



European Elections Manifesto 2014

DRIVING RECOVERY THROUGH JOBS, STABILITY & GROWTH

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Foreword by

AN TAOISEACH

The last few years have been very tough for the Irish people. You have made sacrifices to pull Ireland back from the brink. We are on the road to recovery now but we must work hard to make sure this recovery is sustainable, fair and felt in homes throughout the country. That is why your upcoming decision on the people you send to Europe to represent you, to take decisions in your name, is so important.

We have moved from a crisis where 250,000 jobs were lost in the three years before the Fine Gael-led Government came to office, to a more stable and positive economic outlook where almost 61,000 jobs were created last year. We want to build on that stability to ensure we continue to grow and create jobs so that our people have the opportunity to work and make a good life for themselves and their families here in Ireland.

Your vote in the upcoming European Parliament elections on 23rd May is vital to continuing on the path to recovery. Fine Gael, as a member of the biggest political grouping in Europe - the European People's Party (EPP) - is putting forward candidates of exceptional ability and years of experience at all levels. This will ensure that Ireland stays at the heart of Europe, close to the decision-makers with real influence, and well-represented within the EU.

We need your support to give Ireland the best chance for a strong, sustainable recovery and a better future for all of our people.



Introduction by Minister for European Affairs

PASCHAL DONOHOE TD

Your vote in the European Parliament elections is now more important than ever. This is because, under the Lisbon Treaty, the Parliament now has new law-making powers that apply to more than 40 areas. These include agriculture, energy policy, immigration and use of EU funds.

This enhanced power is already being felt through the impact your Fine Gael MEPs have had on recent decisions, such as the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). They have also had a strong say in the design of the new banking union; the aim of which is to prevent an economic crisis like the one we have just experienced ever happening again.

As the only directly-elected EU body, the European Parliament is the European institution that is most directly accountable to you, the voter. Your Fine Gael MEPs are best placed to make your voice heard in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg on the laws and decisions that affect us all.

Fine Gael MEPs are members of the European People's Party (EPP), the largest political grouping in the European Parliament. Twelve of the EU twenty eight Member States' Heads of State and Government belong to the EPP and have played a key role in leading the European economy out of crisis and into recovery.

Fine Gael MEPs, together with their EPP colleagues, are now setting the agenda for recovery by securing stability within the economy and focusing on driving growth and job creation in Europe. A vote for a Fine Gael candidate in the European Elections is a vote for the policies of recovery. As members of the EPP, a vote for Fine Gael puts power in your hands. Our people must be able to look to the future with hope and optimism. A vote for Fine Gael will deliver a stronger, brighter and more secure Ireland, working towards prosperity within Europe.

1. DRIVING RECOVERY THROUGH STABILITY, GROWTH & JOBS

At the time of the last European Parliament elections, the Irish economy was in free-fall. The Irish people elected politicians that would act responsibly to bring the country back from the brink of ruin to growth. They did so by making Fine Gael the largest group of Irish MEPs.

This decision proved important when the European economy, and the Eurozone, faced massive challenges. The European Parliament played an important role in supporting our common currency and the European financial system. What's more, Fine Gael MEPs, along with their colleagues in the EPP, played a crucial role in introducing a series of vital reforms that will ensure that both the euro and the EU financial system safeguard future growth and stability.

As a small open economy, Ireland's future growth is heavily dependent on what happens in Europe. We have been making real progress in terms of rebuilding our reputation abroad. We are successfully delivering the message that Ireland is a good place in which to do business. But the job is not complete.

By targeting the areas with real potential for growth, such as agriculture, the digital sector, tourism and manufacturing, we are now experiencing the fastest pace of jobs growth in Europe. Investment in Ireland from the European Investment Bank has increased by four fifths compared to 2010. This is crucial to our ability to create the jobs we so badly need.

JOBS

Tackling Youth Unemployment

Fine Gael recognises that the Government and the European Union has a responsibility to ensure that each and every person in our society is given an opportunity to play a role in our economic recovery.

We believe that the single biggest crisis facing the European Union is youth unemployment. Our European leaders must make decisions that will help the single market rise to its potential and create the kind of jobs that our young people can fill. We no longer want to see our young talented people being forced to leave our shores or become dependent on the State's welfare supports.

We also recognise the real dangers of our young becoming long-term unemployed. The €6 billion EU Youth Guarantee, agreed under the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, will ensure that young people who are unemployed are guaranteed a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or training.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work with the Irish Government to ensure the implementation of an effective and well-resourced Youth Guarantee in Ireland.
- Work at EU level to ensure that best practice is disseminated across the EU so that the benefit of the Youth Guarantee is felt evenly and fairly across the Member States. We all stand to gain from getting our young people back to work.

Investing in Research and Innovation

In the most recent European Commission Innovation Union Scoreboard, published in March 2014, Ireland increased its position from tenth to ninth in the overall ranking of 28 EU Member States and was the overall leader in the indicator of the economic effects of innovation. We will build on this success.

Horizon 2020 is the biggest ever European Research and Innovation Programme and the largest worldwide, with a budget of almost €80 billion covering the next seven years. The Government has set an ambitious but achievable target for Irish researchers, of winning funding of €1.25 billion over the lifetime of Horizon 2020. Fine Gael MEPs will work to ensure that Ireland maximises the potential of the EU-wide budget.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Support the establishment of common research programmes between top universities and research organisations.
- Campaign for a European framework for education standards and greater cooperation in research across Europe to maximise investment in future jobs and growth.

Encouraging additional investment in infrastructure through the European Investment Bank and job creation through balanced regional development.

In the last two years, Ireland has increasingly benefitted from the availability of capital from the European Investment Bank (EIB). The EIB has provided loans for the Grangegorman Public Private Partnership (PPP), Dublin Cross City Luas Project and upgrade works on the N11/N7 Motorway. The EIB is now more important than ever in the context of maximising infrastructural investment in Ireland. Fine Gael recognises the invaluable role it can play in helping to develop projects of social value and as a driver of job creation. In total, the EIB provided €1.193 billion in assistance to Ireland in 2013, a 21% increase over 2012. We recognise the need to encourage additional investment and to ensure job and growth potential is delivered through balanced regional development.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work with their EPP colleagues towards improving the role of the EIB to facilitate easier access to capital, especially for SMEs.
- Ensure that procedures are streamlined to allow businesses across Ireland to compete for EU funded projects.
- Focus on directing structural funds to the areas most in need.

STABILITY

Establishing a fair and sustainable financial system to support growth

In Europe, the Fine Gael MEPs have been able to harness their position in the EPP Group to influence policymakers at every level throughout the crisis. They have spoken up for Ireland when it mattered, for example, through their work on the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee of the European Parliament.

What happens next though is critical. Ensuring that the tools are in place to prevent a repeat of the crisis we have just been through is vital. The work our MEPs do to facilitate the delivery of a robust banking union, a satisfactory supervisory mechanism and a workable single resolution mechanism, will also impact all of our lives for years to come. Sending our best to Europe is a must.

The new financial arrangements Europe has agreed will ensure taxpayers will not have to pay for banks' mistakes again. This will be done through a 'bail-in' mechanism whereby banks' shareholders and creditors have to pay their share.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to address Ireland's legacy bank debt, building on the Eurogroup ESM framework for recapitalising European banks, including the potential retroactive recapitalisation of our banks.

Lowering bank lending rates to Irish businesses to German levels through the acceleration of banking union

We have to regain confidence in our banking sector and ensure that our banks are working to serve the people, not the other way around. Encouraging small and medium enterprises to look for credit when they need it, and ensuring that the banks can deliver this credit, is central to the future growth of our domestic economy.

At present, the euro area banking system is fragmented along national lines. Irish SMEs and consumers are effectively reliant on domestic sources of funding. This has led to imbalances across the European banking system where SMEs and consumers are not able to access the affordable interest rates that they need. Under banking union, the cost of bank finance to SMEs and households should converge to the euro area average. This could result in a lowering of lending rates of up to 2%.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work with their EPP colleagues to ensure implementation of the new European banking union banking system.
- Ensure that European banking union will not only provide a safeguard against future crises but also provide a more competitive and flexible system for both SMEs and consumers.

Continued reform of the Single Market to encourage growth

Reform of the European banking and financial sector necessarily took precedence during the years of the financial crisis but we believe that strengthening the Single Market is now just as important. Removing remaining barriers that reduce the free movement of persons, capital, goods and services across the EU can create a new wave of growth among our SMEs and young entrepreneurs. In particular, Fine Gael believes Ireland, as a European hub for digital innovation, is uniquely placed to maximise the potential of the Digital Single Market.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work with our EPP colleagues on breaking down the remaining barriers in the Single Market and resist calls for more protectionism, which would ultimately cost Europeans and our trading partners, particularly in the developing world.

Swifter action to open up EU markets for Irish exporters of services and digital content

Fine Gael believes in a Digital Single Market (DSM) for Europe. This will benefit consumers and open up EU markets for Irish exports of services and digital content. Your Fine Gael MEPs have been working on initiatives such as the Connecting Europe Facility, which helps finance the rollout of high speed broadband across Europe. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, Alan Shatter TD, is also working to ensure that the new EU Data Protection Regulation allows people to have more control over their personal data while supporting current and new digital businesses.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to advance the Digital Single Market by removing the legal and fiscal barriers SMEs face to trading online, by creating common rules for cross-border situations and a new simplified VAT system.
- Work towards an integrated online and mobile payments market to support Irish digital companies. Fine Gael believes Irish exporters are uniquely placed to benefit from the DSM, given the dynamic nature of our digital and ICT sectors.

GROWTH

Cementing Ireland's position as a hub for transatlantic trade and investment through completing the transatlantic free trade area

In the final month of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation, Richard Bruton TD, secured agreement among EU Trade Ministers to start negotiations between the EU and the US on a new trade deal. The proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) would be hugely important for Ireland as the US is one of Ireland's biggest trading partners. American companies had investments worth over \$200 billion in Ireland in 2012 and Ireland exported over €26 billion to the US.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to secure the delivery of the TTIP agreement and to ensure that Ireland is well placed to fully benefit from any deal.

Cutting red-tape imposed on small businesses from European legislation

Fine Gael recognises that small and medium enterprises can be frustrated by overly burdensome red-tape. The EU is often seen as the first culprit for unnecessary or cumbersome regulation.

Ireland is among the countries leading the charge for 'better' and 'smarter' regulation in demanding that EU regulations are efficient, proportionate and do not impose an undue burden on Irish businesses. From 2007-2012, Europe successfully reduced the red tape it imposes on small businesses by over 25%. It is a significant achievement that the European Commission now applies a 'think small first' approach when designing policy (SMEs' interests are taken into account at the very early stages of policy making).

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Build on this progress and ensure that the EU institutions set themselves ambitious targets for administrative burden reduction.
- Implement further reductions in red tape, simpler rules and subsidiarity (the EU will only intervene where action by individual countries is insufficient).
- Work to create a Vice President of the Commission who is given the task of 'red tape watchdog' to continuously scrutinise EU legislation.

Enabling our Agriculture Sector to thrive domestically and internationally

Fine Gael in government has strategically prioritised the agri-food and marine sectors. Since taking office in 2011, agri-food exports have increased by 21% and the sector is well on track to meeting the €12 billion target set out in Food Harvest 2020.

Fine Gael played a key leadership role in Europe in finalising the CAP negotiations through the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU and through our strong presence in the European Parliament. The new CAP is an investment in rural communities and will provide the basis for job creation and export driven expansion in the agri-food sector. This will provide sustainable employment in rural communities across the country.

Through the vital work of Fine Gael MEPs, working alongside the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney TD, Ireland successfully agreed its preferred model of payment supports, which delivers a fair outcome for all farmers. Our MEPs are very conscious of the need to sustain the agriculture industry in Ireland, particularly among more economically vulnerable farmers and this is reflected in the reformed CAP. EU food security and climate change policy measures will be key to ensuring that Member States such as Ireland have room to expand production, in a low carbon, environmentally sustainable way.

Fine Gael is investing in the future of the agricultural industry, recognising the need to attract young farmers, the importance of continued research and innovation and the necessity to grow the sector in an environmentally sustainable way. One of Fine Gael's key achievements under CAP reform was the introduction of very significant extra supports for young farmers to support generational change.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to develop the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) model to link research and innovation to farm practice.
- Promote the expansion of exports in an environmentally sustainable and 'green' way.

2. SUPPORTING A FAIRER, GREENER, HEALTHIER IRELAND

A FAIRER IRELAND

The four fundamental freedoms of the EU: free movement of goods, services, capital and people, has allowed the continent and its citizens to prosper in the post-World War II era. Much of Ireland's rights-based legislation has its origins in Europe and Irish MEPs and Ministers continue to play a strong role in advancing the equality and rights agenda within the institutions of the EU.

For Fine Gael, human rights and fairness are values of central importance. When we entered government in 2011, Fine Gael set about addressing the serious inequalities that persist for many sectors of society, including women, children, same-sex couples and those seeking asylum.

While many of these areas are matters of national competence, the European Union offers a framework for fundamental human rights which must be implemented. This presents us with an opportunity to work alongside other Member States to come up with shared solutions to common problems. The people of the European Union value individual freedoms and democratic rights. We need to work together to build on these shared values.

Gender Equality and Victims' Rights

Recognising that the glass ceiling continues to be an unfair barrier for Irish women, Fine Gael in government has taken steps to address gender inequality. Just 15% of the current Dáil is made up of female TDs. However, legislation has been introduced to provide for gender quotas at the next General Election. The Programme for Government commits to a target of at least 40% representation of both genders on State boards and steady progress is being made in achieving this goal.

Within the EU in 2013 only 17.6% of non-executive directors were women and proposals for a directive to address this imbalance were approved by the Parliament last year; work remains to be done to bring the directive to fruition.

Combatting violence against women is a priority for Fine Gael. Important steps have and will continue to be taken to improve the rights of victims in the EU. The Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU secured agreement on a civil European Protection Order measure which means that a civil protection order, such as a barring order for domestic violence, can still be enforced if the victim travels, or moves, from one EU Member State to another.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to ensure the prompt implementation of the European Parliament's 2013 decision to introduce mandatory gender quotas providing for 40% female representation on circa 5,000 listed medium and large-sized companies in the EU by 2020 and State-owned companies by 2018.
- Seek the introduction of stronger measures to combat domestic violence, which disproportionately affects women.
- Work to address barriers to female employment and professional progression, including childcare.

Disability

There are over 1.3 million children and young adults with disabilities living in institutional care in Europe. Fine Gael recognises the need to provide these most vulnerable, voiceless children and young adults with appropriate community-based living.

Fine Gael MEPs in the European Parliament have actively supported the agencies that work in EU Member States to achieve de-institutionalisation. Fine Gael MEPs have campaigned to ensure that EU structural funds will be spent on enabling people with disabilities in the EU to live in community-based care and not in institutional care. Fine Gael strongly supports the EU's disability strategy as set out in the 'European Disability Strategy 2010-2020'.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to ensure that the commitments in the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 are given effect.
- Advance proposals for a Disability Commissioner.
- Continue to campaign for an end to the institutionalisation of children with disabilities in Europe and the prioritisation of community care.

Advancing Human Rights and Equality

Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU concluded negotiations on the accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights. This constitutes a major step forward in the development of human rights in Europe, ensuring that Member States offer the highest standard of human rights protections to their citizens. Furthermore, during the Irish Presidency, Minister Shatter prioritised enhancing fundamental rights and protecting the rule of law, securing agreement that further consideration would be given to safeguarding fundamental rights and countering extreme forms of intolerance, such as racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and homophobia. Work is ongoing to develop rule of law indicators focussed on a number of fundamental rights to ensure the protection of these rights for EU citizens.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Ensure the development and implementation of the framework for addressing threats to the rule of law in the 28 Member States in areas including racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and homophobia.
- Vocally oppose regressive legislation affecting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals, promoting and protecting the human rights of all people, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

Consumer Rights

The EU, working with national Governments, has defined and protected a broad range of consumer rights over the last fifty years in areas such as product safety and consumer law. The new Consumer Rights Directive has strengthened consumer rights, particularly in the area of online contracts. These protections greatly enhance the rights of citizens in the EU in their own Member States and across borders within the EU. Fine Gael MEPs will ensure that consumer rights remain a cornerstone of the work of the European Parliament.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Prioritise legislation in the five sectors identified in the European Consumer Agenda: Food; Energy; Financial; Transport and Digital.
- Work to strengthen the regulatory framework protecting consumer safety in the areas of goods, services and food.
- Promote more efficient and effective market surveillance and law enforcement to ensure consumer rights are protected.

- Work to progress legislation on mobile phone roaming costs, advancing the proposals approved by the European Parliament to end roaming fees within the EU by 2015.
- Work to progress legislation proposing card payment fee caps (at 0.3% of the transaction value for credit card transactions and at a maximum of seven euro for debit cards) and online payment safeguards.
- Ensure that legislation to deal with data protection pays particular heed to privacy where personal data is concerned, taking account of the European Court of Justice's recent ruling on the Data Retention Directive.

A GREENER IRELAND

Fine Gael has a progressive approach to climate protection and has consistently supported EU pro-activity and leadership on climate policy. We have done this by seeking to frame the internal agenda and the positive influence which the EU strives to bring to the wider international agenda under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

When Fine Gael entered government in 2011 there were 20 open environmental infringement cases against Ireland taken by the European Court of Justice (ECJ), most of which related to long-standing failures to transpose EU Directives. Moreover, Ireland lacked a long-term, sustainable and progressive policy to deal with the reality of climate change.

By making the resolution of environmental infringements a key priority, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Phil Hogan TD, established a dedicated Environmental Compliance Unit to engage actively with the European Commission in reducing the number of infringements. Fine Gael in government addressed compliance issues, introducing a range of primary and secondary legislation across the broad spectrum of environmental areas such as habitats, water services, air quality, waste, planning, and energy performance in buildings

At EU level, a policy debate has just begun regarding the framework for climate and energy to 2030; this represents the next phase in the EU's transition to a competitive, low-carbon economy by 2050. Fine Gael supports in principle the proposed targets set out in the European Commission's proposals - a 40% reduction in EU-level greenhouse gas emissions and a proposed EU-wide 27% target for renewable energy by 2030.

Fine Gael will:

- Work in the European Parliament to ensure that the EU's new framework for climate and energy is ambitious while also being flexible and sustainable on environmental, economic and competitiveness grounds.
- Work in the European Parliament to ensure that decisions on new environmental policies are based on reliable data and that policy options are considered in the context of implications for Member States, including Ireland.
- Maintain Ireland's position among the top Member States in terms of timely transposition of new Directives by proactively engaging with Irish stakeholders, including NGOs, thereby minimising the risk of new infringements.
- Within the framework of EU agricultural policy development, promote Ireland as a green food island.

A HEALTHIER IRELAND

While the governance of the health area is a national competence, Member States face similar challenges including demographic changes which include European citizens living longer than ever before. Similarly, European States are grappling with the challenges of diseases, such as cancer, which claim hundreds of thousands of lives every year.

Many Irish children face very serious health consequences arising from the childhood obesity. The World Health Organisation has now identified a global epidemic of obesity which has very serious consequences for life expectancy, quality of life, and the provision of services. The challenge of combatting childhood obesity and addressing food poverty is being tackled through national strategies and campaigns including the Special Action Group on Obesity, established by the Minister for Health, Dr. James Reilly TD. However, this is an EU-wide problem.

The European Union institutions provide fora for Member States to work together to share best practice and develop shared solutions to mutual challenges. Fine Gael MEPs have been particularly active in the European Parliament in introducing measures to reduce smoking. Last February, the European Parliament voted in favour of the Tobacco Products Directive which includes an EU wide tracking and trading system to combat illicit trade in tobacco products

and larger warnings on packaging. This Directive complements national legislation such as the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill, 2013.

E-Health is about providing better services to patients through the use of technology and Ireland has developed an e-Health Strategy which proposes a number of innovations including e-prescriptions, online referrals and unique identifiers for patients.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work in partnership with colleagues in the European Parliament to find shared solutions to the global epidemic of childhood obesity and to the related issue of food poverty.
- Continue to work to develop legislation which tackles threats to human health, and which will enhance our citizens' lives. We can do this by building on the success of the Tobacco Products Directive and progressing European initiatives to combat the acceleration of diseases such as Alzheimer's.
- Ensure that the aspirations in the Declaration on e-Health are made a reality so that patients throughout the EU have access to better, safer healthcare and greater opportunities to manage illnesses through the use of advanced technologies.
- Campaign for new EU rules which would simplify and harmonise the rules on approving clinical trials while ensuring the protection of subjects.
- Work to bring EU proposals on medical devices to fruition to deliver a safer, more effective regulatory framework in Europe which promotes innovation in the medical devices sector.

3. IRELAND IN EUROPE, EUROPE IN THE WORLD

Our European Union membership provides Ireland with a strong voice in Europe. In turn, the European Union is a powerful force on the world stage. The EU, in particular through the office of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has a vital role to play in building, brokering and sustaining peace through diplomacy.

The debate about the UK's relationship with the EU and the potential referendum in 2017 could have very serious consequences for Ireland. At the EU's eastern borders, by contrast, the desire for countries such as Ukraine to develop closer ties with the EU and to avail of the freedoms and values that come with it is indicative of the benefits of EU membership. Fine Gael is committed to ensuring the development of a Union that continues to deliver on its core mandate for its citizens while supporting other countries and on the road to prosperity and security.

THE EU'S EASTERN NEIGHBOURS

The Western Balkan countries

The countries of the Balkans have overcome many challenges in the last two decades, overcoming significant conflict and bloodshed. The EU has played a crucial role in that process. Croatia is now an EU Member State and other Balkan States are working towards developing their relationship with the EU in the hope of one day becoming full members.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Support the process of accession for Montenegro and Serbia.
- Work to build stronger relationships between the EU and Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) through political dialogue.
- Work with Bosnia and Herzegovina to support the implementation of the 'Growth Compact' and the expansion of the structured dialogue to include governance and the fight against corruption.

Ukraine

Fine Gael is strongly of the view that, as a small country which has traditionally relied on respect for the rule of law as the fundamental guarantor of stability in the international system, Ireland should take a firm position on developments in Ukraine. Fine Gael supports the Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We have played an active role at EU level in responding to Russia's annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work through the European Parliament to help Ukraine to function as a stable and secure State with a stable and inclusive Government.
- Support EU efforts to further strengthen its political association and economic integration with Georgia and Moldova.

The Middle East

Following the changes brought about by the Arab Spring, it is important that the EU works closely with its Middle Eastern neighbours to support democratic developments in the countries concerned to ensure that all the countries of the Mediterranean are democratic, stable and prosperous.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work through the European Parliament to support the resolution of conflicts, in particular the Middle East Peace Process.
- Support the growth of democracy in countries transitioning to democracy.
- Continue to promote discussions at EU level on actions that can be taken to alleviate the plight of refugees and displaced persons arising from the conflict in Syria.
- Seek to address the genuine concerns arising from engagement in the Syrian conflict by EU citizens and their radicalisation.

EU REFORM

As the Union grows we must ensure that its institutions develop with it. We must seek the most effective ways of addressing the concerns of Member States and ensure that the institutions work for, and in the name of, all of the people they represent.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to maintain the Community Method which ensures an independent and well functioning Commission. The Commission's sole right of initiating legislation ensures a level playing pitch for all Member States. This must be protected.
- Deliver reform of the EU institutions within existing Treaties. Better use of the tools that are already available, such as reasoned opinions, yellow cards and sunset clauses, must be explored in a bid to put power back in Member States' hands.
- Advance a proposal which would allow Commissioners to come before national parliaments so that the link between the two can be strengthened.
- While respecting the debate that is on-going in the UK about that country's future relationship with the EU, encourage Britain to remain as a strong and committed member of the European Union by stressing that the Union is stronger with the UK in it.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY (CSDP)

While we look to protect the social and economic well-being of our own citizens, we cannot be immune to the threats faced by vulnerable men, women and children in fragile States, in conflict zones and by those suffering from natural and man-made disasters across the globe. The EU and its Member States can bring a comprehensive approach to the promotion of international peace and stability through a unique combination of civilian, diplomatic, economic, development, justice, security and defence instruments. Only with a strong European Common Security and Defence Policy will we be able to promote our values and interests in a rapidly changing world.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Ensure that the European Parliament expands its scrutiny of the Common Security and Defence Policy in order to increase democratic accountability.
- Continue to support Irish participation in selected CSDP missions in line with our foreign and defence policy objectives.

MIGRATION, ASYLUM AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Increased irregular migration, illicit arms, drug trade and human trafficking, as well as international terrorism are challenges of the globalised world. Europe needs to protect its borders and find a balance between minimising the threat of crimes and maximising ease and convenience of movement. Human trafficking, the slavery of our time, remains a serious problem for all Member States including Ireland. Frontex is a co-ordinating cross-national body that examines how different countries police their borders. Fine Gael and its sister parties in the EPP, want to see the role of Frontex strengthened, together with the creation of a European Coast Guard.

A European Asylum System

Asylum is a fundamental right, granted to people fleeing persecution or serious harm in their own country. Since 1999, the EU has been working to improve the legislative framework governing asylum and to create a Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The Common European Asylum System and the establishment of the European Asylum Support Office provides for standards to qualify for asylum, minimum standards for reception facilities for asylum seekers and the establishment of Eurodac for the comparison of fingerprints in all Member States.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to strengthen Frontex, increase its role and support cross-border cooperation to combat human trafficking across the EU and beyond.
- Work towards the creation of a European Coast Guard.
- Ensure that the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the obligations of International law, including the Geneva Convention are reflected in immigration policies.
- Tackle the abuse of asylum systems by building partnerships between the EU and countries of origin and transit, helping them to develop their own asylum systems.

POLICE, JUDICIAL AND CUSTOMS COOPERATION

The European Arrest Warrant demonstrates the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation in the fight against crime in the EU. Similarly, the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU secured agreement on a civil European Protection Order measure which means that a civil protection order, such as a barring order for domestic violence, can still be enforced if the victim travels, or moves, from one EU Member State to another.

Fine Gael MEPs will work to develop further opportunities for cross-border cooperation on policing and justice including:

- The creation of a European Investigation Order to address difficulties in obtaining information and evidence in cross-border cases.
- The provision of strong supports and protection for victims of crime regardless of where in the European Union they fall victim to the crime.
- Cooperation between Member States to provide for innovative and flexible responses to cybercrime, including legislative measures, police training and support for cross-border cyber investigations.

Serious Crime

Serious and organised crime and terrorism are threats to democracy that do not stop at a country's border. Moreover, Member States of the European Union can best tackle serious crime and terrorism through cooperation and sharing best practice. Tackling corruption and white collar crime is essential to protect our citizens and our economies and to maintain confidence in our system of government.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Implement the new four year EU Action Plan on Drugs agreed during the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU.
- Ensure the legislative framework in the EU facilitates the targeting and seizure of criminal assets from criminal organisations that operate across national borders.
- Campaign to exclude from participation in any public contract throughout the EU any enterprise that has been found to have participated in a criminal organisation, money laundering or any other serious crime.
- Promote extradition agreements with third countries and mutual legal assistance agreements, as they are key to fighting organised crime at a global level.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Developing links beyond the borders of the European Union is key to our continued growth and development. America, China and the Gulf region have all been instrumental to our programme to maximise trade and economic growth. Assisting in the development of other nations is our duty and in our interests.

EU Policy on Development Cooperation

The European Parliament Development Committee, of which MEP Gay Mitchell is an active member, ensured that the Parliament adopted a strengthened Development Cooperation Instrument 2014-2020. This Instrument, on which EU aid policy is based, focuses on poverty eradication initiatives, sustainable development, a human-rights-based approach, development of the private sector, policy coherence for development and coordination of donors' aid policies. The Committee also contributed to setting out the post-2015 goals at the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Review Summit in September 2013.

The Development Committee of the European Parliament has also put a strong focus on increasing resilience and improving Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Strategies in developing countries to help them to cope with the negative effects of natural disasters and economic shocks.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Continue to develop a more effective approach to overseas development assistance.
- Work to ensure that progress continues in ensuring provision of insurance and social security in developing countries.
- Ensure that the EU plays a very strong role in promoting, defending and protecting the rights of women and children, especially in conflict or post-conflict zones and countries.
- Prioritise addressing violence against women and girls and tackle high maternal mortality through EU aid programmes and policies.
- Work with the Irish Government, through the European Parliament, to implement 'One World One Future', the Government's policy for international development.
- Continue to work with our EU and international partners towards the full achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- Continue working to ensure a rights-based approach to development in the post-MDG era that prioritises equality between the global North and South. This reflects Fine Gael's commitment to UN processes on the post- 2015 development framework.



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