



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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MPs to probe implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland peace process

MPs are to examine whether Brexit would have implications for the Northern Ireland peace process.

The potential impact for the land border with the Republic and the loss of EU funds for promoting peace, reconciliation and **cross-border** co-operation will be among other issues considered by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.

Opportunities following a split with Europe allowing the UK Government to increase spending in Northern Ireland and reduce taxes will also be examined. EU state aid rules currently restrict adopting some special measures for Northern Ireland.

Committee chairman Laurence Robertson said: "It is 40 years since the UK held a referendum on membership of the then European Economic Community. The forthcoming vote therefore represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for people to express their opinion on this important issue.

"Our aim is not to make a recommendation on whether the people of Northern Ireland should vote to leave the EU or remain a member. Rather, we will look to inform public debate on the specific issues affecting Northern Ireland that should be considered."

The committee has invited written evidence on its inquiry with a view to holding public evidence sessions in February and March.

The Prime Minister has admitted he is "very suspicious of Brussels" as he said there was a "good case" for new measures to assert the power of Westminster over European Union legislation.

David Cameron, who faces a crunch meeting with EU leaders in February over his demands for a new deal for the UK, said he wanted a settlement that represented the "best of both worlds" - giving Britain the benefits of the single market without the euro or closer ties with Brussels.

A referendum on Brexit could be held later this year, commentators have suggested.

A former British government minister has said creating an EU border between Northern Ireland and the Republic would be a retrograde step.

Lord Alf Dubs said Brexit endangered the close relations between different parts of the island and argued strongly in favour of the UK remaining in the EU.

Freedom of movement restrictions, border controls and customs checking in Ireland were among concerns raised recently during a meeting of British and Irish parliamentarians.

Source: Belfast Telegraph

19 January 2016

New £50m **cross-border** cancer centre will be open by autumn

A NEW radiotherapy centre for cancer patients on both sides of the border is on course to open later this year - and has already created 215 jobs.

Funding for the radiotherapy unit nearing completion in the grounds of Altnagelvin Hospital in Londonderry will be shared between Stormont and the Irish Government on a pro rata basis.

The centre is scheduled to open on time and within budget.

From this autumn, almost 90% of people diagnosed with cancer from across the Western Trust area and Donegal will be treated at the £50m unit. Alan Moore, the Western Trust's director of strategic capital development, described it as a "hospital within a hospital".

Both the running and construction costs for the huge centre will be shared between the two governments.

Mr Moore said: "The building has been designed with the holistic needs of the patients at its centre.

"The staff have all been recruited and in total 215 new positions have been created although some, like the administrative staff, will not take up their positions until later this year.

"We advertised far and wide and have secured staff from all over the island of Ireland, the UK, Europe - in fact, right across the globe.

"This centre will be one of four in Ireland, the others being Belfast, Galway and Dublin.

"This will be one of the most modern facilities in the whole of Europe and will certainly not be a second centre to Belfast or anywhere.

"It will be opened this year - that is a definite - and it will come in on budget. Anything else just was not an option.

"So while at this stage we can't be more specific about the actual date that we will become operational, it will be autumn." More than 500,000 patients will access their radiotherapy at Altnagelvin.

For people living the Western Trust area, it will mean they no longer have to face an arduous journey of at least 90 minutes each way to Belfast.

People living in Donegal will be spared an even longer journey of around four hours travelling to either Galway or Dublin for their treatment.

However, while the centre in Derry will have the most modern and upto-date equipment installed later this year, there will still be 10% of people who have to travel to Belfast for their treatment.

Consultant oncologist Dr David Stewart said: "Unfortunately, people diagnosed with rarer forms of cancer and children will still have to go to Belfast for their chemotherapy and radiotherapy because of the very specialist nature of their conditions.

"For the vast majority of people, the long journeys they faced to get radiotherapy will soon be a thing of the past." He added: "Previously if a patient was considered too ill to make these long journeys either to Belfast or to Galway or Dublin they didn't get radiotherapy, but that will not be the situation any more."

Source: Belfast Telegraph

21 January 2016

Brexit is biggest immediate threat to Northern Ireland economy, says SDLP leader Colum Eastwood; 'Brexit is a threat to farming families, a threat to our business community and a threat to our exports'

SDLP leader Colum Eastwood has said a Brexit represents the biggest immediate threat to the economy of Northern Ireland and to the island as a whole.

Speaking ahead of delivering a keynote address in Brussels on Thursday night at an event organised by the Party of European Socialists Mr Eastwood said any result in Northern Ireland should be respected separately from the rest of the UK result and that a Brexit would fundamentally undermine successive Anglo-Irish Agreements.

He also urged the Taoiseach Enda Kenny to stand by those Agreements when meeting the British Prime Minister David Cameron next week.

Mr Eastwood said: "It appears more and more likely that we will be faced with a 'Brexit' referendum this year, possibly as early as the summer.

"Tonight in Brussels I'll be outlining the devastating impact that a 'Brexit' would have on Northern Ireland. A 'Brexit' is a threat to farming families, a threat to our business community and a threat to our exports. In the case of Northern Ireland it is also a threat to the multiple arrangements and Agreements between the islands of Ireland and Britain.

"There is a huge amount at stake. I will be meeting with the Taoiseach in Dublin on Saturday. I will urge him to represent the interests of the entire island, not just the 26 counties, when speaking with the British Prime Minister in Downing Street next week.

"A Brexit would undermine and destabilise the fabric of successive Anglo-Irish Agreements. It would undermine and destabilise our **North-South** institutions. It would resurrect borders and resurrect barriers for business.

"As co-guarantor of those Anglo-Irish Agreements, the Taoiseach has a role and a duty to represent the interests of the North on this issue.

"The selfish and sectional interests of some in the Tory party cannot be the only voice steering this decision and debate.

"The SDLP has a clear view on what should happen. We will be fighting for the referendum vote in the North to be respected separately.

"The vote of Northern Ireland citizens should be respected separately. After all, we have most to lose."

Villiers dodges Brexit question

Meanwhile the Northern Ireland Secretary Theresa Villiers has refused to be drawn on whether an EU exit would be good for Northern Ireland amid concerns over a split within her team at the Northern Ireland Office.

Ms Villiers is reported to be considering campaigning against the UK's continued membership of the European Union during the forthcoming referendum.

In contrast, Northern Ireland minister Ben Wallace told MPs he believed a reformed EU was "where the UK wants to be".

Labour urged Mr Wallace to reassure the Stormont Executive and Northern Irish public about the region's future within the EU given the "mixed messages" from him and his ministerial boss.

DUP MP Sammy Wilson tried to push Ms Villiers to back a British exit - referred to as Brexit - as he noted the positives of leaving.

The MP for East Antrim asked Ms Villiers: "While the devolution of corporation tax will be important in growing the Northern Ireland economy, would you also agree a vote to leave the EU would help the Northern Ireland economy insofar as it would release £18bn every year for expenditure on public services, would enable us to enter trade agreements with growing parts of the world, and would release us from the stifling bureaucracy of Europe?"

Ms Villiers replied: "Well, I'm afraid you're tempting me to engage in arguments which are rightly a matter for everyone in this country when they get to vote on that referendum.

"We promised a referendum in our manifesto - that's what we're going to deliver."

Margaret Ritchie MP earlier asked Mr Wallace: "Would you encourage your colleague (Ms Villiers) to argue for a yes vote in the EU referendum?"

Mr Wallace replied: "I think there's a temptation in front of me. I think what I'd say is, certainly up to date, membership of the European Union has been good for Northern Ireland. I hope and support the Prime Minister's efforts in achieving reform.

"A reformed EU is where the United Kingdom wants to be - an EU that works to the benefit of everyone in the United Kingdom - and I think if we can achieve that then we can take advantage of being neighbours of Ireland - one of the biggest economic partners of Northern Ireland - to make sure the economy can go from strength to strength."

Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary Vernon Coaker also warned there was "very real concern" in the region about the impact of leaving the EU on trade and investment.

He told the Northern Ireland minister: "You will know there's very serious concern in Northern Ireland about a possible Brexit, in particular because of the fact that it's the only part of the UK with a land border with another EU country.

"Can I also (press you) to reassure the Executive and the people of Northern Ireland about this in view of the mixed messages on Brexit emanating from the ministerial team - in particular your views as opposed to the secretary of state."

Mr Wallace replied: "There is no mixed message. Both myself and (Ms Villiers) are keen for the EU to produce some reforms, as is the Prime Minister's strategy. And when those reforms - and maybe you know what the EU is agreeing, maybe you have a special hotline - are presented to this House, then we'll be able to make a decision.

"For my part, I believe in the past that membership of the EU has been good for Northern Ireland."

Source: Belfast Telegraph