The EU is also supporting measures to combat corruption in Afghanistan and ensure the strengthening of democratic and public service structures.

EU Drugs Action Plan 2009-2012

The new EU Drugs Action Plan 2009-2012 will provide a single framework for all activities relating to drug abuse and trafficking in the EU.

The overarching objectives of this action plan are twofold; to stem the supply of drugs and to reduce the demand for drugs. This is to be achieved via a new European Commission initiative, known as the European Alliance on Drugs which aims to raise awareness, particularly among young people, about the dangers of drug abuse.

In essence, what the European Commission is doing is to increase the number of information programmes that it is running to highlight the dangers of illegal drug abuse. Vulnerable groups in our society will be particularly targeted.

Steps will be taken to improve expertise in collecting data on drugs- related crime and the workings of the drugs market at both a local and a global level.

The European Commission is in a very strong position to gather information as to where the best treatment, educational and rehabilitation programmes are operating in Europe. Countries in Europe can learn from one another and implement best practice initiatives.

The European Union must work with other international organisations including with the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs to help reduce the global supply and demand for illegal drugs.

Combating child sex abuse in Europe

We welcome the publication by the European Commission in March 2009 of two new proposals to step up the fight against the trafficking of human beings, child sex abuse, sexual exploitation and child pornography. These new proposals will provide better assistance for victims and tougher action against criminals responsible for child sex abuse and people trafficking.

The European Commission is also financing international organisations such as the European financial coalition against child sex abuse on the internet. This grouping facilitates closer Co-operation between police authorities, financial operators, internet providers, NGOs and private companies such as Visa, Mastercard, Ebay, Paypal and Microsoft to stop these horrific and illegal practices.

The European Commission is working with authorities from all EU member states to safeguard and protect children when using the internet, to stop cyber-bullying and the hideous practices of grooming children online.

Common European Asylum System

We support the need for a common European asylum system which is to be introduced at an early stage. The European Union is an area where the free movement of people is assured, so the introduction of such a common system for asylum within the EU would have very practical benefits. Such an arrangement under the Common European Asylum system must be fundamentally fair, transparent and humane. In the context of putting in place this policy, we welcome a new EU regulation to set up a new European Support Office. This will oversee all forms of Co-operation between EU member states concerning the operation of the common European asylum system.

Introducing an EU-Wide Missing Child Alert System

Fianna Fáil in Europe has advocated the creation of an EU-wide missing child alert system. Such systems play a very positive role in recovering missing or abducted children.

Activation of an EU-wide alert system would trigger the immediate forwarding to the relevant news media, border authorities, customs and law enforcement agencies of the details of a missing child, a photo, information about the disappearance or suspected abductor and, most importantly, a telephone number to call with information. Such a system would be especially effective in trans-border cases, where rapid and efficient cross-border co-operation is of the essence.

Energy and the Environment

Climate Change

The European Union - tackling climate change

Climate change has been rightly described by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon as the "defining challenge of our age". Our generation will be remembered as the first to be offered solid scientific evidence of the existence of climate change. It is now our responsibility to ensure that we will be remembered as the generation which took decisive action to arrest climate change.

The European Union fully supports the recommendations of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change. The international community must act now to limit the increase in global temperatures to no more than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

There are countless benefits from the transformation of the European Union into a highly efficient, low emission economy. It will spur innovation, which can help job creation and build a low carbon future. The European Union is committed to reducing EU emissions by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels by the year 2020 and by 30% as a contribution to a broader global effort.

EU leaders agreed a comprehensive set of proposals at their December 2008 meeting which sets out clearly how the European Union is going to specifically achieve these targets. This includes reforming the carbon trading emissions system which is the key EU tool for achieving emission reductions at least cost.

Global Co-operation

The European Union, by being to the forefront in arresting climate change must use every opportunity possible to ensure that the global international community support policies to arrest climate change.

America, Russia, China, India, Brazil and developing countries must all play positive roles in ensuring that ambitious climate change targets are reached.

Climate change is a global problem that requires a global solution. That is why we welcome the fact that the next meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will take place in December 2009 in Copenhagen.

This meeting must map out the next serious efforts of the international community in arresting climate change. Reaching an ambitious Copenhagen agreement is not a choice, it is a political imperative. An agreement at Copenhagen later this year must build upon the Kyoto Protocol.

The European Parliament has the political power of co-decision with the EU Governments in climate change policy and is centrally involved in shaping European Union policy making on environmental issues, including through the work of the European Parliament Climate Change Committee.

Environmental Policies in Europe

The Fianna Fáil Party is working within the European Parliament, with the European Commission and with EU Governments on a range of different EU policies in the field of the environment, including the following:

- Promoting cleaner air in Europe.
- Regulating the chemicals sector in Europe by supporting what is known as the new Reach Directive.
- Supporting the biotechnology sector and protecting biodiversity.
- The protection of our soil and our natural eco-systems.
- Supporting the sustainable development of urban living.
- Improving waste management practices in Europe.
- The promotion of high quality water supplies in Europe.
- The EU directive on industrial emissions.

- The EU regulation on ozone depleting substances.
- National emission ceilings for atmospheric pollutants.
- The EU directive reviewing the management of waste electrical and electronic equipment.
- Supporting broader eco-labelling measures.

Energy Policy

An Energy Policy that tackles Climate Change

Tackling climate change and energy security are policies that are inextricably linked.

That is why the European Union is pursuing the policy, with binding targets for all EU member states known as the 20:20:20 Programme. The 20% reduction in carbon emissions use will be matched by increasing alternative energy use by 20% by 2020 in Europe and by reducing energy demand in Europe by 20% by 2020.

Renewable Energy and Efficiency Programmes

Renewable sources of energy - wind power, solar power, hydroelectric power, tidal power, geo-thermal power and biomass - are all alternative energy uses to fossil fuels. This will help to reduce our dependence on greenhouse gas emissions, diversify our energy supplies and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels like gas and oil.

The growth of renewable energy sources stimulates employment in Europe and it creates cleaner and greener technologies.

We fully support the new EU directive on renewable energy which sets legally binding targets that 20% of all energy needs in all EU member states will come from the renewable energy sector and 10% of this target will come from the transport sector alone.

This directive also improves the legal framework for promoting renewable electricity. It requires national action plans that establish pathways for promoting renewable energy sources including bio-energy. This directive must be implemented by the year 2010.

€3.5 billion contained within the European Economic Recovery Plan is earmarked for energy investments, including offshore wind technology, inter-connectors, carbon capture and storage.

Irish projects, such as the North Sea component of the offshore wind energy initiative can benefit from a new 165 million fund to support the development of new wind energy projects in Europe.

The European Union has set the target of reducing energy use by 20% by the year 2020 by putting forward a series of proposals in the field of energy efficiency.

These proposals include energy efficiency measures for buildings and energy using products.

Those who regulate the energy sector in Europe, public authorities, infrastructure operators, the energy industry and the citizens of Europe all must work together in reaching these targets.

Energy Security

Guaranteeing energy security is a necessary prerequisite for the economic development and political stability of Europe.

The European Union is supporting these policies in three respects:

- Identifying priority infrastructure projects based on the medium to long term analysis of supply and demand.
- Improving the existing energy processes in Europe by bringing forward new legislation.
- Creating and developing contractual relationships with third countries and regions, with the aim of ensuring permanent supplies and actively contributing to the diversification of energy resources.

The European Union is right to intensify its political discussions with Russia, Ukraine and with countries based in the Caspian Sea region concerning the protection of our future energy supplies.

We are equally committed to developing a stable, efficient and interconnected internal electricity and gas market in Europe.

We welcome the €110 million which has been given this year by the European Union in support of the construction of the new East-West electricity interconnector.

Sellafield Nuclear Plant

Fianna Fáil MEPs in the European Parliament regularly raise the lack of proper safety standards at the Sellafield nuclear plant in Cumbria.

This storage facility for nuclear materials at the Sellafield nuclear plant known as the B30 pond is arguably one of the most serious problems facing the nuclear industry in Europe, let alone in Britain.

The B30 pond has been the point of refuge for serious amounts of nuclear materials since it first came into existence in 1959 and these dangerous substances need to be cleaned up as a matter of urgency.

This is on top of the very serious and unacceptable breaches of safety which take place at the Sellafield nuclear plant, including one which was only confirmed by the authorities running this facility on April 15th 2009.

Ever since the Thorp re-processing facility was given the go-ahead in 1993, there have been numerous safety breaches and it has been closed on many occasions.

Fianna Fáil MEPs made a comprehensive submission in 2007 to the British Government into the future of the energy sector in Britain.

We find it unacceptable that the British Government is seeking to build new nuclear facilities at Sellafield at a time when serious questions concerning a variety of different safety issues at this plant need to be seriously answered.

Agriculture and Fisheries

Agriculture

CAP Health Check 2009-2013

In November 2008, EU Governments finalised their negotiations on the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy, known as the CAP Health Check. The agreement, which sets out how the CAP will function over the period 2009-2013, includes measures relating to milk quotas, market supports, additional funding for farm payments, rural development and reducing bureaucracy.

Ireland secured an outstanding deal under this agreement. The Fianna Fáil Party, at a national and at a European level, has an excellent working relationship with the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms Marian Fischer Boel.

Irish farmers, their families, rural communities and the Irish food sector will continue to benefit from close to 2 billion in EU transfers in direct payments, from rural development measures and from various market supports such as those being now provided for the milk sector.

Some €1.3 billion will be paid to Irish farmers under the annual Single Farm Payment Scheme, with the remainder paid through a number of co-financed Rural Development measures. In 2008, total EU and national payments to farmers amounted to €2.63 billion. The importance of the CAP in supporting farm incomes and job creation in rural Ireland is immense and its role in promoting environmental protection has been enhanced under the CAP Health Check. The CAP Health Check deal ensures that around €25 million in additional funding will be available for measures to target specific sectors and regions in need of assistance from 2010. In addition, Fianna Fáil ensured that the rate of additional modulation has been minimised and has committed that all funds raised will be passed straight back to Irish farmers.

Between 2009 and 2013 a combination of some 1 billion of Irish exchequer, European Union and private funding will be unleashed for the benefit of rural communities. This is supporting the diversification of the rural economy and it will create 12,000 new jobs directly.

Key Farming Sectors

In 2007, Fianna Fáil MEPs led the campaign for the introduction of a ban on Brazilian beef imports coming into the EU marketplace. The decision to impose a ban on Brazilian beef was rightly made on the grounds that the same rigorous rules and procedures that are in place for European beef producers must also apply to countries that wish to export their products into the EU marketplace.

Ireland East MEP Liam Aylward carried out a key report into the future of the sheep and lamb processing industries in Europe on behalf of the European Parliament. This much acclaimed EU report sets out a blueprint for the reform of the sheep farming sector in Europe. This is a sector that needs financial support if it is to remain viable and competitive into the future.

Key elements of this report include the need for greater assistance to be given to market lamb products in Europe and in third countries and to reform the labelling regime that governs the sheep sector in Europe, so that consumers are fully aware of the place of origin of the lamb products that they purchase and consume.

We are committed to ensuring that the EU increases its support to the Irish dairy sector. Milk prices have fallen dramatically due to international conditions and not least from the current economic downturn. We have successfully pressed the European Commission to provide adequate market supports, particularly through export refunds and intervention, so that the Irish dairy sector can weather this period of market instability and we will continue to do so. Ireland has been to the forefront at meetings of the Council of Agriculture Ministers in highlighting the need for market supports.

As part of the CAP Health Check, Fianna Fáil in Government secured additional milk quota for Ireland in preparation for the abolition of milk quotas in 2015, which is worth 100 million in additional milk production.

Exports of Irish dairy products and ingredients accounted for some €2.56 billion in 2007 and the potential for this sector

to grow further in the new policy environment post 2015 is enormous.

Fianna Fáil lobbied for financial support to help the Irish pig sector when it got into difficulty in December 2008. As a result, the European Union gave 25 million in support to the Irish pig sector.

Fianna Fáil in Europe is constantly engaging with the European institutions in an effort to reduce red tape from the administration of many CAP related initiatives. Unnecessary administrative burdens must be eliminated.

The Irish Food Sector

There are 40,000 people directly employed in the Irish food sector. Fianna Fáil is committed to ensuring that strong support is given to promote Irish food products at home and abroad. Agri-food exports (including beverages) were worth over 9 billion in 2007. Research and innovation is critical for our food industry to maintain its position at the forefront of the European and global marketplace.

It is essential that we respond to the needs of increasingly sophisticated and health conscious consumers. The consumer has a right to know the origin of a product being purchased and therefore we will be seeking to ensure that the necessary EU legislation is in place to guarantee the traceability of all meat products. Fianna Fáil in Government will be working very closely with the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms Marian Fischer Boel, and with the EU Commissioner for Food and Public Health, Ms Androulla Vassilou, on these very important issues.

The future of the CAP 2014-2021

The debate is already underway in Europe on budgetary priorities under the next EU financial perspective 2014-2021.

This means seeking agreement on the policies that will receive EU financial support from the EU annual budget during this period.

These ongoing discussions between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Governments are due to be finalised in 2011.

Fianna Fáil is committed to ensuring that there is a very strong and adequately funded CAP after 2013 and to guarantee that a strong agricultural production base exists within the European Union.

Ireland is a substantial net beneficiary from CAP spending. Fianna Fáil is determined that the CAP will continue to support Irish farmers and rural communities so that we can all face the future with confidence.

We will, as we have always done, fight to ensure that the interests of Irish farmers, rural communities and the Irish food sector are fully protected.

Fisheries

Fianna Fáil MEPs have been centrally involved in the negotiating process with the European Commission to ensure that Irish fishermen secure strong fishing quota rights on an annual basis under the Common Fisheries Policy.

Fianna Fáil MEPs engage regularly with Irish fishing representative organisations to ensure that the interests of Irish fishermen and coastal communities are fully protected under EU fishing policies. We support the implementation of effective management and conservation measures at an EU and at a national level so as to rebuild our fish stocks and ensure a viable and sustainable livelihood for our fishermen.

Fianna Fáil MEPs arranged regular meetings with the EU Commissioner responsible for Fisheries, Mr Jo Borg to address ongoing concerns from an Irish perspective. This is complemented by the work that is carried out by MEPs within the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament.

We support the forthcoming review that will be carried out by the European Commission into the future operation of the Common Fisheries Policy. We will work with the representatives from the Irish Fishing industry and with other key stakeholders, to strengthen the current EU policy to benefit the Irish fishing industry.

Fianna Fáil welcomes ongoing EU support for the development of the aquaculture industry in Ireland. The Irish Aquaculture Sector has enormous potential and can offer coastal communities a very valuable source of job creation and economic growth.

Irish fish products are of the highest quality among European and global fish producers. We support measures to vigorously market Irish fish products both in Ireland and abroad.

We must seek to reduce as much red tape and eliminate as much unnecessary form filling as is possible under the Common Fisheries Policy.

We support the promotion of recreational fishing opportunities within the EU.

Education and Culture

EU Education and Training Programmes

Erasmus

EU educational supported programmes are a 'win-win' for individuals, societies, enterprises and EU member states.

Irish students from our 41 third level colleges are benefiting tremendously from a number of EU supported educational initiatives.

In the academic year 2007/2008, 209 Irish teachers and trainers took part on the Erasmus programme and 1,820 Irish students participated on the Erasmus programme itself. This is the initiative whereby a student from one third level college can go and study for a period of up to one year in another EU country. Some Irish students even study in two or three more countries as part of their third level education.

By the year 2012, over 3 million people in Europe will have participated on the Erasmus programme. Now 160,000 students and 26,000 teachers a year in Europe take part in Erasmus programmes.

This policy of 'mobility for all' is an important element in providing better education, promoting higher practical language skills and supporting job creation. The 'mobility for all' aspects to EU backed education programmes is very important in a globalised world.

University Business Forum Project

The European Commission launched a University Business Forum in 2008 which provides a platform for the exchange of views on issues such as the employability of graduates, continuing education, professional university management and the promotion of University-Partnerships. This is part of the overall strategy of the European Commission to address what are known as 'Europe's future skills requirements up to 2020.'

School to School Partnerships

The EU, through the Comenius Programme supports school to school partnerships which encourage pupils from different European countries to work together on specific topics. It will help to encourage teacher exchange programmes in Europe as part of their training and promotes the use of foreign languages. More than 800,000 pupils in Europe were involved in the Comenius Programme in the year 2007.

The EU is also increasing support to help those who drop out of school under the Grundtvig initiative. This programme is targeted at over 16s.

Lifelong learning and vocational training opportunities are part of the EU educational programme, Leonardo Da Vinci. It is the objective of the European Commission to increase the number of vocational training places under the Leonardo Da Vinci programme from 60,000 in 2007 to 80,000 by 2013.

Schools E-Twinning Project

The e-twinning programme is an initiative which encourages schools to network with one another from different countries over the internet. 35,000 schools in Europe already are taking part in this e-twinning programme.

This helps to support young people to learn about other EU countries with the use of the most up to date information and communications technologies.

The EU Tempus programme supports university Co-operation from the 27 member states of the EU with universities from Africa, the Balkans, Central Asia and the Middle East.

Culture

Supporting Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Europe

Fianna Fáil was to the forefront in leading the campaign to ensure that the Irish language became an official working language within the institutions of Europe.

We won this campaign and the Irish language became an official working language of the European Union on January 1st 2007. Already 52 new jobs have been created.

If the Lisbon Treaty is ratified, there will be more powers of co-decision given to the EU institutions and this will mean the creation of more jobs, as the translation of EU Directives and Regulations only applies to the co-decision procedure.

The European Union, in the promotion of media rights, is very supportive of a wider use of languages. That is why there is a member of the European Commission with responsibility for multi-lingualism.

There are 23 official working languages in Europe, 60 regional and minority languages and some 175 migrant languages. As the European Union integrates more closely, we must always protect different cultural, linguistic and national diversities.

Promoting EU Culture Programmes

Under the EU Culture programme 2007-2013, the European Commission encourages co-operation between cultural projects around Europe, aiming to enhance the development of cross border co-operation between creators, cultural players and cultural institutions. A total of €400 million is available under this Culture programme and it supports the following specific objectives:

- Promoting the trans-national mobility of people working in the cultural sector.
- Encouraging the trans-national circulation of works, cultural and artist products.
- Supporting inter-cultural dialogue in Europe.

This EU Culture Programme 2007-2013 was to the forefront in promoting the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and the 2009 European Year for Creativity and Innovation.

We support the EU Media programme which supports a single European wide cinema network that brings award winning films to cinemas in every EU member state. This gives consumers real choice and the opportunity to see films from other EU member states.

We support the recent setting up of the European digital library called EUROPEANA, which was launched in November 2008. This provides European citizens with direct, multilingual access to our rich cultural heritage. Two million digitised objects are now accessible under these initiatives including photos, paintings, audios, maps, manuscripts, books, newspapers and materials from Europe's museums, archives and libraries.

The Irish Peace Process

EU Support for the Irish Peace Process

The European Union is the greatest peace project in the world and has played a very significant role in supporting the peace process in Ireland. The European Union has been the largest donor to the International Fund for Ireland. It amounts to 40% of all monies spent under the IFI programme.

Following the announcement of the ceasefires in 1994, the European Union put in place the peace fund programmes.

Between 2007 and 2013, the Peace III programme will be worth €333 million to support projects that promote peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and in the border county region. Of this figure, the European Union has contributed €212 million. This initiative targets grassroots programmes that promote community development and social inclusion.

Between 2007 and 2013, the Interreg cross border programme will support the development of cross border economic links in a range of areas. The Interreg programme will be worth €256 million during this period and the EU contribution of this figure is €185 million.

The Interreg programme supports economic development and job creation in the border county region and in Northern Ireland. The Peace III and Interreg programmes are additional to mainstream structural fund initiatives such as the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.

Consumer Protection

EU - Protecting the Rights of Consumers in Ireland

The European Union is to the forefront in promoting and protecting the rights of consumers across a range of policy issues. Moreover, the European Parliament has an equal power with the EU Governments in bringing forward new consumer protection measures.

The European Parliament has an equal power with EU Governments in bringing forward new laws in the field of consumer protection issues.

The European Commission will name any airlines that impose hidden charges over the internet and do not comply with these new EU rules.

Higher safety standards for toys sold in Europe

EU institutions are strengthening and updating the RAPEX system which checks that toy imports coming into Europe comply with EU safety standards. This is as a direct result of breaches of safety standards found in some toys sold within the European Union which resulted in the re-call of millions of toys from the EU marketplace in 2008.

The European Union is working closely with the Chinese Government, where most toys sold in the world are manufactured to ensure that it will improve and update its laws regulating the manufacture of toys.

Shopping online

All airline companies that operate in Europe have to spell out clearly all the costs that are involved in purchasing an airline ticket online. Consumers will have the right to know all the separate elements concerning the cost of an airline ticket, including landing and insurance charges.

One area that the European Commission is looking carefully at is protecting the 150 million consumers shopping online.

The internet as a retail platform is here to stay - and we must be able to adapt to new online opportunities over the internet. 60% of people in Europe have access to internet use for shopping purposes and these figures will increase substantially in the coming years.

This new digital environment where online shopping exists must ensure that both consumers and businesses can prosper into the future. We must effectively break down the regulatory barriers which are holding back the complete development of an effective internal market within the European Union over the Internet.

The European Commission is looking carefully at the issue of whether the rules in place at the moment adequately protect consumers or not. Under existing EU laws, businesses in Europe have to provide concise information in all consumer contracts purchased over the Internet, including the main characteristics of the product, delivery time, the price inclusive of tax and redress issues.

The trader will have to deliver products to the consumer within 30 days. Clear remedies such as financial re-imbusement for late delivery, the repair and the replacement of the product will also be available to EU consumers who have purchased defective goods online.

Fair charges for Mobile Phone Users

We welcome new laws at an EU level that will ensure that the cost of mobile phone texting from abroad is reduced to 11 cent from 39 cent, which is a decrease of 66% in the cost of texting from abroad.

Irish people send on average 160 texts a month. This move will save Irish business people and holidaymakers millions of Euro in the cost of their mobile phone bills.

Highlighting the Health Risks from Personal Music Players

New EU public awareness campaigns are going to be introduced which will ensure that young people are made aware of the dangers of listening to personal music players at high volumes over a sustained period of time.

10% of people in the EU who listen to personal music players for more than one hour a day over a period of 5 year risk permanent hearing loss. This is a particularly worrying statistic for young people, who are such large users of personal music players.

The European Union is also backing the introduction of new technologies for companies that manufacture personal music players to minimise the dangers of overuse.

EU Consumer Market Scoreboard

Fianna Fáil supports the regular publication of what is known as the EU Consumer Market Scoreboard.

This discloses the prices of energy, telecom and financial services products that are sold in each of the 27 member states of the European Union.

This scoreboard also highlights the standards of satisfaction and complaints that applies in these sectors.

Transport and Telecoms

EU Transport Policy

Transport is more than just a sector of our economy. It connects our society together. The free movement of persons and goods that is at the very heart of the construction of Europe would not be possible without an efficient transport system.

As an island, Ireland has very specific transport characteristics and concerns. We are working to ensure that even though we may be at the geographical periphery of Europe, Ireland remains at the heart of EU transport policy

The European Commission in June 2009 is due to bring forward a communication outlining the future direction of European Transport Policy. We must work within the EU to build a transport system that can meet the modern challenges such as globalisation, diversity of energy uses, climate change, and security threats while continuing to meet the needs of industry, tourism and individuals.

Road Transport

The community policy objectives for road transport are to promote passenger transport services, to create fair conditions for competition and to promote and harmonise more environmentally friendly technologies. European road policy aims to promote a system of sustainable mobility that is fair and efficient and that reduces the negative effects on the environment.

The transport sector is responsible for 28% of EU CO₂ emissions, and 84% of this figure emanates from road vehicles.

With our EU partners, we are working towards upgrading and improving our road networks and changing road user behaviour to minimise the impact of road transport on CO₂ emissions.

99% of Ireland's domestic freight is transported by road. We support the European Trans-European Networks in Transport programme (TEN-T). TEN-T policies for Ireland have resulted in the upgrading of large sections of our road network.

As an exporting country, we carefully monitor ongoing EU rules governing the Irish and European haulage industry.

We work with our EU partners to protect all road users and those who depend on road transport for their livelihood. Existing legislation establishes minimal standards for working time, driving and rest periods, including enforcement and the use of tachographs. The EU also promotes and upholds passenger rights and safety standards, and promotes fair competition in the road haulage and road transport markets. EU co-operation is especially important to protect cross-border road users and passengers.

Fianna Fáil supports the development of intermodality in road transport, including the ongoing development of links between our road networks and rail, air and shipping systems.

Road Safety

In 2007, 43,000 people died in road accidents in Europe, with a further 1.7 million people injured.

Fianna Fáil advocates the approach of targeting the three key areas of infrastructure, driving behaviour and vehicle standards to reduce road deaths across Europe. This policy programme will be at the core of the European Road Safety Programme 2011-2020.

We support the European Road Safety Charter, which brings together representatives from the EU institutions and all interested parties in an effort to share ideas and best practices to reduce the number of deaths that take place on our roads. However, the European Union needs to do more to reduce road deaths in Europe and to this end we are pushing for more co-ordinated action and exchange of best practice at a European level.

We support the establishment of the eSafety Aware initiative which seeks to incorporate the newest technologies into road safety campaigns and to create awareness of eSafety.

Air Transport Policy

Ireland's geographical position as an island on the edge of Europe means that ensuring an efficient air transport service is essential for our economic development.

We believe that to maximise Ireland's desirability as a tourism and business destination, Europe's air transport policies must continue to take account of rising passenger numbers, advances in technology and climate change concerns.

We support the 'Single European Sky' initiative which is designed to ensure that the European aviation industry becomes more competitive and respects the environment. This programme reduce flight times and fuel consumption and this will help to reduce airline costs and introduce safer, greener and cost efficient flights. At the core of the Single European Sky package is greater co-operation in the policy area of air traffic control.

We welcome the work of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) in developing new technologies in the field of air traffic management technologies. The EASA promotes the highest common standards of safety and environmental protection in civil aviation at a European level.

Fianna Fáil has supported new EU rules that ensure that passengers are adequately compensated if a flight is delayed by over two hours or more, if a flight is cancelled or if a person is denied boarding.

Maritime Safety

90% of all EU freight outside the EU is seaborne and 400 million passengers embark every year at European ports.

It is essential that shipping and maritime operations are carried out with full respect for the safety of passengers and crew and for the health of our environment.

Therefore, we welcome progress made by the EU institutions on a series of proposals to reform the maritime sector in Europe.

At the heart of these reforms is a commitment to passenger safety and the protection of the environment. Concretely, this entails ensuring that sub-standard shipping is prohibited in European waters, verification of the sea-worthiness of vessels, reducing the risk of maritime accidents and minimising the environmental impact from maritime transport.

EU institutions work very closely with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) on many of these EU proposals.

Freight Transport by Sea

Fianna Fáil supports the Marco Polo initiative, which seeks to support the movement of freight transport on European roads to sea, rail and inland waterways.

We believe that Ireland as an island stands to gain a lot from a strong European short sea shipping policy. Short-sea shipping carries 41% of all tonne-kilometres of freight transport in Europe.

Development of Information Technology in European Transport

We support the development and promotion of measures to change transport behaviour in order to reduce congestion and environmental impact.

We welcome the work that is carried out under the EU's Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), which applies the most up to date information and communication technologies to the transport sector to address congestion and emissions. Examples of Intelligent Transport Systems applications in road transport include urban and motorway traffic management and control systems, electronic toll collection and route navigation.

We support the EU Galileo project, which is an independent European satellite navigation system supporting improved transport operations across a range of forms.

Telecoms

The EU is to the forefront in ensuring that the telecoms sector in Europe is modern, effective, competitive and accessible to all. 250 million people in the EU use the internet alone, making the EU the biggest online market in the world. Telecoms policy in Europe supports job creation, new information technology networks and services that reduce prices for consumers.

The EU supports this objective by promoting the following measures:

- Supporting new regulatory measures to break up competition bottlenecks in the telecoms market in Europe where they still exist.
- Reforming radio spectrum management into a more market orientated, efficient and consistent structure. This will give a boost to the European wireless industry and support the 'broadband for all' initiative in Europe, whether in big cities or in less populated areas.
- Under the i2010 roll-out plan for the telecoms sector there will be increased support for the provision of Government services online.
- Given that the information, communications and technology sectors account for 26% of overall research expenditure, efforts to pool research at an EU level must intensify if we are to maximise the benefits for the European and Irish economies from such important research activities. This includes the public private partnership arrangements.
- The European Union will lead from the front in developing the internet of the future which will replace our current network and service infrastructures.

Foreign Affairs

EU Enlargement

May 1st 2009 marks the 5th anniversary since ten new countries acceded into the European Union.

It was under the Irish Presidency of the European Union in the year 2004, at a time when Bertie Ahern TD was the President of the European Council and Brian Cowen TD was Chairman of the Council of European Foreign Ministers that ten new countries successfully acceded into the European Union.

We support the enlargement process in Europe, taking into account the well established principles known as the Copenhagen criteria and the accession negotiations process.

The historic unification and stabilisation of the European continent would be left incomplete without the gradual integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. We support the close social, political and economic ties that are being built up between all the member states of the European Union and with countries in the Balkans.

Accession negotiations between Croatia and the European Union are advancing well and may be completed by the end of this year. We support European facilitation involving border disputes which exist between Slovenia and Croatia.

The European Union is contributing to bring peace and stability to Kosovo through a European Security and Defence mission, the appointment of a special representative and through the EU contribution to the work of the international civilian office. We support the greatest possible involvement of Kosovo in the stabilisation and association process.

The European Union is supporting the normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, including mutual participation in regional co-operation activities. One of the basic conditions for stabilisation and peaceful developments in the Western Balkans is Serbia's prospects of becoming an EU candidate country. We welcome the full co-operation that is being given by political leaders in Serbia with the International Criminal Tribunal based in the Hague.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has achieved EU candidate status.

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement outlining closer social and political ties between the EU and Albania is in force. Montenegro has also signed and implemented a stabilisation and association agreement with the EU.

The European Union is working closely with the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina so as to achieve a greater degree of political consensus that has delivered so much progress in the other parts of the Balkan region.

EU Relations with Third Countries

European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Union's relationship with Russia is one of the most challenging of our times. Russia is the third most important trading partner for the European Union.

The security of energy supply and demand is a key component of this relationship. But the European Union and Russia will have to work more closely together in an effort to ensure that the principles of the energy charter treaty, namely transparency, reciprocity and non-discrimination are fully enforced. 25% of all gas and oil supplies within the European Union emanate from Russia but 70% of all Russian revenues come from the European Union.

The European Union must continue to engage with Russia on a variety of global political issues, including the Middle East, Iran, Afghanistan and the Balkans.

The European Union must intensify our contacts with Russia in the areas of visa facilitation, customs co-operation, educational exchanges, scientific research and world trade.

The European Union must reinforce the need for the freedom of the press in Russia to be respected at all times.

We support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of countries like Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova as part of this European partnership strategy.

The United States of America

EU-US relations have had a positive and fresh start under the new administration of President Obama. EU leaders had a very successful meeting with President Obama in Prague on April 5th 2009.

The European Union is working very closely with the American Government in addressing global economic challenges.

On the issue of climate change, the European Union is working closely with the American Government, in an effort to secure a new agreement to tackle climate change at the forthcoming meeting in December in Copenhagen of the United Nations Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change.

We are equally committed to implementing the Millennium Development Goals.

We are working closely together on a range of issues including in Afghanistan.

We support the Middle East peace process and we are working with the American Government on many of these issues via the Quartet structure.

The Middle East

The European Union must not give up on the vision of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and in Gaza, living alongside the state of Israel. But the re-construction of Gaza requires a durable solution, as part of a peace process to which all parties are committed. We need a return to substantive and comprehensive peace talks.

The European Union is supporting the re-construction of Gaza in the form of humanitarian assistance to the level of €42 million through what is known as the PEGASE programme.

We support the work of the Arab Peace initiative in terms of promoting peace and reconciliation in the Middle East.

China

China is the largest trading partner of the European Union. The European Union is working very closely with the Chinese Government on a range of social, economic and political issues under the EU-China Trade and Co-operation agreement.

We support the transition of China to become an open economy based upon the rule of law and a respect for human rights. We support the ongoing integration of China into the world economy and the process of economic and social reforms that is taking place in China.

India

The European Union Action Plan on India was updated in 2008. This plan strengthens economic, social and political relations between the European Union and India in a range of policies including in the areas of trade, investment, transport and the environment.

The European Union is providing €470 million to India between the years 2007-2013 to support the implementation of the EU Action Plan on India and to improve education and health services in India.

Latin America

The European Union is the largest investor in both Central and South America.

Between 2007-2013, the European Union is providing 3 billion to Latin America to support a number of programmes including in the fields of drugs, migration and relations with civil society.

The European Investment Bank is also authorised to support economic projects in Latin America to the level of €2.8 billion between 2007 and 2013.

The European Union and the Developing World

European Co-operation in Achieving Development Goals

The European Union is the largest donor of development aid in the world. In 2008, EU Member States and the EU institutions contributed over 49 billion as aid to the developing world. Poverty eradication is not something that any member state can achieve alone. Development policy is an area where, by acting together, EU member states can make a real difference.

We support the full implementation of the EU Code of Conduct on Complementarity and the Division of Labour in Development Policy adopted in 2007. Donors are now encouraged to join forces on particular development aid projects and avoid the duplication of activity. This will help to ensure the more effective spending of development aid.

European Union development aid is allocated in a framework that aims to ensure that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are implemented by 2015. The MDGs are international goals, set by the 189 members of the United Nations in the year 2000. They seek to eradicate poverty and promote social development in the poorest countries of the world.

These goals include tackling HIV/aids, malaria, and tuberculosis, providing primary education for all children, improving health services, providing safe water and sanitary facilities and supporting good governance, the rule of law and democracy in the Developing World.

Fianna Fáil in Europe believes that the EU approach to development must tackle the causes as well as effects of poverty and that the spending of EU development aid must be carefully monitored and assessed.

Protecting Future Generations

We support policies which will put in place programmes that provide primary education to all the children living in the Developing World, in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals.

There are nearly 200 million children aged between 5 and 14 involved in child labour around the world at present. Child labour includes agricultural work, domestic work, factory work, child soldiers, child trafficking and many other forms of exploitation.

The European Union is working closely with the International Labour Organisation in the fight against child labour. The European Union is supporting a range of projects under the European initiative on democracy and human rights to combat child labour in many parts of the world including in Brazil, India, Egypt and in Morocco. Fianna Fáil believes that international efforts and co-operation between governments and industry must be intensified to bring an end to child labour practices around the world.

We applaud the work of The European Instrument for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which has a budget of €1.1 billion (2007-13) and has funded actions to rehabilitate former child soldiers in Angola, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, to combat child trafficking in West Africa, to combat sex tourism involving children and to eradicate female genital mutilation.

Fianna Fáil believes that education, child labour concerns and gender issues should be mainstreamed into all EU aid and development policies.

Sustainability of Food Supply

With the world rising in population by 75 million people a year, the issue of ensuring food security is now a key EU political priority. There has been a dramatic rise in the price of food in many parts of the world in recent times. Fluctuations in commodity prices threaten social, political and economic stability and we believe that sustainable development is dependent on the stability of food supply and pricing.

The European Union has already agreed to provide €1 billion as a food facility for the Third World. €800 million of this financial commitment will be made available this year. Already a 314 million package of projects to support agriculture and improve the food security situation in 23 developing countries across the globe has been adopted. Further programmes will follow, targeting 50 developing countries in total.

Fianna Fáil welcomes the European Union's targeted response to pressing food supply needs, but believes that an increased emphasis must be put on protecting long term food supplies.

International Co-operation for a Better Future

Fianna Fáil supports the efforts of the European Union in implementing a joint EU-Africa strategy. This will foster closer co-operation between our peoples in the fields of social, education and political policies. These include the policy areas of trade, agriculture, migration, research, climate change and the energy sectors. In a globalised world our concerns are shared and we must work together with all our international partners to address issues of climate change, energy security, human rights and security.

Human Rights

Ireland has a long and respected tradition of standing up for minorities and the repressed all over the world. We believe that Ireland can further advance the need to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms by working with our EU partners.

The European Union is one of the leading political forces in promoting human rights throughout the world. The EU's position as a leading global trading bloc has resulted in strong international links and considerable political influence.

Fianna Fáil believes that the EU should continue to use this influence to promote the principles of human rights, tolerance and respect for all that unites Europe today.

The EU must continue to speak out against torture and repression of free speech and must offer support to human rights defenders throughout the globe. The advancement of the principles of social and economic justice must influence all EU internal and external policies.