



Statement by Minister with Responsibility for
Defence, Mr Paul Kehoe T.D., on the Motion
before Dáil Éireann seeking approval for Irish
Participation in Permanent Structured
Cooperation (PESCO)

Chairman, Members,

The following Motion has been placed on the Order Paper for Dáil Éireann and was referred to this Committee:

"That Dáil Éireann approves Ireland's participation in Permanent Structured Cooperation, pursuant to section 3 of the Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009."

I welcome the opportunity to address the Committee today on the important issue of Permanent Structured Cooperation, commonly referred to as PESCO. In commending the motion, I would like to take the opportunity to remind the Committee that the Government on 21 November last, approved the formal notification by Ireland of our intention to participate, subject to Dáil Éireann's approval of same.

I would also note that following Government approval, the issue of Ireland's intention to participate in PESCO has already been the subject of a Seanad Éireann Commencement Matter on Tuesday, 21 November, a Dáil Éireann Topical Debate, also on 21 November, as well as been the subject of a number of recent Parliamentary Questions. This Committee has also previously raised the matter when I attended to discuss other Defence related issues.



International Security Environment

As the members of the Committee will be very well aware, threats to international peace and security are complex, multidimensional, interrelated and transnational in nature. The ever-changing complex and intertwined nature of threats to our citizens, individual states and to international peace and security cannot be denied. These challenges are too great for any individual state, acting alone, to deal with. The best approach for Ireland, in concert with our fellow EU Member States, continues to be to ensure that the countries on the borders of the EU, and beyond the European neighbourhood are stable, secure and prosperous.

EU and UN Membership

Our membership of the European Union and the United Nations allows Ireland to deepen and sustain democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights through, among other things, participating in overseas peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions, which in turn will make Ireland more safe and secure.

In that regard PESCO is a crucial mechanism which provides a treaty based framework designed to improve the means by which EU Member States can participate jointly in projects to develop capabilities that will enhance contributions to crisis management and peacekeeping

operations undertaken by the EU under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

PESCO Projects

Participation in any PESCO project is entirely voluntary and it is a matter for each member State to decide for itself whether or not to participate on a case-by-case basis. While further work is required before Ireland can decide which PESCO projects we may wish to participate in, I can advise the Committee that examples of the types of projects at which we are currently considering include:

- Upgrade of Maritime Surveillance Systems;
- Development of Unmanned Underwater Vehicles for protection of harbours and maritime systems;
- A Centre of Excellence for EU Military Training Missions, and
- Cyber Threats and Incident Response Information Sharing Platform.

Common Security and Defence Policy

Ireland has been centrally involved in the development of CSDP from the outset and has been one of the leading contributors to CSDP Operations. Ireland supports the role the EU can play in support of international peace and security with the UN at its core. It should be noted that all CSDP operations to date have either been mandated or

supported by the UN and endorsed in UN Security Council Resolutions.

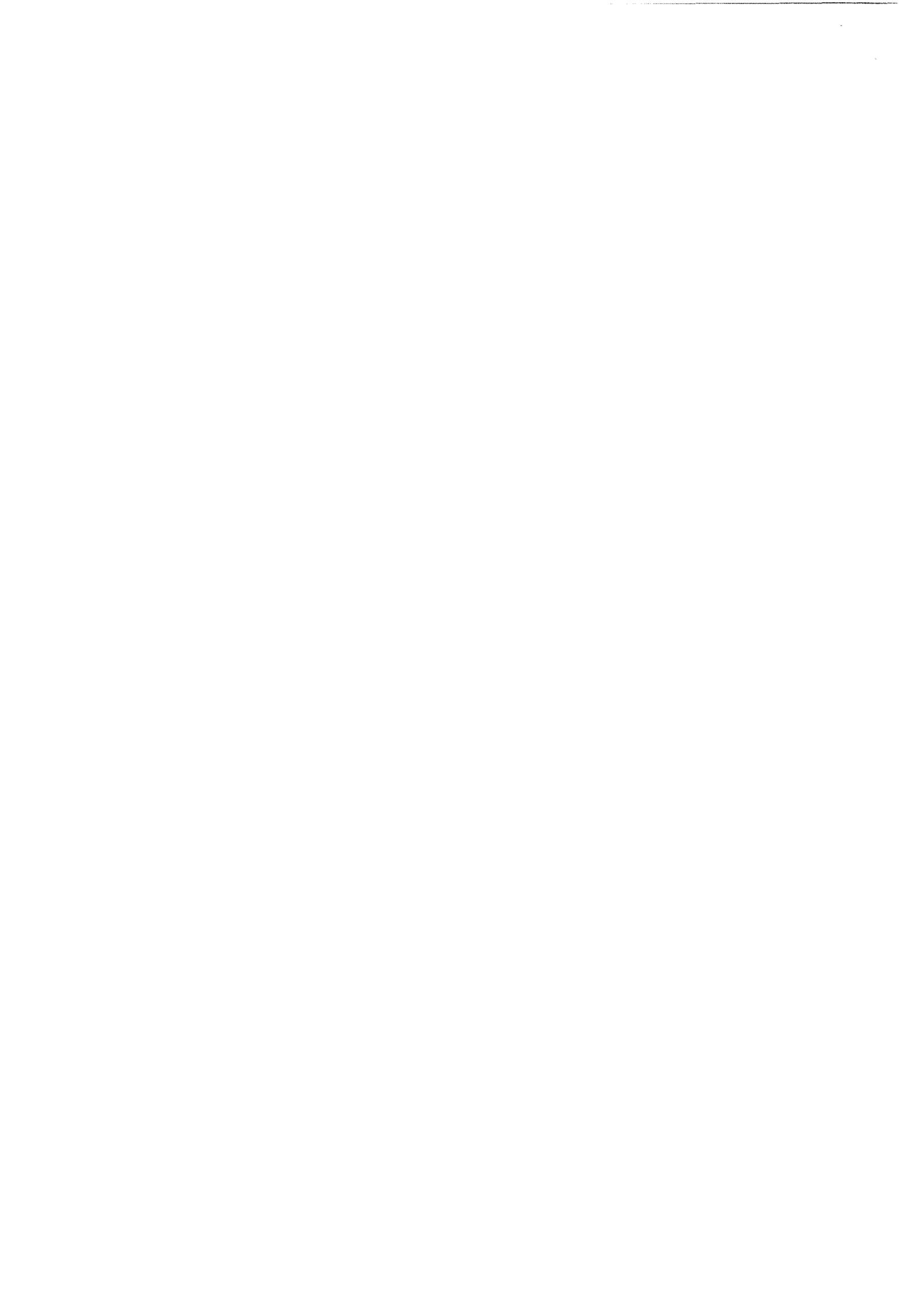
PESCO is a further initiative in strengthening the Union's capacity in this regard. Speaking at the informal meeting of Defence Ministers in Estonia last October, the UN Undersecretary General for Peacekeeping supported the initiative as potentially providing additional capabilities for UN mandated operations. PESCO is also a means of enhancing interoperability and, working with EU partners, ensuring that our troops are equipped with the latest and best equipment and training.

A key challenge to the European Union's capacity to mount crisis management operations, has been a lack of essential capabilities and the political will from member States to commit the required capabilities for CSDP operations. PESCO has been designed to address this challenge, enhancing the political commitment of member States to both develop and deliver capabilities in support of CSDP.

Lisbon Treaty

Participation in PESCO which is provided for in the Treaty of the European Union (Articles 42.6, 46 and Protocol 10) was introduced under the Lisbon Treaty.

Let me be absolutely clear, participation in PESCO has no implications for Ireland's policy of military neutrality or for the 'Triple-lock'. The participation criteria expressly stipulate that PESCO will be undertaken



in full compliance with the Treaty on European Union and the associated protocols and will respect the Member States constitutional provisions. It is also important to note that participation in each project is on an “opt in” basis and is therefore entirely voluntary.

PESCO also has absolutely nothing to do with the creation of an EU army. Nothing in the treaties provides for the creation of an EU Army, in fact it is expressly states in the Lisbon protocol that an EU army cannot be created. PESCO is simply about Member States making more binding commitments to each other to jointly develop military crisis management capabilities for use in support of CSDP Operations.

As I noted earlier, the participation criteria expressly stipulate that PESCO will be implemented in full compliance with the Treaty on European Union and its protocols, respecting the constitutional provisions of the Member States. Three other non NATO EU member States - Finland, Sweden and Austria - have already committed to join PESCO.

PESCO was comprehensively debated in the context of the Lisbon Treaty which was approved by the Irish People when they voted on the Treaty in October 2009. PESCO was specifically referenced in the Lisbon Treaty Protocol to address the concerns of the Irish People and in Ireland’s national declaration. The Legislation setting down

Ireland's approval process for PESCO was published in advance of that Vote and enacted in November 2009.

Conclusion

Ireland, as a strong proponent of the important role the EU can play in support of international peace and security in support of the UN, wishes to remain engaged in all CSDP processes, as it has done to date. Fully participating in these developments ensures that we have a voice and that we can influence the evolution of these initiatives, including PESCO.

It is important that Ireland move forward together and at the same time as our EU partners, including in the security and defence domain, so as to protect our interests within the Union. PESCO is a key initiative in this regard.

Participation in PESCO will also allow our Defence Forces to gain access to latest thinking and technology on capabilities of interest to them. This will help enhance their capabilities for peacekeeping operations. When the Defence Forces deploy overseas, we never do so alone, we always work in close cooperation with other countries. PESCO is a means of enhancing interoperability with project partners and ensuring that our troops are equipped with the latest and best equipment and training, enabling them to be even more effective at peacekeeping for which they are renowned.

Now more than ever, with Brexit and emerging and increasing security challenges in our neighbourhood and beyond, it is important that the Union can demonstrate unity and cohesiveness. To that end, in seeking the support of our EU colleagues on our priorities, it is important that we act in step with our EU colleagues in shared areas of concern, including on security and defence initiatives such as PESCO.

I commend the Motion to the Committee.

Ends

