

Fifth meeting of the Government Trade Forum

Monday 19 May, 2025, Italian Room, Government Buildings

In attendance:

Government Ministers

- Simon Harris TD, *Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (chair)*
- Jack Chambers TD, *Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform*
- Martin Heydon TD, *Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine*
- James Lawless TD, *Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (online)*
- Thomas Byrne TD, *Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*

Department Officials

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

State Agencies

- Jim O'Toole, *Bord Bia*
- Kevin Sherry, *Enterprise Ireland*
- Michael Lohan, *IDA Ireland*
- Alice Mansergh, *Tourism Ireland*

Representative Groups

- Danny McCoy, Pat Ivory, *Ibec*
- Mary Rose Burke, *Chambers Ireland*
- Paul Sweetman, *American Chamber of Commerce Ireland*
- Simon McKeeever, *Irish Exporters Association*
- Neil McDonnell, *ISME*
- Paul Lynam, *British Irish Chamber of Commerce*
- Greg Ennis, *Irish Congress of Trade Unions*
- Damian McDonald, *Irish Farmers' Association*

Apologies

- Paschal Donohoe TD, *Minister for Finance*
- Peter Burke TD, *Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment*
- Niamh Smyth TD, *Minister of State, Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment*
- Dr. Ciarán Seoighe, *Research Ireland*

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

The Tánaiste updated the Forum on the range of relevant developments since its most recent meeting on 28 April, including at the EU-US and EU-UK levels. The Tánaiste briefed the Forum on his meetings in Brussels last week with Trade Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič and EU Trade Ministers, as well as his discussions last week with the Northern Ireland First Minister, Deputy First Minister, and Minister for Economy.

The Forum discussed latest developments with respect to US tariff policy and the list of potential EU counter measures. The Tánaiste welcomed the close engagement between the EU and US, reiterating a negotiated solution remains very clearly the desired outcome. At the same time Ireland understood the need for the EU to undertake further internal preparations in case negotiations are unsuccessful. The Tánaiste noted that the measures will not be implemented immediately and highlighted the Commission's consultation period. The Government will communicate Irish specific concerns to the Commission and want to hear industry concerns. The Tánaiste urged Forum members to participate in the consultation.

The Tánaiste and Forum members welcomed the outcome of the EU-UK Summit, also taking place on 19 May. The Tánaiste noted it marked the beginning of a new phase of EU-UK cooperation. It represents a clear signal both EU and UK seek an enhanced relationship across multiple policy areas, delivering for people and business across the EU and UK.

Declan Hughes and Ronnie Downes, Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, briefed on the trade and investment mission led by Minister Peter Burke to the US Midwest last week, where IDA Ireland support over 300 headquartered companies operating in Ireland. The Minister also visited Washington DC where he met with a number of Enterprise Ireland clients and led the largest ever delegation of Irish companies to SelectUSA, the US government-backed FDI Summit. The importance of developing links at the federal, State and regional levels was noted. State agencies and other Forum members also briefed on latest missions, meetings and other US related activities in support of trade, investment, connectivity and tourism promotion.

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

- *Impacts of ongoing uncertainty in the current trade and investment climate;*
- *Opportunities and challenges across sectors of the economy;*
- *Relevant developments in the US-China and US-UK trade relationships and read across for Europe;*
- *Workers concerns in the context of current economic developments;*
- *Competitiveness and the Irish economy;*
- *Information resources provided to members / client companies - including training and webinars - by State Agencies and business and other representative groups, in the context of current developments in the trade and investment landscape;*
- *Importance of investment in skills, innovation, in-house training, Research and Development;*
- *Scope for future discussion in the Forum on cybersecurity, defence expenditure and economic security as it pertains to the Irish economy*

John McCarthy, Department of Finance, updated the Forum on the latest Annual Progress Report (APR) technical document for 2025, published by the Department on 6 May, with the Spring Forecast also published alongside it, both in line with legal requirements.

Minister Thomas Byrne welcomed the outcomes of the first EU-UK Summit, noting its breadth and forward looking set of commitments. He welcomed Forum members' views and recalled his recent meeting in London with UK Minister for European Union Relations, Nick Thomas-Symonds. On the wider work of the Forum agenda, Minister Byrne highlighted relevant read across to his work at EU level including on the simplification agenda and Ireland's EU Presidency in 2026.

In the Forum discussion, the Tánaiste and Minister Byrne reaffirmed Ireland's position of military neutrality, noting this did not contradict national expenditure on defence or work underway at Government level to facilitate the ability of Irish businesses to partake in defence related tenders/opportunities as appropriate.

Minister Martin Heydon also welcomed the EU-UK Summit outcomes and noted the UK remains the most important market for Ireland's agricultural exports. The commitment towards the negotiation of an SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary) Agreement is also very welcome.

Minister James Lawless noted the relevant read across from Forum discussions to his Department's new programme of work to attract global talent to Ireland. The Minister referenced the synergistic nature of this work to attract academics, innovators, technologists and others.

2. Update on Action Plan on Market Diversification

Declan Hughes on behalf of the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, noted DFAT and DETE are advancing work on the Action Plan, and which will be considered at a cabinet committee meeting next week.

The Action Plan is set to include a number of pillars. It will focus on topics including trade missions, favourable leveraging for Ireland of existing or in-train EU FTAs, business supports such as from Enterprise Ireland and InterTradeIreland, and identifying new market opportunities. The Action Plan will also work to facilitate business through initiatives including accelerating the introduction of a national security clearance arrangements for companies, as well as have a focus on emerging markets in points echoed by State Agencies and other members, and on new Joint Economic Commissions (JECs) – including the recently signed JEC with the UAE and noting a further JEC with India is at an advanced stage of negotiation.

Minister Heydon noted work underway in his Department and in Bord Bia that will contribute to the Action Plan.

3. Sectoral focus: Aviation

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

Ethna Brogan, Department of Transport, set the scene for the discussion, with Ireland long established as the leading global base for aircraft leasing.

The discussion emphasised the significance of this sector for Ireland and Europe. The key sectoral drivers and challenges were noted, including in the current context of greater turbulence in the global trading environment.

ENDS

Government Trade Forum Secretariat

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

20 May 2025