

## Europe Division

1. Europe Division was set up in 2011 following the transfer of responsibility for European Union issues to the Department of the Taoiseach. The Division manages all aspects of Ireland's **bilateral relations** with more than 50 countries in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. These include all EU Member States (with the exception of the UK, which is handled by Anglo Irish Division), Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the countries of the Western Balkans. It is also responsible for two key external policies of the Union- Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy, including its two regional dimensions - the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean.
2. The Division provides support and guidance to 32 bilateral missions under its remit in promoting our political, economic, trade and cultural interests in EU countries and those in the surrounding neighbourhood. This involves bilateral issues as disparate and wide-ranging as agreements on double taxation and adoptions, raising human rights concerns, as well as coordinating efforts aimed at the recovery of State assets, principally in Russia and Ukraine. The Division is also actively engaged in assisting Irish companies experiencing commercial difficulties in a number of the countries within its remit.
3. On EU-related issues, the Division works closely with the EU Affairs and Coordination Division in the Department of the Taoiseach (see separate brief by that Division).
4. Strengthening bilateral relations with countries in Europe is central to the Division's work. The response to the economic and financial crisis which engulfed the country demonstrated the value of strong bilateral ties with fellow member states in the European Union, and beyond. The network of diplomatic missions across Europe, with the support of the Division, will continue to play a key role in helping to restore Ireland's economic fortunes and improve our reputation. Full advantage will be taken of the goodwill that now exists towards Ireland to further leverage opportunities to advance our bilateral trade and economic agenda. This will be achieved through high level visits and events, the continued use of public diplomacy and the pursuit of bilateral initiatives on trade, culture, education and tourism.
5. Ireland is a strong supporter of **enlargement** policy, which is one of the EU's most powerful tools in pursuing our strategic objective of promoting peace, stability, democracy and prosperity throughout Europe.
6. The Division coordinates with other Government Departments in identifying and promoting issues of national interest in the EU's negotiations with enlargement countries. We work closely with the Permanent Representation in Brussels in advancing Ireland's positions.

7. Ireland is a strong advocate of the on-going EU accession negotiations with Turkey, Montenegro and Serbia. Our support for Turkey's EU accession process complements our goal of deepening our bilateral relations with Turkey, which has been identified as an exploratory and high potential market in the Government's Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy.
8. Iceland is still officially a candidate for EU membership, although the Icelandic Government is currently considering its application following its decision last year to place the accession negotiations on hold.
9. Ireland supports the opening of accession negotiations with Macedonia, which has been a candidate since 2005. We also supported the recent granting of candidate status to Albania. We are strong advocates of both Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo advancing on the path to EU membership.
10. The crisis in **Ukraine** continues to be a major focus. The Division works closely with the Permanent Representation in Brussels in developing and articulating Ireland's national position within the EU and in preparing for discussions at political-level meetings including the Foreign Affairs Council, General Affairs Council and European Council. We are also in regular contact with our multilateral missions to the UN in New York and Geneva as well as to the OSCE in Vienna and to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The crisis in Ukraine, coupled with the profound implications for the EU's relationship with Moscow, will remain at the top of the international agenda for some time. We will continue to support international efforts aimed at de-escalating the crisis and finding a peaceful inclusive and negotiated settlement.
11. In the area of EU external relations, the Division leads on **the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**, which was established in 2004 in order to strengthen relations between the EU and countries in its southern and eastern neighbourhood and build partnerships with these countries which reinforce democracy and promote economic prosperity. Within the ENP, a key focus for us has been the development of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), during a period of turbulence marked by the crisis in Ukraine and the resulting regional instability. In spite of this challenging background, progress has been made, with the recent signature by the EU and Member States of Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The Division will handle the necessary preparations for Ireland's ratification of these Agreements, and ensure a strong national contribution to the further development of the EaP, ahead of the next Eastern Partnership Summit, to take place in Riga in May 2015.
12. Improving the overall effectiveness of the European Neighbourhood Policy is expected to be a key imperative for the new Commission and new High Representative after they assume office later this year. Member States will also be

closely involved in this process and this Division will lead Ireland's input to the policy discussion.

13. The Division covers developments in the former Soviet Republics in Eastern Europe, the **Caucasus and Central Asia**, with a particular focus on the protracted conflicts in that region. These include Moldova and its breakaway region of Transdniestria, where the so called "5+2 talks" have been ongoing in an attempt to resolve the dispute. In the Caucasus region, the Geneva international discussions, arising from the 2008 conflict in Georgia and involving the UN, EU, OSCE, Georgia, Russia and the breakaway Georgian entities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia continue. Also in the Caucasus region, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict involving both Armenia and Azerbaijan is a key security concern, and the Division closely follows the mediation efforts of the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.

Europe Division, July 2014

