Standing Up for A Social Europe
Our commitments:

• Support Britain remaining as a full member of the EU and oppose any arrangement which serves to erect barriers between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

• Support a more effective role for national parliaments in questioning and proposing European legislation

• Work with social democratic parties across Europe for reform of the fiscal rules for expenditure on capital and infrastructure

• Encourage a strengthened EU response to the migration crisis

Introduction

Labour remains and will continue to be committed to the project of a social Europe. We believe that Ireland will be strong and our interests are best served when there is a strong European Union.

The experience of the financial and economic crisis in recent years has severely tested the solidarity between EU member states. It has meant a retreat into an intergovernmental mindset, despite an increase in the EU’s powerful transnational institutions. This has undermined the vision for the EU to become a leading political and economic powerhouse in the world.

The EU must enter a new phase of rebuilding its institutions, its infrastructure and its place in the life of all European citizens. Labour believes Ireland as a small member state should be at the heart of this project pushing for change.

The rebuilding must focus the Economic Union in the promotion of greater investment, jobs and stability. The creation of good quality jobs for the coming generation will define the success or failure of the EU project over future decades.

It must progress the Social Union. Labour is very clear; the EU must be as much a social union as an economic union. Economic imperatives cannot outweigh social rights and we will campaign to further defend workers’ and citizens’ rights and work towards the elimination of social dumping.

Only a positive policy mix will offer assurance to the citizens of Ireland and in other member states that the EU will continue to be a force for good into the future. It will also offer hope to the people of Greece that their country can be rebuilt on a sustainable footing. Together with its sister social democratic parties, the Labour Party will campaign at the highest levels of the EU to rebuild the EU social project.
Progressive EU Reform
Labour is a resolutely pro-EU party committed to the vision of a strong, social Europe that delivers first and foremost for its citizens across all member states.

Yet the existing Union has a way to go in terms of meeting the great ambitions of a truly social Europe. Too often in recent times, the necessary project of EU reform has been hijacked by the terminology of isolationist and right-wing movements who wish to see essential worker’s rights, consumer protection and environmental standards devalued across the continent.

Labour believes that this dangerous rhetoric must be met by a consistent programme of progressive reform of EU institutions to construct a true Europe of the people. This must translate into more democratic, accountable and sustainable policies and practices that strengthen, not weaken, the shared project of a better Union.

As a start, the Political Union must be built up and any democratic deficits closed. Engagement with EU citizens must be increased and a more effective role found for national parliaments in EU-decision making. We support a strengthening of the “yellow card” procedure, whereby national parliaments can question the merit of proposed European legislation. We also support going further and trialling a “green card” procedure, where a number of national parliaments can come together to propose legislation at a European level.

It is also essential that the EU strengthens its response in relation to the ongoing migration crisis. More must be done in the coming months and years in terms of providing relocation and resettlement of refugees. European countries and the EU itself must also provide greater assistance to bring peace and stability to war-torn countries in its neighbouring regions to really get at the root cause of people’s need to flee serious conflict zones.

Labour also believes it is the duty of the Union to strive for the best possible trade deals for its member states and citizens. To this end we will support social democratic efforts to reform the questionable International Dispute Settlement Mechanism within the Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership (TTIP).

We want to see a deal in this area that ensures member states enjoy the benefits of free trade with North America, but avoids running the risk of undermining our essential consumer protections and quality guarantees that form a core element of the shared values of European people and nations.

We must also be willing to reform our own national systems to deepen our relations with other member states. It is therefore Labour policy to provide on a reciprocal basis that citizens of the European Union who have been resident in Ireland for at least five years will be entitled to vote in General Elections.

A Fairer Currency Union
Labour supported the ratification of the Fiscal Treaty in 2012. We believe that fiscal rules are a necessary part of currency Union. However, we believe the existing rules have been interpreted and implemented by the European Commission in an overly restrictive way. Member states should be allowed to make larger long term capital investments in their economy where necessary.

We will therefore work with our social democratic sister parties across the EU to push for progressive reform of the fiscal rules for expenditure on capital and infrastructure.

Facing Up to the Risks Of Brexit
The United Kingdom is set to vote on withdrawal from the European Union before the end of 2017. Highlighting the effects of such a withdrawal on Ireland, both north and south, will be a major responsibility for the next Government.

If re-elected to Government, we are determined to treat the possibility of Brexit with the seriousness and proactivity it demands.
Labour’s firm belief is that Ireland’s interests and the interests of the EU as a whole are best served by a United Kingdom that remains a full and positively engaged member of the Union.

We will use our special position as the UK’s closest neighbour to facilitate the associated negotiations insofar as it lies within our power to do so. We will aim to see such talks end in a mutually-acceptable solution to the EU’s future, provided that any negotiated arrangement with the UK does not infringe on the fundamental values and cornerstones of the Union.

Most of all, we will absolutely oppose any arrangement which serves to erect, whether by design or otherwise, barriers of any kind between Ireland and Northern Ireland. It is simply not acceptable to the Labour Party to have free movement between the jurisdictions on the island of Ireland threatened in any way.

We are determined to work as closely as possible with our sister parties in the Party of European Socialists, including the British Labour Party, to combat the threat of a bad deal for the citizens of Ireland and of Europe.

The number one priority of European socialists and progressives must be to ensure that the threat of UK exit is not exploited by conservative or xenophobic parties. Strong efforts must be made to prevent any moves to weaken standards of workers’ rights, consumer protection, environmental law and the basic rights and protections guaranteed by the treaties to EU citizens. Any degradation of these rights and values is contrary to the vision of a social Europe and an anathema to our values as a pro-European social democratic movement.