



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Peter Robinson says cross-border relations never better at his last NSMC meeting

Relations between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic have never been better, Stormont's out-going First Minister has claimed at his last **cross-border** governmental meeting.

Peter Robinson used his final appearance at the **North South** Ministerial Council (NSMC) to hail the current levels of co-operation as the most positive since partition.

“Having gone through a transition over many years I think we have probably the best relationship between Northern Ireland and the south than we have had at any time in our history,” said the retiring Democratic Unionist leader.

“There is a relaxed business-like atmosphere at our meetings, there is a genuine attempt to try and further both of our interests in the co-operation that we are having between the (Irish) government and Northern Ireland Executive. I think it augers well for the future. I may not be here but I know colleagues will continue to move things forward.”

Mr Robinson is set to be replaced by Stormont Finance Minister Arlene Foster as both DUP leader and First Minister when he official leaves office next month.

There was an upbeat and at times humorous mood at the NSMC headquarters in Armagh as Mr Robinson said farewell to counterparts from the Dublin government.

Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny, Tanaiste Joan Burton and Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs Charlie Flanagan all paid warm tribute to the retiring DUP Assembly member.

One of the most remarkable moments came when Mr Robinson spoke Irish to quote the famous republican slogan “Tíocfaidh ar lá” (our day will come) in a light-hearted exchange with his partner-in-powersharing and former arch-foe Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness.

Noting that he and Mr Robinson were the only two ministers left from the Stormont Executive of 1999, the Sinn Fein veteran speculated on his own retirement.

“Very shortly I will be the last, so my day too will come at some stage,” he said.

Mr Robinson interrupted: ``It's 'Tiocfaidh ar la', isn't it?"

Amidst peals of laughter, Mr McGuinness replied: ``I am delighted to see your Irish is improving."

Mr Kenny also praised **cross-border** relations as he wished Mr Robinson well in retirement.

I want to pay public tribute to Peter Robinson as a political engine and a driver over many years that has left his imprint on Northern Ireland politics and the politics of this country and on the political landscape," he said.

You can sense the confidence on both sides here about much closer co-operation as we set out to implement the Stormont House Agreement (political deal involving Stormont and the UK and Irish governments) and the issues of **cross-border** interest on both sides."

On behalf of the Irish government, Mr Kenny presented Spurs fan Mr Robinson with the Royal Irish Academy's biography of Irish names and two tickets to next year's Spurs v Arsenal premier league game.

Mrs Burton also paid tribute to the long-standing unionist leader.

I want to join with others in wishing Peter well in the next chapter of his life," she said.

I think Peter's political career has seen him move through a whole series of political challenges."

Source: Belfast Telegraph

14 December 2015 Monday

Northern shoppers head South in search of bargains

A steady stream of people still **cross the Border** looking for bargains but the flow has been reversed: today it is shoppers from Northern Ireland who are heading to the South.

Retailers in the Republic's Border towns say they have noticed a double-digit increase in custom from the North this Christmas as Northern Irish consumers take advantage of a weak euro and intense competition among retailers to fill their shopping trolleys for less.

This time eight years ago Newry was struggling to cope with an invasion of southern shoppers fuelled by the sterling-euro price parity. Five-mile long traffic tailbacks were not unusual at the weekends as southern shoppers helped to make Sainsbury's Newry store its number one performer across the UK for alcohol and confectionery sales.

Today, euro shoppers, although welcome in the city, are a rarer breed. The major worry for businesses and retailers in Newry is persuading Northern Ireland consumers to shop locally instead of travelling the short distance across the Border to enjoy the benefits of the current strength of the pound against the euro.

Better value

"Back in 2009 there were 90-minute tailbacks outside shopping centres in Newry as southern-registered cars queued to get in. It has flipped totally now," said Harry Traynor of Marshes Shopping Centre. "The disparity in pricing has closed up and northern shoppers will find much better value here now."

According to Paddy Malone of the Dundalk Chamber of Commerce, the migration of Northern shoppers is more than welcome.

"There is a real feelgood factor in the town this year. You only just have to look around the streets and car parks to see what's happening on the ground. I'd estimate that every fourth car in the town is a Northern car, everywhere you go you hear northern accents and it is definitely bringing a great lift to Dundalk.

"We really struggled here when the economy dipped. It was very, very scary. Dublin may have caught a cold but we got pneumonia and the loss of business suffered by Dundalk when the exchange rates were more favourable to the euro was devastating.

"There was just a flow of one-way traffic of people going north - and nobody was blaming them for trying to make every cent count - but the impact that had on the town was terrible".

Mr Malone, who has an accountancy firm in Dundalk, said no one was taking the current boost for granted and while it may help create some temporary retail jobs, it is unlikely to translate into long-term investment.

"We know from experience that everything can change in a blink of an eye, but today it's in our favour. There is no big exodus of people going north to shop from Dundalk and there are a lot more people from the North coming to us. That is helping local businesses, it is bringing money into the town that is staying in the town, that is keeping people in jobs," he said.

"It is very simple: what we are experiencing at the moment is all driven by the fact that Northern Ireland shoppers can get more for their money in Dundalk at the moment, whether it is for their weekly shop or the Christmas presents."

In previous years the Dundalk Chamber of Commerce has organised an advertising campaign to attract Northern Irish shoppers across the Border but this year it was not felt necessary.

However, while Dundalk retailers may be enjoying the pre-Christmas boom new figures released today by the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium (NIRC) confirm the challenges facing Northern Irish retailers close to the Border.

'Black Friday'

NIRC director Aodhán Connolly said the strong pound was simply an added "burden" for retailers in the North, particularly in Fermanagh, Derry and Newry. He said its latest industry research showed shopper footfall in Northern Ireland's town centres last month recorded its worst performance in two years primarily because consumers took advantage of online "Black Friday" promotions.

Mr Connolly said the North's retail industry was undergoing "profound structural change at a time of weak demand and falling shop prices" and the fact that the strong pound could "tempt" local consumers to **cross the Border** did not help. One businessman who hails from Armagh, however, was not complaining. Terry Boyle may have been born north of the Border but his business heart lies firmly in Dundalk.

Owner of Dundalk Bureau De Change, he says on busy days it can have as many as 100 customers from the North exchanging their sterling for euro. "It is all to do with the value they can get in Dundalk, that is really what's driving people from the North to come south."

Source: The Irish Times