European Manifesto **2009**

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Executive Summary

The elections to the European Parliament on 5th June are fundamental to the future role and influence of Ireland in Europe. Europe holds the key to resolving many of the challenges that face us. Europe will play a key role in resolving issues such as regulating international banking, an effective approach to climate change and economic recovery.

Fine Gael is Part of the Strongest Team in Europe.
In an expanded Europe of 27 Countries, and with just 12 MEPs out of a total of 736, it is vital that Ireland's interests are represented by the strongest team in the European Parliament. Fine Gael is that team. As members of the largest political grouping in the European Parliament – The European People's Party (EPP) – we work alongside many government parties across Europe. Our EPP colleagues include President Sarkozy of France and Chancellor Merkel of Germany.

Lisbon – Good for Europe, Vital for Ireland.
Fine Gael strongly supports the Lisbon Treaty. We argued in favour of a Yes vote in the last referendum. Events since then have absolutely reinforced our view that the ratification of the Treaty is vital for Ireland. We will once again support the Yes campaign in the referendum later in 2009.

Fine Gael's Vision of the European Union.
Fine Gael believes that the EU must listen more to the concerns of its citizens, and Irish people must be given more information about how the EU works. We propose the creation of an EU Citizen's Officer in Ireland to offer to the people and to the Oireachtas independent objective advice on issues such as EU legislation and policy, and to act as a watchdog for the public good.

We also want to see the means by which Ireland ratifies treaties improved to give people more information, through the option of referring treaties to the courts to get clarity on what each treaty's constitutional implications are.

We oppose the government's opt-out from Lisbon's provisions on judicial and home affairs, believing that opt-out will hinder our fight against crime.

We also want to see the Oireachtas's role in scrutinising European issues strengthened to give it a real role on behalf of Irish people in reviewing EU laws and directives.

We also want to see an audit of how European law is implemented in Ireland, to ensure laws as implemented in ways that do not create bureaucracy or disadvantage Irish industries in Europe.

The European Economy – Vital for jobs.
The EU played a critical role in our economic development over the past three decades. Fine Gael believes that the European Union can play a key role in our recovery. A key part of that recovery will be the reform of the banking sector and creating the right regulatory structures that protects citizens interests into the future.

Agriculture – Irish interests must be protected
Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been crucial to the success of Ireland's membership of the EEC and EU. The CAP however does not stand still, and further reform of it will emerge post 2013.

It is vital that Ireland has a strong and powerful voice in the European parliament to defend Ireland's interests in any reform of CAP. We must not sacrifice Irish agriculture in any deal, and Fine Gael will be a strong campaigner and voice for Irish agriculture in Brussels and Strasburg.

The Review of the EU budget will focus on agriculture. Fine Gael will insist that Europe develops an agriculture policy first and then seeks the resources to implement the policy at EU level rather than merely cutting policy to fit a budget. We must defend our share of the agricultural budget in the post 2013 era.

Fine Gael believes that agricultural policy must defend the family farm structure in Ireland. The EU must support sustainable agricultural production by providing product-price stability and income stability to farming families. The EU market is vital for our agricultural exports and Fine Gael will work to ensure that Irish agriculture is focused on supplying, and is promoted in, the EU market.

Fine Gael fully recognises the importance of passing on farms to the next generation. The family farm remains at the heart of rural Ireland and must be defended. In particular we believe that the European Union in its policies must work to encourage young people to remain in farming, and encourage young farmer installation.

Fine Gael believes that in all future World Trade Talks, "equivalence" should inform any E.U. approach to WTO negotiations. In other words, the same set of standards relating to animal welfare, environmental standards of production, the use of veterinary medicines, etc must be applied when allowing goods to be sold in the European market. Europe's shoppers should be able to know that all foodstuffs available on the shelves are safe and ethically produced. Europe should require producers in other continents to achieve the same high standards of control, production and safety with their products as are required of European producers, as a condition for access to markets in Europe.

Common Defence and Security Policy – Guiding Principles

Relations within Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world have been transformed over the past two decades. Fine Gael wants any EU common security and defence system to be guided by five key principles:

1. The commitment to adhere to the fundamental principles of the United Nations (UN);
2. The commitment to the pursuit of universal nuclear and biological disarmament, and a promise never to use either type of weapon;
3. The commitment to providing peacekeeping and peacemaking operations;
4. The commitment to respect the right of other EU States to enter other military alliances, or to be neutral, as they choose.
5. The right of Ireland to opt-in and opt-out of aspects of a mutual defence and security system on a case-by-case basis.

Protecting the Environment and Climate Change

Climate change is one of the many issues where a co-ordinated approach from across the EU is vital. Europe set clear reduction targets in March 2007 and has shown a willingness to work with international bodies to make a meaningful contribution to dealing with the crisis. No other region in the world is better suited to provide global leadership on this issue and to stimulate others by its own actions than the European Union.

Fine Gael has produced a detailed and radical policy programme called 'Rebuilding Ireland', containing a visionary €11 billion investment programme will see significant State intervention to rapidly promote more sustainable energy and transport. Our plan launched last March, will not merely change the country's direction and investment in the green economy, but will create 100,000 jobs to turn Ireland into a low carbon economy.

The ability of Europe to take a set of Europe-wide policy initiatives on an issue as sensitive and vital as climate change shows the importance of the EU is helping shape all our futures. Fine Gael is committed in the EPP and in the European Parliament to help in its policies to counteract climate change.

A message from Enda Kenny, TD

Leader of Fine Gael

This year's European elections will be vital for Ireland. The Irish economy has been devastated by the economic collapse and by the chaos in the national finances. The experience of Iceland, which was thrown into chaos by its economic collapse in recent months, shows what can happen to small countries outside the European Union in times of economic turbulence. Now, more than ever, Ireland needs the European Union.

The economic, security, environmental and social challenges facing Ireland today, while diverse, are linked. No one state on its own can deal successfully with these issues. Together, our Union of nearly 500 million people can. For the challenges facing Ireland are the challenges facing Europe also. We can help and learn from each other.

By voting for your Fine Gael candidates you can ensure that Ireland remains at the Heart of Europe. Fine Gael is a member of the largest and most influential party in the European Parliament, the European People's Party (EPP). Our MEPs have earned a reputation as being among the most hard-working and effective members. We offer the best team, in the most influential party in Europe. No party has a better team.

Our candidates in this election are:

- Dublin: Gay Mitchell, MEP
- East: Mairead McGuinness MEP & Senator John Paul Phelan
- North West: Jim Higgins, MEP & Senator Joe O'Reilly.
- South: Colm Burke, MEP & Sean Kelly

Every one is worth supporting in their own right. Gay Mitchell is one of the most experienced public figures, a talented Dubliner, former Minister for Europe and for the last five years Dublin's leading MEP, able to fight Dublin's corner in the corridors of power in Brussels. Mairead McGuinness, one of our outgoing MEPs for East (formerly called Leinster), is hard working and straight talking - a food policy expert who leads the debate on food, farming and environment issues at EU, national and local level. She is joined on the ticket in East by Senator John Paul Phelan, Fine Gael spokesperson on Enterprise, Trade and Employment in the Seanad, and at 30 one of the party's most energetic, talented and exciting new politicians to emerge.

Jim Higgins, a former cabinet member and outgoing MEP for North-West, is widely respected in Brussels and Strasburg for his knowledge and insight. His running mate, Senator Joe O'Reilly, is himself no stranger to Strasburg. He is known for his wide-ranging and informative contributions to national and European policy as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and of Seanad Éireann. He has been a long-term campaigner on disability issues.

Colm Burke, our outgoing MEP for South, has won international praise for his hard work and commitment to policy within the parliament. He is joined on the ticket by Sean Kelly, a former president of the GAA, who brings with him exceptional skills and insight from his years running Ireland's biggest and most successful sporting organisation, an organisation that touches every community and family on the island.

- The creation of a full-time chairperson for the European Council. With 27 members of the Union it is no longer feasible to stick with the system designed when there were just 9 members to have Council meetings chaired part-time by prime ministers, changing in rotation every six months.
- Merging the various competing positions that deal with foreign affairs into one full-time office-holder to increase efficiency and decrease bureaucracy.

4: Fine Gael's vision of the European Union

Fine Gael believes in reform. Since January this year we have been producing a whole series of proposals to reform how the Irish state works. We want to see the Dáil and Seanad changed. We want the committee system reformed radically, and a major reduction in the number of junior ministers. In what we called 'fair care' we have proposed a revolutionary reform of our health service, to deliver European-standard heath care. (The details of 'fair care' can be found at **http://www.faircare.ie/**)

We do not stop however with reforms at home. We want to see the EU reformed also. We believe that the European Union also needs major reform to provide greater openness, transparency and accountability. Fine Gael believes that the EU has failed to communicate the truth about itself to the people, and also failed to understand people's concerns.

Last November Fine Gael produced five specific proposals for change in Ireland's relationship with the European Union.

Establishment of EU Citizens' Officer

Fine Gael proposes the establishment of a new constitutional office of European Union Citizens' Officer. The appointee would act as an independent advisory officer on all aspects of EU legislation, including its transposition into Irish law. He/she would work very closely with the European committees in the Oireachtas and have the power to make recommendations to the government on all aspects of EU lawmaking.

Irish citizens have seen how well the post of Comptroller and Auditor General has worked. We see the new EU Citizens' Officer as a similar office, defending the public interest, offering objective advice, and providing impartial non-political information. The Office would also be responsible for promoting a greater focus on European issues in the education system.

Ratification of future treaties

There is no clarity as to what aspects of international treaties require constitutional approval. Fine Gael has proposed a constitutional change to allow future international treaties to be referred to the Supreme Court when they are agreed to establish which of their provisions require to be put to the people, and whether any of their contents would in any way conflict with the Irish constitution. Such a mechanism would ensure that we have greater clarity on the issues in future referendums.

Irish opt-out from judicial and home affairs cooperation

At the time the Lisbon Treaty was negotiated, the Government secured an opt-out from the parts of the treaty dealing with increased cooperation in the areas of judicial and home affairs. Fine Gael did not support this opt-out at the time as we believe that Ireland should be fully involved in the fight against international crime, especially as there is increasing evidence of this country being used as a route to import illegal drugs into Europe. The result of this new crime threat can be seen in the violent gangland conflicts in our major cities.

Fine Gael believes the Government should abandon this opt-out and any further referendum proposal should be based on Ireland fully participating in this important and valuable aspect of the Lisbon Treaty.

Strengthened Oireachtas' role in European issues with reformed Seanad

A Review of Irish legislation to see how many Irish laws and statutory instruments originate in or from the European laws, suggests that the total is under 40%, far off the mythical 80% claimed by Eurosceptics. Many of these Acts cover areas that if we were not in the European Union we would be passing anyway from choice.

Fine Gael wants a reformed Seanad to deal with EU scrutiny

Implementation of existing EU law

Some people express fears that their lives have been negatively affected by the implementation of laws that come from Europe. This fear is played on by some Eurosceptics who spread myths about how 80% of Irish law comes from the EU.

Most EU directives are incorporated into Irish law through what are called 'Statutory Instruments'. Between 1992 and 2009 in Ireland 588 Acts and 10,725 Statutory Instruments were passed. 114 Acts contain at least one reference to European legislation while 3,050 of the 10,725 Statutory Instruments contain at least one reference to European legislation. That means that of Irish legislation from 1992 to 2009, then, only 3,164 out of 11,313 Acts and Instruments contain any reference whatsoever to European legislation. The actual total is 27.97%, far off the mythical 80%.

People's fears are built up not merely by false claims as to numbers, but also by the decisions they are led to believe they should blame the EU for. An example is the belief that it was because of the EU that water charges are to be imposed on schools from 2010, when in fact the reason is because the Government failed to negotiate a derogation.

There are justifiable fears that the EU is responsible for excessive bureaucracy and regulation. Good regulation is vital. Unnecessary regulation is pointless and a waste. There is also a sense that in some sectors there is a more stringent and vigorous approach to implementation in Ireland than in other member states.

Fine Gael will seek to have an independent audit commissioned into the transposition and implementation of EU law in Ireland. This audit, which will prioritise areas that have caused concern and controversy, will include

international comparative analysis so that it can be established if greater flexibility is being applied in other member states. Such an audit should invite submission from the public who feel aggrieved at the impact of the implementation of EU legislation on their lives or business activities.

Where there are problems, Fine Gael believes that they must be fixed and will work in the European Parliament to fix them. Where people's genuine worries are groundless, the public have a right to know.

5: The European Economy – A vital role in recovery

Ireland's economic growth in recent decades was in large measure because of our membership of the European Union. Membership of the Union gave us access to structural funds, agricultural supports, and a massive market, allowing more of our exports to go to EU states rather than primarily the United Kingdom.

Just as Europe played a crucial part in delivering economic growth, so Fine Gael believes it can play a crucial part in generating economic recovery. Alone and isolated, we would face an almost impossible task in dealing with the current economic crisis. But access to the EU, its funds and markets, opens up potential for a return to a thriving successful Ireland.

Our position would have been all the worse if we still had our own small currency. Being part of a stable powerful international currency protected us from currency speculators and ensured that our economic collapse did not become an economic catastrophe. Fine Gael believes strongly in our continuing membership of the Euro. Our participation in Economic and Monetary Union is, we believe, a vital component to our recovery.

But the benefits of EU and Euro membership is not enough. We can only achieve new success if we fix structural faults within our own economy, faults that the last twelve years of Fianna Fáil have allowed to grow and fester.

Fine Gael believes that costs in Ireland must be brought to a more manageable level. **Proper regulation of the banking and other sectors of the economy must be introduced.** The free-for-all agenda pushed by the current government gave us weak regulation that allowed for widespread abuses. That must never happen again.

Fine Gael in 2009 has announced detailed policies which when implemented by the party in government will help bring Ireland out of recession and into a new era of growth. In government, to boost the domestic economy, we will introduce €11 billion in new investments in the period 2010-13 in key technologies and network infrastructures needed to reposition Ireland as the most competitive and sustainable economy in Europe within the next decade. This will be funded through a new state industrial holding company, the New Economy and Recovery Authority (NewERA). NewERA investments will not count as Government expenditure, as they will be financial investments seeking a commercial rate of return, and repaid through charges on consumers and businesses for the use of new technologies and network infrastructures.

The investment programme will also help to drag Ireland's economy out of recession by creating 100,000 extra jobs by 2013 in areas such as construction, maintenance, engineering, research, software, timber processing and forestry.

The combination of the radical investment programme we propose in Ireland through NewERA, with the positive benefits and access that flow from our role in the European Union, will help ensure Ireland's return to economic growth in the future. Together they will offer the quickest and most effective way back to long-term recovery.

For information on industrial and economic development programme, *Rebuilding Ireland: a NewERA for the Irish Economy*, please visit **http://www.finegael.ie/news/documents/RBI1.pdf**

6: Consumer Protection

The European Union has been at the forefront of introducing consumer protection legislation.

However it is clear that over the years of the Celtic Tiger we have lived in rip-off Ireland. Consumers were overcharged and offered inadequate services, while the Government was slow to put in place sufficient protections against fraudulent or negligent suppliers of goods and services.

It is vital that Ireland learn from those mistakes and follow policies that place consumer protection at the heart of economic policy. Europe too can play its part in protecting the rights of consumers. Among changes needed are

- A high standard of common rules and practices in the area of consumer protection must exist across the EU;
- The distribution of accessible and relevant consumer information must be guaranteed to enable consumers to make informed choices;
- The basic consumer rights a consumer may need to call on if things go wrong, must be clear, fair and easy to understand. The same rights should apply across the Union.

With the growth in the number of cross-border consumer transactions, consumers need increased and easy access to EU systems of arbitration and mediation that will apply across the Union.

To achieve full impact, Fine Gael will tie in its policies on consumer protection in Europe to a series of consumer protection reforms it will introduce in government in Ireland. A key change will be the merger of the National Consumer Agency and the Competition Authority into a new, more powerful, and more consumer-orientated Office of Fair Trading that places consumer rights at the heart of economic and trading policy.

7: Promoting Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

Two-thirds of private-sector jobs in Europe are provided by Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, while SMEs create the majority of new jobs. Their flexibility and dynamism make them a key factor in a country's economy

being healthy. The EPP will do everything it can to encourage this spirit of entrepreneurship in order to create a more dynamic economy.

In that respect, youth and women entrepreneurship should be especially supported. Special attention has to be paid to the needs of start-up companies which should be relieved from excessive bureaucracy. In the context of the economic downturn, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are particularly vulnerable to the credit crunch due to their heavy dependence on bank credit, and limited access to financial markets.

It is the SMEs which need support measures in order to continue to be the main driving force for growth, job creation and innovation. Therefore they should be targeted by the EU and national financial stimulus packages.

8: Common European Defence and Security

Europe and the world in the last twenty years have undergone a fundamental change in relationships. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact have changed completely the context of Ireland's neutrality. Today many of the threats faced by societies and states are not from each other but from armed groups and fundamentalist militants seeking to attack citizens.

Ireland's traditional system of neutrality is designed for a world that is no longer, a world where wars were between countries or were a danger between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. In today's world, security and defence involves dealing with terrorism and international fundamentalist movements. Ireland cannot stand still, applying a twentieth century form of neutrality in a twenty-first century world with twenty-first century problems. European countries are now designing a common EU security and defence system to face the new threats to world peace and international law, and our neutrality needs to evolve to take into account these changes.

We can of course opt out, and stay on the sidelines of discussions on designing a common European security and defence system. That is our right.

Fine Gael believes that that would be a tragic mistake. While we were neutral in the Cold War, we nevertheless were reliant for protection, in event of attack, on the security systems of the time, systems we had no chance of helping to shape.

We should seek from the start to influence the new European security system.
We want Ireland to get involved in the construction of such an agreement at an early stage so that we can join and influence it on our terms. Ireland should not only be part of the EU security and defence architecture, we should be one of the architects helping to design these systems to meet our needs, and our view of Europe's needs.

Fine Gael, for example, wants any EU common security and defence system to be guided by five key principles:

1. The commitment to adhere to the fundamental principles of the United Nations (UN);

2. The commitment to the pursuit of universal nuclear and biological disarmament, and a promise never to use either type of weapon;
3. The commitment to providing peacekeeping and peacemaking operations;
4. The commitment to respect the right of other EU States to enter other military alliances, or to be neutral, as they choose.
5. The right of Ireland to opt-in and opt-out of aspects of a mutual defence and security system on a case-by-case basis.

We cannot guarantee that those five principles will be enshrined in new security and defence systems unless we are at the negotiations insisting on them. If we believe in those fundamental principles, we should be willing stand up and fight for them in negotiations. We should not simply sit on the sidelines, powerless, and then complain when the principles we believe were not adopted as part of the EU defence and security system.

9: International peacekeeping

Ireland has a proud history in peace-keeping and peace-enforcing, most recently our mission in Chad. That role is changing however. In the twentieth century most peace-keeping missions were arranged directly by the United Nations. Underfunding and bureaucracy in the United Nations, and the end of the Cold War, has produced a new system of international peace-keeping. Under UN mandate, the UN asks regional security or political organisations such as the EU, the African Union, and NATO, to provide peace-keeping missions. The UN later on sometimes takes on the responsibility.

That is what happened with our mission in Chad. We served a year in a European Union force called EUFOR TCHAD/RCA. It is the peacekeeping system that the UN will be using in the future.

Ireland regulates our missions through what we call our 'triple lock'. Every mission must have the approval of the Irish Government, Dáil Éireann, and the United Nations Security Council.

Fine Gael believes that system, through honourable, is flawed. The UN Security Council possesses five permanent security council members (the United States, China, France, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom) all of whom possess vetoes, meaning that many crucial peace-keeping missions can be blocked if any one of the five exercises their veto. The vetoes are used sometimes not because of humanitarian concerns but local politics. Ireland, by requiring a Security Council resolution, in effect allows its ability to take part in peace-keeping to be vetoed by any of the five permanent members for their own self-interest.

Fine Gael views this as unacceptable. We are allowing a design flaw in the UN to prevent us from talking part in humanitarian missions.

Fine Gael has proposed that the Triple Lock be modified so that instead of requiring a formal motion to be passed by the Security Council, all missions must be in keeping with the Purposes and Principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Such a change would not by-pass the UN. It would ensure that our participation is based

on principles, not the internal political stances of the five permanent members. That, Fine Gael believes, would be fairer, more honest and more honourable.

Human rights, not international politics, should be the guiding principle of our role in peace-keeping.

10: Overseas Development Aid

Fine Gael has a strong commitment to see the developing world eradicate hunger and offer to its citizens a fair and just society. We supported the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals. We believe the European Union must focus its policies on the developing world on the goals, which aim to

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

Fine Gael has repeatedly backed Ireland's policy of using 0.7% of Gross National Product for Overseas Development Aid by 2012. Ireland has a long and proud history of involvement in the developing world. Our missionaries and third world agencies have been, and continue to be, crucial to championing the cause of the poor in the developing world. We believe it is right that we continue to be at the forefront of providing aid and leadership. As a former colony ourselves we are uniquely placed to understand the difficulties faced by many former colonies in Africa and offer aid, guidance and help.

Ireland today faces tough economic challenges, but so do our friends in the developing world. Therefore Fine Gael believes it is crucial that we do not abandon our commitments to the Developing World.

Fine Gael criticised the Government's decision in the 2009 budget to reduce our ODA budget and called on the government to guarantee that whatever cuts they made this year will not lead to any delay in the achievement of the 0.7% target intended to be hit by 2012. The fact that our target is a percentage means that as Gross National Product (GNP) declines in the economic downturn, so will the amount of money that percentage refers to. So in straight money terms the amount the state is committed to deliver is already falling.

There is in our view no justification for reducing the percentage commitment when the amount of money committed is already falling as GNP falls. We share the concern of third world agencies that the 2012 target, which the government has already delayed once, may be missed a second time. That, we believe, would be unacceptable. The cuts are particularly regrettable given that Ireland has been successful in directing some of its development aid to the fight against HIV/AIDS. For that reason we believe that the government's decision to cut Ireland's overseas aid budget was wrong and will hurt the weakest in the developing world, and cost lives of many, particularly children.

11: Security, Crime and Terrorism in a Changing Europe

We live in difficult and dangerous times. Crime and terrorism offer a challenge to every country in the EU and every citizen. Fine Gael believes the government is not doing enough to protect our citizens. But there is also a lot the EU and its member states can and must do to protect us all.

- Fine Gael in the European Parliament will campaign to ensure maximum co-ordination exists across police forces and criminal justice systems.
- Fine Gael will work to ensure that no criminal can evade prosecution through fleeing between different jurisdictions. We believe there must be no safe havens for criminality in Europe.
- Fine Gael will support the Lisbon Treaty which provides for the creation of a European Public Prosecutor. The new post will only come into force when consented to by the European Parliament. We will work in Parliament to ensure the office when created is efficient, effective and powerful, while ensuring the necessary protections are in place to protect the innocent.
- Fine Gael wants to see the position of 'Eurojust', the EU's Judicial Co-operation Unit, strengthened and made more efficient.
- Fine Gael believes strongly that laws against serious crimes such as trading in enslaved women, drug trafficking, internet-related crime, money laundering and acts of racism should be harmonised throughout the European Union in all national legal systems to establish comparable EU standards.

12: Migration into & within the European Union

Migration into and throughout the EU is a fact of modern European life. People move between states for work and personal reasons. For Europe, immigration is not merely a fact of life but a necessity. Demographically, the percentage of people of working age in the EU will be in decline in the next twenty years, meaning there will be a need for inward migration.

Ireland has received a far higher share of immigrants from countries that joined the EU in 2004 than any other EU state.

Some 5 per cent of the working-age population here originates in those countries, a report by the European Commission has found.

This is considerably more than in the UK, the second-largest receiving country in relative terms, where 1.2 per cent of the working-age population came from these 10 countries.

The task for Ireland and for the European Union is to create structures to enable society to cope with the changes that flow from migration, and ensure that there is fair treatment for all.

Migration was a factor which helped build the Celtic Tiger. The economic decline we are now facing means that immigration rates are dropping substantially, with many migrants into Ireland moving to other member states, or returning to their home country.

Fine Gael believes there must be action in dealing with the migration issue in a number of key areas:

- A co-ordinated proactive anti-discrimination campaign and blueprint for integration must be spearheaded at EU level in order to build on the experiences and good practice in other member states.
- Fine Gael wants to see an agreed mechanism for a standard entry format for third country migration into the Union.
- A much more effective and co-ordinated approach is needed at EU level of prevent human trafficking into and within the Union. Fine Gael has taken an active stand in the Dáil and Seanad on updating Irish laws on human trafficking, and will continue to do so at national and European Parliament level.
- Fine Gael believes the EU should expand and co-ordinate its actions to facilitate a common approach to asylum applications. We wish to see comprehensive EU-wide minimum standards of treatment for asylum applications.
- The right for EU citizens to travel within the union must be protected, but there is also a need to stamp out cross-border crime. This must involve greater co-operation and information sharing between police forces across the EU. The sharing of such information must become commonplace in order to improve border controls.
- A criminal database must be accessible across jurisdictions to ensure all necessary information is available in the policing of borders.
- There must be greater co-operation on third country deportations to facilitate the safe & cost effective return to the country of origin.

13: Enlarging the European Family

Fine Gael believes the project of European enlargement has benefited us all. When we joined the then European Economic Community (EEC) our community just consisted of nine members. Today it stands at 27, stretching from the Baltic or the Mediterranean, the Aran Islands to the Black Sea.

The Community as it originally created just consisted of a number of Western European states. Following the collapse of the Communist bloc the Union spread eastwards. Today there are European Union states all over the European continent, with the Union having a population of nearly 500 million.

Economic barriers have been removed, creating for the Union's members one of the biggest markets in the world. At a time of economic slowdown worldwide, having a potential market of nearly 500 million people to export to will be crucial for Ireland and other places as we try to rebuild our economy.

Like any family, there are tensions and rivalries. But unlike the pre-EEC days, Europe's tensions and rivalries are no longer expressed through wars. That is perhaps the lasting legacy of the European integration. That strength of community has arguably never been needed as much as it will be in the next year or two as the European family struggles to deal with the economic crisis that risks plunging much of the world into an economic depression. The interdependence between member states that is the hallmark of the European Union may well be the most important means at our disposal in enabling us all to get through the economic storm and get back to an era of growth.

14: A Healthy Europe

Fine Gael believes that prevention is better than cure and supports the EU principle that health-spending should be invested in preventive measures, to protect the general health of the population. Preventive medicine protects, promotes, and maintains health and well-being and takes steps to stop disease, disability, and premature death from occurring. Preventive medicine includes a range of interventions including childhood immunisation, health screening and early intervention, resulting in better outcomes for patients and a reduced burden on the health service.

One of the benefits of the EU is that it offers structures that can enable Europe-wide approaches to common health problems. Fine Gael believes that rather than wasting scare resources on duplicating expenditure on bureaucracies, consideration should be given to create a cross-country health budget in specific areas so that the member states could work together to combat illnesses such as obesity, diabetes, Alzheimer's, AIDS and cancer.

All these illnesses occur broadly to the same level in each state, so effective co-ordination of resources is much more likely to deliver benefits to everyone rather than each state on its own funding separate campaigns.

Fine Gael also believes that the European Union collectively should use its might to mobilise global action and resources for health research to halt the spread of diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS that increasingly threaten people all over the world. Properly resourced funding and international pressure from our Union could help save lives.

15: Disability

One of Europe's most effective roles is in the communication of knowledge, of enabling policy makers in one state to learn from the experiences of others about how to deal with an issue.

While disability rights and concerns may be directly the responsibility of national government and local authorities, in terms of practical implementation of policies, as well as implementing the National Disability Strategy Ireland must learn from the experience of our European colleagues as to how to ensure the rights and needs of disabled citizens are fully and comprehensively provided for. Disability should not act as a barrier to someone achieving their potential. Whether in terms of European policy or national policy, Fine Gael believes that the rights and needs of disabled fellow citizens must be taken into account, and the best of international practice learnt from.

Fine Gael will use its position in the European Parliament to work with disability groups at home and abroad to see what additional insights can be learnt from international experience to ensure the position of Irish people with disabilities is protected and their rights vindicated.

16: Education

Access to education was crucial to the creation of the Celtic Tiger. But education is about more than improving economic performance. It can improve lives, giving greater options to people in careers, lifestyles, income, and personal fulfilment.

Fine Gael is highly critical of recent government decisions on education, believing that they will hinder, not help, the prospect of economic recovery.

We also believe that the European Union can play a crucial role in developing the standard of education across all 27 member states.

Fine Gael believes that

- An education system of the highest quality must be available to all citizens providing for greater choice and encouraging wider participation;
- Multilingualism must be a goal across Europe. It is important in the twenty-first century that as many people as possible in our Union should be fluent in Europe's languages. Our educational system must reflect this commitment to multiculturalism.

- We believe strongly that the promotion of new technologies in training and education programmes should be supported;
- Obstacles to student and teaching mobility must be removed.
- Participation in the Bologna Process at a European level is essential to encouraging modernisation of the third level sector, greater levels of quality across the EU, while at the same time favouring academic freedom. To further Ireland's participation in this process Fine Gael has outlined a programme of third level reform aimed at improving quality assurance procedures and enhancing the quality of third level education domestically.
- Ireland's domestic education policy and systems must be developed to reflect the highest standards at an EU level to enhance competitiveness encourage mobility and ensure educational outcomes here favour comparably with our EU counterparts.

Fine Gael has outlined its own detailed policy proposals for Third Level education in its recently launched 'The Third Way: A Fine Gael Green Paper on reform of Higher Education', published in March 2009. Fine Gael believes that education at all levels is vital for the future development of Ireland, and will give it priority attention in government. Ireland's Celtic Tiger years were built on the investment in education in the 1960s. We will insure, at both European and national level, that education remains a key focus.

17: Children – their safety must be our priority

Fine Gael believes Ireland's protection levels for children are inadequate. Children as the most vulnerable members of society must receive full and adequate protection. We want far stronger vetting procedures applied to people who, through employment or volunteer positions, have substantial unsupervised access to children and vulnerable adults.

In the Dáil and in Oireachtas committees Fine Gael has led the debate on strengthening vetting procedures. We will not allow risks to be taken with the safety of our children. That is why we believe a constitutional referendum should be held to remove the defence of "mistake as to age" in cases where an adult is accused of having sex with an underage child, and ensure there is an absolute zone of protection for all children under 15 years of age. We also believe that the age of consent should remain at 17.

Fine Gael also believes that the European Union should take an active role in the promotion of basic vetting standards, creating where possible a uniform system that protects all children of all nations equally. What we fear is that those who prey on children may focus their attention on the country or countries with the weakest vetting system, knowing that there they may escape detection in a way that would not be possible anywhere else. That is a risk we are not prepared to take and we will campaign vigorously on the issue, whether in the Dáil and Seanad or in the European Parliament.

18: Agriculture

Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been crucial to the success of Ireland's membership of the EEC and EU. The CAP however does not stand still, and further reform of it will emerge post 2013.

It is crucial, therefore, that Ireland has a strong and powerful voice in the European parliament to defend Ireland's interests in any reform of CAP. We must not sacrifice Irish agriculture in any deal, and Fine Gael will be a strong campaigner and voice for Irish agriculture in Brussels and Strasburg.

Fine Gael believes that agricultural policy must defend the family farm structure in Ireland. The EU must support sustainable agricultural production by providing product-price stability and income stability to farming families. The EU market is vital for our agricultural exports and Fine Gael will work to ensure that Irish agriculture is focused on supplying, and is promoted in, the EU market.

Irish agriculture will face major challenges in the coming years, challenges made more difficult by the economic downturn.

The Review of the EU budget will focus on agriculture. Fine Gael will insist that Europe develops an agriculture policy first and then seek the resources to implement the policy at EU level rather than merely cutting policy to fit a budget. We must defend our share of the agricultural budget in post 2013 era.

Fine Gael recognises the importance of the live animal export trade to our agricultural sector and the challenges posed by emerging bio-security issues in recent years. We are committed to ensuring that any policies or regulatory measures developed at a European or domestic level ensure sustainability of the sector.

Fine Gael believes strongly in the need to improve our water quality and encourage farm practices that ensure high environmental standards. We also recognise the needs of Irish farmers, and believe that a fair balance can be struck that will not unfairly burden Irish agriculture. We believe that the Nitrates Directive, as with much of EU agricultural policy, has two fundamental flaws

(i) It is too bureaucratic, involving the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and local authorities, wasting too much money on needless duplication.

(ii) It takes no account of the reality of agriculture and policies such as 'farming-by-dates', because of the nature of agriculture, are unworkable. We will insist that Ireland's implementation of the Directive is reformed to provide for the sort of flexibility that is needed on a family farm.

Fine Gael is committed to a simpler approach to effective compliance with EU Regulations and Directives and will carry out a review of domestic implementation of EU legislation to reduce levels of red tape and paperwork for farmers.

Fine Gael will thoroughly examine all necessary regulations to ensure farmers can enter into farm partnerships if they so desire to improve efficiency without suffering any penalties.

Fine Gael will review the myriad of agencies involved in food monitoring and traceability systems domestically with a view to introducing a more transparent, effective system of food safety from farm to fork and enhancing our competitiveness and reputation on the global market.

We will work to see particular emphasis placed in effective marketing of Irish farm produce, to ensure high quality agri-food products receive premium prices on the European market.

Fine Gael is committed to REPS and believes that it must be structured to ensure the maximum number of farmers participate in the scheme by ensuring ease of entry through a minimum amount of paperwork and bureaucracy.

Fine Gael fully recognises the importance of passing on farms to the next generation. The family farm remains at the heart of rural Ireland and must be defended. In particular we believe that the European Union in its policies must work to encourage young people to remain in farming, and encourage young farmer installation.

Fine Gael believes that in all future World Trade Talks, "equivalence" should inform any E.U. approach to WTO negotiations. In other words, the same set of standards relating to animal welfare, environmental standards of production, the use of veterinary medicines, etc must be applied when allowing goods to be sold in the European market. Europe's shoppers should be able to know that all foodstuffs available on the shelves are safe and ethically produced. Europe should require producers in other continents to achieve the same high standards of control, production and safety with their products as are required of European producers, as a condition for access to markets in Europe.

19: Protecting the Environment

Pollution does not respect national boundaries, making it a natural area for co-ordinated EU action. Environmental damage in one state directly or indirectly affects other states. That is why Fine Gael believes the Union must take an active role in legislating for a cleaner environment.

The Celtic Tiger years have seen a deterioration in our natural environment, as rapid development placed little emphasis on occasions on good planning. We believe that the mistakes of the past must be learned and the level of environmental deterioration witnessed in recent years must be challenged.

Fine Gael believes that major emphasis must be placed in terms of waste management on the prevention and minimisation of waste and the provision of recycling facilities.

Fine Gael remains very concerned at the failure of the government to prioritise environmental matters, and to implement EU directives without delay.

20: Climate Change

In Europe, nearly all regions will be negatively affected by some future impacts of climate change, posing difficult challenges to many economic sectors. Negative impacts will include:

- increased risk of inland flash floods
- more frequent coastal flooding
- increased erosion (due to storms and the rise in sea levels)
- increased risk of forest fires (due to heat waves)
- water scarcity and droughts.

Ireland would not escape these.

Climate is one of the many issues where a co-ordinated approach from across the EU is vital. Europe set clear reduction targets in March 2007 and has shown a willingness to work with international bodies to make a meaningful contribution to dealing with the crisis. No other region in the world is better suited to provide global leadership on this issue and to stimulate others by its own actions than the European Union.

Ireland's record under a succession of Fianna Fáil-led governments has been a catalogue of mistakes, misjudgements and missed opportunities. Their errors have left Ireland's carbon emissions so far off target that the only way Ireland can reach its 2012 carbon emissions targets is by purchasing carbon credits from other states. It is a "short-sighted, short term 'sticking plaster' solution to a gravely serious problem", in the words of Trevor Sargent of the Green Party in 2007, a viewpoint Fine Gael shares.

Unlike this government, Fine Gael has produced a detailed and radical policy programme called 'Rebuilding Ireland', containing a visionary €11 billion investment programme which will see significant State intervention to rapidly promote more sustainable energy and transport sectors while bringing telecommunications into the 21st Century. Our plan, launched last March, will not merely change the country's direction and invest in the green economy, but will create 100,000 jobs as we turn Ireland into a low carbon economy.

The ability of Europe to take a set of Europe-wide policy initiatives on an issue as sensitive and vital as climate change shows the importance of the EU is helping shape all our futures. Fine Gael is committed in the EPP and in the European Parliament to help in its policies to counteract climate change.

Fine Gael and the EPP want the European Union to be the frontrunner in low-carbon and carbon-free technologies and will work to achieve that in Dáil Éireann, in the European Parliament, and when we are in government.

21: Renewable Energy

Fine Gael believes that Ireland's performance in the area of renewable energy promotion is neither adequate nor acceptable. We believe the failure of the government to develop adequately all renewable energy options is regrettable and must be reversed.

As a matter or urgency we must create a viable market place for renewable energy. Fine Gael believes that this can be achieved by a number of important actions:

- Wind energy must be prioritised;
- Wood biomass can be used in addition to peat as a fuel source;
- Cutbacks in the forestry sector must be reversed and a new emphasis on planting initiated;
- Tax incentives for non-renewable imported energy sources should be reduced to rebalance the economy in order to encourage the grow of biofuels on Irish farms;
- As an island nation, Ireland must become a leader in research on wave and tidal energy;
- All local authorities must be directed to create renewable energy plans;

In government, based on our *Rebuilding Ireland: a "NewERA" for the Irish Economy* policy document launched earlier this year, among the national reforms we will be introducing are a new semi-state company, "Renewable Energy Ireland", which will invest in early stage green energy companies and applied renewable energy research, with a particular focus on technologies that can be licensed. It will invest €100 million over the period 2010-2013. Renewable Energy Ireland will have two main priorities: (1) To ensure that Ireland fully exploits its favourable ocean energy resources; and (2) To build up Ireland's commercial position in markets which have huge growth potential but where we currently are under-represented, e.g. wind technology.

Taken together, our national and European policies will form a frame-work for the development of Renewable Energy in Ireland.

22: Marine

Fine Gael believes that it is important that Ireland is represented strongly in future negotiations of the Common Fisheries Policy. Fine Gael is committed to the future of Irish fisheries and believes the strength of the industry is dependent on strong negotiation and adequate support at an EU level coupled with a firm conviction to reform the sector domestically as recommended by the Cawley Strategy.

We believe that the policing of the CFP has been unbalanced, with Ireland's fishermen often facing more extreme regulation than those in fishing fleets from other jurisdictions.

Fine Gael believes that it is important that Ireland is represented strongly in future re-negotiations of the Common Fisheries Policy. We believe that the policing of the CFP has been haphazard and unbalanced, with Ireland's fishermen often facing more extreme regulation than those in fishing fleets from other jurisdictions.

We believe a correct balance must be struck. Fine Gael recently published a Fisheries Bill to reform Ireland's fisheries law to provide a fairer legal framework than exists at present, one which reflects the norm in fisheries law in the recent of the European Union.

Two of the major problems currently facing the European Union are smuggling and the threat of terrorism. Countries such as Ireland, with large coasts, face considerable difficulty and costs in patrolling our coastline. In recent years Gardaí and the Irish coast guard have prevented the importation of over €1 billion worth of cocaine, in a number of large seizures. Given that Ireland is often targeted by smugglers because of our membership of the EU, Fine Gael believes the EU should create an EU coastguard, to augment and back up national coastguard services.

Such an EU coastguard would help Ireland and other states in the battle against smugglers, while offering a crucial protection against the threat of terrorism. It is an issue which Fine Gael MEPs will continue to raise within the European Parliament and elsewhere.

23: Tourism

Tourism has in recent years been a crucial feature of Ireland's economic development. Its multi-billion euro contribution to exchequer funding, and the impact of the tourist industry on jobs and Ireland's Gross National Product, highlights how crucial the industry is, particularly during an economic downturn.

Fine Gael believes that the current government's failure to control rising costs, and the growing lack of competitiveness within the Irish economy, has endangered the future growth of this crucial national industry. Fine Gael suggests a full analysis of all structural costs within the industry is urgently required with a view to ensuring maximum competitiveness, so as to ensure maximum long-term benefit both in terms of job creation and contributions to the exchequer.

Tourism possesses particular potential within the European Union. Within the EU tourism accounts for 5% of employment and has a significant impact across all sectors of the European economy and society.

Fine Gael believes that EU funding for tourism, to maximise its impact on the greater European economy, is critical. It is also critical that such funds focus particularly on enabling greater access to the regions, and in redressing imbalances in tourism growth where they arise.

Ireland, as an island nation on the periphery of the European landmass, faces particular problems with regard to access. Fine Gael believes obstacles to tourism such the Departure Levy should be removed and opportunities such as the introduction of the first pre-clearance facility for the United States in Shannon, should be maximised to capture potential tourist traffic through Ireland from the EU en route to the United States.

24: Regional Development

Fine Gael is committed to ensuring maximum status for the Border-Midlands-West (BMW) region in all allocations of EU cohesion funds and that the status is reflective of the economic decline that had followed recent economic events, rather than based on earlier economic levels achieved during the Celtic Tiger.

Fine Gael will work to ensure that EU policies in central areas such as Industrial Development, Trade and Enterprise are not at divergence with EU regional development policies. To ensure balanced regional development their needs must be factored in during the formation of new policies for the EU.

Fine Gael believes strongly that EU Regional Development policies, should aim not only to address economic and social imbalances between the regions, but must also seek to enhance equal opportunities irrespective of gender, age or disability within the regions.

Fine Gael is committed to using available funds under the EU Rural Development Programme appropriately and effectively to ensure long term employment, sustainable enterprise creation and viable rural communities are created through the best possible use of EU funds.