

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS 1999

- Fine Gael Manifesto

PREFACE

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PREFACE

**BY JOHN BRUTON T.D.
LEADER OF FINE GAEL**

Fine Gael is clear about what it wants from Europe, and for Ireland, from these European elections. We set it out in Government when we launched our successful EU Presidency in 1995. We said then what we wanted for Europe.

We		want		peace;
We	want		safe	streets;
We	want		secure	jobs;

We want sound money;

Only the European Union is strong enough and big enough to achieve peace, safe streets, secure jobs and sound money. Individual states on their own are too small to do the job. Big multinational companies, like Microsoft now have stock values several times the size of GDP of a country like Ireland. Only within the European Union can Ireland have the clout to get good things done, or wield the clout to stop bad things being done.

If the European Union is to succeed, it must bring its people with it. The European Union must be democratic. People must see a connection between how they vote in European elections, and what happens in Brussels. The European Union must make the people feel they are part of the decision making. This is the challenge for all of us. We must have a say in our future.

First, we in Ireland must have a say in issues that determine the peace of Europe. We cannot sit on the sidelines and let others make the decisions. The issue of peace in Europe is too important to be left to others.

If we in Ireland commit ourselves to European security, we can help guarantee our own peace and security. If we do not commit ourselves, others will make the decisions, and we may have to live, or die, with the results of their decisions.

Ireland does not have an effective say in its security at the moment. Fine Gael believes that it should, and in Government we will ensure that it does.

Second, only the European Union is big enough nowadays to do all that is needed to ensure that the streets of Ireland are safe from the murderous activities of the local offshoots of international criminal gangs.

I believe that the battle against organised crime should now be made the next big project for the European Union.

Organised crime respects no boundaries. It is facilitated by the speed with which money can be moved across borders. The supply of illegal drugs is one of the main enterprises of modern crime, and it is an international enterprise. The response must be international too.

Third, we want secure jobs for Ireland, and for Europe. At a time when unemployment here has more than halved in a few years, when many employers cannot find staff and when young people from France, Spain and Belgium and elsewhere are coming here to work, it may seem odd to be worrying about job security.

The majority of Irish people have good jobs now, because we did things right in the past. We opened our markets and let in competition. We kept our business taxes low. We worked at partnership between employers and unions. We kept standards high in education, through competitive examinations.

We must preserve those advantages. Others in Europe can borrow from our example. They too can have these advantages if they choose. But we will not allow anyone in Europe to force us to adopt policies of high taxation, or rigid structures, that would take away the source of Ireland's tremendous growth today.

Fourth, we want good money that will underpin the economic stability of the European Union and its member states. The single European currency is the most visible example of European integration and co-operation but its success will depend on the EU putting in place the mechanisms that ensure buffers against currently unforeseeable future shocks and a constant commitment to driving an agenda of European competitiveness to underpin economic prosperity in the single currency area.

These are our key goals for Europe. To achieve them and to ensure that our voice is heard in this larger Europe, we must have even better MEPs than we ever had before. MEPs who will be vigilant. MEPs who will be articulate. MEPs who can make friends and exercise influence on our behalf. MEPs who are drivers, not passengers. MEPs who know what they want for Europe, and for Ireland.

MEP's	like	Mary	Banotti
MEP's	like	Jim	Corr
MEP's	like	John	Cushnahan
MEP's	like	Avril	Doyle
MEP's	like	Alan	Gillis
MEP's	like	Joe	McCartin
MEP's like Jim Mitchell			

INTRODUCTION

FINE GAEL: SECURING OUR FUTURE PEACE AND PROSPERITY IN EUROPE

Fine Gael is the party of Europe. We are members of the European People's Party (EPP) which brings together the European Christian Democratic parties and which is one of the two big groups in the European Parliament. Fine Gael's membership of the EPP enables us to have a real influence in forming and implementing policy beneficial to the Irish people on the European stage.

Fine Gael believes that European and Foreign Policy is an important area of public affairs. It is an area of increasing importance as Ireland's wealth, influence and stature grows on the international stage.

Fine Gael has actively sought to provide a vision of the future of the European Union (EU) which is relevant to the needs of the peoples of this continent. This was clearly demonstrated during our successful Presidency of the EU in 1996 and in particular by

John Bruton's leadership of the European Council through crucial discussions on EMU, employment and a more effective European response to international crime and drug trafficking.

The European Union faces many challenges in the period ahead. We must enlarge to include the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. We must co-operate ever more closely in efforts to create the conditions in which economies, urban and rural, can prosper, to preserve our environment, to fight international crime and to enhance our security.

The European Union has helped provide Western Europe with peace and prosperity for forty years. Now we must ensure that it can continue to provide the framework within which the whole continent of Europe can prosper for the next forty years and beyond.

Fine Gael is committed to European integration as the best means of ensuring Ireland's, and the continent's, future peace and prosperity. In the European Parliament elections we are presenting a group of experienced and skilled candidates, capable of ensuring that our voice is heard and that Europe successfully meets the challenges ahead.

GAY			MITCHELL	T.D.
Fine	Gael	Foreign	Affairs	Spokesperson
May 1999				

Mission Statement

Fine Gael in Ireland, and through the European Peoples Party in the EU, seeks a stable Europe, with secure jobs, safe streets and sound money

1. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

On the continent of Europe, we must learn the lessons of history and ensure that we live side by side in peace and harmony. This is best achieved by European integration. Sixty million Europeans lost their lives in conflicts in the first half of this century. This must never happen again. Fine Gael's policy document entitled European Integration & the Amsterdam Treaty published in May 1998, sets out our position on this important issue. (Full document available from Fine Gael on request).

The conflict in Kosovo is a reminder of how instability in a relatively small part of Europe can quickly involve the entire continent. Now that the Amsterdam Treaty has been ratified and the Agenda 2000 process agreed, enlargement of the Union must again gain momentum.

Fine Gael is committed to the full integration of all democracies in Europe into the EU at the earliest practicable date.

Enlargement is as much in the interest of the existing European Union States, such as Ireland, as it is in the interest of the Applicant States. Our own economic prosperity and stability can only be maintained if such prosperity and stability extends throughout Europe. Enlargement is the key pre-requisite to this happening.

In particular, Fine Gael favours convening an early Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) to deal with the issues of Commission size and voting strengths in the Council of Ministers so that the enlargement process can be expedited.

2. REFORMING THE EU COMMISSION FOR INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY

The New European Commission

The European Union is at risk of a trade war with the US, whose trade deficit with Europe has doubled in the last twelve months. Trade frictions are getting into areas where political values as much as mere economics are at stake. The EU ban on hormone treated US beef has already been struck down by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and another conflict is looming over US food products that contain genetically modified ingredients. The disputes show a conflict of political philosophy between the EU and the US.

A new World Trade Round is due to start next January, and there are already wide differences opening up on issues like agriculture and labour standards. The WTO is without a Secretary-General, and the European Union is without a Commission. Meanwhile a war is taking place within a hundred miles of the EU's borders.

A world trade dispute, with increased levies on trade across the Atlantic could derail Ireland's economic growth, which depends greatly on mutual business between Europe and America. It would also disrupt Europe's defence.

One thing that Ireland could do to avert such a crisis is press to have the new European Commission, headed by Romano Prodi, take office before the end of July this year. At present, without a Commission, there is no one to take decisions for Europe. At the present rate of going, a new Commission will not take office until October or November because the European Parliament has decided to tie up its July session with internal formalities, and then take its annual holiday for all of August.

Fine Gael believes that we cannot afford to wait until October to have a Commission in office. We are committed to having the Parliament undertake extended sittings in July, if necessary at weekends to guarantee the appointment of a new European Commission before the summer break. This is the right thing to do for Europe, and it will show that Europe is prepared to give some leadership in the world at a time of great uncertainty.

Fine Gael believes that the European Commission needs to be reformed. The need for reform has become much more apparent in light of the damning report by the

Committee of Experts.

However criticism of the Commission must be seen in context:

- 80% of fraud related to the work of the Commission occurs in the Member States themselves.
- the Commission needs resources to ensure effective management and to oversee the implementation of all the funds at its disposal (the Commission has half the staff employed in the UK Department of Trade and Finance).
- many parts of the Commission are run extremely effectively and competently, and have no hint of nepotism, cronyism, or fraudulent behaviour.
- if the standards applied by the European Parliament and its Committee of Experts to the European Commission were to be applied in Ireland, the entire government that presided over the frauds and favouritism in the EU supported beef industry, disclosed in the Beef Tribunal Report, would have had to resign.

In this light, Fine Gael:

- proposes that individual Commissioners should have greater accountability to the European Parliament for their actions.
- supports the provision of the necessary resources to ensure the Commission is reasonably equipped to carry out its growing array of responsibilities.
- proposes that members of the College of Commissioners should appear before national parliaments or national cross-party Committees on European Affairs on a regular basis. Such appearances would be supplementary to their appearances at the European Parliament.
- Fine Gael insists on the principle of one Commissioner per Member State. In the event that the number of Commissioners rises to 27 or more some commentators have questioned what the role for so many Commissioners would be. If Commissioners have direct access to National Parliaments they could play a greater role in ensuring openness and transparency in EU decision making. More of the time of Commissioners should be dedicated to this task, which in turn will bring the EU closer to the citizen.
- proposes that members of the European Court of Auditors appear at National Parliamentary Committees, for the same reasons as outlined above in relation to Commissioners.
- proposes that consideration be given to a new procedure whereby the President of the Commission would be elected by the European Parliament.

Benefits:

- this would bring Commissioners (and Auditors) closer to the people of the Member States, breaking down the ivory-tower syndrome.

- allow the Commissioners to address people's concerns more directly, via the parliament/committee.
- provide the Commissioners with first hand experience of the Member State's workings, personnel and positions.
- improve the democratic accountability of the new Commission.

3. EMU

The single currency brings significant benefits to members (including Ireland).

- It cuts transaction costs for imports and exports. Between them, they represent present 195% of Irish GNP so even small savings can yield very real benefits.
- It cuts the costs funding investment by business and individual alike.
- It gives Irish business far more competitive access to European markets.

However, it also removes exchange rate policy and interest rate policy from the government armoury in dealing with economic problems. This loss would be most felt in the event of a significant shock that affected one member state in particular and knocked it out of step with others. In such circumstances, described in the jargon as an "asymmetrical shock", a country could face a currency value and monetary stance that magnified the shock rather than reduced it. It would precipitate a more severe loss of income and employment in the country affected, as it could not fall back on devaluation or monetary policy to assist in the necessary adjustment in its demand and cost structures.

Among the members of the EMU Ireland is clearly more vulnerable to problems of this nature by virtue of the fact that the UK, our largest single trading partner, remains outside the system. A sharp devaluation in sterling would be one such "asymmetric shock".

Within a single country, when a region suffers a reversal, the tax and transfer systems automatically respond to channel resources into the region under pressure. There is no similar mechanism of transfer among the EMU members. Europe needs to anticipate this sort of problem before a crisis occurs for some members, which could jeopardise the credibility of the entire regime.

Fine Gael believes that the EU must respond on two fronts:

1. by establishing a **buffer mechanism** which helps members adjust to such shocks
2. by promoting a **competitiveness agenda** within member states that can ensure members anticipate and minimise potential pressures.

The first of these must be negotiated within Europe. It could be established initially on

the insurance principle where members pay a premium into a fund which would make pay outs in specified circumstances. The EU Budget would need to underwrite the system in the early years but over time it could become self-sufficient. In the longer term, the EU needs to develop revenue sharing mechanisms in relation to funding certain economic infrastructures to underpin the strength of the single currency area. This system would give Europe a direct policy instrument to deal with the potential shocks to the system.

The EU should also take the initiative in developing and monitoring a competitiveness agenda among Member States to underpin economic prosperity in the single currency area. There is ample evidence that the EU is weak in crucial areas that will determine long term competitiveness. These include

innovation and new product development, the application of information technology and facilitation of e-commerce, access to risk capital, and adaptability in managing change at enterprise level B to mention just a view.

Ireland too is weak in these areas. We in Europe must be competitive in these areas if we want to steadily improve employment and living standards in a single currency area.

Fine Gael will press for a European Competitiveness Initiative that would involve:

- setting shared **high level goals** on competitiveness across all members
- developing key elements of a strategy to pursue these goals and associated **policy guidelines**
- obtaining a commitment from each member state to develop a **competitiveness action plan** of its own
- **monitoring** by the Industrial Council of this process.

By acting in consort, member states can reinforce the mutual benefits of the common currency area and strengthen Europe's overall economic position. Ireland should play a lead role in promoting these long-term strategies to underpin the mutual success of the EMU instead of seeing Europe only as a source of handouts.

Our Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Gay Mitchell TD acting as Rapporteur for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs, authored a report on Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), a project to which Fine Gael has long been committed for some time. Fine Gael endorses this report and in particular its recommendations that:

1. The proposed six months of dual currencies (January-June 2002) be shortened to perhaps two months starting on 1 February, 2002. In this way the winter sales would be over and also a shorter "dual period" would be less confusing for consumers and less expensive for retailers. The Minister for Finance and the Taoiseach should report back to the Oireachtas on their efforts with ECOFIN and the European Council in this regard.
2. The Department of Finance lay a report on the continuing implications for the Irish economy of the Stability and Growth Pact before the Oireachtas twice annually, before any such report is submitted to European institutions.
3. The Director of Consumer Affairs should be authorised, and funded, to appoint

- a "Yell and Tell" Consumer Representative in each Euro-Parliamentary constituency on a modest fee, free-lance basis during the changeover period.
4. The Director of Consumer Affairs pay particular attention to money-lending practices and how interest rates are applied by moneylenders, to ensure that poorer persons are not further exploited in terms of interest charges.
 5. FORFAS and IBEC intensify their efforts to educate employees and customers in advance about issues surrounding the Euro, encouraging companies and helping to design specific programmes.
 6. The campaign of FORFAS and the Euro Changeover Board be re-examined so as to ensure that SME's are targeted for special assistance towards preparation for EMU.
 7. The Director of Consumer Affairs publish details of her intentions in relation to assistance to SME's, especially under Section 149 of the Consumer Credit Act, as soon as possible.
 8. FORFAS and the Euro Changeover Board give careful consideration to ways and means of assisting sectors of industry to change to Euro invoicing together where practicable.
 9. The Communicating Europe Task Force be again chaired by a Minister of State, as was the norm before its transfer to the Department of Foreign Affairs, and that the Task Force report on its activities twice annually to the Houses of the Oireachtas.
 10. Sterling devaluation could cause serious problems for Irish indigenous industry. Therefore a special strategy must be put in place to provide for such a possible eventuality. The Minister for Finance should lay plans for such a strategy before both Houses of the Oireachtas.
 11. Anticipating future budget surpluses and a forecasted debt/GNP ratio of about 30% in the first 5 years of the new century, it would not seem prudent to apply forecasted surpluses to simply reducing Government indebtedness. This is particularly true when wise investment in housing, and other infrastructure, is badly needed. Therefore, part of the forecasted annual budget surpluses should be allocated to investment in much needed additional infrastructure, such investment to be structured in such a way as to attract private partnership co-funding, so enabling more projects to be undertaken.
 12. Consideration be given to setting specified increased local authority house-building quotas, and financing this in part out of forecasted budget surpluses, accompanied, where appropriate, by upgraded infrastructure such as roads, rail, etc. This would help efforts to negotiate a successor to Partnership 2000 and ensure that moderate wage demands would continue to assist Ireland in meeting EMU criteria.
 13. Consideration be given to the creation of a National Contingency Fund, into which part of the forecasted future budget surpluses be paid to provide for possible unforeseen events arising from EMU.
 14. The ESRI be asked to undertake further studies on how income flexibility to cope with economic shocks can be extended in the private sector and implemented in the public sector. (Full report available from Fine Gael on request).

4. INFRASTRUCTURAL INVESTMENT

In recent years Ireland has relied on European funds to enable us to make the necessary investment in infrastructure to bring Irish infrastructure up to the

European norm.

The outcome of the recent negotiations on structural and cohesion funds has fallen far short of expectations and the Irish exchequer will have to make up a very significant shortfall to compensate for the reduction in Euro funding.

The National Development Plan 2000 - 2006 , which is currently under preparation, must take account of the regionalisation of the country which has been accepted by the European Commission. Under the new arrangements the bulk of future structural funding will be concentrated in the Objective One region.

Fine Gael is committed to the eliminating the infrastructural deficit. The key priority areas for infrastructural investment have already been identified by the ESRI whose recent study clearly shows the huge challenge facing us if our economic success is to be maintained. The crucial target areas over the next seven years must include:

- Housing
- Transport and environmental structures
- Training and research
- Telecommunications and energy
- Local and rural development

To address these bottlenecks, Fine Gael is committed to doubling the capital budget for infrastructure over the next three years.

Fine Gael is also committed to public/private partnerships to provide infrastructure. In this way the shortfall in Euro funds can be made up by the private sector.

Fine Gael favours the establishment of a Public Accounts Committee in the European Parliament. This committee will be charged, not only with the elimination of fraud, but will carry out value for money audits on selected European spending programmes across the community.

Fine Gael MEPs will be diligent in ensuring that all European monies are spent for the purposes for which they were allocated. In particular, they will ensure that monies allocated to Objective 1 areas will be spent on projects within these areas.

Fine Gael MEPs will ensure that special programmes are drawn up to cater for the needs of the many rural and urban poverty black spots outside of the Objective 1 areas.

5. EUROPEAN SECURITY

At the heart of the European ideal is the concept of economic, social and political solidarity. Political solidarity will increasingly raise the question of European security co-operation.

The ultimate decision on Irish involvement in European Union security structures involving mutual defence obligations would lie with the Irish people in a referendum, following the passing of the Amsterdam Treaty.

We must be prepared to openly debate the issue of European security co-operation. We cannot continue to demand that other EU States show economic solidarity with us if we refuse to even discuss solidarity with them on security issues.

The Maastricht Treaty and the Amsterdam Treaty both refer to the Western European Union (WEU) as an integral part of the evolving role of the European Union. There are calls from many quarters for Europe to take on more of a security role and to be less dependent on American influence. It may well be that the transfer of policy decision making on Petersburg Tasks from the WEU to the EU which occurred with the passing of the Amsterdam Treaty may preface a further integration of the WEU into the EU.

Fine Gael believes that Ireland needs to play an active role in the emerging debate on European security. Consideration should be given to a closer EU/WEU relationship but with the Article V mutual defence obligations of the WEU being refined so as to become a protocol which countries like Ireland could opt in or opt out of.

In this way we could co-operate on vital humanitarian missions but retain the right for the Irish people through their elected representatives in the Oireachtas to decide on each issue on a case by case basis.

The rules for EMU have been set by those who wished to join. Future EMU members will have to take on the responsibilities of membership under rules and regulations already in place. If EU/WEU merger goes ahead a similar set of circumstances will apply i.e. those eventually joining (presumably most or all States) will take on the rules agreed. It therefore seems preferable for Ireland to participate in the rule making from the outset by seeking an Article V protocol which would maximise our future control of decision making. This would allow us to continue to exercise options which would not otherwise be available to full members.

European security co-operation is vital to our future well being and Fine Gael believes Ireland must play an active and constructive role in a debate now ongoing on the shape of future European security co-operation.

Peacekeeping - The EU and the UN

Fine Gael believes that Ireland should be to the forefront in pressing our European Colleagues towards the development of a European Peacekeeping Policy. Any such policy must seek to re-establish the importance and role of the United Nations in all decisions involving the deployment of troops for peacekeeping purposes. This will mean that all members of the United Nations will once again have a very important role to play in peacekeeping and that such decisions will not be left to the major powers. An essential part of restoring the authority of the United Nations will of course involve the restructuring of the membership of the Security Council and the elimination of the veto.

If the European Union succeeds in this pioneering role then serious consideration should be given to the European Union having a seat at the Security Council.

6. PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE (PFP)

In January 1998, Fine Gael became the first party to publish a policy document

advocating membership of Partnership for Peace, entitled Ireland and the Partnership for Peace Initiative - Our Place in the new European Security Architecture. The document argued cogently for Ireland to join PFP. This was at first resisted by the Government which now claims to be initiating a debate on the issue. This debate has long since been initiated and Fine Gael is the only party to have clearly set out its position on this important issue.

PFP is a programme of military and security co-operation between Nato and non-Nato countries. With 44 states participating it is now the most extensive and intensive programme of military and security co-operation in the world.

The 44 participating states include the 19 Nato members and practically all of the members of the Organisation for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). It has at its heart an unprecedented ethic of flexibility which allows it encompass a broad range of participants with a wide variety of motives for membership. It is built on the principle of voluntary commitment where each state decides for itself the level and a nature of its participation.

PFP is a flexible arrangement within which Ireland could choose its own programme of work and which involves no mutual defence obligations.

Among the reasons why we should join PFP now are:

- Our extensive peace-keeping experience which is disproportionate to our size can be shared in a structured way with other States.
- We in turn can learn in a structured way from the experience of other States.
- Membership of PFP would, therefore, create an outward-looking perspective, keep our defence forces in a modern mode and boost defence force morale.
- Ireland should not set a precedent of splendid isolation, if other states followed our example instability in Europe could ensue.
- Membership of PFP does not affect our tradition of military neutrality, as is evidenced by the PFP role of Austria, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and even Russia.
- There would be opportunity for greater North-South co-operation.
- There would be opportunity for greater East-West, British-Irish co-operation, building on the strong foundations of Air Corp/Naval Service-RAF search and rescue practice. The co-operation of neutral Sweden, and NATO member Norway, both of whom are in PFP, shows how neutral or non-aligned and aligned neighbours can co-operate.
- Increasingly, international strife is of an internal nature (in such as former Yugoslavia and Algeria) and requires a new response. Humanitarian aid, for example, can be distributed only where there is security, stability and good order. PFP participation can help maximise our capacity to assist in situations of this kind.

- Training to counteract illegal drugs importation could be written into any PFP Agreement. As an Island state this could bring many benefits in dealing with the drugs epidemic.
- It demonstrates to our EU Partners and the wider International Community that we are prepared to play an active role in the evolving post-Cold War European security architecture, and helps establish our credentials for influencing this evolution.
- PFP is a mutual agreement. We agree the role we want and this is designed to suit our particular circumstances. PFP is not a one fit suit which states must wear.

No cogent argument, based on sustainable principles has been put forward which supports not joining PFP. (Full document available from Fine Gael on request)

From 1st May 1999 the Amsterdam Treaty takes effect. This includes provisions for the EU to give policy direction to the WEU in Petersberg Tasks (humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping, and tasks of combat forces in crisis management on a case by case basis, including peace enforcement). Membership of PFP will help Ireland play a full part in these tasks should we choose to do so.

Fine Gael favours appointing an Ambassador to NATO now, this will arise in any event when we join PFP. Our Ambassador to NATO could raise directly with that organisation our views on e.g. the situation in Kosovo. All European neutrals, except Ireland, have Ambassadors to NATO. Our intentions in relation to PFP should be open, transparent and clear so that the public know precisely what the implications of membership entail.

7. IRISH GOVERNMENT SECURITY COUNCIL

The Government's handling of the Partnership for Peace issue was appalling and, the response of the Government to the recent Kosovo crisis was meagre and unacceptable. Fianna Fail led Governments seem to believe that Ireland should not participate in security issues, unless it is somehow to our advantage. This is not reconcilable with our campaign for a seat on the U.N. Security Council. Ireland has an honourable tradition in, for example, peacekeeping. We therefore have a contribution to make in relation to European and other security issues.

In order to prepare us for this role Fine Gael proposes the creation of an Irish Government Security Council. This Council would include the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Irish Ambassadors to: the OSCE, the UN in Geneva and the UN in New York, the Council of Europe, the EU, the WEU and NATO (when appointed).

This Council should meet on a regular basis under the chairmanship of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and should advise the Government on a more pro-active role for Ireland in foreign policy security issues generally.

8. CONVENTION ON SAFETY OF UN PERSONNEL

Seventy-five Irish persons have died while serving abroad with the UN. The United Nations Safety of Personnel (and Punishment of Offenders) Bill 1999, published by Fine Gael in January 1999, seeks to bring about the passing into law of the Convention on the Safety of UN Personnel and Related Persons. This Convention became international law on 15 January 1999 when New Zealand became the 22nd State to accede to the Convention. However, the Convention applies to those 22 countries only. At present these 22 States can hold those who attack UN (including Irish) personnel accountable. Ireland cannot do so until we accede to the Convention. That we have not done so to date is an outrage.

Ireland should not only immediately ratify this Convention, we should be putting pressure on other countries to do likewise. Ireland has a distinguished history in peacekeeping with the United Nations. We have the largest battalion for the longest period of time serving in the Lebanon (UNIFIL). It is extraordinary that we have not signed into law this Convention, especially given that seventy-five Irish persons have died while serving the cause of peace abroad.

Fine Gael will not only seek the passing of its Private Members Bill, it will also seek a commitment from the Government that they will report annually to the Oireachtas on all Conventions that Ireland has signed but has not ratified. Such a report would include the reasons why the Conventions have not yet been ratified and a timeframe for likely ratification.

With Ireland's role in security issues evolving it is important that legislation of this kind is passed without delay. (Full document available from Fine Gael on request).

9. AGRICULTURE

Fine Gael believes that Irish agriculture is at a crossroads, morale is low amongst many farmers, very few young people are taking up farming as a career and in general there has been a massive reduction in many farmers incomes over the past few years.

Fine Gael believes there are a number of structural changes that must take place in the industry before Irish farm produce can attract premium prices in top value European Union markets.

Fine Gael believes that much better incentives are needed to attract young farmers into agriculture. At the moment the Farm Installation Aid Grant for young farmers at , 5,600 is paid at the same level as it was in 1984/85. Fine Gael proposes to raise this to ,12,000 and to introduce a new 10-year low interest loan for suitably qualified young farmers.

We believe that a major shake-up of the beef industry is required:

1. Massive breeding programme required to upgrade the quality of Irish beef.
2. Outlaw flat pricing at factories thus providing an incentive to breed and sell better quality beef.
3. Encourage the Producer Group concept to form a special relationship with the processor, the meat retailer and the consumer.
4. Actively pursue the opening of the live cattle trade to third world countries and to ensure that there are adequate shipping facilities for the live export of

- weanlings to the Continent.
5. Remove as far as possible the over arching bureaucracy that is now part and parcel of applications for headage grants etc.
 6. Investment in the modernization of meat processing facilities to be linked to increased market shares on EU markets for Irish beef.
 7. Strengthen the role of An Bord Bia to promote aggressively Irish beef, lamb and pigmeat abroad.
 8. Irish consumers should be protected against overcharging for beef lamb and pigmeat given the low prices Irish farmers receive for their stock.
 9. Fine Gael believes that if the meat processing plants want to organize into a more competitive sector they should do so given the acknowledged over killing capacity there is in Ireland but with one proviso - that the cost of this rationalization should not under any set of circumstances fall back on the farmers of Ireland.

Fine Gael supports environmentally friendly farming practices and strongly endorses the REPS concept of farming.

Fine Gael believes that the Minister for Agriculture has let down the sheep industry at the Agenda 2000 negotiations. Sheep farming may not be as attractive under Agenda 2000 because of the fact that sheep do not qualify for extensification payments and because the lower lamb price in Ireland is not adequately compensated for by the Ewe Premium Scheme.

Fine Gael will endeavor to have the Ewe Premium Scheme reflect the lower Irish lamb prices. Fine Gael will also seek a review of the EU Sheep Policy during the first six months of Agenda 2000 and to ascertain the effects of the Beef Policy on sheep prices.

Similarly the cereal sector was badly let down during the Agenda 2000 negotiations. Cereal growers are likely to lose ,122 million over the period 200-2006. Other countries managed to negotiate special concessions specific to their particular requirements such as increases in Reference Yield which is used to calculate arable aid payments whilst other countries received a grain drying subsidy. Ireland's 16,000 cereal farmers were badly treated.

Many dairy farmers are bitterly disappointed that the Minister did not make an issue out of the Butter fat reference matter at the Agenda 2000 negotiations. Due to historical reasons Irish butter fat content was well below the average E.U. levels when milk quotas were established. However, due to better feeding and breeding of the dairy herd our butter fat level has now increased and farmers are now being penalized by reductions in quotas as a result. Fine Gael will actively pursue at EU level the legitimate concerns of Irish dairy farmers on the butter fat issue.

Fine Gael is unhappy with the current EU National Labelling Policy. Countries like France and Germany (our main markets) have enthusiastically adopted National Labelling which has had the effect of re-nationalizing the EU beef market. The 1992 Single Market clearly guarantees right of access for goods and services in all EU Member States and confers equal rights in regards to promotion and sale of products within the EU Consequently Irish beef exports to the continent have been subjected to unfair competition since the National Labelling system became operative.

Fine Gael will seek major changes in EU labelling policy. Such changes will include the elimination of National labelling to be replaced by farm or district labelling.

Fine Gael believes that rural development was not seriously addressed under Agenda 2000. The importance of creating job opportunities in rural areas to offset the flight from the land cannot be over emphasized.

The Government promise of a White Paper on Rural Development has not been delivered on. Fine Gael calls on the government to publish this document now.

Fine Gael believes that there should be a Control of Farmyard Pollution and a Dairy Hygiene Scheme in operation.

10. EU PASSPORTS - FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

In relation to the Schengen Agreement and travel within the European Union without passports, Fine Gael believes that it is anomalous that associated countries such as Norway and Iceland will have greater access to European Union countries than Member States like Britain or Ireland. The Fine Gael led Government negotiated an opt in clause in relation to these provisions but it is not possible to take up this option without losing our Common Travel Area with Britain while Britain remains outside the Schengen area.

Many Irish citizens resent showing a passport when travelling in the European Union as they are citizens of the Union. Accordingly, Fine Gael strongly recommends that negotiations take place with the European Commission with a view to allowing travel within the European Union for Irish citizens on a lesser document than a passport, for example a driving licence or social security card (with picture) as an interim measure while awaiting full access to the Schengen area in tandem with Britain.

This would not necessitate the introduction of an identity card system in Ireland. An acceptable and recognised document for certain purposes here would act as an identity card for travel within the EU, and entire Schengen related area, including Norway and Iceland, if the Fine Gael proposal is implemented.

11. THE FIGHT AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME

Increasing globalisation of trade, economic interdependence and the rapid development of technology has now reached a scale which was not anticipated even a decade ago. The modern organised criminal has adapted to these developments and has access to vast amounts of financial resources and makes use of the very latest technologies. Crime does not respect borders. In recent years there has been a rapid increase in the rate of crime and in the scope and sophistication of organised crime. Ruthless drugs barons prey on the weak and vulnerable in every state of the European Union, including Ireland.

As Taoiseach and President of the European Council in 1996, John Bruton laid particular emphasis on the fight against drug trafficking and abuse and against organised crime. New initiatives to energise Europe's response to organised crime and drug trafficking were agreed under his Presidency.

The Amsterdam Treaty established and reinforced police, customs and judicial co-operation in the fight against drugs, organised crime and trafficking in people.

As a result of measures introduced by Fine Gael in government, the Gardai have been given extra powers to combat the drugs menace in Ireland. However, Fine Gael believes that much still needs to be done at European Union level to combat and defeat the threat to society posed by organised crime and drug trafficking. Organised crime respects no boundaries. It is facilitated by the speed with which money can be moved across borders. The supply of illegal drugs is one of the main enterprises of modern crime, and it is an international enterprise. The response must be international too.

Our priorities include:

- The establishment of a European-wide Criminal Assets Bureau (ECAB). This would be based on the model introduced by Fine Gael in Government to target organised crime and particularly the movement of the illegal proceeds of crime between Member States
- Strengthening the remit and resources of Europol. In particular, the Europol Convention must be ratified at the earliest possible date.
- The problems of organised crime are not confined to EU member states. Fine Gael believes that there is a need for greater co-operation between the EU and all other European countries, particularly the Central and Eastern European states. The EU should assist them to improve their policing judicial systems. This would enable them to move to tackle organised crime more effectively. This process was begun under Ireland's Presidency of the European Union and further development would allow for the strengthening of police intelligence co-operation between the European Union and those states which are seeking membership of the EU.
- The degree of differences in national laws and practices on serious crime within the EU needs to be addressed . Fine Gael believes that the national legal penalties for transnational crimes should be harmonised within the EU states. In particular, Fine Gael believes that all courts in the EU must, by it their sentencing policy, send out a very clear message that every form of drug smuggling and trafficking will be severely punished.

12. THE TREATMENT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Fine Gael condemns the Government's slow response to the humanitarian crisis in the Balkans and the Government's failure to arrange more speedily the airlift of Kosovan refugees to Ireland.

Based on the principle of international solidarity, Fine Gael is committed to the Geneva Convention on Refugees and supports the introduction of common EU laws and procedures on this issue as a matter of urgency.

A just and fair policy towards asylum seekers is at the heart of Fine Gael policy, this includes wanting to see each EU state accept a fair proportion of refugees so as to ensure fairer burden - sharing.

Fine Gael believes that the fair procedures must be in place when assessing each case. This must include access to translation, legal representation and a judicial hearing for asylum seekers. The prohibition of refoulement as set out in the Geneva Convention must be upheld. Furthermore, applicants must be processed as quickly as possible and asylum seekers should be granted a

work permit if their application has not been decided within six months.

According to recent research, up to 400,000 people a year are smuggled into the European Union. Smuggling people into the EU is a business worth between \$3-4 billion a year, much of this finding its way to the pockets of a well organised Mafia. Those who are smuggled are, in the main, victims, who often suffer at the hands of the smugglers.

Accordingly, Fine Gael proposes that penalties for human trafficking should be severe and should be harmonised across the European Union.

13. PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Fine Gael believes that the protection of our environment should be a central object of both the European Union and national governments. In this era of unprecedented prosperity in our country, we have a huge responsibility to ensure that our economy grows in a sustainable way. We must protect our landscape, air and seas for future generations.

We believe that, because pollution does not respect national boundaries, the European Union has a crucial role to play in legislating in this area. We also believe that Ireland has much to learn from other European countries, many of which have very advanced public participation in waste recycling and other environmental initiatives.

We are concerned that the Government has failed to implement a number of important EU directives, including those aimed at regulating environmental impact assessments and at protecting groundwater quality.

Our main objectives include:

- The establishment of a Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development, or a "Green Ministry". This would help to raise public awareness of environmental issues.
- A strategic approach to waste management with priority given to recycling, recovery and reduction policies.
- The strict enforcement of the Litter Act 1997 in order to eliminate litter from our landscape.
- Opposition to the Sellafield plant and in particular to any expansion of its activities.
- An enhanced programme of incentives for both providers and consumers so that the full potential of renewable energy could be realised.

With regard to Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), Fine Gael recognises the need for informed public debate. We believe that the Irish public are right to question developments in cases where insufficient information is available.

In relation to the GMO issue Fine Gael:

- Wants strictly regulated and supervised research.
- Insists that each genetically modified product/innovation should be evaluated on a case by case basis.
- Believes there should be a moratorium postponing the commercial planting of genetically modified crops until a full debate has taken place.
- Demands genuine and enforceable public information and clear labelling for consumers.
- Criticises the Government for failing to promote a real national debate on his important issue.
- Fine Gael will pursue this issue at National and European levels.

14. CONSUMER PROTECTION

The European Union has enacted a wide range of consumer protection legislation.

However, Irish consumers do not always get a good deal, and they do not yet have sufficient protection against fraudulent or negligent suppliers of goods and/or services. Recent examples such as overcharging of customers by the banks and supermarkets have served to underline the consumer's vulnerability.

Fine Gael believes that the Director of Consumer Affairs must be given additional resources and powers to copper-fasten consumer rights and to speedily and thoroughly investigate all cases referred to that Office.

15. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

The period since the last European elections in 1994 has seen the emergence of a flourishing network of community based local development initiatives throughout the country.

Fine Gael in Government extended the local development areas, both urban and rural, from 11 to 35 areas throughout the country. These local development groups have restored local confidence, brought training opportunities and helped create literally thousands of jobs.

These groups continue to have a vital role to play and Fine Gael believes the Irish Government must make up any shortfall in funding arising from the new European funding arrangement so as to ensure that, in the context of the reform of Local Government, these local community groups have their place in the new structures.

Local development partnership companies are publicly funded and Fine Gael wishes to see procedures for making these partnership companies more publicly accountable without taking from their community-based role.

16. HEALTH

Fine Gael supports the creation of a common European health budget to combat illnesses and diseases, such as Alzheimer's, Aids and cancer which, in almost every case, afflict the citizens of all member states equally.

In addition, Fine Gael believes that the European Union and its member governments are big enough to give the lead to mobilise the resources for health research to halt the spread of diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS that threaten the poor in the world today but could threaten all of us tomorrow.

The diseases of the Third World - pneumonia, diarrhoea, tuberculosis and malaria - account for 20% of the illness in the world but they only get 1% of drug research budgets. There is no money to be made by researching these diseases because the victims, usually people in considerable poverty, do not have much spending power.

95% of AIDS sufferers live in the Third World where modern AIDS drugs and treatments cannot be afforded by almost all the victims. In poor countries AIDS is still spreading fast. The only way to halt this rapid spread of AIDS is to produce a vaccine that is cheap enough to be administered widely. There is no commercial incentive for the major pharmaceutical companies to develop this vaccine so the European Union should step in.

DISABILITY

Fine Gael ensured through the Reflection Group and the Amsterdam Treaty process that the needs of the disabled were specifically provided for.

We must now build on that Treaty provision by ensuring that legislation, directives and regulations are introduced to meet the needs and concerns of disabled persons throughout the EU. This will be a priority for our MEP's and all Fine Gael Ministers and TD's, Senators and Councillors.

17. EDUCATION

Education is the best guarantee of secure jobs.

The majority of Irish people have good jobs now because we did things right in the past. One of the most important things we did was to keep standards high in education through competitive examinations.

We cannot afford to stand still. We must preserve this advantage. Others in Europe can borrow from our example. They too can have these advantages if they choose.

Fine Gael believes that in addition to equipping citizens with the necessary working and social skills for a fulfilling life, the education systems across the European Union can play a part in broadening and deepening our understanding of our different countries

and traditions.

Fine Gael is committed to the EU developing a common course in history to be taught in all European second level schools that will allow us to understand our shared European past.

Fine Gael also believes that it should be obligatory on all school students in Europe to learn at least two other European languages.

We also believe that a European University system and a European apprenticeship system, which would include study or work in another European country, should be an integral part of many courses.

18. TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT

Securing Our Prosperity by Maintaining Competitive Advantage

The prosperity we have been fortunate enough to enjoy in recent years is a function of both improvement in our productive capacity as a nation and outstanding performance in international trade. Fine Gael believes that a continued pursuit of competitiveness policies over the next five years is the best insurance we have of securing the prosperity we are now enjoying. This will require prudent management of the public finances and successful adherence to the disciplines of monetary union. Fine Gael will promote both in private and public sector a constant process of innovation to effect new ways of doing business:

Innovation flows from a number of key factors:

- investment in "human capital" ie. education and training and R & D
- investment in public and private infrastructure e.g. transport, telecommunications, water sewerage services etc.
- having institutional flexibility and adaptability in the private and public sectors to unblock potential barriers to innovation which may exist.

Because of our relative peripherality and the quality of our "human capital" we are uniquely placed to harness the great potential of the so called "information society". Fine Gael will aggressively sell this potential to our European Partners. Fine Gael envisages opportunities for continued commercial exploitation in several fields including education, retail, financial services, international consultancies and we will ensure an awareness of this potential across industry and especially in small and medium enterprises.

EU & US RELATIONS

Ireland has benefitted from huge investment by American owned investment companies. In Ireland today approximately 74,000 people are employed in US companies. Our growth in the pharmaceutical, computer & technology sectors is almost exclusively due to US investment. Many of our people have gained valuable jobs and experience and made new lives for themselves in the US as a result of America's

positive action on behalf of Irish immigrants. Fine Gael will ensure that this investment continues by regular communication between the IDA and the investment community in the US.

It is essential that trade relations between Europe and the United States of America remain harmonious and are not damaged by recent disputes over bananas and beef.

Fine Gael proposes that there be more regular meetings - a minimum of four per year - between Trade Ministers of Europe and their counterparts in the US. Such meetings can act as trouble-shooting for a to identify potential areas of conflict.

Ireland is one of the world's most open economies. Therefore, it is essential for our exporters that the next World Trade Negotiations liberalise further the markets for goods and services. Ireland needs free and fair trade.

Fine Gael supports the employment objectives adopted at the Job Summit in November 1997:

- improving employability
- developing entrepreneurship
- encouraging adaptability in businesses and their employees and
- strengthening the policies for equal opportunities

- SOCIAL FUND

Resources must be spent on Ireland's National Action Plan for Employment. As EU Social Funds reduce, essential programmes such as education, training, community-based employment and childcare must not be abandoned and Fine Gael commits itself to a greater share of national funding to ensure the continuance of these programmes.

- TRADE

We are one of the world's most open economies. Therefore, it is essential for our exporters that the next World Trade Negotiations liberalize further the markets for goods and services. Ireland needs free and fair trade.

- EMPLOYMENT

While the fall in the level of unemployment is very positive, we should not ignore the major skills and labour shortages that persist. Fine Gael is committed to training and educating our employees to all levels required whether that be third level skills or medium and low level skills. Our enterprise sector and our attractiveness for investors will suffer if such training and education is not provided.

19. MARINE

1. Fine Gael is committed in the review of the Common Fisheries Policy in 2002 to ensure a Regional Fisheries Policy is in operation where each EU, state would

- have greater control over its own waters.
2. Fine Gael is committed to the ongoing modernisation of the White Fish Fishing Fleet.
 3. Fine Gael will ensure that there is ongoing financial aid for our Irish Commercial Ports and Fishery Harbours.

20. TOURISM

Fine Gael will continue to make the strongest possible case for the continuation of substantial European funding for tourism for the following reasons:

- the need to develop major regional projects in order to tackle the serious problem of regional imbalance in tourism growth so evident in 1998;
- greater access to the regions;
- the development of programmes to extend the season;
- the continuation of environmental programmes to ensure the ongoing development of the industry;
- to tackle difficulties of access to Ireland because of our island status;
- marketing of Ireland because of our island status.

21. EUROPE AND RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Experts now believe that the development of a computer that could be sold for just ,60 is now technically possible. But it is not being developed. Poorer families in Ireland and abroad, are thus deprived of access at home to affordable computers and to the Internet. Why?

One analyst, Nicholas Negroponete says that the development of a ,60 computer is not even on the drawing board of the big companies today because "inexpensive computing is a crummy business. The (profit) margins are too low ."

For similar commercial reasons, little R&D is being done on measures to protect water quality, or prevent disease, in the third world. Again the reason is that short term profit margins are too low.

Individual countries, like Ireland, are too small to do anything much about this. The research budgets of individual states can hardly match those of big companies, given that Microsoft's stockmarket capital value now exceeds the GDP of Canada. But the European Union is big enough to fill this R&D gap.

The European Union can marshal the resources to promote R&D into subjects, like cheap computers, water quality and disease prevention, that commercial companies will not undertake for their own sake.

Fine Gael believes that the EU research budget should be substantially increased, provided it is focused on this sort of R&D, R&D that is socially essential but not

instantly profitable commercially.

22. NORTHERN IRELAND

Fine Gael have consistently advocated a pluralist approach to reconciling differences on this island. This approach is inclusive and recognises the need for integration rather than assimilation, i.e. where different traditions complement each other by respecting their differences and learning to live side by side in harmony while maintaining the best of each tradition, rather than all merging into one assimilated group. We will continue to make peace on this island and between these islands our number one domestic, European and foreign policy concern.

In relation to the island of Ireland and European issues, Fine Gael proposes that the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive, when created, establish a high level group to investigate ways in which both parts of the island could more effectively co-operate on European issues. The group should include governmental and non-governmental representatives, including business, trade union, farming and community groups. The group should invite public submissions to ensure that the widest possible range of views is heard.

The group should report within 12 months to the Taoiseach and First Minister who should then publish the report and their proposed response.

23. THE EU AND NORTH AMERICA - A ROLE FOR IRELAND

In August 1998, Fine Gael published a document titled Foundation for Transatlantic Co-operation which seeks to ensure that we build on our new-found influence in the world, helped by EU membership. As the European Union expands to the east, Ireland becomes geographically more peripheral. However, the promised closer co-operation between EU/North America (both US and Canada), opens a window of opportunity for Ireland. There are over 40 million US citizens who claim Irish ancestry and about 4 million Canadians who do likewise.

Fine Gael have argued for the creation of a Foundation for Transatlantic Co-operation to be located in Dublin, with a European, hopefully Irish, Secretary-General and a prominent north American as chairman. Ireland should be to transatlantic co-operation what Helsinki is to Security, or Geneva is to UN Conventions. Dublin should develop as the automatic centre for furthering this co-operation and we set out precisely why in our policy document. (Full document available from Fine Gael on request).

Among the projects which the foundation could initially undertake are the following:

The establishment of a transatlantic free-trade area, the development of E-Commerce and the possibility of democracy training for emerging democracies.

24. HUMAN RIGHTS REVIEW

As part of the Good Friday Agreement, Human Rights issues will become more prominent on the political agenda in the coming years. Our Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Gay Mitchell T.D. has also initiated a review of human rights issues, in

his capacity as Chairman of the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Human Rights (a sub-committee of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs). This review is almost complete and involved seeking written and oral submissions from the public and Non-Governmental Organisations. This review, due for publication shortly, will inform Fine Gael's approach to the human rights issue.

In particular, Fine Gael will give priority to tackling racism and xenophobia in Ireland and throughout the European Union.

Fine Gael wishes to see the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Human Rights become a permanent feature of the Committee system and proposes that this Committee report annually to the Oireachtas.

25. WAR CRIMINALS MUST FACE JUSTICE

A war crimes court exists to try war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, but the fact that it singles out only one region, and is not universal in its jurisdiction, makes it less likely to be accepted as a body to which, for example, a Yugoslav Government would hand over its own political leaders and citizens voluntarily. A court with universal and non-discriminating jurisdiction would more readily be accepted. The International War Crimes Court is such a body.

The only difficulty is that the Court has not yet been properly established. Setting up the Court was agreed to in Rome last year by 120 countries including Ireland. Some countries, like Israel, China and the United States, did not agree to it.

The difficulty was that these countries did not want to submit their own military to the jurisdiction of the court, unless all the countries against whom they might be in conflict were subject to it too. A proposal to give the Court the right to over-ride the rights of non-signatory states was, however, objected to by some of the same countries.

Fine Gael will pursue the setting up of this Court in such a way as to have universal application.

Fine Gael believes that it is essential that the International War Crimes Court is established as soon as possible. We will introduce a Private Members motion in the Dail to ensure immediate Irish ratification of the Court Convention.

26. OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT AID

A policy document from Fine Gael (published April 1999) is an important part of our foreign policy strategy. Entitled Concerning Our Neighbours, it sets out a number of recommendations which Fine Gael will seek to have implemented. As Ireland's role in the world evolves, we must remember our own history and be committed to sharing our resources with our least privileged neighbours, at home and abroad.

The Case for Overseas Development Assistance

The European Union and its Member States commit up to 4 billion Euros to promote aid and development in the "South" or "Third World" a year and account for between

45% and 50% of all public aid for development, compared with around 20% from the USA and 18% from Japan. The Union itself is responsible for around 15% of the total aid given by Member States, whose national interests are served by helping developing countries which both supply us with raw materials and offer markets in which to sell our products.

The EU is also a vital market for developing countries, absorbing more than 21% of their total exports.

Although much has been achieved in recent years, much more needs to be done. The statistics are frightening:

- 1.3 billion people live in abject poverty;
- 14 million die each year from easily preventable diseases;
- over 1 billion adults cannot read or write;
- the number of people living in the third world is increasing (from 70% in 1950 to 79% today, with an upward trend continuing)

Fine Gael proposes that:

- We must legislate so as to meet our UN commitment of 0.7% of GNP by 2007 (in the same way as National Debt servicing and the payment of judges are assured).
- As such legislation is the sole prerogative of the Government, Fine Gael pledges to support such legislation or to enact it in Government. As this would equate to approximately ,600 million in 2007, provisions for greater public accountability are also proposed.
- The EU Council of Ministers collectively should seek an assessment of the effectiveness of institutions such as the World Bank, and the IMF especially in relation to their impact on alleviating poverty.
- The European Union should seek the creation of a Debt Commission, to review international debt with a view to forgiving debt in countries where the burden of repayment is at such an unacceptable level as to be, for example, an infringement of human rights.
- Ireland should strive to ensure that the WTO decision making process becomes increasingly transparent, and that the WTO be fairer in trade practices, bearing in mind its inaccessibility to civil organisations concerned with trade as an economic justice issue.
- The forthcoming negotiations of the Lomé Convention should be pressed to adopt best debt development practice in relation to trade policy with the EU's Lomé partners again bearing in mind the importance of trade as an engine of development.

- The integration of children and young people in all development co-operation policies and programmes should become a priority.
- Each of Ireland's fifteen Government Departments should be asking to identify and twin with a separate developing country or region and should specialise in providing advice and/or services of assistance to that country or region, following consultations with NGOs here. Similarly, each local authority should twin with a region within a developing state with a view to providing expertise on various issues, such as, sanitation, roads, water, etc. (Full document available from Fine Gael on request).

27. EUROPEAN PEOPLES PARTY MANIFESTO - SUMMARY

Fine Gael is part of the European Peoples Party (EPP). The following are some of the main points in the EPP Europe wide manifesto:

1. The EPP is committed to a free and dynamic Europe, open to the world and living in solidarity with its neighbours.
2. We will support the important role of the family.
3. We support education as a lifelong process and a right for all citizens. In particular we will promote language learning and the study of science and technology.
4. The EPP supports increased liberalisation and deregulation within Europe as we believe it will help to achieve full employment.
5. We are committed to social inclusion and we defend a welfare society which promotes solidarity between people and between generations.
6. We support the creation of a European Environmental Union in which the importance of protecting the environment is central to all policies.
7. The EPP supports the policy of economic and social cohesion which is vital to ensure a fair spread of development.
8. We support the stability pact and the independent central bank as the best means of achieving low interest rates, greater competitiveness and more employment.
9. We favour the enlargement of the EU along with greater democratisation in southeast Europe.
10. Radical reform, including making Commissioners individually responsible for their policy areas, is required to create a more democratic and transparent EU.
11. We will promote greater judicial and security co-operation.
12. We favour the harmonisation of laws relating to asylum and immigration.
13. The EPP recognises the need to create a real EU common foreign and security policy.

ENDS