

National Statement on the European Union
Ireland's contribution to
the European Union's Strategic Agenda 2019 – 2024

Introduction

The European Council sets the overall political direction of the European Union. In 2014, it adopted a seven-page **Strategic Agenda** which identified five overarching priorities to guide the work of the Union until 2019:

- stronger economies with more jobs;
- societies enabled to empower and protect;
- a secure energy and climate future;
- a trusted area of fundamental freedoms; and
- effective joint action in the world.

While much has been achieved in delivering on those objectives, the Union is facing new and sometimes unprecedented challenges, both global and domestic. Leaders have pledged to listen and to respond to the concerns of citizens as they prepare a new Strategic Agenda for 2019-24.

The Strategic Agenda will be adopted by the European Council in June 2019 following an informal discussion in Sibiu, Romania, on Europe Day, 9 May. The new Presidents of the European Commission and European Council to be appointed later this year, working with the next European Parliament, will have key roles in its implementation, but major responsibility also rests with the Member States, individually and collectively.

This National Statement will inform the Taoiseach's contribution to the informal discussion in Sibiu and our priorities for the new Strategic Agenda.

Public support for the Union remains high in Ireland, with 92% of people polled in a European Movement Ireland/Red C poll agreeing last year that Ireland should remain a member. But this cannot be taken for granted.

Inevitably, Brexit has dominated Irish discussion and awareness of the European Union over the past few years. But the particular intensity of Ireland's focus on Brexit should not obscure the very many other issues on the European agenda – issues which, for our partners, are often more important than Brexit. One of the Government's key objectives throughout the Brexit process has been to maintain our place at the heart of Europe, and to make a positive contribution to its future. At all times we have made it crystal clear that Ireland's destiny lies within the European Union. This is well understood, and appreciated, by our partners.

Shaping the new Strategic Agenda requires a well-informed domestic debate on the compromises and choices that may need to be made on the broad range of sometimes competing challenges facing a Union of 27 Member States.

The Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, together with the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Coveney TD, and the Minister of State for European Affairs, Helen McEntee TD, launched a series of **Citizens' Dialogues on the future of Europe** in November 2017. Having listened to the views of citizens and shared them with the European Council, the Government is now publishing this statement on Ireland's priorities for inclusion in the next Strategic Agenda.

Throughout the Citizens' Dialogues, people told us that they want to be part of a Union that continues to do what it does well, but is also ready to meet the many new challenges that we are better off facing together. Most of all, they told us they want to be part of a Union that is fair.

A Narrative Report on the Citizens' Dialogues was published in October 2018 and has helped inform the preparation of this Statement.

We have structured this National Statement around the questions asked during the Citizens' Dialogues, namely how do we build a union that is:

- prosperous and competitive;
- safe, peaceful and secure;
- sustainable;
- socially responsible; and
- equipped for the future.

The Union's fundamental aims are to maintain peace in Europe, to develop prosperity and social progress through working together, and to promote our **fundamental values** at home and around the world: freedom, democracy, equality, justice, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The Treaties are based on the desire to deepen solidarity between Member States while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions. Those who set it up in the post-war period were driven by the historic importance of ending the division of the European continent, and the European Union has played an important role in consolidating peace and supporting **reconciliation on the island of Ireland**.

Concerns were expressed during the Citizens' Dialogues about the erosion of the **rule of law** in some Member States. Our values are enshrined in the Treaties and respect for them by Member States is obligatory. It is a priority for Ireland to work with our partners to ensure these values are upheld and respected, through the application of existing provisions or, as appropriate, new mechanisms.

In Ireland we have benefited immensely, both in social and economic terms, from the Single Market; from the EU's role as the world's leading trading bloc; from Structural and Investment Funds/Cohesion Policy; and from the Common Agricultural Policy. But **the benefits of membership should not be seen in purely transactional terms**. Some of the most important social benefits, such as equal rights for women and men, enhanced protection of the environment, and better consumer protection, are sometimes difficult to quantify. The Union has also enriched our relationships with other European countries and continues to enhance our capacity to promote our values and advance our interests on the world stage.

It is clear that the European Union should continue to do well what it currently does well. It should focus on the big new challenges facing Europe and its citizens, and, where appropriate, devolve powers back to Member States, municipalities and regions. It must continue to work with Member States and elected representatives to **engage better with citizens**.

The document adopted in 2014 was called a "*Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change*." There have been many developments in the meantime: the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals; the migration crisis; Brexit; the rise of populism in many Member States; and challenges from outside the Union to its values and interests and to the rules-based multilateral international order of which it is a fundamental part. These will need to be addressed in the new Strategic Agenda as well as the unfinished business of the last one, especially the completion of the Single Market and the ongoing imperative of tackling climate change.

Ireland recognises that in order to fulfil its ambitions and work for all its citizens Europe requires well-designed and adequately-funded programmes to complement and add value to national expenditure. For this reason, the Government will work to ensure that the next **Multiannual Financial Framework** (MFF) addresses new and emerging challenges facing the EU, such as unregulated migration, security, combating climate change, and the digital agenda while continuing to provide support for traditional policies that have been at the heart of the EU such as the Common Agricultural Policy and Cohesion Policy. The MFF enables and facilitates our priorities and Ireland, which in recent years has become a net contributor, not least because of the strong growth of our economy, is open to paying more into the EU Budget – but any additional resources must bring additional European value by being directed towards policies that contribute to the advancement of the European ideal and the European project.

As we work to achieve the goals to be set out in the Strategic Agenda, Ireland will continue to engage fully in the EU institutions at all levels. We will improve further the quality of our policy-making and the effectiveness of our whole-of-Government co-ordination. Our highly effective Permanent Representation in Brussels will continue to be well-resourced.

Working closely with partners has always been important for Ireland. As we prepare for an EU without the UK, we are recalibrating and intensifying our **partnerships**. We are by far

the smallest Member State with Embassies in all other EU capitals. In a variety of policy areas, we share common approaches with many of them, in particular the Nordic-Baltic Member States and the Netherlands. We will continue to prioritise our engagement with these countries on areas of shared interest. However, and as is reflected in the “*Global Ireland – Ireland’s Global Footprint to 2025*” published in 2018, we will also work to strengthen and diversify our relationships with all of our EU partners. This will include implementing the recommendations of “*Ireland in Germany: A Wider and Deeper Footprint*”, the Government’s comprehensive review of relations with Germany, as well the recommendations arising from the forthcoming comprehensive review of our relations with France.

A prosperous and competitive Union

During the Citizens’ Dialogues, we asked participants how we can achieve a fair and competitive market for our businesses, that creates jobs and improves living standards, while continuing to protect consumers.

The citizens of Europe expect the EU to help drive job creation and economic growth, it is one of the EU’s calling cards and delivering is essential to maintaining support for the Union. Confidence in the EU’s effectiveness in this area has been slowly built in many Member States in the decade since the financial crisis, underpinned in part by a renewed commitment to the social dimension. However, this tentative confidence cannot be taken for granted. Ensuring that the EU can respond effectively to the economic challenges of the next five years will remain one of its overriding strategic challenges.

For Ireland, we need a resilient Economic and Monetary Union; we need a Single Market that is more integrated than at present, particularly in services; we need a Union with the tools to benefit from the opportunities and manage the risks of the next great digital transformation; we need a trade policy that resists protectionism and champions liberalisation and opportunity; and we need economic and financial policies that are socially responsible and place the citizen at their centre.

The **Single Market** is one of Europe’s greatest achievements and we need to build on it over the next five years to complete a Single Market fit for the digital age. The Union will need to be decisive and strategic in seizing and managing the opportunities created by a further acceleration in the digital transformation. Europe must facilitate enterprises of all sizes in providing and obtaining goods and services on-line and by traditional means. The next stage should bring digital policy and industrial policy together in a coordinated fashion which will allow Europe to develop a competitive, innovative, secure and ethical digital economy, enabled by world-class connectivity.

As industry value chains become increasingly highly dependent on services, and given the importance of the services sector in its own right to EU GDP, there should be renewed impetus on removing remaining regulatory barriers to cross-border trade in services and on

preventing the introduction of any new ones. The proper implementation and enforcement of the **Services Directive** should be assured as well as mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

Future growth will be dependent on digital skills, connectivity and expertise in artificial intelligence and robotics (both areas where Europe is still lagging behind) and in high performance computing. Technology will enable the **digital transformation** and research and innovation on the next generation technologies will allow Europe become a world leader on the **Digital Agenda**. This will include policies and funding for the trustworthy **Artificial Intelligence** that will benefit society as a whole.

Greater interconnectedness will empower communities, support older citizens in living independently and enhance the quality of our lives through better public services such as personalised health and education services. This will require access to high speed, secure, internet connectivity to take full advantage of the ‘gigabit society’ and associated technologies such as virtual reality, autonomous vehicles and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

But artificial intelligence, automation, robotics and the ‘Internet of Things’ will pose societal challenges and they will be disruptive to the labour market. The next Strategic Agenda will need, therefore, to anticipate these developments and support those who will be vulnerable to these changes.

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are integral to the well-being of the Union and Europe must continue to develop a business environment where SMEs can acquire new skills, access new markets and carry out the research that will render them competitive. This will mean building on the success of existing programmes and access to the financial support that will see them grow into ‘mid-caps’ and larger firms where they can compete in the global market.

Since the **Better Regulation Package** of 2015 progress has been made in reducing the administrative burden on businesses, while respecting the duty to protect the rights of citizens. The “*Think Small First*” commitment should be strengthened and special consideration given to the effects of regulatory burdens on SMEs.

Business-related legislative proposals will need to be proportionate, evidence-based and fit for the digital age, delivering tangible benefits for businesses and citizens alike. Fitness checks on current legislation should be maintained and, when future-proofing new legislation, efforts should be made to ensure it does not block innovation or digitisation. We will, for example, continue to argue for a robust business justification for initiatives such as Electronic Identification, Authentication and Trust Services and the Single Digital Gateway.

Ireland’s economic interests are best advanced in a strong and stable Euro area economy. For that reason, Ireland will continue to support reforms to improve the resilience of the

Economic and Monetary Union against possible economic shocks. These reforms aim to reduce vulnerability and improve the ability of economies to absorb and recover from such shocks.

The **European Stability Mechanism** will continue to play an important role in providing stability to the Euro area and, by assuming an enhanced role, will make it better prepared to weather future crises.

Reform of the financial sector through the completion of the Banking Union and Capital Markets Union is of particular importance. Participants in the Citizens' Dialogues called for a strengthening of the **Banking Union**. The aim of Banking Union is to enhance an EU-level banking supervision and resolution system which ensures that EU banks are stronger and better supervised. To complement the Banking Union, the **Capital Markets Union** supports the development of alternative sources of finance - including market-based finance, venture capital and crowdfunding - attracting more foreign investment into the EU. These initiatives will provide stability and will benefit Irish consumers, taxpayers and businesses.

Ireland strongly believes that **tax** policies should be fair, effective and transparent. We will continue to engage actively and constructively to shape EU policy on tax issues. Ireland will also work with our European partners, and the wider international community, within the framework of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, to address tax challenges arising from the digitalisation of the economy. As a key tool to support investment and job creation, those tax matters not within the remit of the Union should remain national competences, as endorsed by many participants in the Citizens' Dialogues. We will continue strongly to defend unanimity in EU decision-making on tax.

Cohesion Policy is a concrete demonstration of European solidarity, ensuring the benefits of increased economic activity are shared equally and that those in less developed regions can unlock their economic potential, as Ireland has. It is important that Cohesion Policy is as flexible, proportional and as simple as possible.

It is important that the Cohesion Funds, continue to play a role in supporting programmes across all regions of the Union with the objective of delivering a smarter, greener, more connected, more social Europe and one closer to the citizen.

We warmly welcome the Commission's new **PEACE PLUS** proposal which will continue the work of the current PEACE and INTERREG programmes. These programmes and the successor programme are key to the European Union's continuing commitment to peace building, reconciliation and economic development along the border.

European Territorial Co-operation should remain a significant feature of Cohesion policy post-2020, opening up opportunities for closer cooperation with other EU regions and third countries.

Ireland is an open, highly developed and well-connected economy that is dependent on international trade and investment for sustainable growth. We remain committed to working with the EU in support of a multilateral, rules-based trading system, centred on the World Trade Organisation. Supporting **trade liberalisation** should be a priority in order to open new markets for our enterprises, both indigenous and Foreign Direct Investment. We must, therefore, tackle the threat of protectionism, while providing support at national and European level to exposed sectors and workers.

Given our small domestic market, Ireland benefits significantly from the Single Market and from the EU-negotiated **Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)**. The EU suite of FTAs with third countries help to open new markets, break down barriers and provide new opportunities for Irish based firms. The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement entered into force on 1 February 2019, while the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement has been applied provisionally from 21 September 2017. The EU and Mexico have reached agreement in principle on a new trade agreement, part of a broader, modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement. The EU-Singapore Trade Agreement will hopefully enter into force during 2019, while the EU-Vietnam FTA is completing the remaining procedural steps to enable progression to signature and ratification and negotiations with Mercosur are continuing. Negotiations for separate FTAs with Australia and New Zealand began in July 2018 with the aim of concluding negotiations by the end of 2019. Finally, discussions between the EU and the United States are ongoing on the scope of future formal trade negotiations.

We will continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of FTAs, while prioritising Ireland's interests, ensuring each agreement is mutually beneficial and building on our EU advantage to develop their full potential. Ireland's approach to the negotiation of free trade agreements is informed by the need to make progress in areas where we have offensive interests, and to strongly defend those areas where threats may arise. FTAs will be crucial, for example, in achieving the objectives for the agri-food sector outlined in the *Food Wise 2025* strategy.

Transport connectivity has grown with the ongoing support of the Union and we look forward to continued engagement during the review of the **Trans-European Transport Network** and the formulation of a new **Connecting Europe Facility**. Ireland's focus is not only on infrastructure development. The implementation of new technologies, technical standards and measures such as information systems, road safety and maintenance schemes are equally important and we are committed to working with the European Union on the development and rolling out of new **sustainable and innovative transport technologies**. We welcome the progress that has taken place in improving our **maritime links**, and in maintaining connectivity with other Member States. This is particularly important given the geographically peripheral nature of Ireland, and the increasing challenge this will bring after Brexit.

The closest future possible relationship between the EU and the UK is in the interests of Ireland and of Europe as a whole. The negotiation of that future relationship will be an important feature of the next number of years. The Political Declaration on the **Future EU-UK Relationship** sets out a framework for a deep and comprehensive partnership across a range of areas of importance to Ireland. Such a partnership, including in relation to trade and economic co-operation, should be deeper and more ambitious than with any other third country and we welcome the openness to UK participation in Union programmes in areas such as science and innovation, and culture and education. At the same time, it is vital to our economic interests that the EU's Single Market is fully protected. The Government will also be firm in arguing that any agreement must protect key sectors of the Irish economy, given the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland and the importance of our economic relationship with the UK.

A Union that maintains peace and is safe and secure

Participants in the Citizens' Dialogues were asked how we can work best with our European partners to maintain peace, security and stability. They said they want an ethical and values-based approach and that they believe this is an area where the EU is strong and should speak with one voice, as we work together for a secure, just and fair world.

Ireland strongly believes that the EU has an even more important role to play in today's challenging context in fostering stability (including conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention), advancing prosperity (as the world's largest trading bloc) and promoting multilateralism and the application of international rules and norms - including human rights standards, and the pursuit of gender equality. Central to this is ensuring effective coherence between the EU's internal policies and its external action, including on development cooperation.

The Union needs an effective foreign policy in order to successfully promote its values and interests and Ireland has welcomed the implementation of the **EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy**, which commits the Union to promoting peace, prosperity, democracy and the rule of law. The Strategy, published in 2016, provides the framework for the Union's external action under the **Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)**.

The EU and Ireland's impact and influence are amplified globally when we speak with one voice, and the position of the Union is most credible and sustainable when underpinned by the support of all of its Member States. Accordingly, Ireland will continue to work constructively towards agreeing common EU positions on foreign policy issues consistent with our own values and distinctive foreign policy perspectives. We are willing to examine ways of improving CFSP's effectiveness, within the parameters of the Treaties.

Given the challenging environment for **human rights** worldwide, including the shrinking space for civil society, the EU must reaffirm the centrality and importance of human rights in our internal and external agendas. EU Member States should be encouraged to comply in full

with their obligations under EU and international human rights law and to respect existing EU human rights policies and positions.

The EU should also be an effective advocate for human rights in multilateral fora and mainstream human rights issues in its engagement with third countries, including in the provision of financial assistance and support. In the face of ongoing challenges, Member States should be encouraged to promote international humanitarian law and international criminal law and to support justice and accountability.

We will encourage deeper and wider **transatlantic** ties at EU level to address key global challenges and we will play a lead role within the EU in supporting constructive dialogue with the US and Canada on shared international challenges. Given the shifts in the geo-political landscape, the European Union will need to deepen its engagement with the **Asia-Pacific** and **Latin America and Caribbean** regions. These should be broad, open and constructive relationships based on a level playing-field where the EU acts as one in upholding the rules-based international order and multilateralism. Ireland will continue to play an active and visible role in support of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A credible enlargement process for the **Western Balkans** is a key component of the EU's foreign policy. We are supportive of the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The prospect of accession has contributed to peace there and public support for EU membership remains high. Accession should be open to those countries that are ready to meet the necessary criteria, namely guaranteeing democracy, respecting the rule of law, respecting and protecting minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to take on the obligations of membership. However, they must be able to demonstrate that they will continue to meet those criteria and obligations in a sustained and unequivocal way.

Ireland also supports the **Eastern Partnership** initiative involving Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The Partnership promotes security and stability in the region as well as the delivery of concrete outcomes which improve the lives of citizens.

The European Union and its Member States currently provide over half of total global development assistance. European companies are also important investors in the developing world. The collective contribution to development by the European Union is and will remain an important driver of change. Ireland's EU membership is at the heart of the Government's international policy *A Better World*. Great progress has been made to lift people out of poverty over the past 50 years. However, advances have not been equally distributed around the globe. There are places where extreme poverty remains intractable, especially in **Sub-Saharan Africa**. Conflict, the impact of climate change, forced migration and intensifying inequalities exacerbate these fragilities. However, there are also many opportunities to advance the **Sustainable Development Goals** – and the EU is playing a central role in that.

Drawing from the Global Strategy, the new **European Consensus on Development**, the renewed **EU-Africa Partnership**, the **European Neighbourhood Policy**, and the emerging successor partnership to the **Cotonou Agreement** with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, the EU and its Member States should make every effort to promote international development in all its dimensions – including economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development – especially in those places which are furthest behind. Ireland also supports the **Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs**.

We will work with other Member States to facilitate more effective political dialogue between the European Union and Africa, recognising our shared neighbourhood interests and commitment to multilateralism. The coming years will see an evolution in the European Union's development cooperation instruments. Within this framework we will champion a focus on poverty reduction, fragile states and the furthest behind. At country level, we will strengthen coordination with the European Commission, the European External Action Service and Member States, on analysis, policy engagement and interventions, including joint programming where relevant.

Participants in the Citizens' Dialogues said that, as a small country, **security** is best achieved through co-operation with others. Ireland has always strongly supported the development of the European Union's capacity to respond to international crises in support of the United Nations (UN). The European Union has at its disposal a range of instruments which can be applied right across the conflict cycle from conflict prevention to crisis management, including peacekeeping and peace enforcement, to conflict resolution and re-building.

The Global Strategy also identifies key security challenges facing the Union in its neighbourhood and beyond and commits to a global order based on international law with the UN at its centre. The Strategy recognises the obligation of the EU, as a global actor, to contribute to international peace and security and to defend multilateralism and the international order. The security and defence analysis of the Strategy is consistent with the analysis set out in 2015 in *Ireland's White Paper on Defence* and Ireland has acted as a bridge between the EU and the UN to better align the EU's position as a global actor with the requirements of the UN. The **EU-UN Strategic Partnership on Peace Operations and Crisis Management** had, for example, its origins in Ireland's presidency of the EU in 2013.

As the role of the EU as a major international security provider continues to evolve under the Global Strategy, we will continue to support the ongoing development of **Common Security and Defence Policy** (CSDP) consistent with maintenance of our national policy of military neutrality and the decision-making autonomy of the EU in accordance with the Treaties. At a time of growing geopolitical instability, Europeans must take greater responsibility as security providers and we should play our part in those efforts. With our EU partners, we face increasingly complex threats, including cyber, international organised crime, unregulated migration and hybrid attacks. They require a coordinated response involving cooperation

with our EU partners and with international organisations, including the UN and NATO, while avoiding unnecessary duplication.

Ireland has been one of the leading contributors to CSDP operations deployed under a UN mandate. We will deliver professional and inter-operable forces, trained and equipped to international standards, in support of effective UN-mandated EU operations. We will support EU initiatives designed to ensure that the Union has at its disposal the necessary capabilities to support international crisis management operations, including engagement in **European Defence Agency** projects and other EU initiatives such as **Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)**, the **Coordinated Annual Review of Defence** and the **European Defence Fund**.

The new **Compact on Civilian CSDP** will play a significant complementary role in CSDP by strengthening the EU's ability to help build strong and trusted institutions to underpin resilient, vibrant and well-governed societies which engage and serve their citizens. These actions are intended to work in synergy with development cooperation and trade policies aimed at tackling poverty and fostering economic opportunity. Ireland will ensure strong institutional linkages between the civilian and military aspects of the EU approach to the crisis management cycle from conflict prevention to post-conflict rehabilitation.

Ireland amplifies its voice on **disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control** through the EU. Common European approaches to the export, trade and regulation of conventional weapons have helped prevent the spread of illicit arms and established standards for best international practice. While technological developments, including artificial intelligence, have enormous potential to enhance the lives of our citizens, the legal, regulatory and ethical questions raised by the potential development of autonomous weapon systems cannot be effectively addressed by Ireland alone. These complex issues will require the European Union to lead a global response.

The **EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction** provides a framework for cooperation, assisting Ireland in upholding multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and agreements, and reacting to global challenges, such as the use of chemical weapons. While Ireland pursues free trade and open market policies, it also implements European Union export control measures to prevent the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, to support regional stability and to protect human rights.

Irish respondents to the Autumn 2018 Eurobarometer survey identified **immigration** as the most important issue facing the European Union at the moment. **Irregular migration** remains a contentious issue at European level. Although we are not a member of the Schengen Area, Ireland has played its part on a voluntary basis and we support the successive calls by the European Council for the implementation of “a comprehensive approach to migration.” This should include reform of the **Common European Asylum System**, efforts to address the root causes of irregular migration, increased returns of irregular migrants and enhanced external security. This will require a balance of responsibility and solidarity by

Member States and a move away from *ad hoc* responses to a systematic, transparent and fair system.

Terrorism is a concern, with participants in the Citizens' Dialogues looking to the European Union to do more to prevent attacks. The Union's external action is guided by solidarity and there is already a range of supports available within the EU: working closely with security and intelligence counterparts; ensuring our security systems are inter-operable; sharing best practice on mitigating external influences; and integrating minorities. Preventing the dissemination of terrorist content on-line needs to be addressed at European level with solutions that are enforceable without placing a disproportionate burden on service providers. While security and counter-terrorism remain primarily within the remit of the Member States, coordination should be encouraged and should remain a priority at European Union level too.

The inter-connectedness derived from the digital transformation makes **cyber-security** even more important. The security of digital infrastructure and communications will, therefore, be paramount. This will require a range of measures at European level, including legislation and the protection of the democratic process. Human rights should be at the heart of this work, ranging from data protection to freedom of expression and access to information, as well as gender and LGBTI+ rights.

Cybersecurity threats emanate from state and non-state actors, and can have political or strategic aims as well as criminal ones. Ireland sees cybersecurity as a crucial component of strengthened EU security and defence cooperation, working alongside partner organisations such as the UN, the OSCE and NATO. Similarly, the spread and impact of online **disinformation** which seeks to undermine national and regional institutions is a growing threat to our shared European values and democratic systems. Ireland is supportive of comprehensive new EU policy responses and of greater sharing of information and best practice, including the implementation of the **EU Action Plan to Combat Disinformation**.

A challenge for the European Union is to ensure that **digital justice** measures are fit for the digital era, while respecting the rights of individuals and meeting the needs of business. We must implement fully the EU data protection regime and empower national supervisory authorities and the European Data Protection Board to protect the rights of individuals from exploitation and abuse.

We also need to have the powers to ensure unlawful material can be taken down from the internet and we need to reform the legal instruments for judicial and police cooperation to take account of the realities of information technology in the context of e-evidence, data retention and other areas. E-evidence measures, for example, will need to balance the needs of the justice authorities and implementation issues for digital providers. The challenge will be to ensure that the rigorous legislative framework is implemented appropriately and that the processes at European level for reviewing data adequacy are efficient and effective.

In addition, the future security relationship between the EU and the **UK** will have to be deeper and more ambitious than that with any other third country. Given, in particular, the issues surrounding a shared border, we will want to see as close co-operation as possible and a pragmatic approach to security, including data sharing, police and judicial co-operation (including co-operation in civil justice) and extradition.

A Union that is sustainable

For many participants in the Citizens' Dialogues, nothing is more important than tackling **climate change**. When they were asked how we can plan and manage our rural landscapes in a way that improves the quality of our lives and protects the planet and our natural resources, they said they want the European Union to be a leader in finding global solutions. The development of an EU legislative and policy framework will be crucial to achieving Ireland's ambitions in climate action.

The new Strategic Agenda must recognise sustainable development as a fundamental principle and that its economic, social and environmental dimensions are inter-dependent, as articulated in the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) and also captured in Ireland's new international development policy, '*A Better World*'. This will require profound technological, social and environmental transitions. But, in response, the EU will have to communicate better with its citizens, when explaining the local impacts of these policies, if the Union is to secure the public support it will need for successful implementation.

The SDGs provide an agreed global roadmap for achieving a sustainable future by 2030 and they should be progressively integrated into the Union's internal and external policies. In order to be sustainable, they must be inclusive; leaving no one behind and supporting communities disrupted by the transition to a low carbon economy. The transition from a linear to a circular economy will enhance the EU's resource efficiency and security. It will relieve pressure on the natural environment, support sustainable employment and boost our competitiveness.

The EU must prioritise, therefore, the implementation of the **Circular Economy Action Plan** and Ireland will consider complementary measures, in relation for example to single-use plastics, which go beyond compliance with EU targets. The **LIFE** programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action and it should support innovation and development in these sectors, including the circular bio-economy.

Full implementation of the EU's **Climate and Energy Package** will be vital and funding through relevant sectoral policies such as the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and Horizon Europe should complement this effort. Strong regulation, for example on vehicle emission targets, will also be needed to support Member States in their efforts to meet their commitments.

The EU should endorse the ambition set out in the Commission Communication, “**A Clean Planet for All – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy.**” It sets out a strategy for the long-term transformation of the European economy, including through a socially fair transition, and how to achieve the temperature objectives in the **Paris Agreement**. It is essential that the EU provides the leadership needed to ensure the potential of the Paris Agreement can be realised, recognising the specific challenges developing countries face in addressing climate change.

EU policies should also be aimed at delivering **energy** that is sustainable, secure and affordable for all citizens. This will require significantly improving energy efficiency, better incentives for cost-effective low carbon generation and attracting investment for new resources like energy storage. Consumers should have more choice, and energy poor and vulnerable consumers must be protected.

Participants in the Citizens’ Dialogues recognised the importance of the **CAP** in fostering sustainability and eco-friendly farming. It provides direct support to 125,000 farming families in Ireland, contributing significantly towards the economic, environmental and social viability of Ireland’s rural communities. It is important that it continues to support sustainable food production, protects on-farm income by improving farmers’ resilience, and contributes towards Ireland’s environmental and climate targets as set out in the Paris Agreement for 2030.

We will ensure that the agriculture sector contributes strongly to Ireland’s **water quality**, and **biodiversity strategies** and we will work on stronger coordination to achieve our sustainability ambitions and meet our regulatory requirements. We will also work with the European Commission, Member States and internal and external stakeholders on legislative proposals for the **CAP Strategic Plan 2021-2027**, ensuring Ireland’s interest are taken into account.

We will build on the current **Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)** to ensure an environmentally and economically sustainable seafood industry that protects and enhances the socio-economic fabric of rural coastal communities. The European Commission is due to report on the functioning of the CFP by the end of 2022 but any possible changes to the current policy will be influenced by the outcome of Brexit negotiations. Our priority will be to maintain existing reciprocal access to waters and resources. Ireland will also work with stakeholders to improve the long term sustainability of fish stocks and ensure sufficient support for the sustainable development of the seafood sector through the **European Maritime and Fisheries Fund**. Ireland’s marine plan, *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth*, is supported by the **EU Strategy for the Atlantic** and the **EU’s Blue Growth Agenda**, both of which enable the environment for the investment that will boost our marine economy.

There are close links between our natural heritage, our well-being and the prosperity of the Union and there is increasing recognition across the Union that sustainability in **tourism** is vital from an economic, social and environmental perspective.

A Union that is socially responsible

Participants in the Citizens' Dialogues said they felt their **social rights** are better protected in the European Union. The social dimension has always been a key element of the European project, beginning with the Treaty of Rome's commitment to "promote improved working conditions and an improved standard of living for workers."

Delivering on the principles and objectives defined under the new **European Pillar of Social Rights** is the joint responsibility of the institutions of the European Union, the Member States, the social partners and other stakeholders, with due regard to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The principles outlined in the Social Pillar, together with the **Sustainable Development Goals**, can sustain and protect the Union's legacy for the next generation.

Employment creation will remain important and innovation in the workplace, through increased investment in our citizens, will be necessary. Many existing jobs will be vulnerable to the digital transformation. Investment in upskilling and re-skilling will be needed and **the changing nature of work** will be a key challenge for employment and social protection in the new Strategic Agenda.

Member States will be required to focus resources from the **European Social Fund** on the challenges identified in the **European Semester**. In particular, Ireland will promote labour market participation by women and a better work-life balance; improve access to employment for all jobseekers, including the inactive, under-represented groups and people with disabilities; and promote the social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion and address material deprivation, including housing exclusion.

Ireland is ready to meet the commitments set out in the EU's new Youth Strategy "**Engaging, Connecting and Empowering Young People**". The Strategy sets out principles that will ensure young people form part of the decision-making process within the EU. The European Youth Dialogue will be an integral part of the Strategy and it will have to be improved. We will promote cross-sectoral co-operation and we will deliver on our commitments at a national level through the implementation of policies such as *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014-2020*, our *National Youth Strategy 2015-2020* and the world's first *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy*, which was launched in June 2018.

Early Learning and Care (ELC) are recognised as crucial for children's development and preparing them for the world of tomorrow. The importance of quality ELC is highlighted in the **EU Quality Framework**, which Ireland fully supports. '*First 5*', a whole-of-Government 10-year strategy for babies, young children and their families, which was launched last year was strongly informed by the EU Quality Framework for ELC, as well as wider EU developments. While '*First 5*' is a broad strategy, it focusses on early learning and care and includes commitments on parenting supports and work-life balance, in anticipation of an EU-level **Work-Life Balance Directive**. The 2013 European Commission

Recommendation “**Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage**” contributed to the development of ‘*First 5*’.

Under the EU Treaties, **healthcare** is predominately a competence of the Member States, rather than the Union, save in specific instances. This means that decision-making takes place as close to the citizen as possible.

With many EU citizens travelling to or working in another Member State, cross-border cooperation in the area of healthcare, epitomised by the **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)**, is a tangible achievement of the European Union, resulting in the seamless delivery of services when and where they are needed. The European Commission is encouraging exchanges at expert level between Member States on experiences with digital, with the goal of developing areas of interoperability across systems (such as personal health records and **e-Prescribing**) and the leveraging of EU funds. Such initiatives enhance the patient experience.

The European Union complements national policies by setting high standards of quality and safety for medicines and medical devices in order to protect consumers against substandard or falsified products. The establishment, for example, of the **European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)** offers better outcomes than could be achieved as a sole actor. When an action cannot be adequately achieved by a Member State because of its scale or transnational nature, a co-ordinated approach at EU-level adds real value. Voluntary coordination and reference networks across Europe make sense for Member States like Ireland with small populations.

An overarching message from the Citizens’ Dialogue was the desire for **inter-generational fairness**. Ireland is now seeing a demographic shift towards an ageing population. *Sláintecare* aims to provide enhanced healthcare services that will meet the demands of an aging population and, in this respect, we can benefit from knowledge exchanges with other Member States.

A Union that is equipped for the future

Horizon Europe (as the successor to Horizon 2020 and a key enabler of the EU’s prosperity and competitiveness) will support the realisation of a **European Research Area**, a unified area in which researchers, innovators, scientific knowledge and technology all circulate freely. Ireland is committed to **excellence in research** since sustained investment in research and innovation contributes to improving competitiveness, protecting the environment and promoting sustainability. The creation of a **European Innovation Council** should boost innovative companies, especially SMEs, and help tackle the Union’s societal challenges.

Education was seen as vital by participants in the Citizens’ Dialogues and they said they wanted meaningful opportunities for life-long learning.

Ireland supports the creation of a **European Education Area**. Over the next five years we want to see the implementation of initiatives on the mutual recognition of qualifications, early childhood learning and the new European Universities Initiative (EUI). A successor to the current Education and Training 2020 Framework will also be required.

The **European Universities Initiative** (EUI) will strengthen strategic partnerships across the European Union between higher education institutions and encourage the emergence of a network of European universities by 2024. Ireland is leading efforts to bring forward a Council Recommendation on European universities which will set out a clear policy framework and objectives for this initiative.

The **Erasmus+** programme allows millions of young Europeans to study, train and learn abroad, while broadening their awareness of Europe. The European Commission has proposed doubling funding for the programme to €30 billion over the course of the 2021-2027 Multi-Annual Financial Framework. Erasmus+ funding is currently available for formal, informal and non-formal education, including schools, youth organisations, adult education groups, vocational organisations and higher education institutions. Over the course of the new Strategic Agenda the objective should be to: increase the number of beneficiaries; reach out to people from all social backgrounds; build stronger relations with the rest of the world; focus on forward-looking fields of study; and foster a European identity.

Ireland is committed to working with the EU and Member States' sports bodies to maximise the positive impact **sport** can have and to taking a collaborative approach through the Sport Chapter of Erasmus+ and through gender equality in sport.

The new **Foreign Languages in Education Strategy**, known as *Languages Connect*, will respond to calls from participants in the Citizens' Dialogues for more foreign language learning.

Ireland recognises the importance of having a **professional European civil service** across all EU institutions equipped to deal with the challenges of the future, and reflecting the diversity of the citizens it serves. The recruitment of EU officials on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of Member States, including Ireland, is central to the legitimacy and functionality of EU institutions. The Government will work with like-minded countries and the EU institutions to ensure adequate recruitment into the future.