

Bairbre de Brún MEP explains how Sinn Féin is working in Europe to help Northern Ireland's small businesses

Small businesses are the life blood of the local economy. How we respond to the challenges facing SMEs and our social economy enterprises will be crucial in the time ahead as they represent 98% of businesses employing hundreds of thousands of people on this island.

The European Economic Recovery Plan and Small Business Act contain concrete proposals of particular interest. Sinn Féin has supported moves to ensure access to finance and to procurement opportunities; to fight unnecessary red-tape; to turn sustainability into business; to have work-based vocational and occupational (re)training and lifelong learning programmes specifically tailored to SMEs' needs, co-financed by the European Social Fund; to develop and grow local businesses and turn them into exporters and market leaders and; to bring financial institutions in to support these efforts.

No-one would pretend that Europe can provide the answers to all our economic difficulties. But Europe can help us through the current downturn and, by utilising the resources available from Europe put us in pole position from the outset to benefit from any up-turn in the economy. We can become market leaders in green technologies, putting the green economy at the heart of economic development and recovery.

Moreover, collectively, as a society, we have delivered peace, transformed politics on this island and forged a new relationship between unionism, nationalism, and others and the outcome of this has been a measure of stability and a better environment for business.

We need to build on this.