



An Roinn Gnóthaí  
Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of  
Foreign Affairs and Trade

# Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

## Background Brief

26 June 2020

## **Contents**

Immediate and High Priority Issues	pg. 3
Ongoing Issues of High Importance	pg. 14
Corporate Services and Financial Issues	pg. 42

## Immediate and High Priority Issues

### ***Northern Ireland – Political / Legacy issues***

- Early calls/meetings are recommended with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (SoSNI), First Minister, deputy First Minister and leaders of SDLP, UUP and Alliance. [One possibility for early engagement is to travel to Belfast on 1 July for the wreath-laying ceremony to mark the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme; this is being held in a different format this year due to Covid restrictions, but Ministers have attended in previous years].
- There may be a 'Quad' call on responses to Covid 19 on the island of Ireland in the coming week, jointly chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade and SoSNI with the First and deputy First Ministers and both Health Ministers. As we emerge from the worst of the crisis, it is expected that these calls will not be as frequent, and the focus should move to regular the North/South framework for discussions.
- The **legacy of the conflict** in Northern Ireland and the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement will also be an important and sensitive issue in the coming period. The UK Government is required to bring forward legislation to implement the Agreement, but announced in March that they propose significant unilateral changes to the institutions agreed in Stormont House. It will be important that the Minister engage closely with the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Minister for Justice and Equality, to ensure that any proposed adjustments to the legislation to implement the Stormont House Agreement remain in line with the framework agreed.
- The security assessment in NI continues to see a high risk of attacks from dissident republican groups. The Independent Reporting Commission (focused on ending paramilitarism) will issue its third report this autumn and will seek a meeting with the new Minister in advance of the preparation of its report.
- We are approaching the annual Marching Season, with bonfires on the 11<sup>th</sup> and orange parades on 12<sup>th</sup> July. In a demonstration of leadership in response to Covid-19, the Orange Order acted early to cancel its parades this summer and to work with others to discourage the large-scale bonfires on the 11<sup>th</sup> night. However, there have been some requests to the Parades Commission for a few smaller scale parades and close attention will be paid to see how events unfold on the ground.
- The **North South Ministerial Council (NSMC)**, which was established under Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement, is the main forum for progressing North South Cooperation. The Council met in Institutional format in March 2020 but has not met

in Plenary since November 2016. An early plenary meeting of the Council, to be followed by meetings in all twelve Sectoral formats, is urgently required in order to resume proactive North South cooperation, clear the backlog of outstanding work, and to take forward implementation of the N/S commitments in the ***New Decade New Approach Agreement***

- The end of the transition period on 31 December 2020 and the full implementation of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement including the **Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland**, as well as the implementation of any EU-UK Future Partnership arrangements, will be a focus for the NI Executive over the coming period, and a potential source of tension between the Executive parties.
- **Early contact with UK Ministerial counterparts is recommended, both Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab and Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove** – the latter on UK constitutional matters, EU exit and the Common Travel Area. An early visit to London, virtual if necessary, with political, business and community elements should also be considered.

#### ***US and Canada relations***

- As regards transatlantic relations, the COVID19 crisis has had a major impact on the relationship, with travel and immigration significantly restricted and trade facing major disruptions. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the priority of this Department has been to provide effective consular assistance to those seeking to return home and to support our Irish community in the United States and Canada, many of whom are particularly vulnerable because of the crisis.
- In addition to the challenges caused by the COVID19 crisis, maintaining and developing our bilateral relationship with the US will take place against the backdrop of difficult policy issues relating to immigration, trade and transatlantic relations. EU-US trade tensions have led to tariffs being placed on Irish goods, while debate in the US on re-shoring of healthcare production could impact negatively on Ireland.
- EU Trade Commissioner Hogan is committed to progressing an EU-US trade deal and Ireland is well placed to play a role in this. We are also committed to acting as a transatlantic bridge, deepening EU-US relations more broadly, including building people-to-people links.

#### ***European Union***

- The COVID crisis has affected all areas of our relationships with the European Union. It is a defining moment for Europe politically, socially, and economically - requiring robust responses based on Member State solidarity.-Immediate priorities for the EU

Division include Brexit, the EU multi-annual budget process, the European Green Deal, EU strategic autonomy, digital taxation, migration, and Russia.

### ***Brexit***

- With six months to the end of transition, our focus is on three main interlocking strands of work (i) **negotiations on the future EU-UK relationship**; (ii) **full implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland**; and (iii) **Brexit Readiness and contingency planning**.
- **Early meetings** with key counterparts could include Michel Barnier; CDL Michael Gove (who leads on Brexit issues in the UK); and German FM Heiko Maas (the German Presidency begins on 1 July), as well as Foreign Ministers from other key Member States. Brexit will be a key aspect of the Minister's first engagements with all EU MS, the Commission, the Taskforce and the European Parliament in terms of understanding their approach to the current phase, ensuring that they understand Ireland's priorities and reinforcing the importance of EU unity in the period.
- At home, a July meeting of the Brexit Stakeholder Forum would be useful. An **early Memorandum for Government** on the state of play of the negotiations and Brexit readiness may be considered.

### ***Brexit readiness***

- Further intensification of Brexit Readiness and contingency planning will be a priority between now and the end of the year including a new Brexit Omnibus Bill, finalisation of the necessary checks and controls on trade with GB, business and sectoral supports, stakeholder engagement and public communications.

### ***Future Relationship negotiations with the UK***

- The Political Declaration sets out the parameters for 'an ambitious, broad, deep and flexible partnership'. However, in negotiations the UK has adopted a significantly less ambitious approach.
- Six months remain until the end of the transition period. This time must be used not only to negotiate an agreement, but also to ratify it. As a result, it is likely that EU-UK negotiations will become a high-level political focus in September and October, as this could be the stage when possible landing zones for an agreement are identified.

### ***Implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland***

- A number of decisions on the implementation of the Protocol remain to be agreed between the EU and the UK in the Joint Committee.
- More broadly, there are concerns at the lack of progress on moving to practical operational arrangements for implementation of the Protocol, which must be in place by 1 January 2021.

### ***Multiannual Financial Framework and 'Next Generation EU' (NGEU) Recovery Package***

- Negotiations on the MFF will dominate the agenda in Brussels for the coming weeks. It is hoped by the German Presidency that agreement will be reached at a European Council on 17/18 July. On 27 May, the European Commission published a revised proposal for the 2021-27 MFF, along with a proposed temporary and frontloaded recovery instrument, 'Next Generation EU' (NGEU), to run in the period 2021-24.
- The revised MFF largely reflects Ireland's priorities: CAP, Cohesion, Horizon Europe, support for green and digital objectives, and the external assistance through the Neighbourhood and Development Instrument. [REDACTED]

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### ***European Green Deal***

- The first major legislative act of the von der Leyen Commission, the European Green Deal (EGD) encapsulates the geo-political ambitions of the new Commission with the objective of guiding Europe to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050.
- The joint roadmap for recovery (endorsed by leaders in April) puts the EGD at the centre of the EU's post-Covid recovery. The focus on the EGD gives an opportunity for Ireland to take a more proactive approach in the Green Growth Group.

### ***EU Strategic Autonomy***

- The push for greater 'strategic autonomy' is growing within the EU institutions and key capitals, notably Paris and Berlin. [REDACTED]



### ***Conference on the Future of Europe***

- The Conference on the Future of Europe is a proposed two-year long series of conferences aiming to promote better citizen involvement in the EU. Ireland, supporting improved citizen engagement with the EU, welcomes the Conference. The Parliament is the major driver of the Conference as an instrument to promote further integration through treaty change. The Conference is expected to launch in Q4 2020.

### ***Migration***

- Migration remains a pressing and divisive issue. Reform of the Dublin Regulation and agreement on a relocation mechanism are key challenges – the Commission is due to propose a ‘New Pact on Asylum and Migration’. Following the Malta Agreement, a voluntary relocation scheme is operating informally among some Member States (including Ireland).

### ***United Nations Security Council membership***

- Immediate priorities are preparation for the Security Council term; priority setting, engagement with domestic stakeholders, engagement with P5 and E10, restructuring of resources and rapid increase in our political and security information gathering and analysis capacities.

### ***Middle East Peace Process***

- The immediate priority issue in the Middle East Peace Process is the threat of imminent annexation by Israel of parts of the West Bank.

### ***Arms Control and Iran Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action***

- There is a significant increase in proliferation threats, including the collapse of key arms control regimes and the unilateral withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA and sustained increases in Iranian uranium enrichment activities

### ***European Security and Defence Policy***

- An important priority in the coming period will be the development of European Security and Defence Policy, including the debate around ‘strategic autonomy/strategic sovereignty’ and the creation of a European Peace Facility



### ***Development Co-operation and Africa (DCAD)***

- Immediate DCAD priorities are contributing to effective global response to Covid-19 which is the defining international development issue, with the virus creating a triple crisis – health, economic and social. An immediate action will be develop a Memorandum for the information of the incoming Government on Ireland’s international response to date.
- The EU’s collective global response – both Commission and Member States – to Covid-19, known as *Team Europe*, will be the central topic at the informal FAC-DEC meeting of EU Ministers for International Development, provisionally scheduled for 29 September in Bonn. Work is ongoing across the mission network in Africa to position Ireland as key supporter of Team Europe.
- DCAD will continue to ensure substantive and visible Irish contributions to resolving humanitarian crises, including a Ministerial appearance at the Syria donor conference on 30 June.
- The UN High Level Political Forum, the platform for marking progress towards implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, meets in virtual format 14-16 July. Opportunities for possible Ministerial level engagement are being explored, including on climate and on civil society.
- Over the summer, negotiations of the successor to the Cotonou Agreement, the framework EU economic, development and political relationships with 78 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, should be finalised, though some roll-over may be required.
- A new Climate Unit will be established in DCAD.
- A stocktake of the first year of the Small Island Developing States strategy will be completed, identifying additional opportunities building on initial successes. A virtual conference with Caribbean countries on rebooting their economies, requested by the PM of Barbados, is being organised by DCAD and will involve a number of Departments.
- Preparations will begin for Budget 2021, and progress towards the 0.7% target.

### ***Global Ireland Strategy***

- The Programme for Government envisages an Ireland that is ‘ambitious, visible, and active in promoting the interests of our nation on the international stage’. The implementation of *Global Ireland*, which aims to double the scope and impact of



Ireland's global footprint by 2025, is critical to ensuring that we are well positioned globally.

- The leveraging of our network of relationships around the world through a 'Team Ireland' approach is a smart and effective strategy to support the business sector and our citizens.
- Collaboration and co-operation with Government and State Agencies through a revitalised Team Ireland approach and the resourcing in key markets of an 'under-one-roof' Ireland House, as referenced in the Programme for Government, will be critical.
- The strength of Ireland's domestic response to Covid and our global contribution will be reflected in our international reputation - an important factor in investor confidence. The DFAT network will play an important role in positively differentiating Ireland as a strong and stable economic partner with international partners, targeting sectors which are critical to our economy, and facilitating Irish business to access markets in this volatile environment.

#### *Irish Abroad*

- **Voting Rights:** A draft Bill for a referendum on voting rights in presidential elections has been prepared and can be re-introduced to the Dáil (at Second Stage)
- **Diaspora Strategy:** Following wide public consultation at home and abroad in 2019, a draft diaspora Strategy has been prepared and is ready to be reviewed to take account of the priorities of the incoming Government.
- **Third- and Fourth-Generation:** We will develop education and work opportunities in Ireland for members of the third- and fourth-generation Irish diaspora through a new promotional campaign to encourage young members of the diaspora to take up the opportunities available under the working holiday agreements with US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. We will also work with Foróige to build leadership skills in the next generations of Irish Americans.
- **Returning Emigrants:** We will continue to work with Citizens Information to provide comprehensive online information on returning to Ireland. We will identify remaining administrative barriers facing returning emigrants and work with the relevant Government Departments to remove them.

### ***Trade Division***

- Within the framework of the National Economic Plan, clarify DFAT trade responsibilities, including with regard to the Export Trade Council, Team Ireland, priority markets and Local Market Teams, and Expo Dubai 2020.
- Review trade role of Missions in the context of Global Ireland. Propose a new trade strategy to replace Ireland Connected (2016), aligned with the objectives of the National Economic Plan and related strategies (e.g. Future Jobs).

### ***Expo***

- An early Memo to Government to provide an update on preparations for Ireland's participation in the postponed Expo. The Memo will also seek the approval of Cabinet to appoint a new Commissioner General to represent Ireland at Expo Dubai, relay the programme there back to audiences in Ireland, and maximise Expo's contribution to national recovery.
- Ministerial support for Ireland at Expo Dubai, including re-establishing a Minister for State with direct responsibility, is vital to ensure that other Government Departments and agencies leverage the Irish programme in the UAE and region in the context of national economic recovery.

### ***Regional issues: Asia-Pacific***

- In January 2020, DFAT published a new, whole-of-government multi-year strategy for Asia Pacific that covers political, economic and people-to-people relations in an integrated fashion. The strategy was developed around five, high-level objectives which will see Ireland more engaged, trading more, and executing a collaborative Team Ireland approach across several departments and the state agencies by 2025.
- Ireland is currently represented by 15 missions in 11 countries in the region. The current footprint represents a significant investment in recent years (4 new since 2014), and the Asia Pacific Strategy has committed to third consulate in China, and to an embassy in Manila, Philippines, by 2025.
- The Asia Pacific region can play a key role in the task of national economic recovery. A key target of the AP Strategy is to achieve a two-way trading relationship of €100 billion by 2025 – this is from a baseline of more than €56 billion in 2018.

### ***Enlargement/Western Balkans***

- Ireland has a long-standing pro-enlargement stance. The accession process is the most efficient foreign policy instrument the EU can use to anchor long-term stability

and peace in the Western Balkans. The enlargement process was boosted by the March EU Council decision to open negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia

### ***Russia and Ukraine***

[REDACTED]

### ***Latin America and the Caribbean***

- The Programme for Government commits to publishing a whole-of-government Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean, the first ever Government strategy for the region, providing for the modernisation and deepening of partnerships with countries in the region as envisaged in *Global Ireland 2025* and its ambition to double our global footprint.
- An early visit to the region by the new Minister is recommended to launch the new Strategy and officially open new Missions in Bogotá and Santiago. Such a visit may have to happen in virtual format depending on COVID-19-related developments.
- The Programme for Government also prioritises the deepening of relations with Small Island Developing States (SIDS). An expert level sectoral dialogue covering a number of policy and technical areas is currently being planned for the fifteen Caribbean SIDS.

### ***International Legal Issues***

- Following Ireland's election to the **Security Council for 2021-22**, Legal Division will undertake significant preparatory work with Political Division and other colleagues in relation to legal issues arising, including sanctions, International Humanitarian Law and international criminal justice issues.
- Legal Division will engage closely with EU and IUKA Division colleagues and others in the Department/Government **on Brexit-related issues**. In addition, the Division will continue to advise and participate on work in relation to the Common Travel Area, in particular the areas of health and education, and to prepare for a plenary CTA meeting with the UK this autumn.
- In relation to **Northern Ireland**, Legal Division will advise IUKA on ongoing discussions with the UK on structures to address the Legacy of the Past, including on the new approaches unilaterally announced by the UK Government in mid-March, and will also support IUKA Division in continuing efforts to seek to ensure

appropriate implementation of European Court of Human Rights judgments against the UK.

- Legal Division will advise Political Division on international law issues in relation to **the Middle East Peace Process**, in particular in relation to the response to any purported annexation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory by Israel in violation of international law.
- Legal Division will assist Political Division with the conclusion of an International **Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from Humanitarian Harm arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas**.
- Legal Division is progressing legislation to revise and consolidate the State's maritime jurisdiction legislation, entitled the '**Maritime Jurisdiction Bill**'. The General Scheme of the Bill has been approved by Government and is currently being finalised by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel.
- Legal Division will work with the Department of Justice and Equality to progress legislation related to **Ireland's ratification of amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court**.
- Legal Division will progress the drafting of **Ministerial Orders under the Protection of Children (Hague Convention) Act 2000 and the Child Abduction and Enforcement of Custody Orders Act 1991**.
- Legal Division will progress the drafting of **Ministerial Orders on extradition in relation to Australia; the extension of European Arrest Warrant to Norway and Iceland; and mutual legal assistance**.

#### ***Press and Communications***

- The key Press and Communications priorities are identifying and applying the tools that will best equip HQ and missions to meet the current and future demands of communicating, collaborating, and networking across digital platforms - and building capacity across the organisation in utilising these.
- The need to preserve and protect the level of security demanded of the Department's ICT and related infrastructure make this a particularly challenging project. The task coincides with another major undertaking, the migration of the Department's bespoke web and digital content system to the centralised gov.ie platform.

## ***Culture***

- The immediate priority is responding to the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic has posed existential challenges to the arts ecology at home and abroad, while accelerating a shift towards new digital models of cultural engagement.

## Ongoing Issues of High Importance

### Northern Ireland – Political / Legacy issues

Early calls/meetings are recommended with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (SoSNI), First Minister, deputy First Minister and leaders of SDLP, UUP and Alliance. [One possibility for early engagement is to travel to Belfast on 1 July for the wreath-laying ceremony to mark the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme; this is being held in a different format this year due to Covid restrictions, but Ministers have attended in previous years].

There will be a need for ongoing engagement in support of good working relationships, the stability of the institutions, and the full implementation of the *New Decade, New Approach* agreement. The Irish Government set out specific commitments at the time of the NDNA agreement and it will be important that these are taken forward fully, in parallel with those of the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

There may be a 'Quad' call on responses to Covid 19 on the island of Ireland in the coming week, jointly chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade and SoSNI with the First and deputy First Ministers and both Health Ministers. As we emerge from the worst of the crisis, it is expected that these calls will not be as frequent, and the focus should move to regular the North/South framework for discussions.

The legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement will also be an important and sensitive issue in the coming period. The UK Government is required to bring forward legislation to implement the Agreement, but announced in March that they propose significant unilateral changes to the institutions agreed in Stormont House. This has received widespread criticism from political parties and victims' groups. It is not clear that what is currently proposed by the UK Government would meet the obligations of the European Convention on Human Rights (and therefore the Good Friday Agreement) or be compatible with the International Agreement establishing the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR - one of the key bodies set out in the Stormont House Agreement). It will be important that the Minister engage closely with the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Minister for Justice and Equality, to ensure that any proposed adjustments to the legislation to implement the Stormont House Agreement remain in line with the framework agreed.

An important framework for engagement on these issues will be the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference. Although an institution of the Good Friday Agreement, this did not meet in practice during previous periods when the NI Executive and Assembly were functioning and it will be important to secure agreement with the UK Government on a meeting of the BIIGC at an early stage. As noted in the Programme for Government, this will also be an important forum to engage with the UK Government on ensuring access for an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the Dublin Monaghan bombings and related cases, in line with all party Dáil motions.

### ***Northern Ireland - Justice & Security issues***

The security assessment in NI continues to see a high risk of attacks from dissident republican groups. Through 2019, the main focus of loyalist paramilitaries had centred on their opposition to the EU-UK Protocol, although the heat and rhetoric around this has lessened following the UK general election and the DUP implicitly accepting that the Protocol is now UK government policy. The Independent Reporting Commission (focused on ending paramilitarism) will issue its third report this autumn and will seek a meeting with the new Minister in advance of the preparation of its report.

We are approaching the annual Marching Season, with bonfires on the 11<sup>th</sup> and orange parades on 12<sup>th</sup> July. In a demonstration of leadership in response to Covid 19, the Orange Order acted early to cancel its parades this summer and to work with others to discourage the large-scale bonfires on the 11<sup>th</sup> night. However, there have been some requests to the Parades Commission for a few smaller scale parades and close attention will be paid to see how events unfold on the ground.

The new policing dispensation remains a cornerstone of the peace process. Legacy issues and the threat posed by dissident republican groups continues to impact on the levels of catholic / nationalist recruitment, though there has been some progress in the last six months with the Catholic Church actively advocating for young Catholics to join, and Sinn Féin moving towards a more clear cut position in support of recruitment. An early meeting with the PSNI Chief Constable would be an important signal of the Government's continued support for policing in NI and would build on the progress made to date.

### ***North-South Cooperation***

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC), which was established under Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement, is the main forum for progressing North South Cooperation. The Council met in Institutional format in March 2020 but has not met in Plenary since November 2016. An early plenary meeting of the Council, to be followed by meetings in all twelve Sectoral formats, is urgently required in order to resume proactive North South cooperation, clear the backlog of outstanding work, and to take forward implementation of the N/S commitments in the *New Decade New Approach Agreement*. Early resumption of N/S meetings is also important in the context of the end of the transition period and implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. In addition, it will be important in the immediate period ahead to engage in other areas of North South cooperation of mutual interest and in particular on the response to COVID-19 on the island of Ireland, as well as taking forward the new N/S proposals in the Programme for Government.

### ***Brexit / Protocol on NI***

The end of the transition period on 31 December 2020 and the full implementation of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement including the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, as well as the implementation of any EU-UK Future Partnership arrangements, will be a focus for the NI Executive over the coming period, and a potential source of tension between the



Executive parties. It will be important that the implementation of the Protocol works for all the people of Northern Ireland. The first vote on articles 5-10 of the Protocol in the Northern Ireland Assembly will be due before the end of 2024. Issues now emerging or likely to increase in visibility in the coming period include:

- The operation of the aspects of the Protocol necessary to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland, the need for clarity from the UK Government on their implementation plans, and the responsibility of the NI Executive in some areas of implementation;
- The supports which will be made available to business to adjust to the implementation;
- The question of non-diminution of the rights of individuals (regarding EU rights);
- The retention of benefits associated with EU citizenship for the people of Northern Ireland including freedom of movement, with a likely focus on the European Health Insurance Card and Erasmus;
- The protection and maintenance of North South Cooperation; and
- The maintenance of the Common Travel Area.

### ***British Irish bilateral relationship***

Early contact with UK Ministerial counterparts is recommended, both Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab and Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove – the latter on UK constitutional matters, EU exit and the Common Travel Area. An early visit to London, virtual if necessary, with political, business and community elements should also be considered.

Notwithstanding continuing uncertainty on the EU-UK future relationship, we should now work to “develop a new relationship with the UK”, as per the Programme for Government. Driving a renewal of the relationship is a priority task, given its importance in terms of our joint stewardship of the Good Friday Agreement, our people-to-people relations, and the Ireland-GB economic and trading relationship worth €85bn per annum (the protection of which will be vital to our overall economic recovery). As part of that, identifying how best to build relationships across the new British Cabinet and wider political system will be important. In terms of immediate contacts, there has been good East-West communication on Covid responses, which could usefully continue. Engagement to protect Irish interests will also continue to be necessary, as the final picture of the UK’s future relationship with the EU emerges.

Irish-British contact will be facilitated through Good Friday Agreement structures in the coming months, in particular, the British Irish Intergovernmental Council and the British Irish Council. The work of establishing new structures to strengthen the bilateral relationship – previously agreed at the BIIGC - can now be intensified with the British side. These structures would bring the Taoiseach, Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade and other key Ministers together regularly with their UK counterparts to consider areas for pragmatic cooperation and collaboration.

Work is currently underway with the devolved administrations in both Edinburgh and Cardiff to review our bilateral relationships and deepen collaboration. If agreed, this work can be launched in early autumn, and will feed into the broader strategic review of the Irish-British relationship envisaged in the Programme for Government. This review will be an important opportunity to set new priorities, and signal a new level of ambition for the relationship. Early action to establish a new Consulate in the north of England would represent a tangible expression of that ambition, as would progress on a project underway to reimagine Ireland's physical presence in London.

### **Relations with the US / Canada**

The COVID19 crisis has had a major impact on the transatlantic relationship, with travel and immigration significantly restricted and trade facing major disruptions. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the priority of this Department has been to provide effective consular assistance to those seeking to return home and to support our Irish community in the United States and Canada, many of whom are particularly vulnerable because of the crisis.

The US/Canada Strategy (2019-2025) sets out a detailed roadmap to double Ireland's impact in these two key partners over a six-year period, and we are now urgently examining how best to use the framework in this Strategy to contribute to the wider national recovery effort. The Minister will wish to review our work plan for the next phase of implementation of the strategy, to focus on: (1) support for our citizens and diaspora; (2) using our mission network to drive our economic recovery; and (3) close engagement with the Trump and Biden election campaigns in the lead-up to the November US Presidential election. An early opportunity to visit the United States should be taken up, if possible.

In addition to the challenges caused by the COVID19 crisis, maintaining and developing our bilateral relationship with the US will take place against the backdrop of difficult policy issues relating to immigration, trade and transatlantic relations. EU-US trade tensions have led to tariffs being placed on Irish goods, while debate in the US on re-shoring of healthcare production could impact negatively on Ireland. EU Trade Commissioner Hogan is committed to progressing an EU-US trade deal and Ireland is well placed to play a role in this. We are also committed to acting as a transatlantic bridge, deepening EU-US relations more broadly, including building people-to-people links.

In relation to immigration issues, the E3 visa Bill could potentially open up to 4,000 visas each year to Irish citizens. Should the Bill pass, Ireland would put in place a reciprocal programme for US citizens in Ireland. In the current context, immigration is a contentious issue; however, securing new avenues of two-way migration between Ireland and the US will remain a priority.

In the months ahead, the Minister will wish to engage with Canada to maintain and build on our already cordial relations including through Ministerial visits, actual or virtual. Ramping up the relationship with Canada will be a key component of our economic response to the disruption caused by the pandemic. We will therefore intensify actions and initiatives aimed at further developing our relationship. To that end, the Department will work with the

Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in pursuing early ratification of the EU-Canada CETA trade agreement.

### **European Union, Brexit and wider neighbourhood issues**

**European Union Division** manages and directs Ireland's strategic approach to, and relationship with, the EU. This includes leading on Brexit (including negotiations and readiness planning), as well as the day-to-day engagement with the EU Institutions and fellow Member States, and the enlargement process and the Union's External Relations (including the Eastern Partnership). EU Division also manages Ireland's bilateral relations with all countries in the European and Central Asian space, as well as relations with international organisations such as the Council of Europe.

The Covid crisis has affected all areas of our work. It is be a defining moment for Europe politically, socially, and economically - requiring robust responses based on Member State solidarity. Immediate priorities for the Division include Brexit, the EU multi-annual budget process, the European Green Deal, EU strategic autonomy, digital taxation, migration, and Russia.

### ***Brexit***

The UK formally left the EU on 31 January 2020, in accordance with the Withdrawal Agreement concluded between the EU and the UK, including the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. In addition, the EU and the UK signed a Political Declaration setting out the Framework for their Future Relationship. The UK is now in a transition period, which runs until 31 December 2020. During transition, the status quo is effectively maintained but without UK participation in EU institutions and governance structures. The UK has confirmed that they will not seek to extend the transition period.

With six months to the end of transition, our focus is on three main interlocking strands of work (i) **negotiations on the future EU-UK relationship**; (ii) **full implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland**; and (iii) **Brexit Readiness and contingency planning**

The European Commission Task Force (UKTF), led by Michel Barnier, systematically reports to the European Council and the General Affairs Council (GAC) on major developments. The **October European Council** and discussions in advance are expected to be crucial in identifying the landing zone for a possible agreement, and on implementation of the Protocol.

**Early meetings** with key counterparts could include Michel Barnier; CDL Michael Gove (who leads on Brexit issues in the UK); and German FM Heiko Maas (the German Presidency begins on 1 July), as well as Foreign Ministers from other key Member States. Brexit will be a key aspect of the Minister's first engagements with all EU MS, the Commission, the Taskforce and the European Parliament in terms of understanding their approach to the current phase, ensuring that they understand Ireland's priorities and reinforcing the

importance of EU unity in the period. At home, a July meeting of the Brexit Stakeholder Forum would be useful. An **early Memorandum for Government** on the state of play of the negotiations and Brexit readiness may be considered.

The Minister will be supported in this work by a dedicated EU-UK Unit, which is situated in the Department's European Union Division. The Unit works closely with Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels and the Ireland, UK and Americas Division. This Department currently plays a central role, along with the Department of the Taoiseach, on coordinating our Brexit approach across Government on the future relationship negotiations, implementation of the Protocol and Brexit Readiness and contingency planning.

### ***Brexit Readiness***

Significant progress was made during 2019 on preparations for a no deal Brexit. This is being refined during the transition period and remains valuable for the next phase. Given the limited progress in negotiations to date, the Government **decided on 29 May to intensify its Brexit readiness work** based on two scenarios: a **limited FTA in goods** (including a fisheries agreement), or a **hard Brexit** (i.e. no EU-UK trade agreement). While Ireland still supports the closest possible EU-UK relationship, prudence dictates that we plan for such contingencies.

Regardless of the outcome of the negotiations, from 1 January 2021, the UK will no longer apply the rules of the **EU Single Market and Customs Union**. This will bring substantial challenges for supply chains and trade flows. Checks and controls in both directions on EU-UK trade will be required. In addition, businesses will have to engage with a new range of regulatory issues. Failing to agree a FTA will bring see the introduction of tariffs. A limited FTA in goods only also **does not address a range of areas important to Ireland** such as transport, energy and police and judicial cooperation. No data adequacy decision would make the transfer of personal data much more onerous (if not impossible) and affect almost every sector, public and private, including security and police cooperation.

Work to ensure government, business and citizens are prepared for the two scenarios outlined above will be taken forward in three distinct but overlapping streams:

- **Work for which the Government is the lead** including ongoing investment in infrastructure and systems in Dublin and Rosslare Ports and Dublin Airport to prepare for increased checks and controls; working with our EU partners to secure the ongoing effectiveness of the UK Landbridge; and engagement with the Commission on EU level readiness and contingency planning.
- Addressing the needs of **sectors and business** impacted by the UK's departure. This work covers a broad range of operational, training and informational supports. It will also need to consider the capacity for **financial support measures**.

- While Brexit preparations will necessarily be in the context of a wider business recovery agenda, it will also need to address the distinct economic and **societal and citizen focused** issues.

Departments are preparing the scheme of a new **Brexit Omnibus Bill** to address legislative needs arising at the end of transition. Subject to the new legislative programme, it is hoped the Scheme can be considered by Government before the summer and it will need to be brought to the Oireachtas in the autumn.

A range of studies point to the negative impact Brexit will have on economic growth in Ireland. The Department of Finance projected a negative impact of 4.3% on GDP growth in a limited FTA and 7% in a WTO scenario. Underneath these figures are significant regional and sectoral variations with agri-food, fisheries, manufacturing and retail, the most exposed sectors. **All these projections pre-date the COVID-19 impact.** The Department of Finance is currently updating its assessment of Brexit/COVID impacts but it is clear that we are facing into Brexit from a **fundamentally different economic starting point than for a no-deal Brexit in 2019.** We can expect that the capacity of households and businesses to manage a second economic shock will be more limited, and there is a risk of cumulative effects due to stronger negative feedback loops.

Our approach to our preparedness work will continue to be underpinned by outreach to key stakeholders and a strong communications programme under the 'Getting Ireland Brexit Ready' brand. The Minister chairs the Brexit Stakeholders Forum, which brings together representatives from across the political, business, agricultural and NGO sectors. Public and sectoral communications is being ramped up and September will see the roll out of specific and focussed sectoral communications. The timing and tone of our communications programme will need to be carefully managed in the context of the national response to COVID-19.

### ***The Future Relationship Negotiations***

The Political Declaration sets out the parameters for 'an ambitious, broad, deep and flexible partnership'. However, in negotiations the UK has adopted a significantly less ambitious approach.

The Task Force under Michel Barnier leads negotiations with the UK for the EU side. On 25 February, the EU adopted a comprehensive mandate for the negotiations, and the EU's draft legal text was published on 18 March.

Ireland has consistently supported the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK in the strategic interests of Ireland, North and South, and British-Irish relations, as well as in terms of our economic and trading interests. Our key priorities include securing a quota free and tariff free FTA, with linked provisions on fisheries, strong level playing field

provisions for open and fair competition, agreed transport arrangements and police and judicial cooperation.

Four rounds of negotiations on the future partnership between the EU and UK took place between March and early June. The EU and UK then agreed an intensified programme of talks between 29 June and 21 August. The gap between the EU and UK positions remains wide, including on key issues such as the Level Playing Field, fisheries, police and judicial cooperation and governance. For progress to be achieved, it will be necessary for the UK position to move considerably in the direction of what they had agreed to under the Political Declaration.

Six months remain until the end of the transition period. This time must be used not only to negotiate an agreement, but also to ratify it. As a result, it is likely that EU-UK negotiations will become a high-level political focus in September and October, as this could be the stage when possible landing zones for an agreement are identified.

### ***Implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland***

In our approach to implementation of the Protocol, Ireland is guided by the twin objectives of protecting the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the Peace Process, and the protection of the integrity of the Single Market, and Ireland's place in it. The EU continues to emphasise the importance of full implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and, in particular, the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland as the basis of discussions on the future relationship. The Commission and the Member States are vigilant on potential risks to the integrity of the Single Market in terms of how the Protocol is implemented by the UK Government.

Two meetings of the EU-UK Joint Committee, to oversee implementation of all aspects of the Withdrawal Agreement, and one meeting of the Specialised Committee on Ireland/Northern Ireland have taken place so far. Ireland participated as part of the EU delegation in all meetings. A second meeting of the Specialised Committee is expected in July.

The British Government on 20 May published a Command Paper setting out its approach to implementation of the Protocol. While its publication was welcome, along with its acknowledgement of the need for SPS checks on goods entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain, more clarity and operational detail is required particularly in areas such as customs and VAT. Operational engagement between the UK and the Commission is vital to implementation in the timeline ahead. Detailed plans for SPS facilities are expected to be submitted to the Commission by 1 July. A number of decisions on the implementation of the Protocol remain to be agreed between the EU and the UK in the Joint Committee.

More broadly, there are concerns at the lack of progress on moving to practical operational arrangements for implementation of the Protocol, which must be in place by 1 January 2021.

### ***Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) & 'Next Generation EU' (NGEU) Recovery Package***

Negotiations on the MFF will dominate the agenda in Brussels for the coming weeks. It is hoped by the German Presidency that agreement will be reached at a European Council on 17/18 July. On 27 May, the European Commission published a revised proposal for the 2021-27 MFF, along with a proposed temporary and frontloaded recovery instrument, 'Next Generation EU' (NGEU), to run in the period 2021-24. This proposal is the fourth pillar in the EU's economic response to the Covid crisis, building on the three instruments agreed as part of a €540 bn package in April.

The total amount being proposed is €1.85 trillion: €1.1 trillion for the MFF (1.05% of EU GNI), and €750 billion for NGEU. The Commission has also proposed an additional €11.5 billion be allocated within the current MFF to allow drawdown of recovery funds later this year.

NGEU proposes €500 billion in grants and €250 billion in loans, financed by Commission borrowing. Repayments would be made from 2028 to 2058 drawing on future budget contributions from Member States, or new (to be proposed) 'own resources' of the Union. Expected Irish repayments of the NGEU borrowing could be in the region of €10bn+.

Following years of economic growth, Irish contributions to the EU Budget will increase under all scenarios. Ireland's MFF contributions may rise from ~€3bn in 2021 to ~€4bn in 2027, averaging €3.4bn per year. Irish receipts would be ~€2bn per year under the MFF - predominantly from CAP, but also Horizon Europe. Ireland can expect to gain receipts won through competitively awarded programmes - but such values are difficult to estimate.

Receipts under NGEU may be just under €2 billion (2021-24) comprising: €1.2bn from the new Recovery and Resilience Fund (investments/reforms, including green and digital transitions and national economic resilience); €350m in rural development (Green Deal, Farm2Fork, biodiversity); €215m from ReactEU (essentially cohesion programming); and €132m from the Just Transition Fund. NGEU loans of ~€1bn should be available to Ireland, if we wish to apply.

On 19 June, the European Council had a constructive first discussion on the revised MFF/NGEU proposals, with a sense that leaders wish to engage and come to agreement quickly. European Council President Michel will consult leaders individually and table a revised Negotiating Box ahead of the Extraordinary Council in Brussels on 17/18 July. It is not clear yet if there will be sufficient movement to allow agreement to be reached at that meeting.



The revised MFF largely reflects Ireland's priorities: CAP, Cohesion, Horizon Europe, support for green and digital objectives, and the external assistance through the Neighbourhood and Development Instrument. [REDACTED]

### ***European Green Deal***

The first major legislative act of the von der Leyen Commission, the European Green Deal (EGD) encapsulates the geo-political ambitions of the new Commission with the objective of guiding Europe to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050. The Green Deal is a strategic priority for this Commission and its tenure will be judged, in part, by the level of transformation delivered.

The joint roadmap for recovery (endorsed by leaders in April) puts the EGD at the centre of the EU's post-Covid recovery. The focus on the EGD gives an opportunity for Ireland to take a more proactive approach and address a perception that we are on the periphery of the Green Growth Group.

EU recovery funding for investment in SMEs, research, innovation, and agriculture prioritises actions supporting EGD goals. Forthcoming Commission strategies on digital, industry, and the Single Market will likely be anchored within EGD objectives. Proposals on CO<sub>2</sub> targets, biodiversity, and water quality are likely to include challenging obligations for the agri-sector. A proposal for revised climate targets, for the EU as a whole and individual MS in the non-ETS sector, is expected in the autumn.

### ***EU Strategic Autonomy***

The push for greater 'strategic autonomy' is growing within the EU institutions and key capitals, notably Paris and Berlin. The concept is ill defined, but risks taking Europe into a more protectionist space with consequent challenges for Ireland's economic model. It is a term that is also applied to the EU foreign and defence policies. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Our overriding objective should be to ensure that the EU remains a champion of global free trade, a completed Single Market and with a commitment to open and fair competition. [REDACTED]

### ***Digital Tax***

The Commission MFF/NGEU proposal includes digital tax as a possible new Own Resource. Fair taxation of the digital economy was also part of the Franco-German recovery instrument proposal.

Following failure to agree an EU digital tax last year, attention moved to the OECD process for (i) the taxation of digital business and profit allocation rules; and (ii) minimum effective taxation. Pillar one has achieved greater consensus, but the USA has requested a delay in that work, likely due to domestic political considerations. This has increased trade tensions as the process was seen as the best chance to avoid unilateral digital taxes and retaliatory US tariff measures. The next deadline is the October BEPS meeting, where the OECD will seek to identify what can be agreed.

Irrespective of what happens at the OECD, we expect that the Commission will consider proposing draft measures on both pillars in early 2021. Given unanimity in taxation matters, and the failure of the previous proposal, agreement on this will prove difficult. Nonetheless, changes to taxation on digital activities are inevitable. Our preference remains for any measures to be agreed within the OECD process and that they must respect the legitimacy of our corporate tax rate.

### ***Conference on the Future of Europe***

The Conference on the Future of Europe is a proposed two-year long series of conferences aiming to promote better citizen involvement in the EU. Some actors hope to use it to drive institutional changes, e.g. formalising the *spitzenkandidat* system and transnational lists in European elections.

Critical assessment of the Union's response to COVID will give impetus to assessing the future of the EU in terms of managing major public health crises; questions around fiscal union and shared debt; and the EU's role in consular response to major incidents, among other matters.

Ireland, supporting improved citizen engagement with the EU, welcomes the Conference. Member states have broadly favoured a so-called 'policy-first' approach, led by the issues in the EU's Strategic Agenda. The Parliament is the major driver of the Conference as an instrument to promote further integration through treaty change. The Conference is expected to launch in Q4 2020.

### ***Rule of Law in the EU***

Ireland firmly supports the rule of law as a core EU value. Under Article 7 TEU, the European Council can determine whether there is a clear risk, or existence, of a breach of the rule of law by a Member State, and may decide to suspend certain treaty rights. This was invoked separately against Poland (2017) and Hungary (2018) following concerns about both

countries regarding legal certainty; separation of powers; independence of the judiciary; and media freedom.

Several hearings on both countries have taken place at the General Affairs Council. The Commission has developed a new Rule of Law Mechanism, which includes an annual rule of law report covering all Member States, which is due to be published in September and then discussed at GAC. The Commission has also proposed Rule of Law conditionality in the MFF. Ireland supports this.

### ***Staffing of Institutions***

Ireland faces a 'demographic cliff-edge' in representation within the EU Institutions as many Irish officials will retire in the coming years. This is not balanced by similar numbers of citizens joining the Institutions. EU Division manages the EU Jobs campaign, promoting EU careers in Irish universities, and giving support and training to citizens applying for permanent jobs in the Institutions.

### ***Migration***

Migration remains a pressing and divisive issue. Reform of the Dublin Regulation and agreement on a relocation mechanism are key challenges – the Commission is due to propose a 'New Pact on Asylum and Migration'. Following the Malta Agreement, a voluntary relocation scheme is operating informally among some Member States (including Ireland).

Covid restrictions have inhibited the transfer of people from frontline member states, with pressures intensified by the suspension of the IOM Resettlement and Returns programme. Opponents of a resolution on this issue (e.g. Hungary) may use the crisis as a further justification for their position.

Divisions on migration weaken the EU. A comprehensive approach is essential for a properly functioning EU migration policy. It should be based on a consensus around solidarity, responsibility, and tackling the root causes of migration. Ireland should continue to push for a resolution and demonstrate our solidarity by accepting people (even if only a small number).

### **UN Security Council**

Ireland was elected to the United Nations Security Council on 17 June 2020 and we will take up our seat for a two year term on 1 January 2021. While we have six months before we become a full member of the Council, we are already involved in EU press stakeouts (joint statements on Council issues by current and incoming EU MS on the Council) and will be observer members from October.

Council membership presents significant challenges and opportunities for Ireland. In terms of challenges, the sheer scale of the Council agenda (almost three times the number of country

and thematic files that the Council covered during our last period of membership in 2021/2022) will need a significant re-prioritisation of resources and a rapid increase in our political and security analysis capacities across the Department and in Missions. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

At the same time, membership is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Ireland to influence debates on the central issues impacting on global peace and security. It will put Ireland at the centre of managing some of the most politically sensitive issues on the global agenda and allow us to do our utmost to have an impact on issues such as rule of law and accountability, non-proliferation and disarmament, humanitarian access and adherence to international humanitarian law and addressing the drivers of conflict, particularly climate change. It is an opportunity to bring our core foreign policy values and approach to decisions that impact the lives of millions of the most vulnerable of the worlds' citizens. A successful and impactful Council term will also position Ireland internationally to continue working at a higher level on conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, disarmament and non-proliferation, and accountability and adherence to international humanitarian law into the future.

An important part of our preparation for the Council will be identifying realistic but ambitious priorities that we wish to pursue and ensuring that we engage proactively with domestic stakeholders (Oireachtas, civil society, media, and the wider public) and an early discussion of these issues with the Minister will be important.

#### Middle East [REDACTED]

An immediate challenge for the incoming government will be the threat of annexation by Israel of parts of the West Bank. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

#### European Security and Defence Policy

Ireland is an active participant in the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and contributes personnel to military and civilian crisis management missions. Ireland is strongly supportive of the EU's integrated approach to conflict, which includes development cooperation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, as well as military and civilian crisis management. It is in part the desire for a more integrated approach that has driven the development of the new European Peace Facility (EPF), which aims to bring together the financing of common costs for military CSDP crisis management missions, support to peace and security, including peacekeeping, in Africa and support to regional organisations and third countries in building their security and defence capabilities, into one instrument. Ireland has been at the forefront of shaping the design of the EPF to ensure that any provision of lethal weapons is subject to a separate legal instrument and a separate financing arrangement, so that MS can decide to opt out of that element (through what is known as constructive abstention, as provided for in the Treaties).

[REDACTED]



### **Development Cooperation and Africa Division (DCAD)**

Development Cooperation and Africa Division leads on international development policy, managing approximately 70% of Ireland's expenditure annually on official overseas development, often known as *Irish Aid*.

Separately, DCAD leads on political, economic, cultural and development relations with the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

Three documents guide much of the work of the Division, all published in 2019:

- *A Better World*, Ireland's policy international for development, which focuses on reaching *the furthest behind first*, working across four cross-cutting themes, namely climate action, strengthening governance, reducing humanitarian need and gender equality;
- *Global Ireland, Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025*; and,
- *Ireland's Strategy for Partnership with Small Island Developing States*.

This year, the total DCAD budget, known as Vote 27, after administration, is €515 million. This budget is disbursed according to strict grant management guidelines, which the C&AG has found to be an example to other areas of the Civil Service, to partners across a number of pillars:

- *Bilateral assistance* managed by Irish Embassies in Africa, Vietnam, Palestine, and Colombia
- *Global Partnerships*, such as those with the Small Island Developing States
- *Humanitarian action* which responds to crises such as wars, famines and natural disasters – the Middle East and the Sahel belt in Africa are a priority this year
- *Civil Society*, with an emphasis on supporting Irish development NGOs
- *Development Education*, including outreach to schools and third level institutions and with a new emphasis on global citizenship
- *United Nations and other international organisations*, including core funding to key UN agencies as well as support for programmes in areas of priority for Ireland
- *European Union*, mostly assessed contributions to the European Commission-managed development instruments and comprising, in total, approximately 25% of Ireland's ODA

- *Contributing to global public goods*, including climate diplomacy, normative work at the OECD and other forums, and through engagement with partners such as Global Partnership for Education, GAVI Vaccine Alliance, and Global Fund for HIV, Aids and Malaria

Ireland's strong track record in international development and humanitarian action, as well as strong long-term bilateral relations with key states helped ensure a strong African vote for Ireland in the recent Security Council election. Small Island Developing States also voted for Ireland numbers, reflecting the burgeoning relationship which has grown in recent years and which has particular (but not exclusive) climate focus.

Being an effective donor who 'walks the talk', as the OECD said in its most recent assessment, gives Ireland voice in multilateral arenas and the ability to lead on certain agenda issues, such as – but not exclusively – nutrition.

### ***Immediate Issues***

Contributing to effective global response to Covid-19 is the defining international development of the moment, with the virus creating a triple crisis – health, economic and social. This cuts across all the work of the Division. An immediate action will be develop a Memorandum for the information of the incoming Government on Ireland's international response to date.

The EU's collective global response – both Commission and Member States – to Covid-19, known as *Team Europe*, will be the central topic at the informal FAC-DEC meeting of EU Ministers for International Development, provisionally scheduled for 29 September in Bonn. Work is ongoing across the mission network in Africa to position Ireland as key supporter of Team Europe.

DCAD will continue to ensure substantive and visible Irish contributions to resolving humanitarian crises, including a Ministerial appearance at the Syria donor conference on 30 June.

The UN High Level Political Forum, the platform for marking progress towards implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, meets in virtual format 14-16 July. Opportunities for possible Ministerial level engagement are being explored, including on climate and on civil society.

Over the summer, negotiations of the successor to the Cotonou Agreement, the framework EU economic, development and political relationships with 78 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, should be finalised, though some roll-over may be required.

A new Climate Unit will be established in DCAD.

A stocktake of the first year of the SIDS strategy will be completed, identifying additional opportunities building on initial successes. DCAD will work with Caribbean countries to provide Irish technical and policy expertise to help reboot their economies post-COVID. This was requested by the PM of Barbados and will involve a number of Departments/State Agencies.



Preparations will begin for Budget 2021.

### ***To the end of the year***

The EU-Africa Foreign Ministers meeting in September and Heads of State and Government Summit, in October, will be an important moments in defining the EU's relationship with Africa. Covid-19 related delays to preparations means that a more political discussion than usual may be possible. The EU has signalled that it wants climate to be at the core of deliverables. The ambition is that these would be in-person meetings in Brussels, offering useful opportunities for political level contact building with African leaders before the Security Council tenure.

Development issues will feature at the virtual UN General Assembly, with the high-level debate scheduled for 22 September. Considerations is underway as to how to maximise Irish impact given the non-traditional format.

Work on Ireland's response to the EU Task Force Rural Africa, a process between DFAT and the Department of Agriculture and Food, will be completed.

EU international development Ministers will meet in Brussels on 23 November.

Finalisation and submission of Ireland's application for observer status at the Community of Portuguese Speaking States.

Publication of the Government of Ireland Official Development Assistance Annual Report in the autumn is a moment to engage with the public on the international development programme. This year, the Report features work on gender equality.

Work is ongoing with the Department of Finance to maximise the opportunities arising from Ireland's membership of the African Development Bank and, separately, to develop Irish positions on developing country debt.

The Division will consolidate its preparations for Ireland's term on the Security Council, including on climate and security, and its knowledge of the 70% of Security Council agenda items which relate to Africa.

### **Global Ireland Strategy**

The Global Ireland Strategy aims to double the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint by 2025 through expanding and deepening Ireland's international presence and influence. It is an ambitious expansion of Ireland's diplomatic network, with a commitment to open 26 new missions by 2025. Since 2018, 10 new missions have been opened (Wellington, Bogotá, Amman, Monrovia, Santiago, Vancouver, Mumbai, Cardiff, Los Angeles and Frankfurt) with further openings announced for Kyiv, Manila and Rabat. Our newly opened Missions are working to enhance Ireland's international visibility; promoting our prosperity by developing high level business, community and political contacts; protecting and advancing Ireland's interests and values in Europe; and delivering on our International Development commitments.

DFAT has led development of 'whole of government' strategies, setting out Ireland's approach to Asia Pacific, the Americas and Africa. The Programme for Government seeks to develop the 'Ireland House' model, bringing together all state agencies and government departments based abroad under one roof, to encourage joined-up thinking to promoting Ireland and increasing trade and investment. DFAT is currently working with agencies on the development of Ireland Houses in Mumbai, San Francisco, Manchester and a flagship project in Tokyo.

### **Consular Services**

Consular Directorate provides advice, assistance and protection to our citizens overseas and some services to citizens in Ireland.

The Directorate is divided into three sections:

1. Consular Protection: Consular Assistance; Crisis Planning and Response; Travel Advice.
2. Consular Services and Corporate Support: Authentication & Apostille of Irish Public Documents; Marriages Abroad; Customer Service Delivery; Compliance; Data Management; Budgets, Finance & Reconciliation; Training.
3. Consular Policy and Communications: Strategy Development & Implementation; Public Outreach & Communications; Honorary Consul Network Management; Visa Service; New Missions;

The Directorate has managed the consular response to COVID-19, coordinating the repatriation of over 6,000 citizens from 126 countries across all 5 continents, working in cooperation with EU, UK and other like-minded partners, and chartering 3 special repatriation flights directly (repatriated 132 of our citizens from Peru on 29 March, 68 from India on 4 April, and 95 from Nigeria on 11 May).

The Directorate routinely assists citizens in distress e.g. victims of crime, child welfare, arrests and deaths abroad (1,857 such cases in 2019, with a further 4,744 calls and 5,784 web queries handled). COVID-19 has placed additional demands (18,889 calls received from January to May 2020, a 528% increase on the same period in 2019).

The Directorate has a key economic function in authenticating business documents (over 60,000 applications processed last year, generating revenue of over €2million). We also processed over 3,000 civil letters of freedom to citizens wishing to marry abroad.

In the next six months, we expect there to be a sustained demand on consular assistance due to COVID-19. Our Travel Advice services (website and TravelWise app) will also remain crucial. We will also continue contingency preparations for a possible no-deal Brexit.

### **Passport Service**

The Passport Service (PPS) is returning to normal service after its 10 week closure due to COVID 19 with Passport Online being delivered within normal timeframes by end June. Passport Express, the new Urgent Passport Appointment Service and Foreign Birth

Registration will resume later in the summer. In 2019, the PPS produced nearly 935,000 passport books and cards compared to just 700,00 in 2015. Over half of there were online applications for passport books and cards. It was anticipated that the 1 million mark would be crossed in 2020 but the impact of COVID 19 is not yet clear. The award winning Customer Service Hub handled up to 10,000 customer queries a week through phone calls and webchat.

Foreign Birth Registration (FBR), Irish citizenship by descent, is processed by the Passport Service. The demand for citizenship by descent has increased threefold since 2015. Processing of applications will resume later in the summer.

The PPS has made significant investment in protecting the integrity of the Irish Passport. This has resulted in an increased number of prosecutions under the Passport Act 2008, including a recent sentence of 3 years with the final 18 months suspended for 10 years based on good behaviour. In 2019, the Passport Service referred 69 cases to An Garda Síochána for further investigation. Fraudulently obtained genuine (FOG) passports are a risk to the integrity of the Irish passport. This is when a person obtains a genuine passport with their image but a different name and date of birth. The Facial Recognition Software used by the PPS identifies these applications. Our Integrity unit then works with AGS to investigate this crime.

In 2017 the PPS launched the Passport Online Service and since 2019 citizens in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Great Britain and Europe both adults and children, first timers and those renewing can apply online. The turnaround for simple renewals is 10 days with complex applications requiring additional documentation taking 20 working days. Passport Online expanded in 2019 to include first time applicants, both children and adults, in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Great Britain and Europe. Irish citizens, including children, can also renew their passports online 24/7, from anywhere in the world. The Passport Online service has won awards for its user-friendly process, including a NALA award for the use of plain English. If an applicant is not familiar with using a computer, a friend or relative with basic computer skills can help them to apply online. Passport Online can also facilitate social distancing, given that a renewal application for an adult does not require the signature of a witness.

The next major project is replacing the software which operates the Passport system which was built in 2004, to process a maximum of 250,000 passports per annum. This system is end of life. In addition, the increase in Foreign Birth Registration applications requires a new approach to processing. The current software for processing passports and Foreign Birth Registrations will be decommissioned and replaced by one system. This will improve the efficiency of the system. Tendering for this core processing system is currently underway at an estimated contract value of €13 million. The introduction of passport mailers in 2019 significantly added to the efficiencies of the online service.

The Passport book is designed to both represent Irish culture and to provide a high level of security. The book contract expires next year however due to a number of factors including the longer life span of the printing machines, COVID 19 and uncertainty around Brexit the PPS is looking at postponing this procurement. Such a postponement would allow the PPS to

take a coordinated approach to a new book design when the current passport printing machines require replacing.

International surrogacy arrangements remains a high profile issue as there is no Irish legislation on this issue. The Passport Service become involved as the child needs a travel document to leave the country of commissioning. The Department of Health and Department of Justice and Equality lead on the policy on surrogacy within the State and the PP, advised by Legal Division, works with the Interdepartmental Group on Surrogacy on these complex issues.

### **Trade Division**

Trade Division supports the economic diplomacy of Ireland's ninety missions overseas through coordination, support, funding and messaging. It coordinates relations between our mission network and other government departments, state agencies and the private sector on trade matters. As convenor and secretariat, it supports the Export Trade Council, which brings together these stakeholders. However, it should be noted the transfer of trade to the Department in 2011 did not include international trade policy or any formal reporting relationships with the economic state agencies, both areas assigned to DBEI and other relevant departments. Trade Division organises the St Patrick's Day promotional programme including ministerial travel. It manages funding for the promotion of the DFAT's six high level goals through the Promotion and Outreach Programme. Other responsibilities include a commercial attaché programme; a contacts and events management platform for the mission network; the organisation of Joint Economic Commissions with China, Russia, Korea and Saudi Arabia; and providing detailed messaging and briefing on economic and trade matters to the mission network. Trade Division took responsibility for the organisation of Ireland's participation in Expo Dubai (see separate note).

Trade Division has responsibility for DFAT's engagement on a number of whole-of-government strategies and cross-departmental working groups. These include: *Future Jobs* - which seeks to position Ireland's economy for the future; *Ireland for Finance* - the government's strategy for international financial services; *international taxation and double taxation agreements* - the department plays a role in initiating and progressing DTAs, and works closely with the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners; *Innovation 2027* - the government's innovation strategy

### ***Expo Team***

DFAT has taken responsibility for Ireland's participation in Expo Dubai, October 2021 to March 2022. Expo is a unique global opportunity to promote Ireland. Our theme is *Ireland, Island of Inspiration*. Evoking Ireland's heritage of and capacity speculative thought, innovation for the real world and creativity, the pavilion, exhibition and six month programme will use Ireland's cultural, historical and social identity to stimulate a creative experience in the pavilion and online to captivate and inspire visitors. This directly connects with Expo's over-arching theme of '*Connecting Minds and Creating the Future*'. Related

events, trade shows, and networking will boost Ireland's profile and business opportunities in the region and globally.

Preparations are at an advanced stage as arrangements go into hibernation due to the one-year postponement. The construction of the Irish pavilion will be completed in September 2020. A permanent immersive exhibition to be housed within the pavilion is also under development. The Department has developed a very strong six month 'Be Inspired' programme of activities and events. The programme includes proposals from some 45 Irish organisations, including ten Government Departments and state agencies, to be delivered at the Irish pavilion and across the Expo site. March 17<sup>th</sup> has been reserved to celebrate our national day across Expo, with a high-level visitor expected to attend the ceremonies. Discussions are underway to link this with the National Day events in Ireland.

An early decision to have a performance space at the centre of our presence, and to record all performances, discussions, and activities, will ensure that even with Covid-19 restrictions, our presence at Expo will be streamed online and content shared across the mission network and at home. A strong Ministerial presence at Expo is required, to consolidate new and strengthened partnerships emerging as a result of Ireland's participation at Expo.

### **Regional issues: Asia Pacific**

In January 2020, DFAT published a new, whole-of-government multi-year strategy for Asia Pacific that covers political, economic and people-to-people relations in an integrated fashion. The strategy was developed around five, high-level objectives which will see Ireland more engaged, trading more, and executing a collaborative Team Ireland approach across several departments and the state agencies by 2025.

Ireland is currently represented by 15 missions in 11 countries in the region. The current footprint represents a significant investment in recent years (4 new since 2014), and the Asia Pacific Strategy has committed to third consulate in China, and to an embassy in Manila, Philippines, by 2025.

The Asia Pacific region can play a key role in the task of national economic recovery. A key target of the AP Strategy is to achieve a two-way trading relationship of €100 billion by 2025 – this is from a baseline of more than €56 billion in 2018. The EU has prioritised the development of economic ties with the region, signing FTAs with Japan, Singapore and Vietnam in recent years, and negotiations are underway with Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia. Ireland fully supports the economic diplomacy led by the EU. Realising our €100 billion target, and the opportunities presented by FTAs, will only be possible if we significantly scale up our visibility in the region. Ministerial visits and trade missions will continue to be a key element of our approach, as pandemic restrictions are lifted.

Ireland's relations with China are generally positive and closely linked to the EU perspective on China. The EU has shifted towards a firmer approach towards China since 2019, when it described China simultaneously as a partner, competitor and systemic rival for the Union.

Ireland supports the EU's approach to relations with China, which recognises the opportunities for cooperation as well as the challenges in the relationship. We believe that EU unity is key when dealing with issues in our relationship with China.

Ireland is investing strongly in its ambition to bring our relations and exchanges with Japan to a new, higher level. Japan offers significant opportunities for Ireland, as a like-minded partner on the international stage and our 10th largest trading partner. A key investment in the relationship is the commitment to negotiating in 2020 a new bilateral framework agreement, to be signed at Prime Minister level. The winning design of the new Tokyo Ireland House, the largest overseas capital investment by Ireland, is due to be announced in the coming weeks.

India faces major political challenges while struggling to reopen its economy as COVID-19 cases have spiked. In August 2019, India abrogated the special status of Kashmir and Jammu, India's only Muslim-majority State. Pakistan has repeatedly called for a Security Council debate, with support from China. Twenty Indian soldiers were killed recently in a brutal clash along a disputed border with China, in a region which was hived off from Jammu and Kashmir last year.

The 10 country bloc of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the sixth largest economy in the world and has a collective population of just under 650 million. Strong medium and long term growth prospects, and a rapidly expanding consumer class, make the region a key opportunity for post-Brexit market diversification. Values based diplomacy also forms a pillar of our engagement in the region; Embassy Hanoi operates a regional development programme with Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, with the latter two countries the subject of significant attention by EU and UN human rights mechanisms.

Since end-March, approx. 2,000 citizens have had assistance with repatriation from Australia and New Zealand, both of which countries remain closed to normal travel from Ireland for the foreseeable future. The Australian economy has entered recession for the first time in 29 years but almost all businesses have now re-opened with social distancing.

DPRK is a regular discussion item at the Security Council. The positive atmosphere generated by the Inter-Korean dialogues and US-DPRK summits of 2018-2019 has been replaced by a more confrontational stance from DPRK since January. There is currently little chance of a breakthrough. Ireland, along with our EU partners, approaches DPRK from a position of "critical engagement", supporting efforts at dialogue while fully implementing sanctions until clear, concrete progress on complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearisation has been made. We also seek to highlight the need to maintain a focus on the serious humanitarian and human rights situation in the DPRK.

In addition to bilateral links, there are several multilateral opportunities to advance Ireland's interests in the region. Our position on the UNSC will be a key forum for engagement with China and India (also on the council for 2021-22). Ministerial attendance will be required at annual Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) events - a forum of 51 European and Asia countries, plus the EU and ASEAN.

The Asia Pacific Strategy has established the roadmap for the development of Ireland's relationship with this vast and diverse region in the years ahead. Realising the ambition outlined within it, and achieving the five high-level goals (political, economic, culture/diaspora, visibility, and Team Ireland) will require sustained collaboration both at HQ and in the field as the region emerges from the pandemic. Regular ministerial engagement with the region, through visits overseas, high-level meetings at international fora, and through bilateral contacts with those embassies accredited to Ireland, will be crucial.

### **Enlargement/Western Balkans**

Ireland has a long-standing pro-enlargement stance. The accession process is the most efficient foreign policy instrument the EU can use to anchor long-term stability and peace in the Western Balkans. The enlargement process was boosted by the March EU Council decision to open negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. Draft negotiating frameworks for both countries will be discussed over the summer. A newly agreed enlargement methodology will apply to North Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro. Discussions continue with Serbia on whether they will to be covered by this. Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina are at an early stage of their EU path. The Turkish accession process remains frozen.

### **Russia and Ukraine**

The Tánaiste met with Russian FM Lavrov in July 2019, the first meeting at that level for several years. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] We are due to host the 13<sup>th</sup> Ireland-Russia Joint Economic Commission in 2021. The development of a constructive working relationship with Russia on the Security Council will be a priority.

Ireland is to open an Embassy in Kyiv in 2020, and is to arrange a high-level visit when conditions allow. The conflict in eastern Ukraine is on the Security Council agenda and has been a dominant issue at the OSCE. The December 2020 OSCE Ministerial Council would be an ideal opportunity to meet with stakeholders - the Russian and Ukrainian Foreign Ministers both usually attend.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean**

The Programme for Government commits to publishing a whole-of-government Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean, the first ever Government strategy for the region, providing for the modernisation and deepening of partnerships with countries in the region as envisaged in *Global Ireland 2025* and its ambition to double our global footprint. This comprehensive new strategy for the region will be developed as a priority with a view to



launching it in early autumn. It will take full account of the COVID-19 context and the opportunities for trade and investment with the region in the recovery phase.

An early visit to the region by the new Minister is recommended to launch the new Strategy and officially open new Missions in Bogotá and Santiago. Such a visit may have to happen in virtual format depending on COVID-19-related developments.

The Programme for Government also prioritises the deepening of relations with Small Island Developing States (SIDS). An expert level sectoral dialogue covering a number of policy and technical areas is currently being planned for the fifteen Caribbean SIDS.

### **International Legal issues**

#### ***SECCO membership***

Following Ireland's election to the Security Council for 2021-22, Legal Division will undertake significant preparatory work with Political Division and other colleagues in relation to legal issues arising, including sanctions, IHL and international criminal justice issues.

#### ***Brexit***

Legal Division will engage closely with EU and IUKA Division colleagues and others in the Department/Government on Brexit-related issues. In addition, the Division will continue to advise and participate on work in relation to the Common Travel Area, in particular the areas of health and education, and to prepare for a plenary CTA meeting with the UK this autumn.

#### ***Northern Ireland***

Legal Division will advise IUKA on ongoing discussions with the UK on structures to address the Legacy of the Past, including on the new approaches unilaterally announced by the UK Government in mid-March, and will also support IUKA Division in continuing efforts to seek to ensure appropriate implementation of European Court of Human Rights judgments against the UK.

#### ***Legal issues relating to the Middle East***

Legal Division will advise Political Division on international law issues in relation to the Middle East Peace Process, in particular in relation to the response to any purported annexation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory by Israel in violation of international law.

#### ***Disarmament***

Legal Division will assist Political Division with the conclusion of an International Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from Humanitarian Harm arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, including arrangements for the adoption of the final Declaration.

#### ***Legislation: Maritime Jurisdiction Bill***

Legal Division is progressing legislation to revise and consolidate the State's maritime jurisdiction legislation, entitled the 'Maritime Jurisdiction Bill'. The General Scheme of the Bill has been approved by Government and is currently being finalised by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel. The Bill will consolidate the State's existing maritime jurisdiction legislation and update it to reflect developments in international law since that legislation was first enacted in 1959. The Bill will complement the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill and the Marine Planning Policy Statement being brought forward by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

### ***International Criminal Court***

Legal Division will work with the Department of Justice and Equality to progress legislation related to Ireland's ratification of amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

### ***Ministerial Orders***

Legal Division will progress the drafting of Ministerial Orders under the Protection of Children (Hague Convention) Act 2000 and the Child Abduction and Enforcement of Custody Orders Act 1991.

Legal Division will progress the drafting of Ministerial Orders on extradition in relation to Australia; the extension of European Arrest Warrant to Norway and Iceland; and mutual legal assistance.

### ***International legal/human rights proceedings***

Legal Division acts as the Government's 'Agent' in cases before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and performs a similar role with respect to the European Committee on Social Rights (ESCR) and UN Human Rights Treaty monitoring bodies, working with policy colleagues, line Departments and the Office of the Attorney General, and has a role in ensuring implementation of judgments of the ECtHR and follow up of the opinions and views of the other bodies. Many of these cases give rise to controversy and media comment.

There are five applications against the State pending before the ECtHR. Three involve women who were the subject of symphysiotomies in Irish maternity hospitals in the 1960s. A case has been brought by John Gilligan alleging a breach of rights arising out of delays before the Irish Courts in proceedings challenging the seizure of his assets by the Criminal Assets Bureau. The State is opposing these applications. Finally, Deputy Róisín Shorthall and others are challenging the religious oath to be made by the President and members of the Council of State. This case has only recently been received and no position has been taken on whether to oppose the application.

There are a number of cases awaiting implementation, including a cluster on delay in court proceedings and the lack of an effective remedy for this delay, dating back as far as 10 years ago. There is also a case (brought by Louise O'Keeffe) relating to the liability of the State for sexual abuse by teachers.

There are two applications pending before the ECSR. The first relates to the lack of a possibility for members of the Defence Forces to terminate their service on the grounds of conscientious objection. In the second, the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI) complain about their pay and conditions.

There are two applications before UN Human Rights Treaty Monitoring Bodies : an application brought before the UN Human Rights Committee [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]; and an application brought before the UN Committee against Torture [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

### ***Negotiations***

Legal Division will continue to support efforts at UN level to adopt, by 2021, a new international Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), to include the creation of a mechanism for establishing high seas marine protected areas.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Legal Division will seek to move forward with the Department of Justice and Equality on delayed negotiations with Brazil and Canada in relation to the conclusion of bilateral extradition agreements and, in the longer term, will seek to engage with the Department of Justice and Equality with a view to agreeing a strategic approach to the negotiation and conclusion of agreements with third countries concerning international cooperation in criminal matters.

Legal Division will work with the Department of Justice and Equality to provide input into the drafting of a new Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes, and Crimes Against Humanity – [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

### **Press and Communications**

The Department's Communications Unit is relatively new. It has responsibility for the traditional press and information work carried out by the Department as well as a new focus on direct public engagement, including public diplomacy and managing major public information programmes and campaigns, many of which have a cross-government dimension. It has particular responsibility for the external promotion of the activities and

objectives of the Government's Overseas Development Programme (Irish Aid) and it manages the Department's social media presence.

Recent/ongoing activities include Brexit Preparedness; Ireland's election to the UN Security Council; promotion of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals; the promotion campaign around the Rugby World Cup in Japan; the new passport online service and the communication of the Department's Travel Advice.

The Unit is increasingly called upon to generate or commission graphic design and multimedia content to support and promote the activities of business units across the Department. This trend for greater use of digital platforms and engagement has accelerated as a result of the COVID restrictions halting many of the everyday activities and events that make up the normal business planning of the Department and its Mission network. Meeting this demand is a major challenge for the Unit in the period ahead.

The Unit provides guidance on best communications practice, data analytics, and website and online platform training to Missions and HQ. This includes practical training on mobile journalism (MOJO) and digital storytelling, and the production of video output and provision of photography services. While a small number of our larger Missions have dedicated press/comms officers, the vast majority do not and are heavily reliant on the support provided by the Comms team at HQ.

**The Press Office** handles relations with the media, media aspects of major visits and events, and is the main focal point in the Unit supporting the Offices of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Ministers of State and operates the main twitter account.

**The Public Outreach** team is responsible for the public diplomacy and external promotion work of the Department, especially Irish Aid. They manage the Department's social media presence and work with business units to deliver a strategic and joined-up approach to the Department's external communications and public facing work.

**The Web and Digital** team manage the Department's and Missions' suite of 80+ websites and online digital services. They also produce photographic, film and other audiovisual content for use online and in publications.

**The Brexit Communications** team works across Departments and Agencies to ensure coordinated Government messaging on Brexit, with a particular focus on preparedness and information sharing. The Unit has organized stakeholder fora across Ireland.

## **Culture**

To deliver the ambitious cultural objectives of Global Ireland and create more strategic depth for Ireland's cultural diplomacy and soft power, DFAT established a new Culture Unit in mid-2019. Working in partnership with D/Culture, initiatives include the appointment of specialist officers to drive cultural promotion in key locations including Berlin, New York and London (with more to follow), the negotiation of a global strategic partnership with the British Council, and investment in Ireland's flagship cultural centres abroad, in particular New York and Paris. Since COVID, DFAT has been pioneering new models of digital

programming in collaboration with the Mission network, including an ambitious global initiative for Bloomsday 2020. Planning is also taking shape for an international cultural programme in 2022 to mark the centenaries of the State and of the publication of *Ulysses*.

***Policy Planning Unit***  
***DFAT***  
***26 June 2020***

## **Corporate Services and Financial Issues**

### **Corporate Services Division: Overview and Key Priorities**

#### ***Background***

Corporate Services Division supports the effective operation of the Department and oversees adherence to statutory obligations, at home and abroad. This includes management of staff, ICT, properties and corporate compliance. The Division comprises 160 officers and services the needs of the Department and staff across twenty HQ buildings on the island of Ireland and ninety locations overseas. Divisional units are Human Resources, ICT, Property Management, Security and Corporate Compliance and Corporate Services Management.

Austin Gormley is the Director General of Corporate Services Division. His role is to provide policy advice to the Secretary General and Management Board in relation to these corporate services functions including: ensuring the delivery of key strategies and major projects; ensuring oversight, control and value of money over expenditure in this area; overseeing statutory schemes and programmes relating to corporate services functions; and overseeing appointments, assignments and postings, performance and discipline of personnel and other HR issues across the Department.

#### ***Overview of current operations***

Over the past five years, the Department has undergone a period of unprecedented expansion at a time also of fast-paced change and modernisation both in how we present ourselves and in how we manage and deliver our internal and external services. “Global Ireland” set a goal for Ireland’s global footprint to double in the period to 2025. Thirteen new missions have been opened or announced since June 2018 and our diplomatic representation has expanded by nearly 20 percent. To meet this ambition, the Department has needed to recruit and restructure where necessary. Since 2017, staffing in the Department has expanded by approximately one third. A total of 321 new entrants joined the Department in 2019 alone, an increase of 12 percent on total headcount.

Arising from Corporate Services Division front line role in meeting the staffing, property, ICT and compliance requirements from this expansion, the division itself has needed to increase its capacity and resourcing. This has taken place through the recruitment of technical and professional expertise, the upskilling and augmenting of staff within core areas and certain restructuring to ensure cohesion and coherency in approach. This resourcing has been underpinned by the development of strategies in the areas of Human Resources and ICT, a governance framework for the management of our property portfolio and a much stronger focus and cross Departmental awareness building of fundamental compliance functions and requirements (including in the areas of data protection and GDPR, security including HQ and mission requirements, and the necessity for robust knowledge and records management systems).

This investment in return has allowed for: (1) a much stronger strategic approach to the management of the Department's human resources; (2) enhanced ICT capacity building (including our ICT platforms, our equipment and our cyber security); (3) the consolidation of a professionalisation of our approach to property management; (4) the professionalisation of core compliance and service delivery areas including in security, data protection, health and safety and ICT; and (5) effective management of the expansion of the Department, enhanced mitigation of risk, and more recently, a coherent, agile and effective cross-divisional response to the Covid crisis.

### ***Challenges***

Covid-19 has had a profound impact on our Department's operating environment. Nearly all of the Department moved almost overnight to remote working on 12 March and has continued to do so. There will, for the foreseeable future, be continued constraints on public engagement, on travel and on our ways of working across HQ and the mission network. Thus far as a Department, we have been resilient to these impacts. However, significant challenges remain, including in our missions abroad and in those regions where the impacts of the virus have not yet been felt, and at home, as we take a phased approach towards a safe return to the workplace starting with the Passport Service.

The impact of the virus will continue to shape and, in some instances, accelerate areas of Corporate Services Division's work, including our approach to our future ways of working and the supports we can develop and deliver for our staff; our strategic workforce planning and our capacity to respond to crises and ensure resilience and agility; the resourcing of our offices overseas; our ICT and digital platforms and how they can best deliver for us; and our ongoing response to Covid-related risks including to the health, safety and security of our staff at home and abroad.

Alongside this, the Division will need to continue to deliver upon the Department's modernisation agenda and requirements arising from the Department's major priorities. These include our commitments under Global Ireland; operational impacts arising from Brexit; the requirements to service our UN Security Council seat; the requirements arising from Ireland's national and international climate commitments and our transition into becoming a Green Foreign Ministry and the Department's important role in supporting a post-Covid national recovery effort. Overall, there will be a need to ensure that Department remains agile and effective and that we have the right people in the right places with the right mix of skills and the right technology to deliver.

### ***Key immediate priorities***

Major priorities for the period ahead include:

- To ensure the safe working of all our staff and visitors in all our workplaces at home and abroad;
- To continue to respond effectively to and manage the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on all of our staff and on our operations and maintain the focus on core priorities;

- To respond adequately to the needs of our posted and local staff overseas including through a flexible model for relief of our staff overseas and temporary deployments;
- To continue to mitigate against Covid related risks including against any future resurgence and to enhance DFTA business continuity and crisis management structures;
- To continue to develop policies and advice on health and safety and travel and ensure a reinforcement of security capacity at HQ and abroad;
- To continue to invest in knowledge management, ICT, digital platforms and digital skills for all staff, including our local staff abroad, and deliver enhanced training and VC and IT connectivity; to advance key modernisation projects including contacts, grants and records management
- To ensure that we have the right skills and knowledge to deliver Global Ireland including through finalisation of a new Learning and Development Framework (including for local staff) and in the introduction of a first Foreign Languages Policy;
- To embed sustainability as a core value of the Department at home and abroad and lead on the operational transition of the Department into a Green Foreign Ministry including via the measurement and significant reduction of our carbon footprint;
- To advance a new DFAT Property Management Strategy and to advance major projects including Bishop's Square, Iveagh House, Ireland Houses in Tokyo and Abuja, and Embassy London;
- To continue to build a positive, diverse and innovative workplace including through the mainstreaming of Gender, Equality, Inclusion and Diversity in all of our policies and practices.

**Corporate Services Division  
25 June 2020**



## **Financial Overview Note**

The Department's spending in 2020 is allocated across six Expenditure Programmes, which correspond to the High-Level Goals as set out in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2017–2020.

Five of these Programmes are managed through the Vote 28 (Foreign Affairs and Trade) expenditure framework and the remaining one through the Vote 27 (International Co-Operation) framework.

	<b>Vote 27</b>	<b>Vote 28</b>
REV 2020	€550.7M	€270.5M
REV 2019	€544.9M	€257.5M

The following is the financial situation as of end May 2020:

### **Vote 27 Gross Expenditure is €16.2m ahead of profile mainly due to earlier payment of grants:**

- Pay is broadly on profile.
- Non-pay is €1.4m behind profile across all subheads reflecting the general COVID-19 slowdown.
- Programmes grants are €17.6m ahead profile reflecting the earlier payment of grants as part of the Department's COVID19 response.

### **Vote 28 Gross Expenditure is €10.0m behind profile mainly due to slow down in operational expenditure resulting from the COVID-19 crisis worldwide:**

- Pay is on profile.
- The remainder of the subheads are behind profile reflecting the general COVID-19 slowdown in operations. We expect them to come back on profile later in the year.

## **COVID-19 Additional Costs**

For the Department, there are 3 new areas incurring COVID19 related costs:

### **1. Repatriation Flights**

As of end May, the total cost of repatriations of stranded Irish citizens amounted to €1.3m broken down as follows:

- €0.475m recouped from citizens to date
- €0.173m amounts due from individuals
- €0.654m amounts claimed from the EU

It is too early at this stage to estimate the likely cost to DFAT of the repatriation flights. To date the Department is in the main recouping the cost of the flights from citizens (using a Departmental PayPal account) and the EU. The final cost will depend on the success of the collection of the amounts owed.

## 2. Emergency Relief Mechanism Pending Repatriation

This mechanism is targeted at citizens who are abroad on a non-permanent basis and are vulnerable while awaiting repatriation flights. To date, there has been limited uptake of this mechanism with a total of €3,524 dispersed. A number of Embassies have also accessed the fund to assist a small number of individuals in financial distress and provided non-flight cost related financial assistance.

## 3. COVID-19 Response Fund for Irish Communities Abroad (CRF)

This is focused on protecting and supporting our Irish communities abroad, as they face new challenges resulting from the crisis. ESP have reprioritised €2.5m from within its 2020 allocation of €12.6m for this CRF. To date ESP have sanctioned to €1,053,168 for 61 projects mainly in Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

### Other Issues to Note:

#### United Nations Security Council

Ireland's term on the Security Council will require a significant and substantial commitment by the Department in both human and other resources. We estimate that for the remainder of this year the cost will be circa €2m in staffing costs. Annually for 2021 and 2022, it will be circa €4m per annum for staffing costs.

#### EXPO - Dubai

A formal decision has been taken to put the event back 12 months due to the pandemic. The Programme of events will now run from October 2021 to April 2022. The construction of the Irish pavilion is approaching 60% complete. OPW are managing this construction project and they plan to complete the construction and then mothball the building until next year (this will incur security and maintenance costs during the mothballed period). Due to on-site COVID19 restrictions, it is anticipated that construction will now be completed at the end of September 2020.

#### Global Ireland Strategy

Embassies are now open in Wellington, Monrovia, Bogotá, Santiago and Amman, and Consulates General are open in Vancouver, Mumbai, Cardiff, Frankfurt and Los Angeles. Roll out is ongoing but some of our permanent office location projects have been delayed due to national lockdowns e.g. Mumbai, Wellington, and Vancouver. We expect these to complete once the contractors are allowed to return to site. In relation to the 3 new missions (Rabat, Manila and Kyiv) planned for later this year it looks like these will be delayed, but a diplomatic presence could be on site by the end of this year. Consideration is being given to the next phase of the rollout commencing in 2021 and the location for new missions.

Design work on Ireland House in Tokyo is continuing. The Department is nearly ready to announce the winning design under the design competition and will then move to the detailed design stage of the process.

