

**Oireachtas Joint Meeting of Joint Committees on the occasion of Europe Day, 9 May
2019**

**Opening Statement on the Common Security and Defence Policy Challenges facing the
European Union**

Good morning Chairman, and Committee Members. My name is Michaela Reilly. I am a Masters student in UCC on the International Public Policy and Diplomacy programme. I am very grateful for the invitation this morning to discuss the challenges that the European Union is facing concerning its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

On this day it is particularly important to recall why the EU was initially established: to end frequent and bloody wars between neighbours and to unite European countries both economically and politically so as to secure lasting peace across the continent. It has become profoundly difficult to analyse almost any of the future challenges that the EU must withstand without considering the repercussions of Brexit on these. The area of Common Security and Defence Policy is unfortunately no exception. As policy makers and influencers, it is of the utmost importance that the aforementioned founding principles of the EU are not abandoned in the wake of the United Kingdom's exit later this year and in the years ahead.

While different visions of CSDP proposed by the 'Big Three' member states have long created space for smaller member states to avoid hard choices concerning issues of security and defence, a more cohesive EU in the future post-Brexit presents significant challenges to states, like Ireland, who have long thrived in the murky waters of strategic ambiguity.

Indeed, with the United Kingdom leaving, it could be argued that a significant stumbling block for European defence cooperation has been removed. British scepticism has previously allowed others such as Denmark and the Central European states, who viewed NATO as the prime security provider in the European theatre, to stand back from defence cooperation in the EU without overexposing themselves. Others, such as Austria and Ireland, have avoided hard questions on the tensions between formal military non-alignment and the realities of being part of a deeply integrated organisation. The absence of the UK from future CSDP debates will likely push these states into the limelight in terms of blocking or opting out from security cooperation. While the EU must grapple with the loss of its transatlantic alliance partner, it is imperative that it now attempts to balance a bilateral agreement on CSDP with the UK that also compliments a type of unified EU approach to issues of Security and Defence, encompassing the considerations of 'small' and 'big' states alike.

If we look at the decision taken by Federica Mogherini to forge ahead with the publication of the EU's new Global Strategy in the immediate aftermath of the Brexit vote, it is apparent that some attempts by the EU to push ahead with CSDP have been taken. Although faced with somewhat of an existential crisis in June 2016, the EU found a response in building a security architecture to reinvigorate EU institutions and to unite the remaining 27 member states. This provided a common ground for cooperation without reopening a Pandora's Box of institutional reform that would be required to deal with more traditional areas of European cooperation such as market regulation.

For Ireland, the aftermath of the Brexit vote has been particularly challenging. We now have to strongly reconsider our own Security and Defence policy, in addition to that of our position in the wider EU CSDP. Brexit has uncovered a number of political and constitutional fault lines – none more serious for the UK, Ireland, and now the EU, than its impacts on the Good Friday Agreement. The Irish government deserves credit for the way in which it has managed the Brexit negotiations to date, particularly in securing support from our European partners concerning Ireland's position on the border. However, at what price will we pay for this in future negotiations on matters such as CSDP?

The reduced room for manoeuvre on Common Security and Defence for small states, such as ourselves, in an EU that is more dominated by France and Germany than before, must be taken into account. In a Franco-German EU, the space for constructive ambiguity is likely to be greatly reduced. Ireland's hesitancy and ambivalence on this matter may no longer be sustainable.

Irish attitudes to European security and defence might best be characterised by a paraphrase of Churchill in that "We are with CSDP, but not of it. We are linked, but not compromised. We are interested and associated, but not absorbed." It is perhaps time that we do become absorbed in greater cooperation with the EU on issues of Common Security and Defence that extend beyond PESCO, as we lose the shelter of the UK in such debates.

The threats of a no-deal Brexit and the medium to longer term security threats posed by any kind of Withdrawal have yet to be provided for. Both the Irish state and the EU as a whole faces profound challenges in this regard and are there, as of yet, no signs that neither it nor the EU is prepared to address them.

Thank you very much for your time. I will be happy to address any questions that you may have