European Conservatives and Reformists Group

Time to take a new direction

Taking the EU in a new direction

20 achievements of the ECR Group 2009-2014



www.ecrgroup.eu



European Conservatives and Reformists Group

Time to take a new direction

Foreword by Martin Callanan MEP, Leader of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament

The ECR Group was formed in 2009 because we were not satisfied with the direction in which the EU was travelling.

We became the only mainstream organisation in the European Parliament committed to making the EU focus solely on areas where the EU can add value, such as opening markets and supporting cross-border cooperation.

And we are the only group that believes the EU should decentralise powers back to national capitals, town halls or to families and individuals.

In the European Parliament, ECR MEPs have 'rolled up their sleeves' and immersed themselves in the detail of the work of the European Parliament.

Our efforts have delivered results. Many of these results do not make good headlines in newspapers, but they improve people's lives nonetheless.

The ECR will continue to promote a wider agenda of long-term pan-European reform as the means of making the EU more flexible, open and economically vibrant. On a daily basis, our MEPs will also work to deliver tangible benefits to the people and taxpayers of Europe.

For a new group often swimming against the federalist tide, we have a strong record of delivery in Brussels and Strasbourg. Here are just a few examples of how we have begun to take the EU in a new direction.



MARTIN CALLANAN

20 achievements of the ECR Group 2009-2014

1. The ECR secured a more rational EU budget, saving taxpayers money whilst maintaining support for newer EU Members
2. The ECR brought an end to years of fisheries mismanagement by bureaucrats in Brussels
3. The ECR ensured safer oil and gas exploration without hurting industry and jobs
4. The ECR helped to secure more equal payments for farmers in newer EU countries
5. The ECR has driven the opening of trade across the world, making products cheaper and giving businesses new opportunities
6. The ECR led the campaign to cut the costs of the Parliament‘s ‘Travelling circus‘ - and saved taxpayers 15 million Euros
7. The ECR made it easier for professionals to have their qualifications recognised across the EU
8. The ECR has seen off efforts to introduce new EU-wide taxes
9. The ECR has ensured that poorer parts of Europe can easily benefit from available EU money for infrastructure and economic growth
10. The ECR has fought off efforts to regulate against Shale gas
11. The ECR has delivered measures to improve the fight against terrorism
12. The ECR has tackled unemployment and helped entrepreneurs
13. The ECR strengthened consumer rights - especially on the internet
14. The ECR worked to ensure that taxpayers never have to bail out banks again
15. The ECR led the campaign to cut red tape for businesses and EU meddling in everyday lives

16. The ECR delivered safer and cleaner motorbikes, supported EU manufacturers and cut red tape for makers, enthusiasts and users
17. The ECR promoted internet safety and protection from cybercrime
18. The ECR stood up for persecuted Christians around the world
19. The ECR has made it easier for smaller businesses to bid for public contracts
20. The ECR delivered stronger passenger rights for bus and coach passengers, but without adding costs to local operators



1. The ECR secured a more rational EU budget, saving taxpayers money whilst maintaining support for newer EU Members

The ECR Group was able to deliver a seven--year EU budget deal that - for the first time in its history - saw a more rational amount available to spend and guaranteed more resources for Central and Eastern European countries at the same time.

The agreement will see the EU's costs reduced by around 35 billion euros.

This reform also ensured that budget lines for areas that help create jobs were increased by over a third.

Funding will also increase for the Horizon 2020 programme, which enables cross-border research; the Connecting Europe facility, which aims to bridge the gaps in energy, transport and digital infrastructure in Europe; and the Erasmus student exchange programme. The ECR has ensured that all of these programmes are better focused to promote job creation and business--led economic growth across Europe.

All this was done whilst ensuring that more resources could be committed to helping Central and Eastern European countries overcome the disparities created by decades of Communist mismanagement, through the so-called Cohesion policy.

We delivered an historic deal working with like-minded leaders.



Did you know?
Leading MEPs initially wanted to vote for the EU budget by a SECRET BALLOT but ECR MEPs thwarted their attempts and demanded the parliament vote in a transparent manner

2. The ECR brought an end to years of fisheries mismanagement by bureaucrats in Brussels

ECR MEPs led reforms to the Common Fisheries Policy that will take powers from Brussels and give them back to local people and local communities.

The reforms will also bring to an end the immoral and scandalous practice of discards, which - for many years - has seen millions of tonnes of edible fish being thrown overboard to meet EU quota limits.

ECR MEPs led a campaign for powers to be devolved back to Member States, adopting the Windsor Declaration in 2011 which called for an end to Brussels micromanagement and interference.

The reforms have ensured that day to day management of fisheries policy will be controlled locally and based on scientific evidence and information from fishermen themselves.

The ECR has led the charge for a fisheries policy that takes power out of the hands of bureaucrats in Brussels, and gives it back to the fishermen and scientists who know best how to conserve stocks profitably.



Windsor declaration:
http://ecrgroup.eu/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/The-Windsor-Declaration.pdf

3. The ECR ensured safer oil and gas exploration without hurting industry and jobs

New EU rules on oil and gas safety - proposed after the Gulf of Mexico tragedy - would have heaped huge costs on industry and, perversely, lowered safety standards.

However, work by the ECR Group has meant that the new legislation will make oil and gas exploration safer - without regulating the industry out of existence.

The EU's proposed regulation would have required safety inspectors to implement and comply with thousands of pages of new and untested rules, ripping up their established and proven rules and not allowing the fundamentally important ability to adapt to differing sites and conditions across European waters. This would also have restricted their ability to learn lessons and have a continually evolving safety culture for all offshore installations.

That is why the ECR re-wrote the legislation line-by-line so that safety would be improved without the need for extra red tape that would turn safety officials into box tickers and destabilise safety in an industry where the consequences of accidents can be catastrophic. The ECR approach was to take the best practice from several North Sea countries and set minimum standards that countries could improve upon even further if necessary.

The legislation will also encourage much more sharing of information to help raise awareness and prevent disasters, and should the worst happen and there is a spill, the law puts in place a much better process for sharing equipment to stop the leak and clean it up.

Had we not rewritten this new law, safety of oil and gas exploration could have been compromised and significant costs to the energy companies would have meant even higher fuel bills for consumers.

4. The ECR helped to secure more equal payments for farmers in newer EU countries

Farmers in much of Central and Eastern Europe compete on an uneven playing field when it comes to the direct payments that they receive under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

ECR MEPs used a major reform of the CAP to move towards much fairer payments for all European farmers. In the years leading up to 2020, the gap will be closed with redistribution of payments from those receiving well over the average payment per hectare of land, to those receiving below 90 per cent of the average.

Although ECR MEPs will continue to campaign until all farmers compete on a completely level playing field across the EU, this reform represents a major step forward in making the CAP fairer.

Farmers in countries such as Poland ask only for equal treatment compared with farmers in older EU countries. We still have further to go, but thanks to ECR MEPs we will have a fairer distribution of payments in the future.



5. The ECR has driven the opening of trade across the world, making products cheaper and giving businesses new opportunities

More open trade means more jobs, more business opportunities, and cheaper goods. That is why the ECR Group has delivered a number of agreements that will break down the barriers to European companies trading with major economic powers.

ECR MEPs led through the parliament a new type of Free Trade Agreement with South Korea, which will be worth at least €1.6 billion to the EU economy every year. The deal cuts tariffs on everything from spirits to chemicals; agriculture devices to medical devices.

Following the adoption of the Korea trade agreement, the EU has worked on a number of other deals, including with Japan, South East Asia, Canada, India, Singapore, Vietnam, Columbia and Peru. ECR MEPs have been in the forefront of promoting these agreements.

ECR MEPs also led calls for an EU-USA trade agreement, amending European Parliament proposals to demand the opening of talks. Negotiations began in 2013 towards an agreement that would be worth around €545 for an average household in the EU.

We are proud that in difficult economic times we have made the EU look to respond to the crisis so that - through trade - we can offer people new jobs and consumers cheaper products and services.



6. The ECR led the campaign to cut the costs of the Parliament‘s ‘Travelling circus‘ - and saved taxpayers 15 million Euros

The ECR has led efforts to put an end to the European Parliament‘s monthly shuttle between Brussels and Strasbourg, which sees 750 MEPs, 3,000 staff and a number of lobbyists and other officials relocate to another parliament in the French City - for four days.

Estimates of the relocation costs are between €102 million and €180 million per year. And the move causes the unnecessary release of 20,000 tonnes of CO2.

As the arrangement is enshrined in the EU‘s treaties it requires unanimous agreement of the EU‘s leaders to change, and France vehemently defends the relocation.

However, action taken by ECR MEPs meant that the parliament only made 11 journeys to Strasbourg in 2012, instead of 12.

The parliament has control over its own calendar, and the ECR proposed an amendment that moved two sessions into one week, thus cutting the costs by around €15 million and saving several thousand tonnes of CO2. The amendment received cross-party support.

Unfortunately France and Luxembourg took the change to the European Court, and won, meaning the calendar change could not be applied in future years.

Not deterred, the ECR co-authored a resolution that called for the parliament to seek a change in the EU‘s treaties. This resolution was supported by 483 votes to 141, thus committing the parliament to amend the EU‘s treaties so that parliament has just one seat.

These votes are not the end of the travelling circus, but they may be the beginning of the end. The ECR‘s campaign will continue.

7. The ECR made it easier for professionals to have their qualifications recognised across the EU

Professionals will find fewer barriers to having their qualifications recognised when they decide to apply for work in other EU countries, thanks to efforts spearheaded by the ECR.

The ECR drafted a European Parliament report that directed EU legislation to speed up and simplify the system.

Conversely, the new legislation ensures that rogue professionals who are struck off, or use false qualifications to get a job, will not simply be able to move to another EU country and perform the same profession.

Professionals will have greater opportunities to work across the EU without going through lengthy processes to have their qualifications recognised.



The ECR also made sure that these new rules tightened language requirements for cross-border workers in the health sector, so that medical staff can be checked for their ability to speak the local language fluently before being allowed to practice.

8. The ECR has seen off efforts to introduce new EU-wide taxes

ECR opposition to proposals for an EU-wide financial transactions tax (FTT) helped to stop the tax being imposed across all EU countries.

After the financial crisis, MEPs and the European Commission began promoting the idea of a FTT - a tax on every share and derivatives trade.

However, ECR MEPs all warned that the FTT would have a serious knock-on impact on investors, pensions, and the wider economy in Europe. Because the profit margins are often very small on share trades, even a comparatively small tax would have risked sending many financial firms outside the EU altogether, costing countless jobs.

However, thanks to ECR pressure, the idea was dropped at the EU-wide level.

Several countries have decided to go ahead with a FTT within their own countries. ECR MEPs have argued that this is their choice, but as shares can be traded anywhere, the tax must not apply to the stock exchanges of countries that do not wish to take part.

At the start of the crisis calling for a FTT was fashionable, but it was a terrible idea.

Financial services benefit the wider economy through investments such as pension funds. Unilaterally adding a tax of any amount on to each share trade would have increased the chance of those trades happening elsewhere in the world.

Today the FTT is far less fashionable. People are starting to wake up to what an unworkable idea this was, thanks to constant pressure from ECR MEPs.

9. The ECR has ensured that poorer parts of Europe can easily benefit from available EU money, and it has fought against disparities between EU regions

Poorer regions in Europe have been championed by ECR MEPs.

Thanks to efforts of ECR MEPs, such regions will have to find less money themselves in order to make use of EU programmes designed to help them build infrastructure and grow their economies.

EU regional support must be 'co-financed', meaning that the region itself must pay a proportion of the cost of the project. Since the economic crisis, many regions have been unable to take advantage of the projects available due to a lack of funds themselves.

Amendments led by ECR MEPs ensured that these funds are less likely to sit unused, because up to 85 per cent of the funds will be provided by the EU budget for these projects.

ECR MEPs also fought to ensure that wider EU budget cuts did not undermine EU regional development policy, and they fought off efforts that would have punished poorer regions if their central governments failed to follow EU rules on the management of the wider national economy.

ECR MEPs have also fought for the EU to support the Carpathian region through a regional strategy that tackles the many challenges in one of the EU's poorest regions. Thanks to ECR MEPs this region's transport links (known as the 'Via Carpathia') are now treated as part of the core EU transport network for the first time, better linking the northern and southern parts of Central and Eastern Europe.

The EU budget has been very useful for building infrastructure in countries that suffered under decades of communism. This infrastructure has not only helped to build our economies, but has opened new opportunities for businesses across Europe.

ECR MEPs have made sure that this fund continues to be an effective tool for promoting economic development in Europe's poorest regions.

10. The ECR has fought off efforts to regulate against Shale gas

With energy bills and energy security still a major concern across Europe, the ECR has led the charge to ensure safe shale exploration, whilst rejecting efforts to kill off the potential of the shale industry to provide cheaper energy.

The European Parliament held votes on two reports: one from the Industry Committee calling for regulation based on hard evidence, and one from the Environment Committee calling for a knee-jerk reaction.

The ECR was able to produce a report in parliament's Industry Committee that acknowledges the important role of shale gas and leaves it up to governments to decide on how to proceed with such operations.

Following intense pressure by ECR MEPs and AECR Prime Minister David Cameron, the European Commission dropped plans to introduce draconian new legislation, opting instead for some broad guidelines.

Shale gas has the potential to help secure our energy supply, to reduce household bills, and to drive economic growth. It would be self-defeating if we halt exploration of this energy source without any clear evidence that such a moratorium is justified, especially for Member States as Poland, where large deposits of Shale gas have been found.

Thanks to the ECR, we can proceed with caution, setting national regulatory regimes that are proportionate to any risks identified.

11. The ECR has delivered measures to improve the fight against terrorism

ECR leadership has enabled several crucial counter-terror agreements with the USA to be completed.

The first was the Passenger Name Records (PNR) deal, which facilitates some basic passenger information to be transmitted to the USA before a Transatlantic flight. PNR data has helped to capture hundreds of murderers, sexual attackers, kidnappers, drug dealers, and major terrorists including those involved in the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the foiled Times Square bomber.

The second agreement enables banking information to be transferred for the purpose of preventing terrorism. The so-called 'Swift agreement' protects people's data whilst allowing information about terrorists' financial flows to be used in order to prevent attacks. A number of left-wing groups in the European Parliament voted down a temporary agreement in 2010, but efforts by the ECR enabled a permanent agreement to be adopted that summer.

These agreements allow the flow of information crucial in the fight against terror, but they also put in place very strong safeguards to ensure our data is being used for the purposes intended and in a proportionate manner.

The ECR also led rejection of EU plans to gather people's statistics on how they 'feel' about crime. One example of a question used in the survey was 'how people felt about the theft of bicycles'. The ECR felt that the 12 million euro cost of this survey was unnecessary so they led its rejection by the European Parliament.

12. The ECR has tackled unemployment and helped entrepreneurs

The ECR has been at the forefront of efforts to fight against social exclusion, poverty and unemployment, such as by encouraging entrepreneurs.

ECR MEPs helped to draft the new EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), which will tackle these issues through employment services and micro-finance.

The ECR has also sought to improve entrepreneurs‘ access to finance through the European Investment Bank, and by making the EU‘s Horizon 2020 research funding available and easier to access for small businesses.

We have argued that more flexible labour markets will help to tackle the problem of youth unemployment, whilst EU-wide legislation in this area too often reduces people‘s opportunities and choice. Decisions about people‘s lives and work should be made closer to them.

Opening markets, giving entrepreneurs access to opportunities and finance, and providing support for people to find their place in the market, have all been major priorities that the ECR has fought for, and delivered in a number of areas..



13. The ECR strengthened consumer rights - especially on the internet

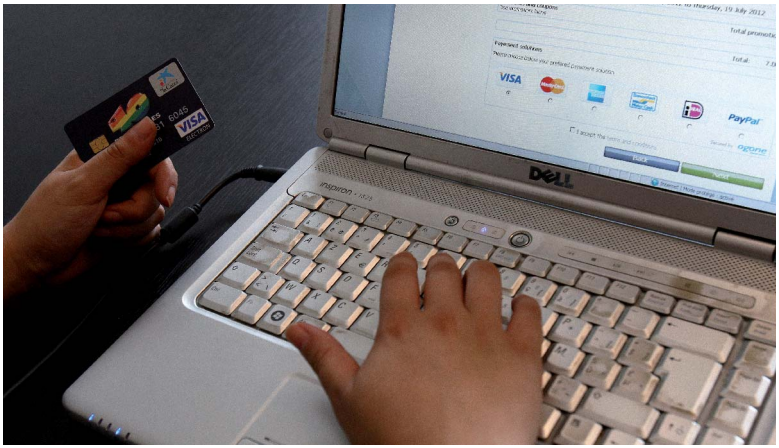
With an ECR MEP chairing the parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, ECR MEPs have put consumer rights at the heart of their efforts to complete the EU's single market.

The ECR helped to steer a new directive on consumer rights that would give consumers clear pricing information, an end to surcharges, and 14 days to change their minds about a purchase. The new law gives consumers more confidence when shopping online from another EU country.

Meanwhile, we also worked to deliver new legislation that enables consumers' disputes to be settled without having to go to court under an 'Alternative Dispute Resolution' mechanism. MEPs also adopted a new online system for resolving disputes - especially when cross border.

On the Industry Committee, ECR MEPs have supported moves that are driving down the costs of mobile 'roaming' around the EU, lowering the caps on 'phone calls, texts, and internet usage.

The ECR has led efforts to give consumers clear rights when buying goods and services across the EU's Single Market. People will now be able to shop around safe in the knowledge that they will have basic levels of protection.



14. The ECR worked to ensure that taxpayers never have to bail out banks again

When the European Parliament agreed new bank capital rules, ECR MEPs fought to ensure that some countries could put in place even stronger rules aimed at ensuring taxpayers never have to bail out European banks again.

The Capital Requirements Directive sets out the global standards banks must follow in the amount of capital they keep available. In light of the banking crisis these rules were revised. However, the initial EU proposal would not allow national governments to place stricter rules on their banks.

As well as allowing countries to go further, ECR MEPs also ensured the directive would allow countries to 'hedge' their commercial risks, which were crucial to ensure pension funds and savers are not adversely affected.

Before the crisis, the capital held by banks to safeguard against adverse circumstances was insufficient and led to taxpayers having to step in. We are trying to make sure that this never has to happen again. The ECR was successful in making sure that we both protected the banks, and protected people from the banks.

15. The ECR led the campaign to cut red tape for businesses and EU meddling in everyday lives

Red tape and regulation reduction is a key aim of the ECR's efforts to kick-start economic growth across Europe. The ECR authored a number of the parliament's annual reports setting out principles for the EU to introduce less burdensome and smarter laws, and to cut redundant laws.

The European Commission has adopted a proposal by the ECR calling for the smallest businesses to be exempted from new EU laws unless absolutely necessary.

And after a great deal of ECR lobbying, the European Commission has introduced a programme called REFIT, which will withdraw legal proposals, repeal some meddlesome EU laws, and simplify others. Among the proposals to be withdrawn include health and safety for hairdressers, a directive on soil, and the statistics of steel.

Entrepreneurs need to focus all of their efforts on growing their businesses, not on complying with endless regulations and rules.

All ECR MEPs have fought against meddlesome new laws that hold back businesses and finally our message is getting through to the European Commission. We will continue to argue for an EU that is less meddlesome and more focused on getting our economy working again.



16. The ECR delivered safer and cleaner motorbikes, supported EU manufacturers and cut red tape for makers, enthusiasts and users

Motorbikes, trikes, quads and lightweight vehicles will be safer and cleaner, and manufacturer investment will be encouraged now they have EU rules for design and development. The ECR ensured that performance, emission and safety standards did not significantly drive up costs, or prevent enthusiasts from making improvements to their bikes.

Motorbike and moped users account for 16 per cent of the total number of road deaths in the EU but only two per cent of the total kilometres driven.

Among the specific improvements is mandatory anti-lock braking (ABS) on powerful motorbikes, advanced braking (CBS) on scooters, reduced exhaust emissions, and on board diagnostics.

Enthusiasts expressed concern that the original European Commission proposal would introduce excessive anti-tampering measures, so ECR MEPs managed to reach agreement to only include such measures on bikes where power or speed is restricted, for young or inexperienced riders. Opening up technical information will help independent repairers to maintain bikes, trikes and quads, and enthusiasts to customise them.

The ECR listened carefully to biking enthusiasts to make sure the EU put in place a law that makes two, three and four wheeled machines safer and cleaner, without ruining their lifestyle.

17. The ECR promoted internet safety and protection from cybercrime

New proposals cracking down on child pornography on the internet were strengthened by ECR MEPs who helped draft the directive.

We called for stronger measures to ensure internet providers remove websites with abuse images; such as social networking sites and chat rooms having a 'panic' button on screen; and a blocking of abusive images that originate from outside the EU.

This law will make a major difference in our fight against online child pornography and child abuse images. We must never rest until this outrageous material is taken off of the internet and those who supply it brought to justice.

The ECR also led efforts to strengthen the internet against cyber criminals. Proposals led through the European Parliament by the ECR will see the EU's agency for securing online operations (ENISA) beefed up.

Cyber crime is a prime area where the pooled resources of nations working together will achieve far more than individual states working in a vacuum.



18. The ECR stood up for persecuted Christians around the world

The ECR Group has placed the plight of persecuted Christians prominently on the EU foreign policy agenda.

Around the world persecution is on the rise. More than any other group, Christians are a target of religious violence. A long ignored situation by EU foreign policy, ECR members were among those who pressed for more EU action.

A key success was the adoption in June 2013 of EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion. The guidelines provide clear standards for EU policymakers on what to do when they see persecution.

Many millions of Christians experience discrimination and persecution on a daily basis. Other minorities are also denied their basic rights. The EU and its Member States must do more to help these people. Thanks to ECR work we now have the guidelines, but it is not enough. The ECR will continue to press for more action to help those who are persecuted for their faith.

19. The ECR has made it easier for smaller businesses to bid for public contracts

Major reforms to the way public bodies buy goods and services have been a key cause championed by ECR MEPs, so that taxpayer money better supports Europe's economic recovery.

ECR MEPs were successful in reforming the so-called procurement rules that had previously made it very difficult for smaller companies to compete for large contracts to provide goods or services to the public.

The reforms will enable the contracts to be broken down, with easier access to information for businesses and less red tape when bidding for work right across the EU Single Market.

They will also encourage authorities to think about how they can provide better value for taxpayer money by supporting innovation in how they deliver their services to the public.

Public authorities spend an enormous amount of taxpayer money on procuring goods and services. We wanted to ensure that these contracts not only go to large companies, but also to smaller and more entrepreneurial companies who can often provide better services and value.

These reforms give businesses more opportunities, and taxpayers better public services. It's just another example of how the ECR is making the single market work.

20. The ECR delivered stronger passenger rights for bus and coach passengers, but without adding costs to local operators

Travellers on long bus and coach routes will receive new rights under proposals supported by the ECR Group.

A series of twelve basic rights (mainly regarding disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility, non-discrimination and submission of complaints, informing passengers etc) will apply to passengers travelling on services of all distances.

However, for services over 250km, passengers will be entitled to compensation for death or personal injury, or for loss or damage of luggage. They are also entitled to assistance to meet practical needs such as clothes, food and accommodation in the event of an accident. If a bus or coach is overbooked or cancelled, passengers will be offered a choice of re-routing or a refund. If a journey of more than three hours is cancelled or delayed by more than 90 minutes, assistance, meals and accommodation should be offered, unless caused by bad weather or major disasters.

The package is also a great victory for disabled and reduced mobility passengers' rights. Provided that the passenger informs the company of his/her needs at least 36 hours before departure, the operator will be required to provide assistance or to allow a companion to travel at no extra cost.

This is a step in the right direction towards ensuring that passengers are properly protected. Disabled passengers and passengers with reduced mobility are protected across both long and short distances. The ECR has helped to boost passengers' rights, but smaller companies will not be hit by excessive costs and red tape.

Notes

The EU is at a crossroads



Time to take a new direction



European Conservatives and Reformists Group

European Parliament
Rue Wiertz - ATR 07K 066
B - 1047 Brussels
Belgium
tel.: +32 2 284 13 94
+32 2 284 45 32

European Parliament
Allée du Printemps - LOW T04 139
F - 67 070 Strasbourg
France
tel.: +33 3 8817 48 23
+33 3 8817 39 31

www.ecrgroup.eu
www.twitter.com/ecrgroup
www.facebook.com/ECRgroupEU
www.flickr.com/ecrg
www.youtube.com/ECREuroParl

