DUBLIN — Ireland said Thursday that it was extending its banking guarantees to some foreign-owned banks operating in the country after questions were raised about a possible violation of European Union rules.

The move will raise the amount of liabilities covered by 10 percent, to €440 billion, or $600 billion, a Finance Ministry spokeswoman said.

Finance Minister Brian Lenihan said the program, which already guaranteed the debts and deposits of the six biggest Irish-owned banks, would be "available to certain banking subsidiaries in Ireland with a significant and broad-based footprint in the domestic economy."

He named the eligible banks as Ulster Bank, which is part of Royal Bank of Scotland Group; First Active; Halifax Bank of Scotland, a unit of the British bank HBOS; IIB Bank, owned by KBC of Belgium; and Postbank, a joint venture between the Belgian-based Fortis and the Irish post office.

"Clearly, there will be some additional limitations and safeguards in relation to these operations to ensure that the support provided relates to liabilities arising from their position within the national economy, rather than to their wider group," Lenihan said in a statement.

When it was announced last week, Ireland's plan to underpin confidence in a faltering domestic financial system triggered cash transfers from Britain, raising concerns in both Brussels and London that the action discriminated against non-Irish banks.

The European Commission said Thursday that Ireland's decision to extend the program may remove a potential problem.

Limiting the program to Irish banks had been a problem for EU regulators, who monitor whether national decisions are compatible with the EU laws on state aid and competition.

"It was one of the problems identified by the commission," a spokesman, Jonathan Todd, said in Brussels.
He added that the commission was examining new information it had received on the updated Irish plan.

"We will take a decision as soon as possible," he said.

Ireland's prime minister, Brian Cowen, said Wednesday that he expected to publish details of the plan next week.

The overseers of international accounting standards on Thursday backed a plan to speed bookkeeping changes in response to the global financial crisis, allowing banks to reclassify some investments for third-quarter results, Bloomberg reported from Brussels.

In step with U.S. rule makers, the International Accounting Standards Board, based in London, plans next week to ease "fair value" rules that have forced banks to take write-downs on losses in securities holdings.

The board's supervising foundation on Thursday waived such procedures as requesting comments from the public to accelerate changes to the rules, which are used in more than 100 countries.

"We support the IASB in suspending the normal due process to take action in these present extraordinary circumstances," Gerrit Zalm, the former Dutch finance minister who heads the oversight body, said in a statement. "The goal must be to ensure that a fair and transparent level playing field related to financial reporting exists globally."

European government leaders have called for the change to give their banks the same rules as U.S. companies, following a move to change U.S. accounting principles. The international board's overseer, the International Accounting Standards Committee Foundation, said its action had not been a reaction to political pressure.
"Any weakening of the IASB's independence would be likely to reduce transparency," said the foundation, which oversees the board's working methods. Interference would "potentially lead to a weakening of standards worldwide and would ultimately undermine investor confidence at a fragile time."

The European Union, the biggest group of users of International Financial Reporting Standards, already plans to make a change to the same effect. The European Commission next week will propose changes to the rules on how the standards apply to the 27 EU countries.

The board and EU actions will let banks reclassify some of their holdings as banking assets, a shift - normally forbidden - from the so-called trading book, where values are subject to more volatility from fluctuations in market prices. Securities, loans or other assets held as investments continue to be "marked to market," or revalued with swings in market prices.

With a rout in securities markets, at least 49 EU banks have taken a combined $173 billion of losses or write-downs, 29 percent of the global total, according to Bloomberg data.