

Fourth meeting of the Government Trade Forum
Monday 28 April, 2025, Italian Room, Government Buildings

In attendance:

Government Ministers

- Simon Harris TD, *Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (chair)*
- Paschal Donohoe TD, *Minister for Finance*
- Jack Chambers TD, *Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform*
- Martin Heydon TD, *Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine*
- Peter Burke TD, *Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment*
- James Lawless TD, *Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science*
- Niamh Smyth TD, *Minister of State, Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment*

Department Officials

- Joe Hackett, Colm Hayes, Maeve Von Heynitz, Robert O' Driscoll, Liam Morris, *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*
- Brendan Gleeson, Sinéad McPhillips, *Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine*
- David Moloney, *Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform*
- John McCarthy, *Department of Finance*
- John Callinan, Helen Blake, *Department of the Taoiseach*
- Ronnie Downes, Brian Keegan, *Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment*
- David Keating, *Department of Further and Higher Education, Innovation, Research and Science*
- Clare Mungovan, Stephen Kinsella, Conor Glynn, *Office of the Tánaiste*

State Agencies

- Jim O'Toole, *Bord Bia*
- Kevin Sherry, *Enterprise Ireland*
- Michael Lohan, *IDA Ireland*
- Dr. Ciarán Seoighe, *Research Ireland*

Representative Groups

- Danny McCoy, Pat Ivory, *Ibec*
- Ian Talbot, *Chambers Ireland*
- Paul Sweetman, *American Chamber of Commerce Ireland*
- Simon McKeever, *Irish Exporters Association*
- Neil McDonnell, *ISME*
- Paul Lynam, *British Irish Chamber of Commerce*
- Greg Ennis, *Irish Congress of Trade Unions*
- Tadgh Buckley, *Irish Farmers' Association*

Apologies

- Thomas Byrne TD, *Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*
- Alice Mansergh, Chief Executive Officer, *Tourism Ireland*

1. Update on trade developments

The Tánaiste noted the significant developments since the Forum last met on 4 April, including with respect to US tariff policy and the EU response. The Tánaiste updated on his close ongoing contact with EU colleagues, as well as his meeting in Washington DC with US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick.

In referencing the President of the European Commission's advocacy for a zero-for-zero tariff agreement between the EU and the US, the Tánaiste noted the EU remains committed to constructive negotiations with the goal of achieving frictionless and mutually beneficial trade. The Tánaiste noted that the pause for 90 days of US tariffs, (albeit alongside the global “baseline tariff” of 10% and the certain sector specific tariffs), together with the EU's now paused countermeasures should now create the conditions for meaningful negotiation. Ireland, as part of the EU, wants to play a constructive role and will continue to be a voice for calm and measured engagement in the time ahead.

The Tánaiste updated on EU-UK trade and wider developments, ahead of the EU-UK Summit on 19 May. The importance of the relationship with this vital likeminded partner was noted with *inter alia* scope duly identified for the EU and UK to look at improving the trading relationship and removing barriers to trade.

Minister Donohoe briefed on his meetings during the week of 21 April in Washington DC - on the occasion of the Spring meetings of the World Bank and IMF - including with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Kevin Hassett, Director of the US National Economic Council. Minister Heydon updated the meeting on his visit to the US which included meetings with US Secretary of Agriculture, Brooke Rollins and trade mission events in conjunction with the state agencies. The Minister also previewed the upcoming trade missions he will lead to Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Members of the Forum were invited to share their views on latest developments. This included exchanges on:

- Continued uncertainty in the current trade and investment climate, including at sectoral and supply chain levels;

- A focus on non-tariff barriers in addition to a focus on tariffs, including impacts of current and proposed regulation;
- Concerns of workers in the current economic climate;
- Relevant developments in the US-China trade relationship and implications for Europe;
- Importance of investment in skills and Research and Development;
- Implications of latest economic developments for logistics and transport sectors;
- Read across to Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2026;
- Planning for the EU-UK Summit and the significance of this relationship;
- A focus on managing the cost of doing business;

A consistent theme in interventions was the importance of working to control what we can control. Minister Chambers highlighted opportunities to be gained from the NDP review and reform process and the fiscal plan, including protection of capital expenditure and infrastructure delivery. Regulatory reform at the domestic and EU levels as well as addressing barriers to entry and a focus on research and development remain important. The Minister welcomed engagement by Forum members in the focus on infrastructure and broader developments as Government works to deliver regional balance and acceleration of projects.

Minister Lawless reiterated the centrality of a continued focus on skills, research and innovation in supporting the economy's resilience and competitiveness. His Department will continue to examine how Ireland can respond to changes in the US research environment.

3. Update on Action Plan of Market Diversification

Minister Burke updated the Forum on the preparation of the Government's Action Plan on Market Diversification, which is being developed jointly by his Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as a key part of the Government response to current market turbulence. Work is ongoing to support market and supply chain diversification across new and existing markets.

Minister Burke updated the Forum on the Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity which is due to be completed by July. Emphasising the importance also of existing markets,

Minister Burke previewed the upcoming trade mission he will lead to the US where he will also undertake high level political meetings. The Minister welcomed feedback on priorities for future trade missions, including for another Team Ireland Trade Mission, highlighting their potential for success across sectors and the totality of the bilateral relationship. The Minister spoke to the critical role of Joint Economic Commissions – Minister Smyth signed a Memo of Understanding with her UAE counterpart establishing a new Ireland-UAE JEC during her recent trade mission there, with plans for a new JEC with India also.

Minister Smyth updated the Forum on trade mission activities in conjunction with the State Agencies across locations and sectors. The Minister will open the new Enterprise Ireland office in Glasgow as part of the upcoming trade mission to Scotland. Trade missions under preparation include to the US, UK, Nordic countries, Italy, Spain, Germany, and, provisionally, to South Africa in conjunction with Ireland's participation as a guest country during the South African Presidency of the G20 this year.

4. Sectoral Focus: Medtech Sector

The Forum was joined for this agenda item by representatives of the medtech sector.

Kevin Sherry, Interim CEO of Enterprise Ireland, and Michael Lohan, CEO of IDA Ireland, presented on the medtech sector in Ireland.

The presentations recalled the significance of this sector in Ireland, with a strong mix of both indigenous and global medtech companies. Key sectoral drivers and challenges were noted. Client supports were detailed, including new activities in response to latest developments. The presentations highlighted the various factors by which Ireland is an attractive location for the sector and noted how Ireland can continue to work to improve competitiveness.

5. AOB

In concluding, the Tánaiste informed that the Secretariat will continue its outreach with Forum members to discuss the Work Programme. Dates for the next scheduled Forum meetings will also shortly be circulated.

*Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade,
14 May 2025*