

***SDLP European Election candidate Alban Maginness will put the growth of small businesses at the heart of a strategy for economic recovery***

The global economic and financial crisis is hitting economies, businesses, workers and citizens all over Europe hard.

The international economic crisis has to be tackled on all fronts: European, national and local.

The SDLP is part of the Party of European Socialists, one of the largest and most powerful groups 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 discussion document, *New Priorities in Difficult Times: Supporting the Northern Ireland Economy*, which identifies £408 million of finance which can be used to support the Northern Ireland economy.

In Europe the SDLP will promote small business growth 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 European Parliament has given strong support to make the Small Business Act politically binding and we will continue to back measures that create an environment which allow entrepreneurs to thrive.

The SDLP will continue to promote the creation of an EU Commissioner for small and medium sized businesses. In the meantime, we welcome the creation of an SME envoy within the EU Commission's Enterprise and Industry directorate.

The Envoy should facilitate better communication between the Commission and SMEs in order to make the institution aware of their viewpoints.

However, only a standalone Commissioner can represent the interests of SMEs 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.