



Coimisiún um Óglaigh na hÉireann  
Commission on the Defence Forces

5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Commission on the Defence Forces  
Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021  
By Video Conference  
Minutes

**In attendance**

**Commission Members**

- Mr. Aidan O’Driscoll (Chair)
- Ms. Jane Williams
- Professor Maura Conway
- Ms. Marie Cross
- Professor Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen
- Adm. (Retd) Haakon Bruun-Hanssen
- Mr. Dan Harvey
- Ms. Caitriona Heintz
- Mr. John Minihan
- Lt Gen. (Retd) Conor O’Boyle
- Lt Gen. (Retd) Esa Pulkkinen
- Ms. Geraldine Tallon
- Dr. Gerry Waldron

**Apology**

- Mr. Shay Cody

**Secretariat**

- Mr. Cathal Duffy, Head of Secretariat
- Ms. Gráinne Guinan
- Lt Cdr. Paul Hegarty
- Mr. Jerry Higgins

## **1. Introduction**

The Chair, Mr. Aidan O’Driscoll, began by welcoming members to the fifth plenary meeting of the Commission.

## **2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The draft minutes from the fourth meeting were agreed.

The Chair noted that a replacement for Mr. Peter Brazel, who has had to step down for urgent personal reasons, is due to be appointed shortly.

## **3. Review of RIA Webinar 7<sup>th</sup> April**

The Chair provided an overview of the recent Royal Irish Academy (RIA) hosted webinar and noted that there was a significant interest, with circa 480 registrations while the viewership never dropped below 250, which he felt was a reflection of the significant level of interest generated. There was a consensus that the event was a very positive and beneficial contribution to the Commission’s consultation process, and appreciation was expressed for the work of the RIA and Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) in putting together such an informed group of speakers and moderators. It was noted that a report on the webinar would be provided by the RIA for publication. The Chair indicated that a second webinar, on behalf of the Commission, would be hosted by the IIEA in late July.

## **4. Meeting with NATO Defence Planning and Capability Review Team**

Under this item, the Chair welcomed the Director of the Defence Planning at NATO HQ, Mr Paul Saveroux, and members of his team; each of whom provided a brief summary of their conclusions following the 2018/19 PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP Review). These briefings covered the following areas: Operational Contributions and Deployments; Land Capabilities and Special Forces; Maritime Capabilities; Air Capabilities; and Joint Enabling Capabilities.

Following a broad-ranging discussion on various aspects of the NATO briefing, the Commission noted the usefulness of having this skilled external assessment of various aspects of the Defence Forces capabilities as an input to its work. The need for a clear Level of Ambition around the roles of the Defence Forces was underlined in the discussion, as were the relatively low levels of overall Ireland’s defence funding, and equipment funding specifically, compared to other countries. Also discussed were issues around high level Command and Control within the Defence Forces, options for “jointness” throughout the decision-making levels of the Defence Forces, force structures and investment prioritisation.

The Chair expressed the Commission’s gratitude to the NATO team for their insights and noted that the points raised during the broad discussion will be hugely beneficial to the work of the Commission, and in particular for the Capabilities sub-group which is to be established.

## **5. Update on Public Consultation**

The Head of the Secretariat provided an update on the Public Consultation submissions and provided members with an initial breakdown of the various groupings across some 520 submission received. On completion of initial analysis, and the need to remain cognisant of certain confidential details pertaining to individuals, the first tranche of submissions will be published on the CODF website during May and will continue in further tranches thereafter.

The Secretariat is also developing an appropriate methodology for reviewing the submissions and will be utilising a software platform to ensure the analysis is conducted within accepted norms. The Chair noted that understanding the data, and what the data is revealing, will be very important to the analysis being conducted by the sub-groups, and will be invaluable to the overall work of the Commission.

## **6. Review of visit to Air Corps HQ, Baldonnell & plans for future visits**

The visit by a delegation of Commission members to Casement Aerodrome on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March was reviewed.

The Chair referred to the significant value of the visit in terms of hearing first-hand and candid views from the frontline, and there was agreement that the Commission should continue with a number of further such visits, restrictions permitting, combining both in-person and virtual attendance. The high calibre and commitment of the personnel that the Commission met with, both serving, retired and re-enlisted, was particularly noteworthy.

The next series of Commission visits will be planned in the coming months, restrictions permitting, as the planned visit to the Naval Base had to be postponed but it is hoped it can be re-scheduled shortly.

## **7. Review of Paper from Strategy sub-group**

The Chair of the Strategy sub-group provided an overview of the sub-group's recent report and outlined the "blue-skies" approach, objectives and methodology used in its composition along the core themes of level of ambition, C2, jointness, technology and the Reserve Defence Force. The need for all sub-groups to address issues concerning the Reserve was reiterated, particularly as a separate RDF sub-group is likely to be established later in the year to give full consideration to all Reserve issues.

Following an extensive discussion, the report was welcomed by the members for its clarity in highlighting key issues and for providing a useful starting point for the Structures and Capabilities sub-groups that are to be established. The Chair emphasised that this report is a "straw-man" and, as such, elements of the sub-group's report may, or may not, end up in the Commission's final report. It was noted that the report had been shared with the Department and the Defence Forces and it was agreed that the Commission would need to have regard to work underway in areas such as C2 as part of the process of challenging the "straw-man".

The Chair thanked the sub-group for their considerable work on this report and he welcomed the fact that it had been very positively received by Commission members.

## **8. Updates from Security and Staffing sub-groups**

The Security sub-group draft paper on trends in the threat and risk environments remains in draft form and minor amendments have been made to reflect the members comments at the previous plenary meeting.

The Chair of the Staffing sub-group provided a short briefing note to members which outlined the progress being made. The sub-group Chair indicated that the two visits to installations to date had highlighted a number of key issues that the sub-group will be addressing. It was noted that the sub-group's work-plan will be updated with regard to the latter phases of its work.

## **9. Future work**

### **○ Formation of new sub-groups**

It was agreed that two new sub-groups are to be created to examine issues pertaining to structures and capabilities. Both sub-groups are to be formed in the coming week, based on expressions of interest from members, and the both are to present draft work-plans at next month's Commission meeting. In addition, the Chair emphasised that Reserve issues must be considered as each sub-group conducts its analysis.

### **○ Engagement with UN and EU organisations**

The Chair outlined plans for future meetings with the UN, the European Defence Agency and the European External Action Service in the context of future overseas operations.

### **○ Engagement with Joint Oireachtas (Parliamentary) Committee**

The Chair of the Commission is scheduled to meet with the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April at 1230 and a link will be provided to all Commission members.

### **○ Engagement with Association of Retired Commissioned Officers (ARCO)**

It was confirmed that the Commission will meet with representatives from ARCO on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> April.

## **10. AOB**

- Nil.