



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

Ministerial Brief

December 2022

EUROPEAN UNION DIVISION

European Union Division is a division of 42 staff led by Director General Alma Ní Choigligh and has its office on Clare Street. There are 6 Directors and 5 Units: GAC Policy II/Enlargement and Western Balkans Unit led by Pat Kelly; EU Policy 1 led by Olive Hempenstall; EU Institutions and Coordination led by Aoife McGarry; Council of Europe led by Ragnar Almqvist; and EU-UK led by Karl Gardner and Deirdre Farrell.

Broadly, the Division develops and co-ordinates Ireland's EU policy. This includes Ireland's policy on and approach to the UK's withdrawal from the EU as well as coordinating the Government's overall response to Brexit. In close conjunction with the Permanent Representation, Brussels and Irish Embassies in the other EU Member States, EUD is responsible for seeking to ensure that they understand and where possible support Irish positions on EU issues.

The Division also has responsibility for Irish policy towards the Western Balkans and Turkey and for Ireland's participation in the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The Division oversees Ireland's bilateral relations with all European states, EU and non-EU, and manages the Department's 41 European missions. The Division is also responsible for Communicating Europe initiatives (including EU50) and the implementation of the *A Career for EU* Strategy.

Below provides a summary of key topical issues across each of the Unit's areas of work including notable upcoming diary dates and suggested engagement with key partners in the New Year. A summary of important dates also below:

Dates

Anniversary of 50 years of EU membership	1 January
EU Heads of Mission lunch (Swedish Presidency)	12 January
General Affairs Council	24 January
<i>TBC Visit by ECtHR President Siofra O'Leary</i>	<i>1 February</i>
General Affairs Council	21 February
General Affairs Council	21 March
European Council	23 March
General Affairs Council	25 April
Europe Day	9 May
General Affairs Council	30 May
General Affairs Council	27 June

1. GAC Policy II/Enlargement and Western Balkans Units


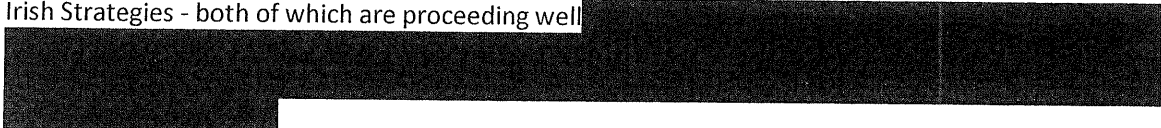
Director: Pat Kelly

General Affairs Council

The General Affairs Council coordinates preparations for European Council meetings. It is also responsible for a number of cross-cutting policy areas. The General Affairs Council is mainly made up of the European Affairs Ministers from all EU member states. The European Commission is usually represented by the Commissioner for inter-institutional relations, depending on the matter discussed. GAC meetings are held once a month, with the planned dates in the first half of 2023 being 24 January, 21 February, 21 March, 25 April, 30 May and 27 June.

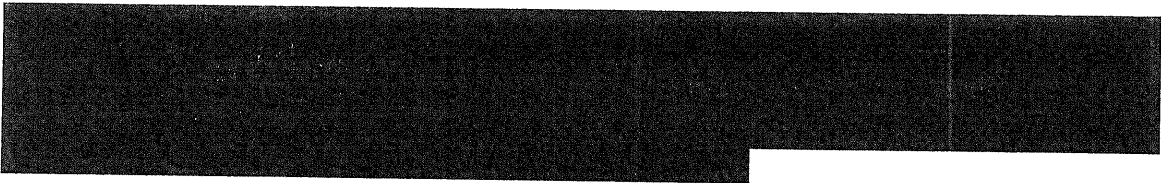
Bilateral relations

The GAC Policy II unit leads on bilateral relations with Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg. This includes implementation of two major strategies – the French Irish and the German Irish Strategies - both of which are proceeding well



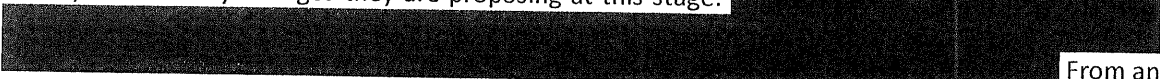
Enlargement/Western Balkans

The Enlargement and Western Balkans Unit is responsible for Ireland's approach to EU Enlargement and also handles bilateral relations with countries in South-East Europe and the Western Balkans (Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Romania, Slovenia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey). **Western Balkans** continues to be a major focus **at EU level**. The EU-Western Balkans Summit in Tirana on 6 December was attended by the Taoiseach. Council Conclusions on Enlargement were agreed at the December GAC, including a positive decision on granting EU candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina. This decision is likely to be endorsed by the European Council meeting on 15 December.



Conference on the Future of Europe

A feedback event took place on the **Conference on the Future of Europe** (CoFoE) on Friday 2 December 2022 and generated a good follow-up discussion between citizens and those representing the Institutions. The Czech Presidency was very effective in coherently setting out the Council's position and making clear that the Council is happy to advance the CoFoE proposals where possible. As regards Treaty change, the Council will await hearing further from the European Parliament on exactly what Treaty changes they are proposing at this stage.



From an Irish perspective, it is important that all the Institutions continue working together to help implement the implementable recommendations and proposals arising from the Conference.

2. EU Policy 1 including Nordic, Baltic, Arctic and the OECD

Director: Olive Hempenstall

Current Priorities

- Ongoing engagement with a number of key crosscutting EU files of major interest to Ireland including in the Fit for 55 legislative package, the Single Market (SMEI), the Environment and Climate (Nature Restoration), Digital (Chips Act, Data Act, AI Act), Finance (MFF/EU element of financing for Ukraine) and Maritime (CISE engagement, Mission ocean.)
- Work on engaging earlier with the Commission on their work programme and the EU's legislative agenda, particularly in the context of Ireland's forthcoming Presidency.
- Implementation of the Nordic Strategy and a strong working relationship with the Nordic Baltic counties and our missions in the region.
- Engagement with the OECD at a policy and administrative level ongoing, which is of growing importance in terms of whole-of-Government policy making.

Ministerial engagements

[REDACTED]

Upcoming Arctic conferences

- Arctic Frontiers Conference Norway 28th January to 1st February, Norway – a key Arctic conference at which Ireland will be represented.
- EU Commission and EEAS Conference 'Arctic and Indigenous People's Forum' in Nuuk in February 2023.

Policy challenges of next 6 months

[REDACTED]

Key EU crosscutting files

DIGITAL

Digital Transformation is one of the six priorities of the European Commission for 2019-2024. The European Union's digital strategy aims to support people and businesses through the transformation, set strong regulatory standards and support the target of a climate neutral Europe by 2050. DETE and DECC lead on these issues for Ireland.

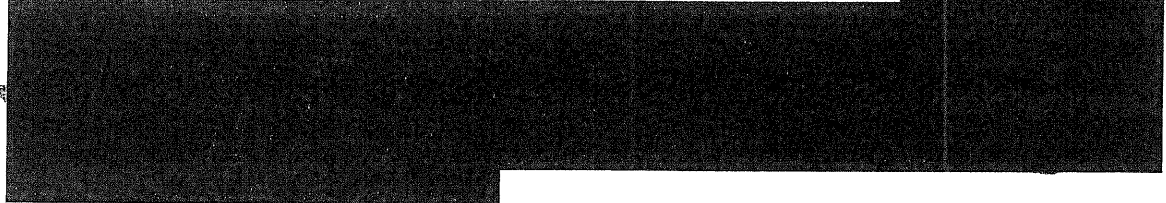
CLIMATE

Member State negotiations on the EU's flagship Fit for 55 climate action programme (which seeks to implement the European Green Deal) were largely concluded under the French Presidency. These agreed positions form the basis for the ongoing tripartite negotiations between the EU institutions (trilogues), with the aim of reaching an agreement on these legislative files. Ireland's level of climate ambition is high but a number of the Fit for 55 proposals will pose challenges for us in terms of delivery.

The national approach is coordinated by DECC under the guidance of a Senior Officials Group on which EU Division is represented.


ENERGY

Energy security and pricing are key issues for Ireland in the coming months.



SINGLE MARKET


Ireland is a strong supporter of the Single Market. It has transformed our economy. We support efforts to protect and enhance its resilience post-COVID. Ireland emphasises greater EU resilience rather than autonomy as our preferred goal. The Commission has recently proposed a Single Market Emergency Instrument as a tool to ensure the Single Market continues to function in times of crisis.



DETE has begun a public consultation on the proposal. Negotiations in Brussels are at a very early stage.

NATURE RESTORATION

As part of the European Green Deal, in 2020 the Commission adopted the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which sets out the general objective of reversing biodiversity loss, so that Europe's biodiversity is on the path to recovery by 2030 and that by 2050, all of the EU's ecosystems are restored, resilient and adequately protected. The Commission's proposals for a Nature Restoration Regulation aims to fulfil this commitment. DHLGH lead on this file through the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It has been agreed that they will require strong cross-Government support and a Senior Officials Group on this issue meets regularly



3. Institutions and Coordination Unit

Director: Aoife McGarry

The unit is responsible for **bilateral relations** with Spain, Portugal, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The unit is also responsible for relations with the European Institutions; an incoming visit by European President Roberta Metsola MEP is likely for 2-3 February [REDACTED]

The unit has responsibility for the **Rule of Law files**. Of note, engagement has recently commenced with the European Commission on preparation of the Ireland country chapter of the **Commission's Annual Rule of Law Report 2023**. This will require EU Division to coordinate inputs sourced from various government departments, principally Departments of Justice, PER, and TCAGSM. The main written deliverable, **due 20 January 2023**, will be a submission that updates on actions Ireland has taken to maintain good rule of law standards and to implement the country specific recommendations set out in our 2022 country chapter. This coordination role will also require facilitation of the state authorities meetings that will form part of the Commission country visit which is expected to take place the week of 6 February. The Minister for European Affairs has joined the start of the prior country visits to welcome the Commission and the rule of law dialogue process. The Annual Rule of Law Report process regularly features as an agenda item at the General Affairs Council.

On the **Communicating Europe** side, the **EU50 programme** is marking key milestones around our 50 years of EU membership which will fall on 1st January 2023. Government Departments, State Agencies, primary, post primary and third level institutions, civil society groups, industry, cultural institutions and our Mission network have all been encouraged to get involved. Ongoing/planned events include the EU50 Iveagh House Lecture series [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the 'Into Europe' Travelling exhibition being prepared by the Royal Irish Academy for display in some public buildings, across the libraries network and by the Mission network; the MYEU50 schools competition (awards event held on 1 December with the 3rd level element to follow in Spring 2023); a special supplement in the Irish Times/Irish Examiner in January; EU50 stamp to be issued on 5 Jan 2023; a commemorative EU coin for issue in 2023; expanded Communicating Europe Initiative (CEI) and outreach with local authorities; an expanded Europe week 2023 schools visits programme involving Ministers and EU Ambassadors. A Memo to Government has been prepared for 13th December 2023 to update on above.

EU Presidency 2026

The unit has also begun planning for the next Irish EU Presidency will be in the second half of 2026, as the first of Trio with Lithuania and Greece. Ireland will be taking over after Cyprus (last of Poland, Denmark trio). [REDACTED]

Interdepartmental Committee on EU engagement (ICEE)

In terms of monitoring the **application of EU Law in Ireland**, the ICEE (Interdepartmental Committee on EU engagement) meets quarterly, chaired by the Minister for European Affairs and covers transposition [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Infringements [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and Ministerial attendance at Councils (formal and informal) and the European Parliament.

Oireachtas Scrutiny/Seanad Reform –A new scrutiny role for the Seanad (to examine EU Statutory Instruments) is also expected to come into effect in Q1 2023. As part of this new process, the MoS EU will meet with the new Seanad Committee, probably on a quarterly basis.

On **EU Careers**, Ireland is in the process of finalising a draft national action plan to be agreed between the Commission (DGHR) and ourselves aimed at ameliorating Irish representation within the Commission. This is expected to take place in Jan/Feb 2023. Recent figures show that Irish officials make up 0.8% of junior Commission staff, half of our guiding rate of 1.6%. In addition to this, approx. 1/3 of Irish Commission officials are expected to retire by 2026. We are also putting in place an agreement with the Institut National du Service Publique (formerly ENA) for targeted training to be provided to Irish candidates going through the concours process. This agreement will commence on 1 January. EU Division will attend a number of career fairs around the country in Jan/Feb 2023. [REDACTED]

4. Council of Europe

Director: Ragnar Almqvist

Key Dates

- 1 February - European Court of Human Rights President Siofra O'Leary to deliver EU50 Brigid's Day Lecture at Iveagh House *TBC*
- 16 / 17 May - Council of Europe Summit in Reykjavik
- 28/29 September - European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments in Dublin

Key Issues & Priorities

Ireland concluded a successful six-month term as chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) in November. Across weekly meetings of the 46 member body and over 40 conferences and seminars in Strasbourg and across Ireland, the Presidency steered the CoE through a turbulent period in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and subsequent expulsion from the organisation. As Chair, Ireland delivered a range of concrete outcomes: backing Ukraine in seeking accountability and joining the CoE Development Bank; establishing the CoE's first structured engagement with democratic opposition in Belarus; securing two Dublin Declarations on Countering Violence against Women and Promoting Global Civic Education respectively; and supporting the election of Irish citizens to senior roles within the CoE.

The Presidency's key achievement, however, was to initiate and lead a process of institutional renewal, driven by Minister Coveney and Minister of State Byrne. Underpinned by a report on the future of the CoE by an eminent persons group chaired by former President Robinson, this effort culminated in November with the Committee of Ministers agreeing to convene just the fourth Summit in the CoE's 73 year history next year in order to reaffirm political commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Ireland will also work to enhance coordination with the OSCE, whose Human Dimension Committee we will chair next year, and the President Biden initiated World Summit for Democracy, where, alongside the European Commission, we are chairing a **Cohort on Deliberative Democracy & Citizens' Assemblies**.

The leader of the Irish Delegation to the CoE's Parliamentary Assembly, Senator Fiona O'Loughlin, is the Assembly's rapporteur on the fourth Summit and will play an important role in its preparation. Beyond Reykjavik, Oireachtas engagement with the CoE will be heightened with the Ceann Comhairle hosting the **European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments, which will see speakers from the 46 CoE members and observer states convene** in Dublin on 28 and 29 September.

Elsewhere, Ireland's immediate focus in Strasbourg will be to consolidate the positive legacy of our Presidency. In particular, Ireland will look to reinforce the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and its guardian, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), of which Irish Judge Siofra O'Leary is now President. President O'Leary is expected to visit Dublin on 1 February, to deliver an EU50 lecture at Iveagh House which will also serve to celebrate St Brigid's Day.

5. EU-UK Update

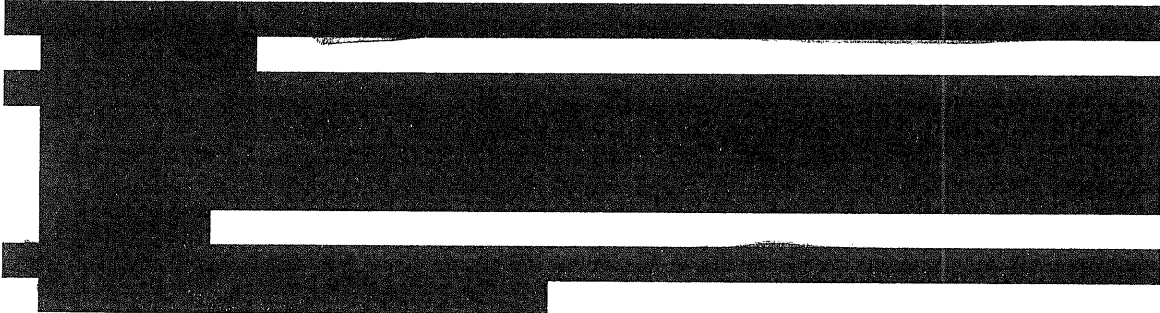
Directors: Karl Gardner and Deirdre Farrell

Overview

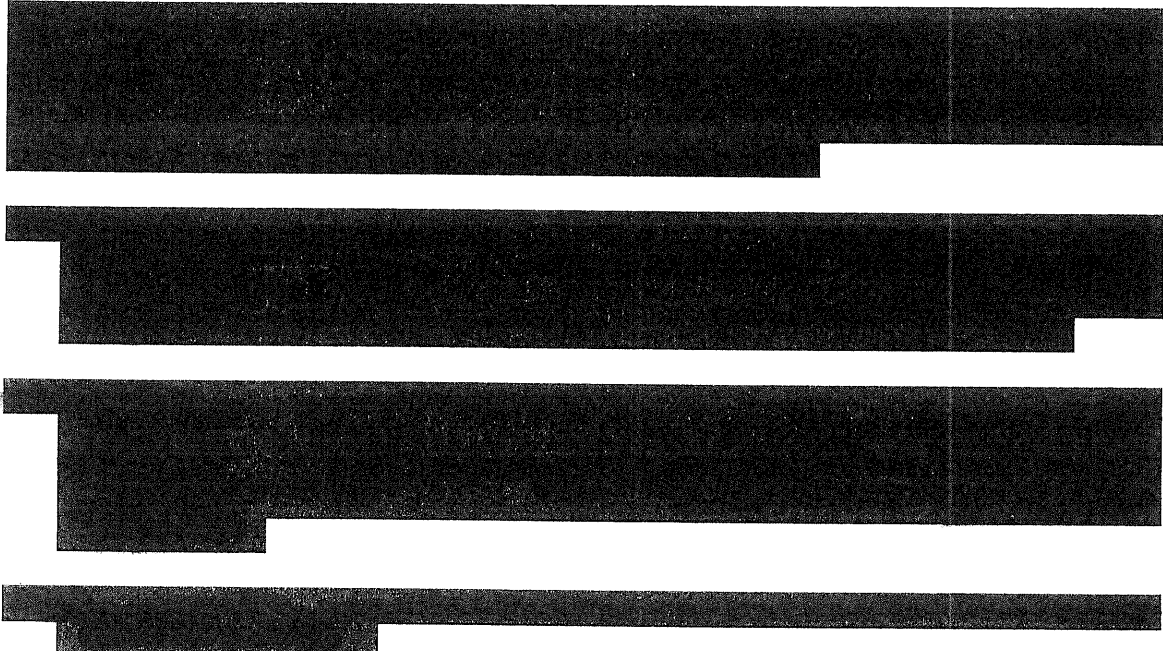
The Minister of State will play a central role (in conjunction with the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs) in coordinating the Government's continuing response to the challenges arising from Brexit and managing the EU-UK relationship. Brexit will feature heavily in the Minister's initial engagements with European counterparts and other stakeholders. While EU Member States approach EU-UK issues in different ways, some at Foreign Minister level and others at Europe Minister level, overall oversight of EU-UK relations falls to the General Affairs Council which the Minister of State for European Affairs attends.

EU-UK Unit in EU Division supports the work of the Minister coordinating with IUKA and the Brexit teams in the Perm Rep Brussels and Embassy London as well as Legal Division and the Communications Unit. The Unit's overall role is to ensure Ireland's interests are represented in the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, the NI Protocol and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), as well as in the development of the EU-UK relationship more broadly. The Unit also works closely with the Department of the Taoiseach and plays a coordinating role on EU-UK issues across all Government Departments.

Key Dates/Engagement by the Minister

A table with redacted content, likely containing dates and details of engagements by the Minister.

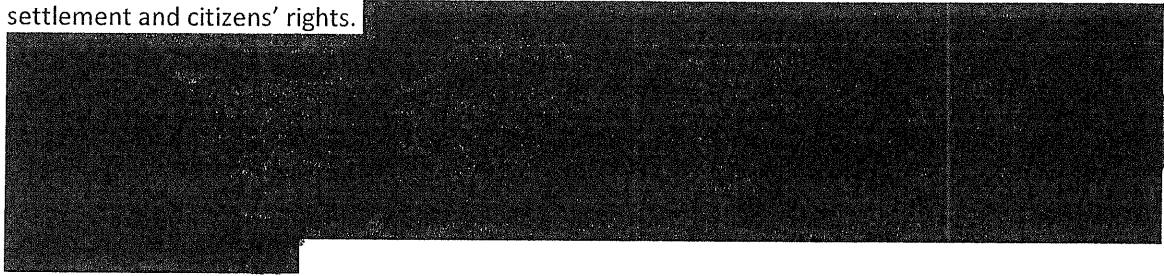
The Protocol on Northern Ireland

A table with redacted content, likely detailing the implementation of the Protocol on Northern Ireland.



Other Withdrawal Agreement issues

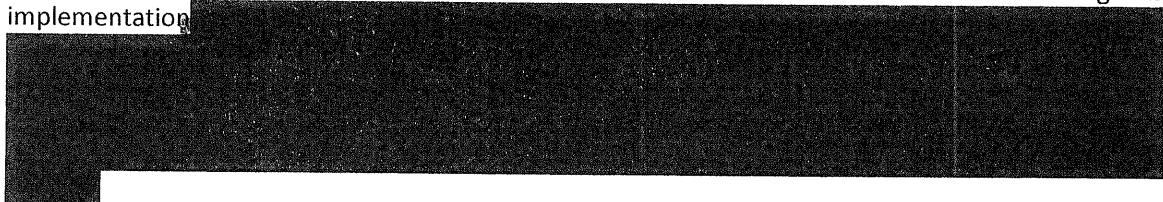
The EU-UK Unit also monitors implementation of the other aspects of the WA, including the financial settlement and citizens' rights.



The Trade and Cooperation Agreement

The TCA is working broadly well, ensuring tariff-free and quota-free trade in goods is continuing and cooperation is on-going in the areas of fisheries, transport, energy, and police and judicial cooperation, all underpinned by the level playing field provisions. However, the frictions around the Protocol cast a shadow over the Agreement and have resulted in the EU holding back on deepening cooperation with the UK in many areas.

EU and UK officials meet regularly through the various committees of the TCA to manage its implementation.




Their ongoing exclusion from EU **Horizon** programme remains an issue for the UK and led them to initiate the TCA dispute resolution process. Consultations took place in September. The UK can now decide if they wish to take the next step and request an independent arbitration tribunal.

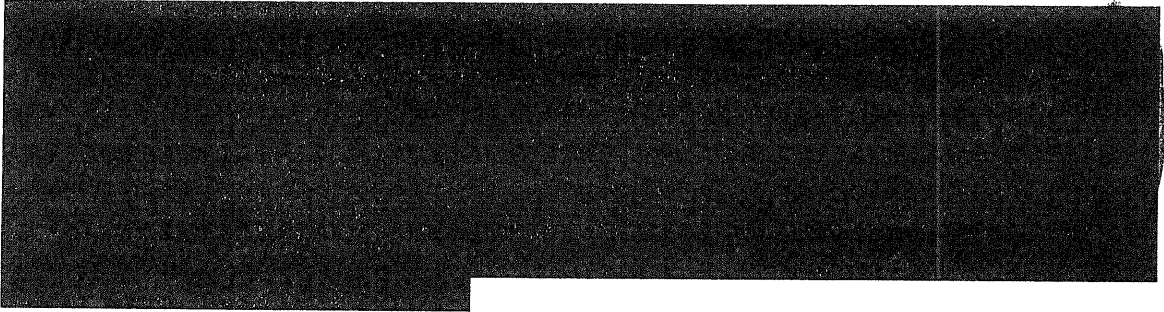
The main TCA governance body, the Trade Partnership Council (co-chaired by VP Sefcovic and FS Cleverly) due to meet early 2023.

Divergence

As the UK seeks to move away from the EU regulatory sphere, in search of Brexit 'dividends', the resulting EU-UK divergence brings significant challenges for Ireland and Irish business. The Department engages with other Departments to assist them in managing the risks arising



Wider EU-UK Relationship



EU Division
14 December 2022