



**Statement by Minister with Responsibility for Defence, Mr Paul Kehoe T.D., on the Motion before the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs & Trade and Defence seeking approval for Irish Participation in a European Defence Agency programme.**

Chairman,

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 a European Defence Agency Project in relation to Military Search Capability Building pursuant to section 2 of the Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009.*

In commending the motion to the Committee, I will briefly outline the function of the European Defence Agency and the background to the programme that Ireland wishes to participate in.

### **Background to European Defence Agency**

The European Defence Agency was established by a Joint Action of the Council of the European Union in 2004, "to support the Member States and the Council in their effort to improve European defence capabilities in the field of crisis management and to sustain the European Security and Defence Policy as it stands now and develops in the future".

On 6 July 2004, the Government approved Ireland's participation in the framework of the European Defence Agency. It is an Agency of the European Union which is composed of Defence Ministers of the 27 participating Member States. Ireland participates in the framework

of the Agency and contributes to the annual costs of running the Agency including its annual work programme.

The Agency is focused on assisting Member States in capability development, in obtaining better value for existing spending levels, improving competitiveness and securing greater efficiency, particularly in the area of research, technology and procurement of Defence Capabilities. The primary reason for Ireland's participation in the Agency is to support the development of Defence Forces capabilities for peacekeeping and international crisis management operations.

The Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 prescribes that participation in EDA ad-hoc Category A and B projects or programmes is subject to Government and Dáil approval.

Ireland has participated in a number of EDA projects since we commenced our participation in the EDA in 2005. All such projects have been approved by Dáil Éireann in accordance with the provisions of the Defence Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2009 and are targeted at enhancing our defence capabilities in support of international crisis management operations. They include:

- a Force Protection Programme which involved measures to protect military forces engaged in operational activities. This is a key issue for the Defence Forces engaged in peace support and crisis management operations overseas.
- a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Protection Programme to enable the Defence Forces to remain at the leading edge of capability development in this key area through access to the results of the research, studies and development work packages undertaken as part of the programme.
- Counter-Improvised Explosives Devices Manual Neutralisation Projects to enhance the skills of our EOD personnel in dealing with such devices where the use of remote or semi-remote techniques is not possible.
- Maritime Surveillance Networking Projects under which a system was developed to enable the sharing of information and data through a common data interface at differing security levels.
- a project on Cooperation on Cyber Ranges in the European Union which aims to maintain and improve cyber resilience as well as the levels of awareness, insight and expertise of Member States' personnel.

- a project on Joint Procurement Arrangements for the Satellite Communications which aims to provide better value and capability Satellite Communications to EDA member States.

All of these projects are designed to enhance the capacity of the Defence Forces to participate in international crisis management operations, whether through capability development, or more economic procurement of required capabilities.

### **Military Search Capability Building Programme**

The proposal I am putting to the Committee today, is to seek approval for Ireland to participate in an EDA project in relation to Advanced Military Search Capability. This is a key capability when working in a contested environment.

The Defence Forces engage extensively in specialist military search activities, dealing with unexploded ordnance, improvised explosive devices and ensuring a safe and secure operating environment for military operations. The Defence Forces Engineer Specialist Search and Clearance teams are regularly deployed on both home and overseas operations.

There are two specialist search teams operating overseas in UNDOF and UNIFIL and they predominantly conduct route searches and area clearances in advance of vehicle or foot patrols. The Defence Forces have also provided specialist search capability to An Garda Síochána in support of Aid to Civil Power operations during high profile visits by foreign VIPs and for searches for bodies and weapons. Examples of recent such deployments include the Papal, British Royalty and US Vice President visits. There have also been a number of searches for the bodies of missing persons and more conventional operations against paramilitary groups and criminal organisations.

The Defence Forces Corps of Engineers does not have specialist search teams at an advanced search capability level. Advanced search personnel are capable of conducting Hazardous Environment Search, Working in Confined Space and operating in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear environments. Participation by the Defence Forces in this project addresses this capability gap.

The aim of the project is to develop common processes, techniques and procedures for military search for contributing Member States.

The overall cost of the project is €2.8m over six years and will be funded by eight participating Member States. Funding comprises

both financial contributions and contributions in-kind. Ireland's contribution over the lifetime of the project is €157,500. This comprises €102,500 contributions in-kind associated with hosting an international seminar and a number of training events and a direct financial contribution of €55,000. Costs will be met from within existing resources.

Eight Member States are planning to join the project as follows: Austria; Belgium; Cyprus; the Netherlands; Portugal; Spain; Sweden and Ireland.

The anticipated benefits of the Defence Forces participation in this project are:

- It addresses a current deficiency at the advanced level of Engineer Specialist Search and Clearance capability
- the training to Instructor level in this project will ensure that this requirement may be met in-house going forward.
- the project provides an efficient and cost effective means of qualifying teams to advanced search level and maintaining their currency, which would otherwise be prohibitive if it had to be procured in the market.

Additional benefits also arise from interaction with other forces and the sharing of tactics, techniques, procedures and experiences.

The Government's White Paper on Defence published in August 2015 states that Ireland will identify opportunities to participate "*in multinational capability development projects within the framework of the European Defence Agency in support of the Defence Forces' operations, capacity and capability.*" This project is a prime example of how the Defence Forces can develop their Military Search capability to an advanced level and provide a pathway for ensuring there is no future skills fade.

Ireland's participation in this project affords us the opportunity to keep abreast of best practice and new developments in the defence environment in a cost effective manner, particularly as it impacts on multinational crisis management operations.

I commend the Motion to the Committee.

Ends