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## New rules allow Euro candidates to spend €230,000

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CANDIDATES in the European election in June may spend up to €230,000 to get elected, according to new guidelines published yesterday.

However, any money spent now, before the campaign begins officially, such as funding billboard campaigns or leaflet drops, does not have to be included in official returns.

The Standards in Public Office Commission published its guidelines yesterday, setting out the rules on donations and election spending.

They are similar to the rules which applied to the 2002 General Election where candidates spent over €9m.

The spending limit for each candidate in the election has been set at €230,000 by Environment Minister Martin Cullen.

This is an increase of almost 21pc on the limit for the 1999 European elections, which was £150,000 (€190,461).

Those who are elected or who get one quarter of the quota will be entitled to a refund from the Exchequer of up to €38,092.14 of their election expenses.

A number of candidates, who did not wish to be named, gave estimates yesterday of between €50,000 to €150,000 to run a campaign, with up to €60,000 being paid out for posters.

In the Munster constituency Fianna Fail candidate Brian Crowley is already understood to have erected over 2,000 posters. If the MEP leaves these in place for the official campaign, which will be at least five weeks long, the cost of them will have to be included in his return to the standards commission following the election.

Candidates standing for a political party can assign all or part of the limit to their party. However, the party is only allowed to spend the total of the amounts assigned to it by its candidates.

This can be on its national campaign or on individual candidates. Overall spending on a candidate may not exceed the €230,000 limit.

The commission advised yesterday that if any individual or group intends to incur expenditure promoting or opposing a political party or a candidate at the European election, they must first register with it.

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Candidates and parties were reminded that any reference to their European election campaigns in promotional material used in connection with the citizenship referendum or the local elections will be taken into account in relation to their European election spending limit.

The referendum and the local and European elections are due to be held on June 11.

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