



BUNREACTH NA ÉIREANN
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An Roghchoiste um Ghnóthaí Eachtracha agus Cosaint
Márta 2023

Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
Consideration of Revised Estimates Volume (REV) 2023

March 2023

Introduction

The Select Committee on 14 February held an engagement with the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence Micheál Martin TD to examine the spending allocations and associated performance metrics for the following Votes:

- **Vote 27: International cooperation**
- **Vote 28: Foreign Affairs**
- **Vote 35: Army Pensions**
- **Vote 36: Defence**

Standing Order 95(3) of Dáil Éireann states:

“The principal purpose of Committee consideration of matters of policy, governance, expenditure, and administration under paragraph (1) shall be— (a) for the accountability of the relevant Minister or Minister of State, and (b) to assess the performance of the relevant Government Department or of a State body within the responsibility of the relevant Department, in delivering public services while achieving intended outcomes, including value for money.”

Select Committees are tasked with consideration of the annual Revised Estimates for Public Services (or REV)¹ that fall within their remit. While Select Committees have no role in approving the Estimates, it is an ongoing opportunity for the Committee to examine Departmental expenditure, to make the budgetary process more transparent, and to engage in a meaningful way on relevant performance issues.

The Committee subsequently sent a message confirming completion of its consideration to the Clerk of Dáil Éireann on 14 February in accordance with Standing Order 101 of Dáil Éireann. Under Standing Order 100(2) of Dáil Éireann, this message is deemed to be the report of the Committee.

¹ The Revised Estimates (comprised of Ministerial Votes / Vote Groups) are included in the Revised Estimates Volume (or REV). REV2023 was published on 14 December 2022.

Reporting on REV consideration

Under SO215A(2)², this report summarises issues arising from the Committee's consideration and will be laid before the Dáil and sent to the Minister for consideration. This report will also be provided to the Committee on Budgetary Oversight which will examine all Select Committee reports, collate the information to identify any common issues or concerns, as well as examples of best practice, and make recommendations for the improvement of the consideration process.

Committee commentary on consideration of REV2023

In a letter sent to the Minister from the Committee Cathaoirleach, a short, non-technical Departmental briefing was requested on 8 December. The briefing was received on 28 December in respect of votes 35 and 36, and on 17 January in respect of Vote 27 and 28. Further briefing material was received on 13 February in respect of Votes 35 and 36. The public hearing with the Tánaiste was held on 14 February. The briefing was comprehensive and was accessible to Members. The Committee concluded that there was sufficient time to prepare for the public engagement with the Tánaiste. The engagement with the Minister was substantial and the Committee was satisfied.

Specific allocations that were queried by the Committee included the following:

Vote 27: International Co-operation

The Committee welcomed expenditure of €10 million in emergency humanitarian assistance to Türkiye and Syria but queried whether this meant that this meant that the relevant budget line was exhausted for the year. The Tánaiste replied that the Government has capacity to respond if further emergency situations arise. The Committee also queried Ireland's humanitarian response capacity given that Ireland had not been able to provide search and rescue assistance in response to the earthquakes. The Committee also raised difficulties of delivering humanitarian aid to Syria. The

² 215A. (1) Subject to Standing Order 215(2) and unless the Dáil shall otherwise order, Committees shall complete their consideration of Estimates referred to them pursuant to that Standing Order not later than 60 days after such Estimates have been so referred.

(2) Any report that a Committee proposes to make arising from its consideration of an Estimate shall be made within a further period of 14 days.

Tánaiste highlighted that Ireland is a strong contributor to UN Central Emergency Response Fund and has consistently provided materials and goods to the hubs in Brindisi in Italy and in Dubai, ensuring that materials requested such as tents, food etc can be supplied rapidly in response to a crisis.

The Committee raised concerns about the destruction of aid that has gone to Palestine and the West Bank and asked what action is being taken to hold Israel to account for the destruction of Irish Aid and donor-funded structures and projects.

The Committee queried progress towards to goal of spending 0.7% of GNI on overseas development assistance. The Committee welcomed increased spending on ODA but noted that progress towards the 0.7% target has largely flatlined since 2015. The Committee also sought an update on progress on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Committee sought further detail on priorities for climate finance related expenditure. The Tánaiste replied that the role of climate adaptation has been a stronger dimension of climate finance since COP26. Ireland's first initiative was to support a German initiative called the global shield. Some of the initial tranche of funding will also go to UN Agencies. The Tánaiste commented that there is work to be done with regards to how best to allocate climate finance funding.

Vote 28: Foreign Affairs

The Committee sought further information in relation to the expansion of Ireland's diplomatic network, with members expressing concern at plan to open an Embassy in Tehran and proposing consideration be given to opening an embassies in Cuba, Lebanon, a consulate in Perth, and a full embassy in Ramallah. The Committee raised concerns at the backlog in processing Foreign Birth Registration applications and sought clarity on operational aspects of the Passport Office. The Committee also sought more the level of funding given to the International Criminal Court, noting the importance of its work in respect both Ukraine and Palestine.

Vote 35: Army Pensions

The Committee noted that while expenditure on pensions had been described in the briefing as non-discretionary and demand driven, the number of people who leave active service and transition to a pension path is under our control. The Committee also proposed that retirees leaving the Permanent Defence Forces could have the option to transition directly to the Reserve Defence Forces as a means of bringing the Reserve Defence Forces up to strength.

Vote 36: Defence Forces

The Committee welcome increased expenditure but queried whether the increase was sufficient to ensure implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on the Defence Forces in respect of the Commission's recommendation to move to Level of Ambition 2. The Committee expressed concern at recruitment and retention levels, with the Defence Forces currently well below establishment strength. The Committee welcomed investment in two maritime patrol aircraft and queried reports that a new CASA C295 had been ordered. The Tánaiste replied that a contract was awarded to Airbus Defence and Space for the provision of a new fixed-wing military transport aircraft for the Defence Forces.

The Committee sought further information on expenditure on built infrastructure and an update on the status of projects identified in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. The Committee queried the allocation of capability develop funding to be spent on equipment, the impact of materials cost on subhead A12 (barrack expenses and engineering equipment), litigation and compensation costs, and communications and IT.

The Committee sought an update on a feasibility study on the future of Cathal Brugha Barracks. The Tánaiste replied that the Government has taken no decision on the relocation of Defence Forces' operations at Cathal Brugha barracks. A tender was run in late 2022 for a Cost-Benefit Analysis of relocation of the Defence Forces operations at Cathal Brugha barracks. Negotiations are ongoing on the outcome of that tender. The CBA-feasibility study feasibility study will take approximately six months.

The Committee welcomed a €5 million allocation for private medical treatment. The Committee proposed reform to pay including pay for apprentices and the introduction of long service increments. The Committee proposed direct employment of army nurses

rather than the use of agencies. The Committee also requested a note providing further information on consideration of low carbon options in the procurement of Army boots and footwear.