

**WHEN WE WIN
YOU WIN**

**NASZA WYGRANA
TWOJĄ WYGRANĄ**

**ÁR MBUA
DO BHUA**

**QUANDO NÓS VENCEMOS
TU VENCES TAMBÉM**

A win for Alban Maginness will be a win for us all

The European election on Thursday 4 June is about you and your future. Europe is having an ever-greater impact on all our lives. That's why the North needs an MEP who will be able to have an impact in Europe for us all. With the global economic downturn taking a severe toll in Northern Ireland, it is crucial that we have a strong, effective voice in the European Parliament.

Alban Maginness is the only candidate who can deliver for you, because the SDLP is the only major party in the North that is pro-Europe. Our membership of the Party of European Socialists gives us real influence at the very heart of Europe. We used that influence to deliver results for you in the past – and we will again.

In this manifesto, we set out an ambitious agenda for you in Europe. We pledge to represent your interests effectively and to fight for your needs tirelessly. Complementing the dynamic proposals the SDLP has put forward to tackle the downturn in the North and throughout the island of Ireland, this manifesto is a charter for radical action. It is a roadmap to greater prosperity, true equality and opportunity for all. As your MEP, Alban Maginness will be a vigorous champion of your rights, aspirations and hopes for the future.

This election must not become a sectarian vanity contest. Other parties will want it to be all about who will emerge as top-dog. That's because they have no record in Europe to run on or no positive agenda for the future. The bottom line is that they have failed to deliver – and have let you down. And that's not just in Europe. In the Executive, the record of the two main parties falls far short of what you need and deserve.

The SDLP always puts the best interests of the people we serve first. When we win, you win. A win for Alban Maginness will be a win for us all.



Mark Durkan MP MLA
SDLP Leader



Message from Alban Maginness

The election to the European Parliament on Thursday 4 June takes place against a backdrop of



global economic recession, instability and uncertainty. The downturn is exerting a severe toll in Northern Ireland. Thousands have already lost their jobs, with worse likely still to come. Firms and families are struggling to make ends meet. People are worrying about what the future holds.

Over the last few months, I have travelled throughout the North. I have listened intently to people's concerns. I have also found inspiration in the aspirations they have for themselves, their families, their communities and this country.

This manifesto sets out how the SDLP will work to ensure that people's best hopes and highest ambitions are fulfilled. It is the programme of work that I pledge to deliver if you elect me to serve you in Europe. I give you my word: your needs will be my priority.

As your MEP, I will work tirelessly to ensure that our region will be at the forefront of economic recovery and that positive initiatives to help workers through the worst of the downturn are delivered. I will champion the needs of small and medium sized businesses by campaigning for an EU Commissioner who will eliminate red tape. In addition, I will push for new regulation for the whole financial sector, including hedge funds and private equity.

Huge opportunities exist to grow our 'green' technologies and I believe that rural communities can and must benefit significantly from ambitious investment in this sector. By developing our indigenous renewable industry we can help to drive down energy costs and contribute positively towards radical global climate

change targets. I will fight for a fair deal for our farmers during negotiations on CAP reform and for a better future for our fishermen and coastal communities.

I will also support vital and valued community and voluntary organisations by ensuring that the Executive fully delivers the PEACE III funding programme.

The SDLP has consistently supported the Lisbon Treaty because we believe it provides for more transparent decision-making and better representation of your interests in Europe. Now more than ever, Northern Ireland needs a strong, credible pro-Europe voice at the very heart of Europe. Global recession demands international, not insular, responses. We need to be outward-looking and forward-thinking.

The SDLP is the only major party offering that positive platform to voters in this election. Our membership of the Party of European Socialists - a powerful grouping of social democratic and labour parties from across Europe - gives us real influence where it matters. You know we used that influence to deliver for you in the past when John Hume was our MEP. We want to deliver for you again.

Northern Ireland can emerge from the current downturn with genuine hope for prosperity in the future. To ensure that we do, it is vital that your voice is heard and listened to in Europe. Our best days are yet to come. After five years of losing in Europe, it's time for us all to win again.

Alban Maginness MLA

Economic prosperity, employment and a new social Europe

STRIVING TOWARDS FINANCIAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The world has changed dramatically since the last European election. The economic crisis is hitting economies, businesses, workers, families and citizens all over Europe hard. The fundamental failures of the economic system that persisted over recent decades are undeniable: an unregulated global financial market that historically sacrificed long term investment, jobs, wages and the general wellbeing of the planet and its people for the benefit of a few.

This economic crisis must be tackled on all fronts: international, European, national and local. If the European Union is serious about relaunching the global economy, then we need to end tax avoidance, curb excessive pay and bring in new regulation for the whole financial sector including hedge funds and private equity. Just as Europe must pull its weight alongside the USA, China and Japan in countering this recession, all political parties at the local level must also step up to the challenge.

The SDLP is part of the Party of European Socialists (PES), a united group of social democratic and labour parties and one of the largest and most powerful groupings in the European Parliament. That gives us real influence at the heart of Europe. Influence to reform the financial markets, counteract the recession and prepare our local economy to create new jobs and growth.



The SDLP has strong policies and has used our influence in Europe to deliver for Northern Ireland in the past. And we will do so again.

Locally, the SDLP launched a radical document, *New Priorities in Difficult Times: Supporting the Northern Ireland Economy*. This paper outlines measures to support our economy and identifies ways in which money can be found to fund them.

Beidh an SDLP, mar bhall de PES, chomh láidir céanna inár gcuspóirí agus inár gcuid machnaimh shamhlaíoch sa Phairlimint Eorpach agus a bhíomar

anseo sa Tionól.

As a member of the PES, the SDLP will be as bold in purpose and imaginative in thought in the European Parliament as we have been here in the Assembly.

OUR COMMITMENT TO A 'GREEN' ECONOMY

Policy-makers throughout Europe and beyond have thrown their support behind creating more 'green collar' jobs and increasing 'green' investments to counter the present downturn. For the SDLP, in these difficult economic times it simply



“The green economy is a central pillar to economic recovery”

makes good long term economic sense to use our unique natural resources to support the creation and development of industries in the North that create more jobs and play a role in managing climate change.

With ingenuity and industry, we can build a strong recovery plan with a coordinated investment in jobs and green growth at its centre.

Today, Northern Ireland imports 97% of our energy. This is neither desirable nor

sustainable. Consumers in the North should not be at the mercy of fluctuating international oil prices. If we had the infrastructure in place, Ireland could become a huge exporter of electricity to mainland Europe. The technology to produce such power already exists, although it is still relatively expensive and time consuming in terms of installation, plus the planning system is slow and laborious as far as these projects are concerned.

However, there is little doubt that wind or tidal power as alternative renewable energy technologies are significant breakthroughs for Ireland and our economy North and South. The manufacture of such technologies could provide hundreds of jobs for people across Ireland. Building and servicing such plants will provide more work, while generating and transmitting the electricity will provide further employment as well as permanent and valuable revenue for both governments.

Clearly, all of this requires massive financial investment, probably with State intervention, as the amounts involved will be huge. Nonetheless, in the long term, this is undoubtedly the best option for our island. The SDLP will work in the European Parliament to push policy-makers to take the lead in promoting and coordinating national policies in support of a green economy as a central pillar to our response to the economic crisis.

BENEFITING FROM EUROPE IN A TIME OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

In presenting its Northern Ireland Task Force report, the European Commission encouraged Northern Ireland to reap maximum benefits from the EU support we can expect to receive until 2013. The report is also an invitation to develop new ideas and strategies to help our local economy survive the downturn and prepare for renewed growth when it happens.

In Europe, the SDLP will provide clear leadership to develop new solutions to ensure Northern Ireland harnesses the goodwill in Europe towards this region. We must capitalise on all possibilities and opportunities to boost our economy.



For example, the SDLP will argue the case in Europe for stronger regional discretion in the area of state aid to ensure our economy remains competitive. We will ensure serious consideration is given to proposals aimed at reinvigorating this island's economy to benefit our workers and small businesses in construction and other key sectors.

In the Task Force report, the Commission encouraged Northern Ireland to increase our participation in

R&D projects under the EU's 7th Framework Programme. If our economy is to keep up with high-skilled research and development-led economies, we need a number of joined-up initiatives that don't solely rely on EU financial aid.

To this end, the SDLP proposes expanding the high-speed broadband network. While we realise there is a huge cost involved in ensuring the whole of Northern Ireland (particularly our rural areas) gains access to high-speed broadband, we believe the NI Executive

should commit to a long term target of meeting that challenge.

We also want to see Northern Ireland specifically represented in the cabinet of the Regional Development Commissioner with immediate effect.

SUPPORTING OUR SMES

Nearly every business begins as a small enterprise serving local markets. With ambitious management and the right help, SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) can become major employers. The SDLP is ambitious for the expansion and growth of our SMEs into international markets, since we believe that today's SMEs are tomorrow's major employers.

Underpinning work on the Internal Market, the preparation of a renewed Lisbon Strategy will be high on the EU institutions' agenda, in view of its planned adoption at the Spring Summit in 2010. Priorities in this area must be the promotion of environmentally-friendly growth and reduced bureaucracy for SMEs. The SDLP and the PES support these objectives.

Although the initial goal of becoming "the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy" by 2010 may now seem out of reach, the review of the Lisbon Strategy will once again be an opportunity to influence Europe's competitiveness in a difficult economic environment. The SDLP will promote small business growth locally as a key part of our strategy to create a high-wage, high-skill economy in the North and integrate it into ever-growing North-South opportunities.

The EU's Small Business Act - which

aims to support entrepreneurship and promote SME growth by helping SMEs tackle the problems which hamper their development - has been given strong support from the European Parliament to make it politically binding. We will continue to support measures that create an environment within which entrepreneurs can thrive.

For example, there is a need to strengthen European measures by speeding up the use of structural funds

and enhancing European Investment Bank support for small businesses.

Although we welcome the creation of a SME Envoy and will work closely with the Envoy's office to maximise its role as the voice of SMEs in Europe, this post does not quite possess the authority of a standalone Commissioner.

The SDLP upholds our proposal to create an EU Commissioner for small and medium sized industries. It is essential that the interests of SMEs are

represented across the many relevant policy departments of the EU Commission, including those responsible for environment, IT, internal market and competition. Supporting small business growth should not be left solely to the Directorate General for Enterprise.

A NEW SOCIAL EUROPE

The impact of the economic downturn will be with us for years to come. Within the space of two years, it is estimated that Europe will have lost 10 million jobs,



“We will play our role in ensuring a fair deal for all”

with dramatic social consequences for people all over the EU. Here in Northern Ireland, unemployment is expected to rise to 6% by the end of 2009. Actions taken to fight the recession must be progressive and contain solid social principles that put people's interests first.

To this end, the SDLP and our PES colleagues will work for a European Employment Pact to safeguard employment, create new and better jobs, fight mass unemployment, and strengthen workers' rights, working conditions and equal pay.

Ní mór do shaorghluaiseacht saothair a bheith bunaithe ar phrionsabail atá dírithe ar phá, ar choinníollacha oibre, ar obair agus ar áit oibre chomhionann.

Free movement of labour must be based on the principle of equal pay and equal working conditions for equal work in the same workplace.

The Socialist group in the European Parliament achieved implementation of EU-wide laws on working time, and brought in measures to give part time and temporary workers the same rights as full time workers as regards training, pensions, maternity rights and leave. SDLP MPs supported similar measures at Westminster.

In the forthcoming European Parliamentary term, we will play our role in ensuring a continued fairer deal for all.



IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Push for a strong recovery plan with coordinated investment in jobs and green growth.
- Market Northern Ireland as an ideal location for investment in these jobs that help put our region on the path to a cleaner, more energy efficient future.
- Seek support for regional planning policies that accelerate, not impede, the application process for the creation of renewable energy plants.
- Demand clear regional discretion in state aid to support competitiveness and jobs at this time.
- Support measures that facilitate expansion of the high-speed broadband network across the North.
- Boost Northern Ireland's competitiveness prospects by ensuring the offer of a seat on the cabinet table of the Regional Development Commissioner is immediately taken up.
- In the face of currency fluctuations, look for measures to promote currency stability and in the long term, campaign for the introduction of the Euro. Only an all-island approach to the economy, including the use of a single currency, will attract investors and enable Ireland North and South to seriously compete on the global stage.
- Promote a small and medium sized enterprise Commissioner and in the meantime, make the office of SME Envoy work to the benefit of local small businesses.
- Underline that fundamental social rights for all must form a central part of our way out of this recession.

Education, skills and innovation When We Win Workers Win

It is widely accepted that in order to ensure our economic prosperity we need to devote further resources to research, innovation, better education and training systems.

We believe that now more than ever, human resources are the European Union's main asset. These are central to the creation and transmission of knowledge and a determining factor in our society's potential for innovation.

The SDLP has long recognised that a well-educated and highly skilled workforce is crucial for economic growth through both indigenous enterprise and inward investment. This can only be achieved through ongoing investment in a high-class system of education and training suited to the needs of individuals and of society. Locally, the SDLP has demonstrated its commitment to these principles by opposing the 11-plus and promoting lifelong learning.

This island has traditionally produced generations of innovative thinkers with a strong sense of entrepreneurship. During the present economic downturn, we want to secure a better environment to further develop this region's potential as a knowledge-based economy that not only keeps up with other regions around the world but in the long term, surpasses them to claim a position of leadership in the global market.

RETRAINING AND UPSKILLING OUR WORKERS

The SDLP considers it essential that the NI Executive helps create a



sustainable workforce better prepared to ride the waves of an economic storm. In the long term this must entail development of innovation-led training to ensure Northern Ireland becomes a champion of innovation.

In the short term, it is essential that high levels of support are provided to those who have become unemployed or risk being made unemployed. This is support that workers in other European countries are already receiving.

Locally, we propose the following measures for implementation which have been fully and independently costed:

- Payroll Shelter: a wage subsidy scheme similar to that in Wales and

the Netherlands, which subsidises an employee's wage and offers employers the opportunity to apply for funding.

- The introduction of further funding and opportunities for graduate training apprenticeships.
- Enhance current training provision through increased funding to the Department of Employment and Learning strategy 'Success through Skills' with schemes specifically focused on those who have recently become unemployed.
- Skilled person's initiative to assist highly skilled people who have become unemployed start their own businesses.

“Working to achieve a culture that thinks innovation, works innovation and grows innovation”

Furthermore, the SDLP has proposed creating a virtual 'Open Faculty for Innovation'. This Open Faculty would serve as a platform to engage and encourage not only those in our universities and our regional colleges but also within our businesses to work towards achieving a culture that thinks innovation, works innovation and grows innovation.

COMPETING ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

The valuable report of the MATRIX panel outlines a preliminary roadmap that the North must follow if we are to *“meet the challenges of global competition and take advantage of new opportunities to make our economy more competitive, deliver increased prosperity and tackle disadvantage and poverty.”*¹

Policy-makers have been presented with proposals and recommendations

including new markets on which, with the proper investment and encouragement, the North can be expected to become a world player. These include exploiting our unique selling point as a clean and green region open for business across a range of sectors (clean energy, clean manufacturing, clean health, etc).

We envisage the Open Faculty for Innovation playing a key role in boosting the North's competitiveness on the international level. Practitioners and experts from not only these islands but around the world could be Fellows of this Faculty, mentoring businesses, inspiring students and fostering competitive research.

Europe too is keen to see our region prosper as we enter the second decade

of the 21st century, as is clear from the recommendations of the NI Task Force. We now have a chance to significantly grow internationally and be held as an example to our eastern neighbours of how the EU over time can contribute to lifting the economy and prospects of a Member State.

The SDLP will use the goodwill from our European colleagues to press for swift action in implementing the MATRIX proposals. We will not stand for missed opportunities or neglected responsibilities when it comes to delivering a sustained innovation environment in which Northern Ireland's knowledge economy can thrive and grow.

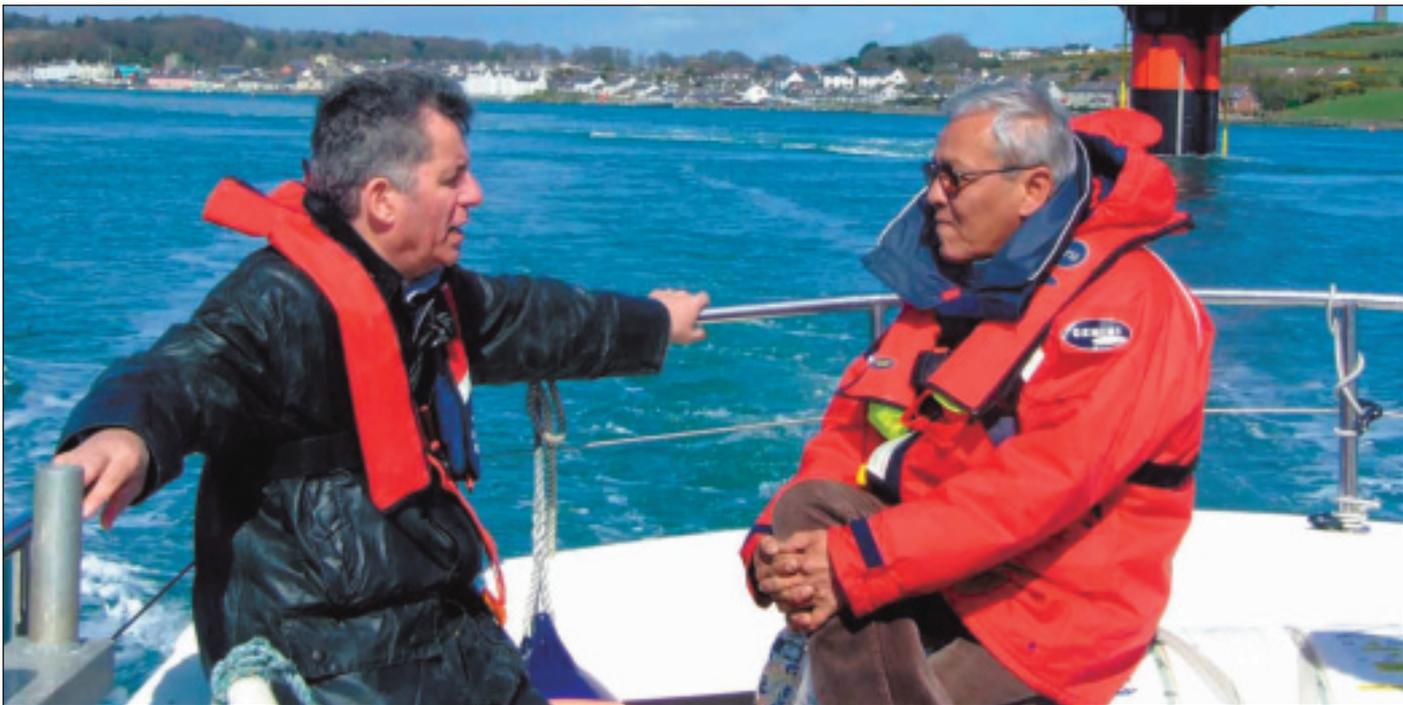
MAKING MORE OF EU OPPORTUNITIES

The NI Task Force report concludes that Northern Ireland would benefit from increasing its participation in the various EU education, training and youth-related initiatives. In particular, the North receives more ERASMUS programme students than it sends overseas. The SDLP wants to address this trend, and will look at ways to encourage our higher and further education students to develop language and other skills through studying in institutions in other EU Member States, including removing financial impediments that may prevent greater uptake in the programme.

IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Work for the introduction of targeted support for our workforce - on a par with that already provided in other European countries - during the economic downturn.
- Prepare individuals and businesses here for the upturn through better funding provision for training programmes and apprenticeships.
- Make innovation a critical part of our economic policies by championing the launch of a virtual Open Faculty for Innovation here.
- Seek EU support for the timely and sound implementation of the MATRIX panel recommendations.
- Look at ways to facilitate uptake in the ERASMUS programme to enable more higher and further education students to participate in study abroad.

¹ Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2008-2011, 29 January 2008.



Ambitious action to manage climate change

The PES has been at the forefront in developing a progressive global strategy to combat climate change. This work has enabled Europe to show leadership in advancing new, efficient 'green' technologies and reducing the risk of a future loss of prosperity due to the impact of climate change. The SDLP is a valued member of the PES and will work alongside our colleagues throughout Europe to lay down ambitious global

action to manage climate change.

We believe the current financial crisis must be used as a springboard to accelerate action on climate change. With thousands of jobs lost in Northern Ireland and millions across Europe, now is the time to create new jobs by moving in an orderly way from our present dangerous and expensive over-reliance on imported fossil fuels. This requires a partnership between Brussels and

Northern Ireland. The goodwill and resources in Europe available for our region can only be translated into action here by a party which is committed to the European ideal and prepared to build on our links there.

Only the SDLP can bring the resources from Europe which could be critical in creating the thousands of green jobs which Northern Ireland needs. Our membership of the PES enables the SDLP to win friends and allies in every European country and so will enable the North to emerge as a leader among these islands in implementing climate change policies that will enhance, and not impede, economic policy.

“Now is the time to accelerate action on climate change”

Ba mhian linn ár gcúrsaí eacnamaíochta a chur chun cinn trí níos mó feidhme a bhaint as teicneolaíochtaí atá tíosach ar fhuinneamh inár bpobal, sa bhaile agus ar obair. Tíg le hiompar poiblí, dearadh agus tógáil meabhrach na dtíthe, na bhfoirgneamh phoiblí agus na n-áiteanna oibre an mhí-úsáid cur amú fuinnimh a sheachaint.

We want to boost our economy through the use of more energy efficient technologies in our communities, at home and at work. Efficient public transport and intelligent design and construction of homes, public buildings and workplaces can all help avoid wasteful energy consumption.

By focusing on becoming more energy efficient, we can reduce our

dependency on increasingly expensive energy imports. Volatile energy prices are hitting families and consumers hard. It is clear that world energy prices lie behind some of these increases which make it difficult for regional administrations to address the problem. EU policy-makers, however, have a key role to play on the global stage in controlling and seeking to stabilise energy prices, thereby ensuring a better deal for Europe's citizens.

The SDLP believes that the EU's energy strategy must not only deliver low-carbon energy networks and maximise efficiency but importantly, it must deliver low and stable prices for consumers.

We recognise that the transition to a low-carbon and sustainable development path can only be achieved through a coordinated international effort, enshrined in a fair and effective global agreement. That's why the global climate change summit in Copenhagen in December 2009 will be crucial in laying down a roadmap for action for the post-2012 framework, as well as giving endorsement to the need to support economic growth and create green jobs in the short term while laying the basis for a more sustainable economy for the future.

IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Support EU-led negotiations for an agreement on a 30% global target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.
- Secure real economic incentives for Northern Ireland to exploit its natural advantages - wind, water, afforestation - in potential renewable resources to out-perform European targets and provide employment through technologies our region can lead in, including compressed air storage.
- Assist developing countries to combine necessary economic growth and social progress with an increasingly responsible and effective climate policy.
- Ensure EU policy-makers work towards an energy framework that does more for less, and delivers stability and the best price for consumers.



Environment and public health When We Win the Environment Wins

We all have a responsibility to protect, preserve and improve our environment for present and future generations. The European Union has a longstanding body of legislation for the protection of the environment, and is focused on ensuring full compliance and adherence to these

laws.

Beidh sé ina phríomhaidhm thar an chéad thréimhse Parlaiminte eile go gcinnteofar go ndéana Éire, idir Thuaisceart agus Dheisceart, a gcuid dualgaisí agus gealltanais a chomhlíonadh, ar leas timpeallacht atá

glan, glas agus sláintiúil.

It will be a key requirement over the next Parliamentary term to ensure Ireland, North and South, lives up to its environmental commitments and obligations and can reap the rewards of a clean, green and healthy environment.

Demands on Europe's environment today - including climate change, land use change, habitat destruction, pollution and waste disposal - all pose a threat to biodiversity. But by protecting the natural environment and ensuring the recovery of habitats and species, biodiversity can in fact play a key role in controlling these pressures, particularly climate change. We will work in the European Parliament to build and strengthen successful EU biodiversity policies, including the Birds and Habitats Directives, and persuade decision-makers that biodiversity is an important tool we need to preserve in order to successfully manage the many pressures our environment faces.

On a global level, waste production is leading to overuse of materials and energy and the depletion of the earth's renewable and non-renewable resources. Europe must do more to minimise waste production and give consideration to innovative and effective measures that underpin the recycling market, including state aid and other intervention methods.

We remain committed to an all-Ireland waste strategy that has at its core strong prevention measures, exceeds EU standards and preserves the attractiveness of our countryside, towns and cities.



HEALTH IS THE GREATEST WEALTH

The importance of our personal health and wellbeing and the extent to which our environment can affect how we feel and act have rightly gained increased attention from policy-makers. Increases in conditions including obesity, diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure and heart disease are partly caused by environmental factors such as poor air quality, low-cost, low-standard food, a poorly-designed natural environment and over-reliance on cars, which limits walking and cycling. Ensuring strong environmental - and therefore health -

protection is crucial.

In the European Parliament, the SDLP will work for better integration of health and environment policies to ensure that local communities and the wider environment in which we live are health-promoting and environmentally sustainable.

Health can also be an important driver of economic growth and prosperity. There is an increasing realisation of the importance investment in our health will play in the future development of our society and economy. The SDLP, through the PES, will press the Commission to ensure full implementation of the EU's health

strategy for 2008-2013, so that the links between health and economic prosperity are more widely recognised and form the basis of policy decisions locally.

The added value of having a strong voice at the European level to address issues that affect the North cannot be underestimated. In relation to the provision of cross-border healthcare, the SDLP will campaign to facilitate the free movement of patients and medical personnel within the EU, and campaign for the highest common principles and standards of care.

IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Support a new framework that maintains and strengthens protection of our biodiversity post-2012.
- Encourage measures to protect our rivers, lakes and the Irish Sea from pollution.
- Seek support for a stronger EU framework on waste which focuses efforts more squarely on the prevention component of waste minimisation and examines measures to make the recycling industry more profitable.
- Gain recognition of the need to tackle environmental issues on an all-island basis, given that waste and pollution know no borders.
- Ensure increased consideration of the linkages between a clean environment, people's health and economic prosperity.
- Commit to tackling health inequalities in Ireland and throughout Europe by highlighting the need to carry out health impact assessments for all policy formation.
- Support greater cross-border cooperation on health to provide the best health care for the island of Ireland.
- Recognise the value of addressing cross-border health threats and free cross-border movement of patients and health professionals.



A new regional policy for the 21st century

Today's global economic turmoil is a stark reminder of just how important regional and cohesion policies are as factors of financial stability and long term investment in sustainable social and economic growth. The SDLP has been extremely successful in maximising EU funding, and Ireland North and South has greatly benefited from European regional policy investment.

Indeed, the work of John Hume in proposing and enabling the implementation of the PEACE I and II programmes delivered over £500 million and created over 8000 jobs around the North and in the border areas. The SDLP

is proud of this record. We will therefore maintain pressure on the Executive to fully deliver on PEACE III. Community and voluntary groups and those working towards a better and shared future must not be overburdened or unfairly obstructed in their quest to secure appropriate funding.

The coming years provide an opportunity to shape European regional and cohesion policy post-2013, in the context of the next EU Budget. In an expanded Europe - where Northern Ireland is just one of over 270 regions - we will campaign for a new EU regional policy that moves beyond the traditional

focus on infrastructure to one that takes more account of the economic potential of regions. This 'next generation' of European regional policy must enable all regions to capitalize on their ability to become more competitive and dynamic on the international stage.

The SDLP will demonstrate more innovative, strategic thinking than has been on offer from the three MEPs over the last five years. We will look for other ways through which our region can maximise its EU membership in the absence of Objective 1 status. As stated before, stronger regional discretion in the area of state aid would help create a



better business climate and stimulate entrepreneurship here; two key pillars of the SDLP's economic recovery plan.

A 21st century EU regional policy must be more articulate and support 'region-proofing' to ensure full account is taken of regional diversities in economic, social, cultural and political terms. Just as John Hume championed a "Europe of the regions", in the next Parliament we will campaign for a new regional policy that provides versatility and allows Europe's regions to better respond to today's difficult economic environment.

BUILDING ON THE NORTH-SOUTH/EAST-WEST AGENDAS

The SDLP has always championed the North-South agenda. We believe that it is helping to improve the lives of all on this island. Working together breaks down the barriers which have hindered development and made social and economic progress more difficult. Our thinking in relation to future regional policy sees a role for deeper North-South cooperation.

Through our North-South Makes Sense campaign and the dedicated chapter of the Dublin government's 2007 National Development Plan, the SDLP and others have promoted all-Ireland development. It is regrettable that the current governing parties in the North have failed to build on our achievements which have and would continue to bring particular advantages to and within Northern Ireland.

In Europe, we will call for all future EU funds to be earmarked on an all-island basis. This would enhance cross-border business and the networking of SMEs North and South, as well as find joint solutions to problems such as urban, rural and coastal development. Following

positive experiences with the PEACE and INTERREG programmes, we believe there would be merit in implementing the European Social Fund in such a way that the island as a whole benefits.

One way to facilitate this process would be the creation of a dedicated cross-sectoral format within the North South Ministerial Council. This body would focus on the impact that all European policy decisions - not only those pertaining to funding - have on this island.

Just as the North-South dimension must be strengthened, there are issues around the implementation of EU legislation and other decisions which could be addressed via the British-Irish Council. There is no reason why something like the INTERREG fund for these islands could not be established through the British-Irish Council. This could foster and support effective, worthwhile cooperation and pilot initiatives between regional and local government and social partners in different parts of our islands.

EU ACTION ON A REGIONAL BASIS

The SDLP watches with interest as the EU Commission prepares its Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the aim of which is to coordinate the efforts of various actors in the region in order to promote more balanced development of this particular region. The Baltic Sea Region currently faces major challenges including demographic change, an underdeveloped economy and pollution of its sea and wider environment. These challenges are not unique to the Baltic Sea Region - these are concerns shared by Northern Ireland, and indeed these islands as a whole. The content of the Strategy and any proposals it contains will require careful analysis should the Commission decide to use it as a template for the future development of other 'clusters' of maritime regions, including our own.

Marine management does not just affect fishing and aquaculture but transport and logistics, energy, tourism and the environment. The SDLP will therefore monitor discussions on the draft Strategy and through the Party of European Socialists group, provide input when the Parliament has the opportunity to amend the proposals, likely to be during 2010.

IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Demand a new EU regional policy for the 21st century that encourages more innovative thinking and supports all regions in their economic development.
- Ensure that the next EU Budget for 2014-2020 is based on adequate resources to deliver effective regional, economic and social policy goals to benefit Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland as a whole.
- Maintain pressure on the Executive to fully implement the PEACE III programme to allow community and voluntary groups to continue their excellent work and vital service provision.
- Seek opportunities for our own region's further development arising from the forthcoming Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Agricultural and fishing industries When We Win Rural Communities Win

PROVIDING CERTAINTY TO LOCAL FARMERS

There are a number of challenges facing local farmers during the next Parliamentary term. The SDLP pledges to be the strongest voice in Europe for a farming industry seeking certainty for the future. Our membership of the Party of European Socialists places us in a unique position of strength. No other MEP will have the extensive network of contacts and influence to deliver for the North.

Supporting the continuation of sustainable farming helps maintain the countryside and contributes to rural development. We will use the review of the existing Less Favoured Area (LFA) scheme to press for specific protection and strengthening of our LFAs to allow for the long term growth of farming here in Northern Ireland.

Tá cosaint níos cuimsí de dhíth do na feirmeacha beaga, ar mhaithe le cúiseanna timpeallachta agus eacnamaíochta; tá sé ar leas na ndaoine go léir go mbeidh muid go fóill in ann toradh áitiúil a cheannach.

We need specific protection for smaller farmers - for environmental as well as economic reasons, it's in all our interests to remain able to buy local produce.

A further priority will be to address the issue of farm gate prices being less than the cost of production, an issue of particular concern to the dairy sector.

We will strive to ensure the rural environment remains a place in which people wish to live and work, by securing equal access to public services and maintaining normal service provision and social amenities to prevent people from feeling isolated.

CAP REFORM: ENSURING A FAIR DEAL FOR FARMERS

Any system that has been around for as long as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) may require detailed review and reform, not least to ensure that the money spent on the CAP reaches the farmer, and is not absorbed by administrative costs and red tape.

The coming years are key for local farmers many of whom have benefited greatly from the CAP to date. With the Health Check completed, the medium term future of the CAP may be strongly influenced by discussions on how the EU's overall 2014-2020 budget should be spent. This is likely to raise the question of what the EU's future priorities should be and the subsequent importance placed on farming.

The current economic crisis underlines the urgent need to fulfil the EU's goal of becoming the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world. The SDLP believes the agricultural sector can contribute to this vision.

The Party of European Socialists have led efforts to counter the European Commission's sometimes over-liberal position and sought a proper balance between adapting the CAP to new challenges and the international context, and protecting farmers and the environment.

We will work with our Socialist colleagues to ensure that the budget made available for farming beyond 2013 takes into account the needs of Northern Ireland's farming industry and its unique



contribution to our rural economy. We will use the opportunity of CAP reform to integrate health goals into the CAP, with a view to better linking health, environment, infrastructure and agriculture.

STANDING UP FOR OUR FISHING INDUSTRY

EU cutbacks in days at sea and quota reductions in cod demonstrate how local fishermen need strong representation in Brussels to protect this industry from ill-advised thinking. We will work to find solutions that restore the worst-off stocks and at the same time, guarantee that fishing can continue to be a reliable source of revenue for local fishermen.

Creating targeted retraining and upskilling opportunities is one way of providing a future for fishermen, but we will demand a long term response that ensures a simple and sustainable system for managing our fisheries that can last well into the 21st century.

DEVELOPING OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Traditionally, the SDLP - through John Hume, Bríd Rodgers and others in local Councils, the Assembly, the Executive and at Westminster - has led with policies and positions aimed at sustaining our rural communities. These include supporting decentralisation and retaining and investing further in essential frontline services in rural communities.

Besides the central role our farmers and fishermen play in sustaining rural communities, more focus must be given to supporting rural vitality and providing equal opportunities for all rural dwellers. In the context of CAP reform, greater emphasis will be placed on rural

development activities. In addition to the reform, however, the SDLP will work to develop new ideas and strategies to achieve a more balanced performance across our region; a new rural development policy for the 21st century.

A key challenge facing Europe's rural regions over the coming years is enabling the rural economy to compete and thrive during uncertain economic times and crucially, to sustain itself in preparation for the upturn when it happens.

The SDLP has called for greater investment in renewable energy here in Northern Ireland, in an effort to meet and exceed climate change obligations and at the same time, create jobs and boost our economy. The development of a healthy indigenous renewable energy industry will contribute to sustaining our rural economy in particular, since it is the rural parts of Northern Ireland that offer the best location and conditions for many renewable energy technologies, including wind and tidal.

The development of rural areas

depends largely on access to high-speed broadband. While we have urged the Executive to make a long term commitment to full expansion of the high-speed broadband network, the SDLP notes that the European Investment Bank is already involved in the financing of energy as well as telecoms infrastructure throughout Europe. We will explore the possibilities that may be open to the North in respect to EIB assistance in order to eliminate the digital divide here.

At the European level, the SDLP will continue to stress the importance of the continued provision of high quality public services in rural areas to promote equality, minimise rural exclusion and combat isolation. The SDLP and our PES colleagues will seek support for policies and incentives that ensure equal access to these services - education, healthcare, culture, transport and communications - securing a decent life for all farming and non-farming rural dwellers and their families.

IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Protect and strengthen our Less Favoured Areas.
- Secure a fair and sustainable future for farmers and the rural community under CAP reform.
- Develop a long term, steady policy in relation to farm gate prices and production costs.
- Stand up for our trawlermen, the fish processing industry and coastal communities' interests during Common Fisheries Policy reform.
- Promote and market internationally our local produce on an all-Ireland basis to avail of the positive attitude towards 'Irish' produce in Europe and beyond.
- Contribute to discussions aimed at developing a modern, innovative rural strategy, and pay particular attention to measures that will boost the rural economy to the benefit of farming and non-farming rural dwellers alike.

Embracing cultural diversity When We Win Society Wins

A thriving cultural, media and arts sector is an important part of the quality of life in any region. It is also a sign of success. Culture also makes a major contribution to economic life and is a significant source of employment in the advanced regions of the EU.

Capital cities in these islands, such as Dublin, Edinburgh and Cardiff, all have a strong cultural dimension. Belfast has

made significant strides in recent years and has been rewarded by widespread acknowledgement that it is an equal partner among these neighbouring cities in cultural terms. We want to see more active involvement in EU cultural initiatives for our other cities, including Derry, Lisburn and Newry, in order to encourage the development of our cultural life across the North.

For too long cultural diversity in Ireland has been a source of conflict. It is in fact an opportunity. The EU has long supported cultural and linguistic diversity both in Ireland and across Europe; the recent enlargements being a prime example of this. The SDLP has the best record in promoting cultural diversity. In the Assembly, we have tabled a draft bill for the Irish language which would establish Irish and English as the official languages in the North, giving Irish speakers the right to have their language recognised in all public spheres, including the courts, education and employment.

Sa chéad Pharlaimint eile, beidh muid ag tnúth le cur le cláir thacaíochta AE do chúrsaí cultúrtha agus d'éagsúlacht teangacha, chun maoiniú breise a aimsiú do thionscadail na Gaeilge.

In the next Parliament, we will seek to expand EU support programmes for cultural and linguistic diversity, and to secure more funding for Irish language projects.



“The SDLP has the best record in promoting cultural diversity”

IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Support more active involvement in EU cultural initiatives for our cities, in order to encourage the development of our cultural life across the North.
- Promote support for cultural diversity and the Irish language on a statutory basis through adoption of the SDLP's draft bill for the Irish language.

Equality, human rights and social justice

The SDLP is committed to promoting equality, social justice and reconciliation, and to protecting human rights. These principles are not just slogans; they are a part of our founding philosophy. One of the reasons we've been such strong supporters of the European Union is its track record in upholding equality and human rights for all European citizens.

EQUALITY FOR ALL

The SDLP is proud to stand up for the rights of all in our society, regardless of sex, race, ethnic or social origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Europe has often led the foundations for the development of national measures to promote equality, and during the lifetime of the next Parliament we intend to build on the progress already made.

The SDLP will continue to work tirelessly to make Northern Ireland a welcoming and safe place for migrant workers. It is unacceptable that those who want a better life for themselves and their families can feel threatened and unwelcome in our society. The SDLP wants to see all workers respected as equals and benefiting equally under the law. In a new and larger Europe, we in the North are in a position to extend a hand of friendship to our fellow European and external neighbours in an effort to encourage integration and shared society. We will encourage others to do likewise.

With our sister parties in the PES, we will lobby the other EU institutions to create a women's rights charter to promote gender equality in economic and political life, draft family friendly measures to enhance parental leave rights and call for the establishment of a new



Commissioner for gender equality.

As MEP, Alban Maginness will be proactive towards achieving equality and promoting anti-discrimination policies in order to improve the lives of older people in the North. In line with the PES pledge, we are committed to enhancing the provision of care for the elderly, and will examine models similar to those already in place for child care with a view to developing a European strategy on elderly care. This is all the more important in light of our ageing population. Locally, the SDLP will continue to campaign for the appointment of a full-time, adequately funded older person's Commissioner to ensure that the voice of older people is heard and that they are involved in all policy-making decisions.

UPHOLDING HUMAN RIGHTS

The North needs a strong voice in the European Parliament to eliminate the gap between political rhetoric and reality when it comes to the implementation of human rights. The SDLP will continue to champion human rights at both the European and local levels to advance the further

development of a rights-based democratic culture here in Northern Ireland.

Evidence of this has been our sustained lobbying for a strong Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The SDLP remains convinced that a Bill of Rights can support the common ground that does exist in our society, and provide protections and principles upon which we can agree despite our differences. On such common ground we can build a truly shared future.

The European Charter of Fundamental Rights, when legally binding, will empower citizens throughout Europe to challenge any decision taken by EU institutions, or by Member States implementing EU law, that they feel infringes their fundamental rights. To this end, we are hopeful of a strong Europe-wide ratification of the Lisbon Treaty which would give the necessary legal force to the Charter.

CHALLENGING RIGHTS ABUSE

The PES Group in the European Parliament has made major progress in protecting children against sexual abuse and violence, including online. We will

seek further assurances and measures to protect our children including robust cross-border sharing of criminal records information between Member States to ensure that sex offenders are not able to gain employment with children by moving between EU countries.

The SDLP supports the ongoing EU commitment and action to combat trafficking of women and children and to protect those who have been trafficked. We are pleased to see that the UK has now ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. However, continued monitoring is required particularly within the current candidate countries and others which may wish to join the European Union in the future.

The SDLP believes the EU has succeeded in overcoming the historic divisions and conflicts of Europe in large part because of its inclusiveness and respect for diversity. We have always appreciated European support for our work of peace-building in the North. The SDLP will continue to raise awareness in Europe of human rights abuses that took place in the North and will, in particular, seek European support to bolster our calls for support at Westminster for a full public judicial inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane.

SETTING THE SOCIAL JUSTICE AGENDA

The denial of equality, fairness, and social justice to many people in our society remains a major scandal that must be confronted politically. Far too many of our young people have their lives defined by where they live or their parents' socio-economic status, dictating the life opportunities open to them. Families are struggling to put food on the table, while a worrying proportion of our elderly population find themselves in an

environment of both physical and emotional deprivation and can die in relative isolation. It is intolerable that many of our children live in poverty or on the edge of poverty and are unable to access an adequate education.

In the last Executive, the SDLP made child poverty a priority in the Programme for Government, establishing the Children's Fund and other Executive Programme Funds in support of child and family services. We made sure that child poverty was a key deprivation indicator and set up the office of Children's Commissioner. In doing this, we deliberately borrowed good examples from Europe and applied them locally. Today, several elements of the SDLP's legacy have been rejected by the ruling political parties. It is unacceptable that there is no longer a Children's Fund and no clear budget for a Children's Strategy.

Across the North, the SDLP has been collaborating with community and church representatives to seriously tackle the plight of poverty and social injustice. The

Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie, has led the charge in tackling fuel poverty here by committing to a vision of eradicating fuel poverty for vulnerable people and those who live in social housing by 2010 and for other households by 2016.

In the Assembly, our MLAs have won unanimous political support for a motion on rising energy costs, while our MPs have made similar representations in Westminster. We will continue to press OFMDFM to deliver on the Executive's anti-poverty commitments. It is not right that so little has been delivered, and urgent action is all the more needed given the current economic crisis.

In Europe, Alban Maginness will take our responsibilities just as seriously. Alongside our PES colleagues, he will work to ensure the National Action Plans for Inclusion, the cornerstone of the EU Social Inclusion Strategy, demonstrate vigour and ambition in their aims and objectives. The Strategy can only succeed if Member States place the rights of poor and marginalised people at the centre of the Action Plans.

IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Ensure migrant workers and those from this island receive equal treatment at work and in society.
- Give support to a women's rights charter to promote gender equality in economic and political life, and call for the establishment of a new EU Commissioner for gender equality.
- Develop family friendly measures to enhance parental leave rights.
- Seek support to draft an EU-wide strategy on elderly care, and continue to campaign for the appointment of a full-time, adequately resourced older person's Commissioner in the North.
- Seek political support for a strong Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.
- Profile in Europe Northern Irish human rights issues, including the need for a full judicial review into the murder of Pat Finucane.
- Secure support at EU level to ensure real delivery locally on anti-poverty measures.

Security and fighting crime When We Win the Community Wins

The progressive elimination of border control within the EU has considerably facilitated the free movement of European citizens, but has also made it easier for criminals to operate transnationally. The fight against organised crime is one of the EU's top priorities, and the SDLP will build on the work that has been done in recent years to develop EU anti-organised crime, anti-terrorist and anti-smuggling policies so that the agencies in both parts of Ireland can work effectively with their counterparts in Europe.

An effective response is not feasible without the continuous monitoring and smooth exchange of information among the police and judicial authorities of the Member States. This must occur within the framework of the competent international and European institutions, such as Europol and Eurojust, and the European Judicial Network. We welcome the decision officially registering Europol as an EU agency with Community financing from January 2010, since this will go hand in hand with closer involvement of the European Parliament in its capacity as budgetary authority.

Locally, the SDLP is determined to combat crime and ensure safer

communities for everybody. It's been 10 years since the Patten Commission recommended sweeping changes to policing in the North. The SDLP steadfastly lent its support to ensure the Patten recommendations were implemented, and the reward has been that our community is now closer to benefiting from a truly representative and fully accountable police service. We will continue our work on the Policing Board to keep delivering change.

The link between organised crime and the paramilitaries is very clear. They are defying the democratic will of the people of Ireland and severely damaging our society. Their racketeering is stunting the development of communities. Their involvement in drug-dealing is cutting young lives short and terrorising older people.

At present, the real and active threat to police personnel, to peace and democracy, is coming from so-called dissident republicans. Parties in the Assembly cannot allow differences and difficulties around the devolution of justice and policing to be exploited for these groups' sinister purposes.

Devolution can achieve more and perform better if policing and justice

services join, share and engage with other key service providers and planners under devolved policy making and budget planning.

The devolution of justice and policing powers to the Assembly will be a further new beginning to policing. Without it we will not have the completion of the Good Friday Agreement or Patten. We should make it happen as soon as possible. Our Socialist colleagues in Europe are with us to ensure that this aspect of the Agreement is implemented fairly and swiftly.

Just as the transfer of justice must have a strong North-South dimension agreed upfront, there should be further initiatives around North-South cooperation on criminal justice and policing through, for example, the creation of an all-Ireland Criminal Assets Bureau, modelled on the Criminal Assets Bureau in the South, to deprive criminals of their wrongful gains across the island. This issue has become more acute with the end of the ARA as an independent agency and the primacy of SOCA.

We cannot simply accept the benefits of Europe without taking on our responsibilities. The SDLP's experience in reforming the police and law enforcement, and creating accountability in Northern Ireland will be of great value as the European Union addresses the challenges of organised crime, drugs smuggling, and dealing with terrorism within the rule of law and without compromising fundamental freedoms.

IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Seek to maximise existing instruments such as the EU Commission Forum on the Prevention of Organised Crime and the EU Crime Prevention Network.
- Use the Parliament's scrutiny role to encourage increased effectiveness and democratic accountability of Europol and Eurojust.

Europe in the wider world

The EU is the greatest example of conflict resolution in history and the greatest opportunity for international development in the future. The SDLP wants to see the EU continue as a frontrunner in advancing peace and sustainable social and economic development worldwide. We do not believe simply in a Europe of economies, but in a Europe of values and a Europe of influence - a real challenge to poverty, disease and war.

The SDLP has long advocated international development issues at all levels of government. In the Assembly, SDLP representatives founded and chair an All Party Group on International Development, aimed at raising awareness of and giving practical help to developing countries. At Westminster, our MPs have taken a strong stance on issues including the Iraq war, humanitarian relief for Gaza and cluster munitions, which gained cross-party support and was quickly followed by a decision by the British government to support a ban on cluster bombs. In local Councils around the North, SDLP Councillors have won support for Fair Trade and international solidarity motions.

The next five years of the European Parliament coincide with the lead up to the 2015 deadline for achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals. The EU must keep its promise to increase its collective aid to 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2015 to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and meet its commitments to improve the quality of its aid. This will be extremely challenging, since faced with the current economic crisis, many Member State governments are reviewing their external aid budgets.



This can only spell disaster for those countries whose people's prospects rely on foreign aid.

We would argue that building up the economies of developing countries is not just a moral imperative, it is in all our interests as the European example has clearly proven by boosting all the economies of the Member States, including our own.

WORKING FOR GLOBAL TRADE JUSTICE

Trade is much more than the exchange of goods and services. It has an impact on every area of social life, and a social Europe must work for global trade justice.

EU trade policy is negatively impacting developing countries as it continues to push for trade agreements which are harmful to the interests of developing countries and those living in poverty. Under the Global Europe strategy, the EU is proposing further opening of developing country markets and additional rules that will restrict access to technology, including

seeds and medicines, and see that the environment and natural resources are considered as 'economic goods' that should be economically exploited, rather than 'common goods' that should be protected. The SDLP considers it imperative that EU trade policy does not undermine the aims of existing strategies to which the EU is committed, including the Millennium Development Goals and the Kyoto Protocol.

The SDLP will therefore work towards a much more progressive EU trade policy that prioritises development, environmental sustainability, core labour standards and human rights objectives, especially with regard to the world's poorest countries. Trade policy would also benefit from being made more open and democratic, to include much greater sharing of information and real participation by civil society. This would be made possible under the Lisbon Treaty, which proposes giving the European Parliament an expanded role in shaping EU trade policy.

D'iarr SDLP ar Fheidhmeannas Thuaisceart na hÉireann ceannach Cóir-Thrádála a chur chun cinn, i ngach cinneadh sólathair. Leanfaidh muid leis an obair chun torthaí Cóir-Thrádála a thabhairt chun cinn taobh istigh dár n-eacnamaíocht féin agus trasna na hEorpa, mar shampla, beidh muid ag iarraidh ar an Choimisiún dóigheanna a mholadh chun feacht na dtomhaltóirí a spreagadh ar torthaí Cóir-Thrádála. As ucht an ghnímh seo, cuireann muid forbairt inbhuanaithe chun tosaigh agus tá muid ag iarraidh pá atá ceart agus cóir a dheimhniú sa domhan atá i béal a forbartha.

The SDLP has called on the NI Executive to advance Fair Trade purchasing in all procurement decisions. We will continue working to promote the expansion of Fair Trade products within our own economy and across Europe by, for example, encouraging the Commission to adopt measures aimed at raising consumer awareness of Fair Trade products. By doing so, we promote sustainable development and help guarantee decent wages for those in the developing world.

RESPONSIBLE FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL POLICIES

Agriculture plays an important part in trade and development strategies. The SDLP has called for a fair deal for local farmers during the ongoing reform of the CAP. Similarly, CAP reform is an opportunity to address the global food crisis and tackle the inherently unfair current situation whereby in Africa alone, the number of people vulnerable to hunger has now reached 400 million.

An EU deal which will divert €1 billion over three years in unused European farm subsidies to help tackle the global food price crisis - the so-called 'Food Facility' -

is aimed at helping African farmers gain access to seeds and fertilisers in order to increase their productivity. Although a welcome development, the SDLP considers such short term investments can only succeed if they are supported by increased aid flows from developed countries. This is the key to achieving food security in the long term.

FURTHER EXPANSION OF THE EU'S BORDERS

The continuation of the accession process for Western Balkan states and for Turkey will be a key priority over the coming Parliamentary term. The enlargement-friendly Swedish will be aiming at successfully closing Croatia's negotiations by the end of their Presidency in December, and at opening several new chapters with Turkey, depending on the progress made with each country. As Turkey's accession talks continue, the SDLP will underline the need to ensure the Turkish authorities fully comply with international human and civil rights standards, and make swift progress in the area of freedom of speech.

Membership talks with Macedonia could be opened towards the end of the year, and a consensus on a reply to the requests for candidate status from Albania and Montenegro will have to be found. A membership application from Iceland is imminent, in light of the announcement that its Parliament is to vote on whether to begin membership talks with the EU.

All this has a bearing on existing Member States since each enlargement brings with it new neighbours on Europe's borders and the challenge of integrating new members into the EU. The SDLP and the PES strongly support EU efforts to reconstruct countries including Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia-Montenegro,

Albania and Turkey. We believe consolidating these fledgling democracies and promoting human rights are in the interests of all Europeans, as we all have a stake in achieving secure democracy and stability throughout the entire continent of Europe.

Further eastward enlargements bring EU-Russia relations into play, particularly important in light of energy security issues. The impact of the Russia/Ukraine gas crisis once again brings home how important it is for the EU to have stable and predictable relationships with its neighbours.

SUPPORTING PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

As stated, the EU stands as a powerful example of conflict resolution in the world. We therefore oppose any attempted militarization of the European Union. The EU is unique because it depends solely on the rule of law, and has no armed forces. Its strength lies in its example, its diplomacy, its development policy and its trade policy, not in its military resources.

However, to be effective in supporting peace, there is a clear need for the EU to have a more coherent foreign policy capacity. This should not extend to supplanting the independent foreign affairs policy of member countries. However, it must enable the EU to increase its leverage in a global situation where the voice of peace can barely be heard above the racket of war.

The SDLP consistently voted against the Iraq war in Westminster and in the European Parliament, mirroring the widespread opposition of the European public to the invasion. With the withdrawal of British troops now having taken place and the planned withdrawal of US troops by 2011, it is worth asking what alternative

outcomes might have been possible had the EU benefited from a well-developed foreign policy position and been able to exert greater influence to counter the US-led approach.

The SDLP and its sister parties in the PES remain committed to ensuring the Iraqi people are supported on the long journey towards full democracy that lies ahead of them.

We want to see the EU play a stronger role in securing peace and protecting human rights in the Middle East, securing a peaceful, two-state solution. Europe must equally play an honourable role on the world stage and in the Middle East in particular to counter the damage from the historically unbalanced American role. To achieve these, there is further merit in calling for the EU to have a coherent foreign policy capacity.

The SDLP has long considered that this region of Ireland has a role to play as a model of conflict transformation for regions still in conflict. We're therefore pleased the Commission's NI Task Force report endorses the development of a facility here to provide research and advice on conflict resolution. This is an opportunity to internationally profile positive experiences of the peace process.

Within the context of the ongoing policy dialogue between the EU and countries such as China, Russia and the Western Balkan region, there lies potential to draw attention to the specific contribution of the PEACE programmes here to social and economic development. In the EU context, we would support cooperation and exchanges between the North and third countries specifically on peace and reconciliation issues as promoted under the PEACE programmes, since there is

IN EUROPE THE SDLP WILL:

- Build support to maintain but ultimately to increase EU support, aid and fair trade to developing countries.
- Call for an urgent rethink of EU trade policy to ensure that it prioritises development, environmental sustainability, core labour standards, and human rights objectives, especially with regard to the world's poorest countries.
- Engage with decision-makers in the other EU institutions to achieve long term food security in the developing world through increased aid flows, and in the meantime, provide democratic scrutiny of European aid spend, including the €1 billion Food Facility.
- Build strong working relations between the EU and the Obama administration, to the benefit of our own region, the island as a whole and the wider international community.
- Encourage proportionate and appropriate Europe-wide offers of resettlement to former Guantánamo inmates.
- In the interests of democracy and stability, lend continued support for further EU enlargement that upholds the principles of human rights and equality for all.
- Gather support for the development of an effective EU strategy on conflict prevention.
- Léireofar Tuaisceart na hÉireann mar shuíomh cuí do shaoráid idirnáisiúnta ina gcuirfear taighde, comhairle agus saineolas ar fáil ar réiteach coimhlinte.
- Profile Northern Ireland as a fitting location for an international facility providing research, advice and expertise on conflict resolution.

much to be gained in sharing the expertise that exists within our shores.

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

The new European Parliament term of office coincides with that of a new US administration. This is opportune and should allow for good working relations to develop between the new Parliament and President Obama and his staff. Key issues are likely to be debt relief and fair trade, as well as international peace keeping.

Where possible, the SDLP will make best use of this new relationship to make

further progress at the international level on key concerns including pressing US representatives to ensure the rights of 'undocumented' Irish people living and working in America are protected.

Further, we will seek agreement among the North's political parties to join with the Taoiseach and other EU leaders in offering to accept Guantánamo detainees for resettlement in Northern Ireland. Northern Irish people are known for their commitment to global justice and democracy, and political leadership at regional, national and European levels should reflect that commitment.

Alban's Top 10 for Europe

IF YOU ELECT ME AS YOUR MEP ON THURSDAY 4 JUNE, I WILL:

- Through my membership of the influential PES group, help create more jobs and ensure economic recovery in our region.
- Protect our workers' rights and interests by ensuring that positive initiatives in other EU regions are implemented here - including wage subsidy schemes and new training opportunities.
- Use European measures and new ideas to ensure we champion and lead on innovation, and use this as a platform for our future economic development.
- Bring jobs to rural communities, including through green technologies. Push for a sustainable future for rural dwellers by protecting vital services and addressing infrastructure needs.
- Campaign for a Commissioner for small and medium sized enterprises, who will eliminate red tape and champion the needs of local businesses at the heart of EU decision-making.
- Stand strong for a fair deal for our farmers during negotiations on CAP reform, and a real future for our fishermen and coastal communities.
- Demand the EU lives up to the promises of increased aid, and delivers on the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.
- Develop this region's renewables industry, help drive down energy costs and support an urgent and ambitious global climate change policy.
- Use Europe as a platform to uphold the SDLP's founding principles of equality, human rights, social justice and reconciliation in Ireland and throughout the world.
- Just as John Hume championed a "Europe of the regions", campaign for a new regional policy for the 21st century that allows all regions to better respond to today's difficult economic environment.



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