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EU funds for missing children helpline not available:

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FUNDING FOR a missing children's helpline is not available through the EU, the commissioner with responsibility for the matter has told Irish MEPs.

Despite a request by a delegation of Irish MEPs, vice president of the European Commission and European digital agenda commissioner Neelie Kroes said funding for the helpline, which Ireland is obliged to implement, is not available. However, given Irish concerns and those of other states that have not yet established the helpline, Ms Kroes has committed to present a report on the subject, expected by the end of the year.

Despite being advertised almost three years ago, the Europe-wide missing children's helpline has not yet been established in Ireland.

A delegation of MEPs, made up of Gay Mitchell, Pat the Cope Gallagher, Proinsias de Rossa, Liam Aylward, Marian Harkin, Nessa Childers, Seán Kelly, and Mairead McGuinness met Ms Kroes in Strasbourg last week.

Mr Gallagher said he hoped Ms Kroes's report would reveal best practice in other countries and indicate how much it had cost to set up elsewhere.

"When that can be established, I feel then we should consider calling on the Government for funding, or at least providing partial funding," he said.

"This would be an EU-wide number and if it were established, a call would alert all of the agencies throughout Europe."

Mr Mitchell said the helpline was an important service.

"It's a very sensitive issue given the situation surrounding missing children generally and we met to emphasise the point that we want it here in Ireland," he said.

As part of reforms to the EU's regulatory framework for electronic communications adopted in November, a provision on 116 numbers was inserted in the universal service directive.

The missing children's hotline is one of the 116 numbers that the EU wants to harmonise.

Member states have until May 25th, 2011, to incorporate these requirements into national laws, at which point infringement procedures are launched against states that have not implemented the directive.

The missing children's helpline has been assigned to service providers in 12 member states and is established in Belgium, Denmark, Greece, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia.