

Fianna Fáil, Fianna Fáil in Europe (1979)

Source: Group of European Progressive Democrats. Fianna Fáil in Europe . [s.l.]: 1979.

Copyright: (c) Fianna Fail

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/fianna_fail_fianna_fail_in_europe_1979-en-8accf2cb-e02a-4288-b7db-25ec789bc4b9.html

Publication date: 24/10/2012

Fianna Fáil in Europe (1979)

On January 16th, 1973, the Irish members took their seats in the European Parliament for the first time. Speaking on that occasion on behalf of all the Irish members, Senator Michael Yeats said: — "We look forward, those of us who come from Ireland, to playing our part in the long and arduous programme of work that has been promised for the coming years."

This booklet seeks to portray how Fianna Fáil has met this new challenge, and played its part in defending Ireland's interests in the European Parliament.

From the first, Fianna Fáil laid great stress on the importance of the Parliament as an extension of Dáil Eireann in Europe. As more and more EEC legislation becomes a part of the national law of Ireland, the greater the need for an active Irish presence at the Parliament.

Fianna Fáil actions at the European Parliament have had two main aims: seeking the amendment of draft laws where these seem to threaten Irish interests; calling for Community action that will be of benefit to Ireland, in agricultural industrial, social, regional, economic and other fields.

Because of its association with the Group of European Progressive Democrats, Fianna Fáil has had complete freedom of action at the Parliament. On basic matters — in particular, the agricultural, regional and social policies that are of such vital importance to Ireland — it has had the full support of the Group. On the rare occasions when this has not been possible, the Group has sanctioned a complete freedom of action by the Fianna Fáil members.

This freedom has unfortunately not always been obtained by the Fine Gael and Labour members of the Parliament. They have frequently been inhibited by their membership of big multi-national political groups whose interests by no means always coincide with those of Ireland. This is one reason why, during the past 5 years almost all the Irish initiatives at the Parliament have been those taken by Fianna Fáil. Although from 1973-1977 Fianna Fáil formed just half the delegation, they made more than three-quarters of all speeches by Irish members.

The following pages list some of the main initiatives taken by Fianna Fáil at the European Parliament. Since there are hundreds of individual contributions and initiatives involved, it is only possible to give a very brief summary of Fianna Fáil activity.

The Fianna Fáil members have taken a very active part in the work of the Committees and of the Bureau of Parliament. At the plenary sessions, they have made their mark by the frequency of their contributions to debate, as well as by their effective use of the procedures of Parliament — written and oral questions, the initiation of special debates, the tabling of resolutions and amendments, etc.

This record of achievement at the European Parliament enables Fianna Fáil to look forward with confidence to the coming of Direct Elections. After the Elections, the Irish members will form only a small proportion of the total membership of the Parliament. They will be just 15 out of 410.

It is essential, therefore, that those who are elected should be active and effective in safeguarding Irish interests. The record set out on the following pages shows why — in Europe as already at home — the Irish voters should place their trust in Fianna Fáil.

It was natural, following our entry into the EEC, that Fianna Fáil should join with the French R.P.R. (Gaullist) members to form the Group of European Progressive Democrats. Sharing a common historical heritage, and imbued with a common republican tradition, the French and Irish members of the new Group were from the start able to adopt an active and increasingly influential stance at the European Parliament. In 1975 the group was further strengthened through the adhesion of the Danish Progress Party.

The Group's philosophy is based on a deep commitment to the concept of the family farm and to its

strengthening by means of the Common Agricultural Policy. From the outset the Group has been foremost at the Parliament in demanding the application of a genuine Regional policy that will reduce the imbalances in the Community, and guarantee the equal development of all the Community regions. They have followed also a progressive social policy, with stress laid on the establishment of genuine labour rights, workers' participation, and the rights of migrant workers.

The European Progressive Democrats have consistently called for the realisation of European Unity, while conscious of the obstacles to be overcome. They believe that there must be an extension of the powers of the Community in a large number of areas, and a consequent revision of Community structures and institutions. They have demanded reforms to improve the running of the existing institutions of the EEC.

The Group refuses to conform to hidebound traditional political patterns, and cannot be classified as of the right or of the left. Its programme is based, not on abstractions, but on present realities, reflecting the aspirations and needs of our peoples. The unity of the Group's approach to Community problems has enabled it to speak with one voice, while the other political groups at the parliament have frequently been unable to agree even on basic issues.

Fianna Fáil members have constantly insisted on the maintenance and strengthening of the Common Agricultural Policy, that is of such vital importance to us in Ireland.

In particular they have called for: —

*the elimination of monetary compensatory amounts,
full devaluation of the Irish Green Pound,
ban on beef imports from third countries,
elimination of imports of butter, cheese and lamb from New Zealand,
greater help for the family farm,
farm price increases in line with rising costs,
review of the farm modernisation, farmer retirement and disadvantaged areas schemes.*

Fianna Fáil have also opposed the introduction of the co-responsibility scheme, and called for an end to EEC isoglucose production which is to the detriment of sugar beet producers.

They have consistently demanded the setting up of a common sheep policy based on guaranteed prices, intervention and control on imports. In announcing (December, 1977) the agreement between the Irish and French Governments under which Irish lamb is now admitted to the French market. Jim Gibbons, Minister for Agriculture, stressed the decisive role played by the Group of European Progressive Democrats in achieving this result.

Mindful of the difficulties that have faced Irish industry during the past few years. Fianna Fáil have on many occasions called for EEC action to relieve these problems.

They have stressed the importance of the textile sector to the Irish economy, and have demanded the protection of the textile, clothing and shoe industries from dumping. They insisted that there should be a return to the Irish textile industry of its market share lost over the past four years due to unfair competition.

Because of the difficulties caused for us in Ireland by our geographical situation, they proposed the introduction of special subsidies for the transport of goods from remote regions of the Community to the central markets.

In addition the Fianna Fáil members called for: —

*taxation and profit incentives for industrial growth,
relief of Irish newspapers from the burden of VAT,
a realistic approach to the problems of reducing pollution,
a detailed examination of the disposal of radioactive waste,
measures to reduce our dependence on imported sources of energy,
measures to eliminate the danger of unfair competition to the Irish tobacco industry.*

Realising the great importance for Ireland of an adequate and realistic Regional policy, they have insisted time and again on the need for a much larger Regional Fund.

They have expressed disappointment at the continued EEC failure to correct the disparities between the richer and the poorer regions, and have demanded that whatever funds are available should be spent only in the poorest regions of the EEC.

As a result of the efforts of the Fianna Fáil members, there is now a good understanding at the European Parliament of the regional problems of Ireland. On a Fianna Fáil initiative, a delegation from the Parliament visited the underdeveloped areas of the West and North of Ireland.

In a Parliamentary climate where there was little support for Ireland's special case, the Fianna Fáil members have in numerous debates stressed the problems of our fishing industry, due to over-fishing in the North-East Atlantic.

They have constantly emphasised the social, economic and regional importance of the development of the fishing industry in Ireland. They have called for the declaration of a 200-mile economic zone, and demanded an exclusive zone for Irish fishermen.

They have opposed a fishing policy based on quotas, demanded the exclusion of third countries from the Community's 200-mile economic zone. They have also declared their opposition to the allocation of fishing rights on the basis of 'historic rights'.

In general, they have supported policies for the conservation and management of fishery resources. They have asked for EEC fuel subsidies for fishing boats.

In keeping with the traditional approach of Fianna Fáil, they have adopted a vigorous policy at the Parliament in favour of much more rapid advances in the social field. They actively supported Commissioner Hillery's Social Action Programme, and backed him in his efforts to get more money for the Social Fund.

They have constantly demanded greater EEC efforts to deal with unemployment — particularly amongst the youth — and called for better training for workers so as to combat unemployment. They have also called for measures for the benefit of old age pensioners.

In addition they have defended the rights of migrant workers, called for better educational facilities for the children of such workers, and have also pointed out the difficulties facing Irish emigrants.

They supported the creation of a European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (now at Loughlinstown House, Co. Dublin).

Fianna Fáil have urged consistently that the EEC as a whole must aim at a rate of economic expansion that will create a situation of full employment. They have demanded courageous policies to combat unemployment.

They have called for greater Community action on youth unemployment, and stressed the need for career guidance. They criticised the lack of interest in education in the Community, and asked for specific and practical recommendations on youth unemployment. As a means of achieving these ends, they proposed that there should be a series of joint meetings between the EEC Ministers for Education and Labour.

Fianna Fáil members have also called for: —

*a scheme for early retirement as a means of reducing unemployment,
equal opportunity in education at all levels,
protection of employees' rights in the case of mergers and takeovers of firms,
early implementing of the directive on mass unemployment,
better unemployment statistics so as to give comparable figures for all Member States.*

In addition, they have on a number of occasions criticised the employment policies of multi-national companies.

They have been active at the Parliament in support of the Directives aimed at the introduction of equal pay for equal work, and at the provision of equal opportunities for women workers. They supported greater access to the Social Fund for women, and called for the ending of discrimination against women in the field of social welfare payments.

They denounced the illegal effort by the Coalition Government to prevent the introduction of equal pay in early 1976, and they have continued to press for the complete carrying out of the equal pay legislation throughout the EEC.

In the absence of any members of the Parliament from the Six Counties, the Fianna Fáil delegation has accepted the responsibility of looking after the interests of all parts of Ireland, North and South. As the opportunity arose, they have called for EEC initiatives to solve the problems of Northern Ireland.

As a result of a Fianna Fáil amendment, a considerable additional sum was included in the 1978 Budget for further EEC cross-Border studies in the economic and social fields. They called also for the extension of such studies to cover agricultural and economic co-operation.

They moved a budgetary amendment, also, to provide for the setting up of an EEC Information Office in Belfast. On a number of occasions they have raised the problem of different levels of MCAs on both sides of the Border.

The Fianna Fáil delegation has throughout adopted a policy of giving enthusiastic and positive support for new initiatives aimed at strengthening the institutions of the EEC.

On Direct Elections, they have spoken and voted on all occasions in favour of the holding of these, and continue to press for the fixing of a definite and early date for the elections. They have stressed the importance of adequate information for voters in the period leading up to the elections. They have also insisted on adequate representation (and the use of proportional representation) for Northern Ireland.

In numerous speeches calling for various measures to improve the democratic aspect of the EEC, they have supported the applications of Greece, Spain and Portugal to join the Community subject to there being adequate safeguards for Irish interests. They have stressed the need for a Charter of Human Rights for the Community.

Amongst numerous other initiatives they have: —

*called for greater progress towards European Union,
proposed the strengthening of the Council of Ministers through the creation of a political secretariat,
supported the introduction of a European Passport,
called for the early introduction of a European driving licence,
condemned the treatment of Solzhenitsyn by the Soviet authorities,
called for greater progress in the Euro-Arab dialogue and for better EEC, relations with China.*

In addition they have frequently urged improvements in the Community's relations with developing countries. They have put forward amendments to the Budget providing more money for food aid to the countries of the Third World.

Message from the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Having participated in the negotiations that led to the formation of the European Progressive Democrats I am happy to see that this serious Group has lived up to our expectations.

The Group has successfully established itself in the main stream of European politics. It provides a most suitable forum whereby Fianna Fáil Members of the European Parliament can contribute in a positive and imaginative way to the legislative process of the EEC, and exercise a degree of influence in the European Parliament far in excess of their numbers. This is evidenced by the degree of support that was forthcoming for Senator Michael Yeats when he stood for the Presidency of the European Parliament.

Direct Elections provide us with the opportunity to increase our representation and influence in the European Parliament. This of course will require the whole-hearted support of every member of the Fianna Fáil Organisation in what must be one of the greatest democratic exercises of this century.

Michael O'Kennedy *Minister for Foreign Affairs*