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Madeleine McCann: parents' missing child alert for Europe on track

On the eve of the third anniversary [on 3 May 2007, Praia da Luz, Portugal] of the disappearance of Madeleine McCann in Portugal, a proposal to develop missing child alert mechanisms across Europe, supported by her parents Kate and Gerry McCann, is now well on course with €1 million EU funding.

Vice-President of the European Parliament Edward McMillan-Scott (Yorkshire & The Humber, LibDem), who launched a campaign with the McCanns in Brussels in April 2008, said their calls on the EU to improve cooperation on missing children was now official policy.

The [EU's Stockholm Programme](#), which includes co-operation between police and rescue services, invites all countries who do not have such a system to set one up, by creating a public alert system which can immediately forward relevant details such as a photo to news media, border authorities and law enforcement agencies.

The child alerts would be modelled on the US Department of Justice's '[Amber Alert](#)' system in the USA which has recovered over 500 children since 2005 and the French [Alerte Enlevement](#) run by its interior ministry, which on 20 April announced new media partners for its 2006 system.

After the proposal for a Europe-wide network received the support from the [majority of MEPs](#), EU interior ministers backed the plan in November 2008 and the European Commission is currently financing several studies on cross-frontier cooperation. On [25 May](#), International Missing Children's Day, the British element will be launched, after EU finance cooperation with Belgian, Dutch and French authorities. Portugal's interior ministry received [€113,000](#) to set up a system.

In a statement today [30 April] Kate and Gerry McCann said:

"We are delighted and relieved that this system is being introduced. We very much welcome this new initiative and we hope that a truly integrated European alert system can now be developed and used to combat child abduction.

"The first hours after a child goes missing are crucial and if such international co-operation stops just one child from being abducted, then all the work involved will have been worthwhile. We remain very grateful to those European parliamentarians and officials who supported us in our efforts to highlight the obvious benefits of such a structure."

McMillan-Scott, a longstanding a campaigner for improved child rights in Europe, which are now reinforced by the [Lisbon Treaty](#), said:

"When a child goes missing, the first 72 hours are crucial. Currently European countries are unable to cooperate effectively when recovering missing children. Despite the commitment of missing child charities in a number of countries, the only viable solution is a government-sponsored system linked to a Europe-wide network.

"If we can organize severe weather warnings, we can save missing children by the same procedures. It costs nothing but it saves young lives. I hope the incoming government in Britain will take this as seriously as the Americans and the French – and now the EU.

"Kate and Gerry McCann have studied international missing child alerts in depth. I share their belief that Madeleine will be found but in the meantime we can make sure that their family's personal tragedy is avoided for others."