

British-Irish
Parliamentary
Assembly



Tionól Parlaiminteach
na Breataine agus
na hÉireann

Committee B (European Affairs)

UK-EU Defence and Security Cooperation Post-Brexit

Final report

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Summary of conclusions and recommendations

- 1. We welcome the agreements concluded between the UK and Ireland in March 2025 and between the UK and the European Union in May 2025. In our view, they establish a promising basis for further mutual cooperation on security and defence matters. We expect these agreements to result in a more collaborative approach to security and defence issues which concern BIPA jurisdictions, while also recognising Ireland's longstanding tradition of military neutrality. (Paragraph 33)**
- 2. We welcome the inclusion of critical infrastructure in the UK-EU Security and Defence Partnership. This is an area where evidence of effective cooperation is currently lacking. We recommend that the governments of the UK and of Ireland undertake rapid development of a coordinated programme to address threats to the critical infrastructure within and between BIPA jurisdictions and between BIPA jurisdictions, continental Europe and the North American continent. (Paragraph 34)**
- 3. We recognise the inclusion of maritime infrastructure as a priority for further action in the UK-Ireland Joint Statement. To further effective cooperation in this area, we recommend that the governments of the UK and of Ireland establish a joint statutory Cables Protection Commission to protect and monitor critical infrastructure. This body should include representatives of governments and of defence forces as well as of asset owners, and government or defence representatives. This body should be commissioned to deliver the following:**
 - a. the comprehensive mapping of communications cables, gas pipelines and other maritime infrastructure serving all BIPA jurisdictions;**
 - b. the establishment of monitoring patrols in British and Irish waters, and**
 - c. the development of resilience capacity through increased meshing of communications networks. (Paragraph 35)**
- 4. We welcome the commitment to undertake a full review of the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Ireland on defence cooperation by the time**

of the next UK-Ireland summit. This review ought to be undertaken with a view to enhancing future defence cooperation. (Paragraph 36)

- 5. We repeat our recommendation aimed at including energy security within the ambit of discussions at UK-Ireland and UK-EU level on security, given the substantial potential impact of energy issues on the economic security of BIPA jurisdictions and of continental Europe. (Paragraph 37)**
- 6. We welcome the announcement of the development of port infrastructure in the Firth of Cromarty to support the construction of floating offshore wind infrastructure. This facility, to open in 2028, will be the first such facility in a BIPA jurisdiction. We recommend that full weight be given to consideration of the security requirements for such infrastructure as the port is developed. (Paragraph 38)**
- 7. The recognition of the security dimension of irregular migration in the UK-EU Security and Defence Partnership is welcome. Irregular migration, and in particular migration into EU Member States facilitated by malign overseas actors, has a significant and observable effect on security in the EU and indeed across BIPA jurisdictions. We recommend that UK and national and EU authorities enhance their cooperation on intelligence sharing and countermeasures in this regard, with a particular view to tackling migration routes into the countries along the EU's eastern frontier where Russian forces are suspected of facilitating organised migration. We also recommend that the new Committee A would consider examining the issue of illegal migration and its impact on security. (Paragraph 39)**
- 8. While we observe that cooperation on policing within the Common Travel Area is working well under current arrangements, police authorities must take care to minimise the risk of divergence between forces on measures likely to affect continued cooperation. (Paragraph 42)**
- 9. The UK and Irish Governments and the EU should work closely together to manage any future divergence in intelligence and policing cooperation. We welcome the inclusion of cyber security as a priority area for cooperation in the Joint Statement,**

and we recommend the intensive sharing of information and best practice so as to contribute to the highest possible levels of cyber security across BIPA jurisdictions. (Paragraph 43)

10. Legacy IT systems leave government IT infrastructure compromised and open to the damaging effects of cyber-attacks. We recommend that the governments of all BIPA jurisdictions ensure that their legacy IT systems are updated as a priority, and that governments share information on how best to counter cyber threats to legacy IT systems which have not yet been updated. (Paragraph 44)

11. We recommend that the relevant governments of the BIPA jurisdictions examine the merits of the establishment of a Policing Centre of Excellence, to provide training at a senior level and a structured forum where members of all police forces in BIPA jurisdictions could come together to share best practices, through periodic conferences. (Paragraph 45)

Introduction

12. The related issues of defence and of security on the European continent—issues central to the security of all jurisdictions represented in the Assembly—have been a concern of the Committee since the start of negotiations on the terms under which the United Kingdom would leave the European Union.
13. In July 2018 the Committee undertook an inquiry into European security cooperation after Brexit, in the course of which it examined the potential impact of Brexit in cooperation between the UK and the EU on security matters, including cross-border policing cooperation, the fight against organised crime, counter terrorism and cyber security; the future of security cooperation between the UK and Ireland in the context of Brexit, and the future direction of European security policy and the implications of its development for future security cooperation between the UK and the EU.¹ The Committee issued three interim reports on the topic before its activities were paused, initially for the parliamentary elections in the UK in December 2019 and in Ireland in February and March 2020 and then during the hiatus in parliamentary activity during the pandemic.
14. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 the conflict it precipitated, have had a further significant impact on the defence and security landscape across Europe, including on the defence and security of the jurisdictions represented in the Assembly.
15. The Committee therefore returned to the overall subject of security and defence cooperation, and in October 2022 launched an inquiry to consider three distinct but related facets of this subject—the response to the war in Ukraine, cyber security, and intelligence and policing—and to make recommendations based on the evidence received.²
16. In May 2023 we issued an interim report, which was noted by the Assembly at its 65th plenary conference in St Helier, Jersey.³ This report predominantly covered the first element of our terms of reference—the response to Ukraine—although it also touched on

¹ References to three interim reports

² The full terms of reference for the inquiry are set out in Annex 1 to this report.

³ British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, [Interim Report on UK-EU Defence and Security Co-operation Post-Brexit](#), Report of Committee B (European Matters) noted by the Assembly at its 67th plenary session, 15 May 2023

issues relating to the second and third elements of the inquiry that arose during the gathering of evidence, given their wider relevance to Russia and the conflict in Ukraine. We made a number of conclusions and recommendations for the governments of BIPA jurisdictions to consider.⁴

17. Since then, we have taken further evidence on the remaining elements of our terms of reference, visiting Dublin in July 2023 and Helsinki and Tallinn in March 2024, and receiving an online briefing from senior officials at the UK National Crime Agency in March 2024.⁵ We are extremely grateful to everyone who gave up their time to meet us and to contribute to our inquiry.
18. We regret that due to the parliamentary elections in the UK in July 2024 and in Ireland in November 2024 and January 2025, and the subsequent further long hiatus in BIPA activity, we were not able to publish this report sooner.
19. In this report we summarise significant recent developments in the field of UK and European security and defence cooperation. In the light of these developments and the evidence taken by the Committee we then set out our outline conclusions and recommendations, which we trust will remain of use to the governments of the BIPA jurisdictions in their shaping of policy in this crucial area. The security situation in Europe has undergone a profound shift in the months since the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in November 2024 and the commencement of the second Trump administration in January 2025. The nature of that change need not be summarised in detail here, but the conclusions and recommendations below ought to be read in the light of recent and current events.
20. In July 2025 the Steering Committee of the Assembly undertook a review and a revision of the orders of reference of the Assembly's committees in the light of the programme of co-operation between the governments of the UK and of Ireland announced in a joint statement

⁴ See British Irish Parliamentary Assembly, Committee B (European Affairs), [Interim Report on UK-EU Defence and Security Co-operation Post-Brexit](#), May 2023, p. 13 ff

⁵ A list of those who provided evidence to the Committee or who held discussions with Committee members during the inquiry is set out at Annex 2.

at the UK-Ireland Summit in Liverpool in March 2025.⁶ Under this revised structure, responsibility for scrutiny of the European dimension of policy affecting Assembly jurisdictions passes to a new Committee on Security, Justice and Global Issues. As we observe below, security and defence cooperation is prominent in the Joint Statement programme of cooperation to 2030: we expect that the new committee will be able to build on our observations below in its scrutiny of this crucial area of policy.

⁶ The joint statement issued by the UK Prime Minister and An Taoiseach is available on the UK Government website here: [Joint statement between Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Taoiseach Micheál Martin](#) and on the Government of Ireland website here: [Statement released by Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Taoiseach Micheál Martin on 6 March 2025 following UK-Ireland Summit](#) [both last accessed on 11 October 2025]

Chapter 1: The UK-EU security and defence cooperation landscape in 2025

21. Several significant agreements were concluded in the first half of 2025 which ostensibly provide a more secure long-term footing for cooperation between Assembly jurisdictions and between those jurisdictions and the European Union.

The UK-Ireland Joint Statement

22. In March 2025, following a summit held in Liverpool, the governments of the UK and of Ireland issued a joint statement setting out a programme of co-operation between the two countries expected to continue until 2030. Defence and security cooperation is a substantial feature of this programme: the statement recognises that ensuring the safety and security of the people living in Ireland and the UK is a priority both governments share. In this respect the two governments have agreed:

- to continue to co-operate “to ensure that the sharing of information and best practices contribute to higher levels of cyber security across both countries”, to “work to develop approaches that benefit both countries, particularly in the areas of skills development, cyber hygiene awareness and research projects” and to “continue to work together to tackle threats to safety online”;
- to pursue implementation of “all aspects” of the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on defence initially agreed by both governments in January 2015, “particularly in the areas of military training and education”, and to “review and update” the memorandum by the time of the next UK-Ireland Summit,⁷ and
- to “strengthen our co-operation in the area of maritime security, with a particular focus on critical undersea infrastructure, which will require greater international co-operation, including closer co-operation between Ireland and the UK”.

⁷ “[UK and Ireland sign historic defence agreement](#)”, UK Government news release, 19 January 2015 [last accessed 11 October 2025]. A copy of the text of the memorandum appears to have been published at <https://database.cyberpolicyportal.org/api/files/1659806701571y6ej79rajg.pdf> [last accessed 11 October 2025].

23. Work in these areas is to continue to be developed, including through an existing “structured security dialogue at senior official level”.

UK-EU agreements on security and defence

24. In May 2025 the UK-EU Leaders Summit in London concluded with agreement on a Common Understanding framework for a strategic partnership between the two, and on a specific security and defence partnership. The latter is summarised as follows:

The Partnership represents a framework for dialogue and cooperation on security and defence. It will help the EU and the United Kingdom boost cooperation in areas such as: supporting Ukraine; security and defence initiatives, including on defence industry; mobility of military materiel and personnel; space security; regular high-level dialogues and strategic consultations; peacebuilding and crisis management; cyber issues; countering hybrid threats and resilience of critical infrastructure.⁸

25. The Common Understanding framework also sets out areas of work to enhance internal security cooperation on law enforcement and on the exchange of information between Europol and UK police forces.

26. The Security and Defence Partnership agreement sets out the existing areas of cooperation between the UK and the EU on security and defence measures, namely a Security of Information Agreement concluded in 2020, the UK’s participation in the EU Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and Defence (PESCO) military mobility project approved in November 2022, the close alignment between the UK’s Operation INTERFLEX and the EU’s Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine (EUMAM), and continuing cooperation between UK and EU civilian and military missions and operations in theatres such as the Red Sea and the Western Balkans.

27. Under the Partnership the UK and the EU have formally agreed to maintain “flexible and scalable engagement” between officials in a number of security and defence policy areas

⁸ UK Government policy paper, [UK-EU Summit - Common Understanding](#), 19 May 2025, para 5 [last accessed 11 October 2025]. The full Security and Defence Partnership Agreement concluded on 19 May 2025 is available on the UK Government website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-eu-security-and-defence-partnership> and on the Council of the European Union website at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/3w3hhlxz/eu-uk-summit_sdp.pdf [both last accessed 11 October 2025].

of shared interest, and have agreed to expand cooperation general and in specific additional areas.

28. The Partnership contains commitments to the following:

- Exchanges on regional security issues;
- Establishment of a dialogue and exploration of cooperation in peace building and crisis management;
- Regular exchanges on maritime security and exploration of ways to deepen practical cooperation
- Regular exchanges on the development of respective security and defence initiatives, policies and instruments
- Regular exchanges on space security to strengthen cooperation in areas of shared interest
- Exchanges on security against and resilience to emerging disruptive technologies, including on the responsible use of artificial intelligence in security and defence
- Development of cooperation on cyber issues, responses to malicious cyber activities and cyber capacity building in partner countries, including through the existing provisions of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement
- Cooperation on research into hybrid threats and on enhancing the resilience of critical infrastructure in Europe, including underwater infrastructure
- Strengthening cooperation in the countering of foreign information manipulation and interference with security and democratic institutions and processes
- Developing cooperation on counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism, based on the existing provisions of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement

- Working together on measures to address the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to further disarmament, and on multilateral measures to control conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons
- Exploring further opportunities for capacity building for partners in security and defence
- Seeking to cooperate in the field of training and education in security and defence, including cooperation between UK authorities and the EU Security and Defence College
- Strengthening cooperation on situational awareness and threat assessments through exchanges of intelligence, including additional measures to support effective information sharing
- Seeking opportunities to strengthen bilateral cooperation in third countries and in multilateral forums and institutional exchanges
- Exploring ways to exchange views on the external aspects of respective economic security policies, in line with ongoing cooperation within the G7
- Strengthening cooperation to tackle corruption and illicit finance in third countries
- Exchanging good practices and cooperating closely on the implementation of the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda
- Exploring opportunities for cooperation on the external dimension of irregular migration, including addressing challenges from transnational organised crime, trafficking of human beings and migrant smuggling
- Exploring the possibility of a regular exchange on the policy nexus of climate change and peace, security and defence issues
- Enhancing cooperation and information exchange on global health security issues and public health security emergencies

29. We set out below the areas we have identified where security and defence cooperation between the UK and Ireland and between the UK and the European Union ought to be enhanced. We recommend that the respective administrations work within the framework of the 2025 agreements to deliver closer practical cooperation in these areas.

Chapter 2: Cooperation in response to the war in Ukraine and the threat from Russia

30. In our interim report we noted how the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine had highlighted the vulnerability of countries across Europe to geopolitical threats. We observed that relations between the UK and the European Union (of which Ireland is a member) had often been strained following both the decision of the UK to leave the European Union and the implementation of the agreements on exit and on the future relationship.
31. At the time of reporting, we nevertheless observed a unanimity in the values and perspectives both sides held, not least on the shared view that the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 had constituted a gross violation of international law. We also noted with approval the warming of relations between the UK and the European Union since the announcement in February 2023 of the Windsor Framework on the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol to the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement, and the gradual advance of cooperative initiatives on foreign policy and defence issues. One example of this positive development was the willingness signalled by the UK to join the EU Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) military mobility project (PESCO): the UK's application to join was approved by EU defence ministers in November 2022.⁹
32. The agreements on security and defence concluded at intergovernmental level appear to confirm the positive direction of travel we remarked upon in our earlier report. We have nevertheless not had the opportunity to interrogate these agreements in detail to establish whether they are sufficient to address the concerns which we raised in the relevant conclusions and recommendations of our interim report.
- 33. We welcome the agreements concluded between the UK and Ireland in March 2025 and between the UK and the European Union in May 2025. In our view, they establish a promising basis for further mutual cooperation on security and defence**

⁹ See [EU Permanent Structured Cooperation \(PESCO\): a future role for UK defence?](#), House of Commons Library Research Briefing CBP 9058, 21 November 2022 [last accessed 11 October 2025]

matters. We expect these agreements to result in a more collaborative approach to security and defence issues which concern BIPA jurisdictions, while also recognising Ireland's longstanding tradition of military neutrality.

34. We welcome the inclusion of critical infrastructure in the UK-EU Security and Defence Partnership. This is an area where evidence of effective cooperation is currently lacking. We recommend that the governments of the UK and of Ireland undertake rapid development of a coordinated programme to address threats to the critical infrastructure within and between BIPA jurisdictions and between BIPA jurisdictions, continental Europe and the North American continent.

35. We recognise the inclusion of maritime infrastructure as a priority for further action in the UK-Ireland Joint Statement. To further effective cooperation in this area, we recommend that the governments of the UK and of Ireland establish a joint statutory Cables Protection Commission to protect and monitor critical infrastructure. This body should include representatives of governments and of defence forces as well as of asset owners, and government or defence representatives. This body should be commissioned to deliver the following:

- a. the comprehensive mapping of communications cables, gas pipelines and other maritime infrastructure serving all BIPA jurisdictions;**
- b. the establishment of monitoring patrols in British and Irish waters, and**
- c. the development of resilience capacity through increased meshing of communications networks.**

36. We welcome the commitment to undertake a full review of the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Ireland on defence cooperation by the time of the next UK-Ireland summit. This review ought to be undertaken with a view to enhancing future defence cooperation.

37. We repeat our recommendation aimed at including energy security within the ambit of discussions at UK-Ireland and UK-EU level on security, given the substantial potential impact of energy issues on the economic security of BIPA jurisdictions and of continental Europe.

- 38. We welcome the announcement of the development of port infrastructure in the Firth of Cromarty to support the construction of floating offshore wind infrastructure. This facility, to open in 2028, will be the first such facility in a BIPA jurisdiction.¹⁰ We recommend that full weight be given to consideration of the security requirements for such infrastructure as the port is developed.**
- 39. The recognition of the security dimension of irregular migration in the UK-EU Security and Defence Partnership is welcome. Irregular migration, and in particular migration into EU Member States facilitated by malign overseas actors, has a significant and observable effect on security in the EU and indeed across BIPA jurisdictions. We recommend that UK and national and EU authorities enhance their cooperation on intelligence sharing and countermeasures in this regard, with a particular view to tackling migration routes into the countries along the EU's eastern frontier where Russian forces are suspected of facilitating organised migration. We also recommend that the new Committee A would consider examining the issue of illegal migration and its impact on security.**

¹⁰ UK Government news release, "[Government unlocks floating offshore wind with major investment for Scottish port](#)", 5 March 2025 [last accessed 11 October 2025]. The UK Government is also supporting the development of floating offshore wind manufacturing capacity for the Celtic Sea via the Celtic Freeport initiative located in Milford Haven and in Port Talbot: see UK Government news release, "[Celtic Freeport launch boosts growth and clean energy missions](#)", 13 March 2025 [last accessed 14 October 2025].

Chapter 3: Developing cooperation across the intelligence, policing and cyber security landscape

40. A consistent theme through the evidence we heard was that the cooperation between the relevant bodies in the UK and in Ireland on intelligence and policing had remained effective at a high level even after the UK's departure from the European Union. That event had, however, hampered UK access to Europe-wide databases used in intelligence and in policing. The academics we interviewed in our visit to Dublin in July 2023 had indicated that Part Three of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), dealing with law enforcement and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, had the greatest potential for dynamic divergence between the systems used by the respective parties. It appeared to them that the prospects of substantive renegotiation of the TCA was unlikely, and that better results for information sharing were likely to be achieved through bilateral agreements such as the agreement on police cooperation which the UK had concluded with Belgium.
41. We set out below our observations, based on the evidence we heard, on practical measures for the enhancement of cooperation between the UK and Ireland on intelligence and policing.
- 42. While we observe that cooperation on policing within the Common Travel Area is working well under current arrangements, police authorities must take care to minimise the risk of divergence between forces on measures likely to affect continued cooperation.**
- 43. The UK and Irish Governments and the EU should work closely together to manage any future divergence in intelligence and policing cooperation. We welcome the inclusion of cyber security as a priority area for cooperation in the Joint Statement, and we recommend the intensive sharing of information and best practice so as to contribute to the highest possible levels of cyber security across BIPA jurisdictions.**
- 44. Legacy IT systems leave government IT infrastructure compromised and open to the damaging effects of cyber-attacks. We recommend that the governments of all BIPA jurisdictions ensure that their legacy IT systems are updated as a priority,**

and that governments share information on how best to counter cyber threats to legacy IT systems which have not yet been updated.

45. We recommend that the relevant governments of the BIPA jurisdictions examine the merits of the establishment of a Policing Centre of Excellence, to provide training at a senior level and a structured forum where members of all police forces in BIPA jurisdictions could come together to share best practices, through periodic conferences.

Annex 1: Terms of reference

On 13 October 2022, we announced the following terms of reference which would provide the basis for our work.

Ukraine

- To consider the approaches of the UK Government, Irish Government, Crown Dependencies, devolved UK legislatures and EU in response to the crisis in Ukraine.
- To consider the cooperation between the UK, the EU and its individual member states and how effective this cooperation has been.
- To consider the impact of Brexit on the UK's cooperation with European partners in the context of Ukraine.
- To consider whether there are any lessons to be learned thus far from UK-EU cooperation on Ukraine or whether there are future opportunities to do things differently.
- To consider the outlook for longer term UK/EU cooperation on defence and security.
- To consider to what extent the recent change in German defence policy, the prospect of Finnish and Swedish accession to NATO and the AUKUS agreement has had on the UK-EU defence and security relationship.

Cyber security

- To consider the biggest challenges facing the UK, Ireland and EU in cybersecurity, including whether they have identified the same priorities and whether are they broadly aligned in what they need to do to address these challenges.
- To consider how the UK, Ireland, Crown Dependencies and EU can cooperate effectively to tackle these challenges now the UK is no longer part of EU bodies including its Agency for Cyber Security (ENISA).
- To consider implementation of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement in this area, including the current status and outcomes of the 'regular dialogue'.

- To consider whether there are lessons to be learnt from how the UK and EU Member States pursue such cooperation in other settings, such as NATO.
- To consider the extent to which the UK and EU's separate legislative agendas are compatible or divergent.
- To consider how the UK and EU can cooperate effectively to influence cybersecurity standards for existing and emerging technologies.
- To consider any risks for effective cooperation between the private sector in the UK and Ireland/ the EU if there is regulatory divergence and the impact on private and academic sectors ability to cooperate on cyber.
- To consider the importance of UK researchers being able to participate fully in EU-funded research into new cybersecurity measures under the 'Horizon Europe' programme.

Intelligence and policing

- To consider the practical impact of the arrangements for law enforcement and criminal justice cooperation under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).
- To consider the impact of Brexit on practical law enforcement cooperation on the island of Ireland and between Irish and relevant UK authorities.
- To consider the legal structures and/or mechanisms that now apply to the exchange of operational information between law enforcement authorities in Ireland, the Crown Dependencies and in the UK.
- To consider whether the UK and Ireland have concluded any bilateral cooperation agreements since the UK left the EU to facilitate cross-border cooperation, over and above the long-standing Common Travel Area.
- To consider the effectiveness of TCA provisions on surrender/ extradition and whether the transition from the (pre-Brexit) European Arrest Warrant (EAW) procedures to the new TCA procedures has been straightforward.

- To consider whether post-Brexit developments in EU or UK law could jeopardise cooperation under Part Three of the TCA (e.g.: UK Bill of Rights, Data Protection and Digital Information Bill as well as proposed changes to the EU's Prüm rules governing the transfer of DNA and fingerprint data during criminal investigations).
- To consider whether there are specific areas of law enforcement and criminal justice cooperation in which differing EU and UK approaches to the use of technology, or the development of standards, could jeopardise cooperation under Part Three of the TCA.
- To consider whether the UK's exit from the EU affected the Irish Government's approach to its EU justice and home affairs opt-ins and whether divergence in substantive criminal laws and procedures in Ireland and the UK make cooperation more difficult over time

Annex 2: Meetings held and visits undertaken

We have received briefing and gathered evidence on the elements of our terms of reference in the course of the following meetings and visits:

London, 13 October 2022

- Ian Bond, Director, Foreign Policy, Centre for European Reform
- Dr Nicholas Wright, Visiting Researcher, Centre for Britain in Europe, University of Surrey
- Vice Admiral Mark Mellett DSM (retired), Chief of Staff, Irish Defence Forces (September 2015–September 2021)

Brussels, 30 and 31 March 2023

- Lindsay Croisdale-Appleby CMG, Ambassador and Head of Mission, and Brigadier John Oldroyd, Deputy MILREP (EU) and UK Defence Advisor, UK Mission to the European Union
- Angelina Eichhorst, Managing Director, Europe Division, and Joanneke Balfourt, Director of Security and Defence Policy, EU European External Action Service
- Nick Pickard CVO, Deputy Permanent Representative, UK Joint Delegation to NATO

Dublin, 7 July 2023

- Drew Harris, Commissioner, An Garda Síochána
- Dr David Fennelly, Assistant Professor, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin, and Ms Gemma Davies, Associate Professor in Criminal Law, Durham Law School
- John Fitzgerald, CEO, Supernode;
- Paul Doherty, Founder and Executive Director, Diarmuid O’Loan, Technical Director - Marine, and Stiofain MacDaibhead Head of Communications, Gavin & Doherty Geosolutions
- Barry Colfer, Director of Research, and Cian FitzGerald, Senior Researcher, Security and Defence/Foreign Policy, Institute of International and European Affairs
- Richard Browne, Director, National Cyber Security Centre, Ireland
- Representatives of the Department of Justice, Government of Ireland

7 March 2024 (virtual meeting)

- Rob Jones, Director General (Operations) and Nicole Nicholls, Director of Intelligence, UK National Crime Agency

Helsinki and Tallinn, 23 and 24 March 2024

- Tapio Pyysalo, Head of International Relations, Maxime Lebrun, Deputy Director of Research and Analysis, Henrik Praks, Senior Analyst, Community of Interest Strategy and Defence, Anna-Maria Wiker, Analyst, Research and Analysis, Anna-Kaisa Hiltunen, Special Advisor, Communication & Publications, and Sanni Parviainen, Coordinator, International Relations, European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), Helsinki
- Commander Jacob P. Galbreath, Head of Strategy Branch, Andrii Davidyuk, national representative of the Government of Ukraine, and Angelica Tikk, Head of International Relations, NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), Tallinn
- Mr Kalev Stoicescu, Chair, National Defence Committee, Parliament of Estonia
- Guests at a working dinner in Helsinki, 23 March 2024:
 - Ms Outi Holopainen, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Security Policy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Government of Finland;
 - Mr Timo Harakka, Chair of the UK-Finland Parliamentary Friendship Group, deputy member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Grand Committee, Vice-Chair of the Committee for the Future, Parliament of Finland
 - Mr Jouni Ovaska: Chair of the Ireland-Finland Parliamentary Friendship Group, Chair of the Transport and Communications Committee, Parliament of Finland
 - Dr Iro Särkkä: Senior Research Fellow, Finnish Institute for International Affairs
 - Mr Paul Sherlock, Ambassador of Ireland to Finland
 - Ms Kirsti Bourret, Deputy Head of Mission of the British Embassy, Helsinki.
 - Parliament of Finland

Members of the Committee from UK legislatures also met representatives of the British Embassy, Helsinki, during the visit.

During the inquiry the Committee also received written evidence submissions from a number of stakeholders, including Cisco Systems UK and Ireland; Dr Amanda Kramer, University of Belfast; Gemma Davies, Durham University; and Rights and Security International.

Annex 3: Summary notes of discussions

These notes represent staff summaries of discussions held in the course of the inquiry at a number of the meetings listed above. They are provided here as an indication of issues discussed during the Committee's meetings. They have not been agreed with the participants and the views here ought not to be attributed to any individual.

Meeting with Drew Harris, Commissioner, An Garda Síochána

North-South policing relationship has remained very good post-Brexit although structures have changed as per the TCA. Good information sharing on a police-to-police basis across UK and Ireland. Pressures have significantly increased in the last 10-15 years with the rise of cybercrime, proliferation of child abuse images and proliferation of online fraud. The biggest international element is around organised crime, human trafficking. There are numerous mechanisms for intelligence and evidence exchange. Cross-border UK/Ireland security is a top challenge. There has been 20 years of close cooperation on organised crime. Human trafficking takes place across the island of Ireland. Rural crime on farms, car and bike thefts – border used as an easy way of moving stolen goods. Cybercrime is hard to determine whether it is state sponsored. There is very close cooperation within Europol – information is shared. Discussion of organised crime groups from Georgia and Albania. There is a large increase in traffic at Irish ports post-Brexit. Ireland is not immune to migrant crisis. Common Travel Area and risk to organised crime – no risk identified at present. Huge amount of UK activity on drugs coming from South America. Ireland now has to make joint UK/Ireland case alone within EU.

Meeting with Dr David Fennelly, Trinity College Dublin, and Ms Gemma Davies, Durham Law School

The biggest problems to European defence and security post-Brexit are relatively minor – overall the TCA has worked well. Extradition between UK and Ireland presented some difficulties but overall it is working well. Funding for research around organised crime can now be difficult. The more you get people together via joint agencies, the better. Part 3 of TCA has most scope for UK/ EU divergence and this area is dynamic on both sides so there is a need for a framework that can adapt over time. On data protection, UK lost access to EU databases and there now has to be justification for this info to be shared. No UK participation

in SIS considered a real weakness. Bilateral agreements – an example is Belgium and UK police cooperation via a strategic working group. Improving the TCA unlikely as EU want to move on from Brexit so bilateral options likely to be more realistic for UK. Part 4 of TCA sets out cyber security cooperation – only area singled out for additional cooperation. India is seeing increased cybercrime within its jurisdiction but there are currently few relationships there. Difficult to know who the actors are in cybercrime. UK is trying to replicate SIS2 internally but there is no evidence that it will take off.

Meeting with Supernode and with Gavin & Doherty Geosolutions

There is a need to develop interconnectivity between countries. Meshed networks that offer contingency are required. Security of supply will need a more cooperative approach to assets including security monitoring and surveillance. Cable Protection Committee needs to rise up the agenda. Huge risk to offshore wind farms etc. Energy gets more protection than telecoms. Very difficult to stop someone sabotaging a cable. Ireland is adopting a model where Eirgrid and CRU will own the export cable, but how will they operate/ manage offshore assets? Potential for accidental damage historically considered far more than malevolent actions. Russian activity in Irish Sea is being monitored. Revenue from assets is incentive for asset owner to protect the infrastructure as best they can. Defence forces should assist. Smart monitoring with remotely operated vehicles came in some years ago. In terms of best practice elsewhere, nowhere has nailed it but the Dutch and Germans are slightly further ahead.

Meeting with the Institute of International and European Affairs, Dublin

War has presented a number of opportunities for cooperation between the UK and EU. Potential avenues for cooperation will be in industrial and multilateral capability development. Suggestion by some that Ireland should join NATO. Neutrality means something different to Ireland, Malta, Cyprus. Just under 50% of Irish public supported joining NATO – public attitudes are beginning to shift. Not an appetite to join but neither is there to continue as normal. Greater emphasis by Irish Defence Forces on peacekeeping operations. 30% of all Europe's data travels through centres based in Ireland. Discussion of interoperability cost if Ireland joined NATO. Absence of a security strategy in Ireland – other countries set out their goals.

Meeting with Representatives from the National Cyber Security Centre (Ireland) and the Department of Justice (Ireland)

No barrier post-Brexit to exchange of information but the speed is slower. Efficiency could be improved. Don't see a particular need for a UK/ Ireland agreement similar to what the UK has with Belgium. Irish information sharing with UK National Cyber Security Centre – good bilateral relationship, meets and discusses regularly best practice and information sharing. Gap between UK and Ireland/ EU is widening on cyber post-Brexit.

Meeting with the UK National Crime Agency

A Strategic National Assessment is published annually (2024 version due imminently). The NCA gets the assessed position in relation to the threat. Online child abuse, firearms, fraud, organised immigration crime, serious organised crime, drugs. NCA drives response to non-traditional threats. Strategic assessment covers all of these. Online abuse is one major area of focus – in UK it is estimated that at least 680,000 adults have a sexual interest in children. Large cocaine and heroin market. Relations across the world crucial to the NCA's work. There are liaison officers in countries across Europe. Multilateral relations with Interpol and Europol. There is still the ability to work police-police post-Brexit. Can't quite lead in the same way as before but the UK is considered an integral third country. Very good relationship with Isle of Man and we support them based on threat to their community. Support to agencies in intelligence community, there is maritime cooperation through the EU, on transatlantic cocaine trafficking, lots of partnerships on borders. Nobody wanted to lose access to SIS II – it is not as slick now on data access but still effective. Nonetheless, NCA has had to work to mitigate the impact. Extradition generally works well with EU partners. Europol want UK to be part of the structures. Finance and immigration powers are the way to tackle some of the crimes with Russian and Chinese backing. There is tension in some international arrangements, which are not as resilient as they could be but the TCA is pivotal in what has been achieved post-Brexit. More a case of needing to build on what we have, which is sometimes fragile, rather than making big changes. Need to ensure that serious organised crime is on the agenda when we talk about trade and security internationally. Critical infrastructure lies mostly with National Cyber Security Centre (which repeatedly declined a meeting with the Committee) – NCA responsible for criminal investigation element. Critical National Infrastructure is generally well protected by the intelligence community but NCA is part of the response. Need to tackle the eco system that supports

crimes. Nothing in terms of regulation is holding NCA back in this area. Biggest challenge to public sector cyber security is legacy IT systems – there are a range of systems still being used that shouldn't be. NCA does not lead on counterterrorism but closely linked. National Economic Crime Centre deals with intelligence sharing, criminal powers etc, similar approach to its Irish counterpart organisation.

Meeting at the British Embassy, Helsinki

Overview of their work and the political and economic situation in Finland, including demography. UK-Finnish relationship is very strong and the Fins speak highly of the UK. Discussion then went on to cover defence and security topics. Finland is strong in the peace and mediation space. Finland has the ability to scale up to a large army at short notice. Border issues – Finland has a large border with Russia, much of which is forest, no fence etc. Border infrastructure was strengthened in 2015. Russia is facilitating a migrant crisis into Finland – migrants from Belarus, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. Migrants are beginning to hear about the Russian route – it started at conventional border crossings but is now becoming a bigger problem elsewhere. Finnish move towards NATO was gradual, they were almost an associate member before, having enjoyed very close relations with the alliance. Discussion about chance of global instability resulting from large number of elections due to take place.

Meeting with the European Hybrid Centre of Excellence, Helsinki

Discussion about the characteristics of hybrid threats, actors behind them, key vulnerabilities and how to address them. Russia and China cooperation on hybrid threats, election interference, disinformation including spreading of anti-western narratives, maritime hybrid threats – energy/ data cable infrastructure a real problem and vulnerabilities in the space environment are a growing concern. It is all about reaction in dealing with hybrid threats – although it is easy to under- or over-react. Capacity to react. Nobody has a map of critical infrastructure, and no statutory body with responsibility for protecting it apart from obligations of operators. There are opportunities to address this – EU directive designates protection responsibilities. First responder is generally going to be the state. There was discussion about being unpredictable in response to hybrid threats vs the issue of the Centre having all its material publicly available online. The Centre does not propose counter hybrid attacks. Finland approached the Centre for advice, but they don't proactively offer support. The Centre does not receive classified data but there has been some intelligence shared,

particularly in the case of Ukraine. There has been a pattern of hybrid escalation in Baltic states in recent months, migration pressures Russia's neighbours along the border. Hybrid attacks targeting politicians are becoming more commonplace, bomb threats, attacks against Russian opposition. Cyber-attacks are growing in scale and complexity. Disruption of railway traffic in Poland through a radio hack. There have been arrests for espionage and conducting or preparing sabotage. Energy infrastructure is a big target – the Nord Stream sabotage remains unattributed. Damage to Baltic connector pipeline – Chinese owned ship with Russian links responsible and this demonstrates the dangers. The three Baltic states electricity grid is still connected to the Russian system – to be synchronised with the European grid in Feb 2025, the risk of an unexpected de-synchronisation from Russia has not materialised.

Meeting with the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), Tallinn

The Centre of Excellence is not an operational Centre, it is policy only. It works on international projects not on Research & Development for any individual country. They have four flagship projects:

1. Locked Shields: a cyber defence simulation exercise with red team on attack and blue team on defence.
2. Crossed Swords: a cyber offense exercise. It is made up of multinational teams which enables countries to make relationship and learn from each other.
3. CyCon: An international conference attended by 600 people per year.
4. The Tallinn Manual: An International law textbook, as applicable to cyberoperations.

The legal framework on undersea infrastructure is very out of date. The last treaty is the UN Convention on the Sea from 1994 (the US is not a signatory of this). Undersea cables are very difficult to protect due to the quantity. Additionally, most are owned by private companies and many private companies will pay ransom when they are threatened and do not report the threat to protect information about their cables, so not much is known about these situations. There should be a penalty for not reporting these threats.

Russian hackers are very successful in the domain of cyber-attacks. Building resilience in this area is key. We should be mindful of the quality of the workers in charge of these areas – e.g.

an operator in a power station has much greater responsibility than an operator in a bank but the salaries don't reflect this.

Meeting with Mr Kalev Stoicescu, Chair of the National Defence Committee, Parliament of Estonia

Finland and Sweden joining NATO has been very positive for Estonia. Russia tries to exploit areas where there is less unity. There can be a psychological element to warfare including propaganda, sowing distrust and confusion in the state as well as issuing threats. This can cause nearly as much damage as an actual attack. Russia regards the Balkan countries as only temporarily part of Europe, that they will eventually be part of Russia again. Mr Stoicescu gave an outline of the conscription policy in the Estonian armed forces as well as the ongoing training for the reserve members. He further outlined the Government spending on defence, including military personnel weapons and ammunition.

Annex 4: Members of Committee B (European Affairs) during the inquiry

The following were members of Committee B during the evidence-taking phase of this inquiry:

- Darren Millar MS (Chair)
- John Lahart TD (Vice-Chair)
- Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA
- Lord Bruce of Bennachie
- Peter Fitzpatrick TD
- Ross Greer MSP
- Stephen Hammond MP
- Paul Kehoe TD
- Rebecca Long Bailey MP
- Senator Vincent Martin
- Colin McGrath MLA
- Mark Menzies MP
- Lord Murphy of Torfaen
- Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD
- Karin Smyth MP
- Juan Watterson SHK