

Third meeting of the Government Trade Forum

Friday 4 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, *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*
- Brendan Gleeson, Sinéad McPhillips, *Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine*
- Declan Hughes, Ronnie Downes, *Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment*
- David Moloney, *Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform*
- Ian Power, *Department of Finance*
- David Keating, *Department of Further and Higher Education, Innovation, Research and Science*
- Clare Mungovan, Stephen Kinsella, Conor Glynn, *Office of the Tánaiste*
- John Callinan, Helen Blake, *Department of the Taoiseach*

State Agencies

- Jim O'Toole, *Bord Bia*
- Kevin Sherry, *Enterprise Ireland*
- Michael Lohan, *IDA Ireland*
- Dr. Ciarán Seoighe, *Research Ireland*
- Alice Mansergh, *Tourism 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*
- Damian McDonald, *Irish Farmers' Association*

1. Opening remarks by An Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Harris TD

The Tánaiste welcomed participants to this the third meeting of the Forum, convened on foot of the US Administration's announcement on 2 April to impose tariffs of 20% on EU exported goods. The meeting provided the opportunity to get members views as Government takes stock ahead of the EU Foreign Affairs Council on Trade on 7 April in Luxembourg.

The significance of the US announcement was duly noted. The Tánaiste reiterated Ireland's support for a proportionate response together with our EU partners that avoids escalation and brings parties around the negotiation table. The EU has remained measured in its response to these tariffs, prioritising negotiation and engagement with the US, and at the same time has carried out the preparation required if it becomes necessary to introduce re-balancing measures.

The Tánaiste updated on his and Government's latest contacts with the Commission and EU Member State counterparts, including on his ongoing close contact with EU Trade Commissioner, Maros Šefčovič, as well as the series of calls and meetings he has held with EU colleagues over recent days. This includes calls with Trade Minister counterparts from Germany, Finland, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Croatia, Italy, Sweden and Spain. An update was provided by the Tánaiste on his discussions this week with the First and Deputy First Ministers and Minister of the Economy in the Northern Ireland Executive. The Tánaiste shared an overview of his call with US Secretary of Commerce, Howard Lutnick, on 24 March and anticipated further contact with the US Administration shortly.

2. Presentation on EU-US Trade Developments

Maeve von Heynitz, Director General of the EU and Trade Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, presented on EU-US Trade Developments. The presentation provided a comprehensive overview of the US tariff actions impacting the EU, the work on an EU response, the expected Commission process, timelines, and key concerns arising for Ireland.

3. Exchange of views

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

- Concerns over uncertainty in the current economic climate, including at sectoral level;
- Clear communications with the public;
- Responses at EU level to US trade policy decisions, including the 2 April announcement to impose tariffs of 20% on EU exported goods;
- Concerns over potential differences in EU & UK responses and the differentiated tariff levels imposed on EU and UK/NI; Minister Smyth urged the importance of the border region not getting lost in the conversation.

- Second order issues to guard against e.g. dumping;
- **Importance of working to control what we can control:**
Minister Chambers spoke to the significance of the work on NDP review and reform and the medium term fiscal plan to protect capital expenditure - to deliver the structural changes required in the economy to promote competitiveness. Minister Donohoe noted the relative strength of the US economy and agreed that patience is required for the long road ahead, adding how the focus on these structural changes will also make Ireland well placed to benefit from future upsurge; in this vein also, Minister Burke acknowledged the activities of the State Agencies and explained how his Department are in the process of advancing the Action Plan on Productivity and Competitiveness. Similarly, Minister Lawless reiterated the importance of promoting the innovation economy – skills, talent, mobility, research – which again is all in our gift to do.
- Mitigation measures important but actions now speak to structural changes in the economy.
- Upcoming trade mission activities planned by Forum members - Minister Heydon outlined the key issues the current situation presents for the agri-food sector and detailed his visit to the US the week of 7 April (Washington DC, Kentucky, Chicago), which will include timely meetings with political leaders and trade mission follow-up. Minister Smyth updated the Forum on the upcoming trade missions she will lead to UAE and Scotland (including opening of new Enterprise Ireland office in Glasgow).

4. Presentation on the Pharmaceutical Sector

Michael Lohan, CEO of IDA Ireland, gave a detailed presentation on the pharmaceutical industry amid concerns that the US may impose sector-specific tariffs in the future.

The presentation traced the long standing partnership between Ireland and US MNCs and outlined the significant scale of the sector's presence and activities in Ireland.

The presentation also included a focus on the various factors by which Ireland is an attractive location for the pharmaceutical, med tech and wider sectors as well as how Ireland can continue to work to improve competitiveness and productivity.

5. AOB

The Tánaiste reiterated the importance of the exchanges facilitated by this Forum.

The minutes of the meeting and the two presentations delivered will be circulated to the Forum members by the Secretariat.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 28 April at 12 midday in same venue, Italian Room, Government Buildings.