



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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19 February 2016

Scottish minister urges Ireland to take part in referendum debate

Ireland is the only foreign state whose voice should be heard in the referendum on the UK's future in the European Union, a Scottish minister has said.

Humza Yousaf, a member of the Scottish National Party and Scotland's minister for Europe, said his advice to those across the continent who wanted the UK to remain in the EU was "to say nothing at all".

However, Ireland was the one exception to that rule.

"The Irish are seen as close friends, indeed our cousins," Mr Yousaf said. "Any support they give will be viewed positively, [if given] in a way that is genuine and sincere."

Speaking in Dundalk, Co Louth yesterday, Mr Yousaf said Irish voters could play a decisive role in the Brexit referendum, which is expected to take place in June.

"All the polls suggest this is on a knife edge. You have 465,000 Irish citizens living in the UK. That could possibly swing it," he said at a conference on Brexit organised by the Centre for **Cross-Border** Studies.

Dragged out

Mr Yousaf suggested that if the UK voted to leave but a majority of Scottish voters wanted to stay in, being "dragged out of the EU against our will" could lead to another independence referendum.

Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon has said a second independence vote will take place only if there is public demand. "But this could be an issue that would create material change which could facilitate some of that demand," Mr Yousaf said.

Mary C Murphy, a lecturer in politics at University College Cork, said a British vote to leave would trigger political and economic instability, and could result in the value of sterling falling.

"In the most dire assessment, the future of the EU and European integration could be called into question," Dr Murphy said.

"In addition, Northern Ireland's capacity to influence a post-Brexit political and economic landscape is limited due to its size and political make-up," she said.

Paul Brennan, a British Labour MEP from the north of England, said the Northern Ireland peace process would be threatened in the event of a vote to leave.

He suggested there was a place in the referendum debate for US politicians, particularly those who were involved in the peace process.

It was not only Scotland that could be forced out of the EU against its will, he added.

It was possible that Scotland, Wales, the northern English border region, Yorkshire and London could vote to remain in the EU but that the UK overall would have a majority in favour of leaving.

"We're looking potentially at the Balkanisation of England," he said.

Source: The Irish Times

20 February 2016

DUP confirms it will campaign for Brexit in Leave/Remain referendum; Do you agree with DUP? Scroll down and cast your vote

The Democratic Unionist Party has formally announced its intention to campaign for a Brexit.

The anticipated move from DUP leader and Stormont First Minister Arlene Foster came in the wake of David Cameron's referendum announcement.

Northern Ireland Secretary Theresa Villiers has also joined those advocating an EU exit.

The other three parties in the Stormont Executive - Sinn Fein, the SDLP and the Alliance party - all support the UK staying within the European Union.

The Ulster Unionist Party, which quit the power-sharing coalition administration in Belfast last year, has yet to officially nail its colours to the mast.

Mrs Foster said individual members of her party would be free to take opposing sides in the debate.

"The Democratic Unionist Party has always been Eurosceptic in its outlook," she said.

"At every stage in this European negotiation process we had hoped to see a fundamental change to our relationship with Europe.

"In our view we see nothing in this deal that changes our outlook. Therefore we will on balance recommend a vote to leave the EU.

"Importantly however the decision on whether the United Kingdom should remain in or leave the EU is fundamentally not one for parties but for every individual voter across the nation to determine.

"As every voter has the opportunity to express a view we fully expect that DUP members and voters will hold a range of differing personal views as to what is in the best interests of the United Kingdom. They are fully entitled to do so during what will be a momentous political debate about the direction of travel our nation chooses."

Mrs Foster called for a "positive" campaign.

"There have been far too many scare stories already in this debate," she said.

"People want clarity. They want facts not spin. I hope that, on both sides, the scare stories will now stop as we get down to the serious business of debating our future relationship with Europe."

SDLP leader Colum Eastwood said: "This campaign will be one of the most important votes faced by people in Northern Ireland in decades.

"It is therefore vital that a strong and positive campaign is conducted to remain in Europe."

He added: "Secretary of State Theresa Villiers has today joined the Leave Campaign. As I have told her repeatedly, she does not represent Northern Ireland in this position. She must not attempt to speak on our behalf.

"The simple fact is that the pick and mix of extremists and eccentrics in the Leave Campaign have no Plan B."

Sinn Fein Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness said the island of Ireland had "benefited greatly" from the EU.

"Benefits of our EU membership can be felt daily across all sections of our society and many organisations and groups have directly benefited from EU funding," he said.

"In particular, our agriculture and agri-food industry have gone from strength to strength with the help of EU Single Farm Payments.

"The EU has also supported key infrastructure projects and boosted our economy through peace and structural funds.

"It has also been a key supporter of the progress made in the peace and political processes over the last two decades.

"Businesses, industry, the agricultural sector and community and voluntary organisations have made it clear that they want to continue to avail of the huge opportunities that exist as a result of our EU membership.

"The future of Ireland, **north and south**, is within the European Union and Sinn Fein will be campaigning vigorously to stay in".

Jim Allister, leader of the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) party, described Mr Cameron's deal as "pitiful".

"Not a single important aspect of our relationship with the EU will change as a result of Mr Cameron's deal," he said.

"Roll on the referendum in which TUV will campaign vigorously, and unitedly, and with others to extricate our nation from the EU. We have nothing to lose but our chains."

Source: Belfast Telegraph

23 February 2016

PM dismisses calls for Villiers to quit over her backing for Brexit

David Cameron has backed Secretary of State Theresa Villiers after calls for her to resign over her support for a UK exit from the EU.

The Northern Ireland Office also made clear that Mrs Villiers will remain in position unless the Prime Minister conducts an unexpected reshuffle.

Mr Cameron has allowed Cabinet ministers to campaign against remaining within the EU, and Mrs Villiers is part of a six-strong anti-EU group which also includes ministers Michael Gove and Chris Grayling,

Mr Cameron told the House of Commons: "The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland does an excellent job.

"She is exercising her ability to reach a personal decision and to campaign for Britain to leave the EU and that's absolutely right she is able to do that.

"I think the key thing is everybody in Northern Ireland should make up their own mind based on the evidence and I look forward to coming to try to help persuade them to remain in a reformed EU."

But Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness and SDLP leader Colum Eastwood insisted Mrs Villiers should stand down.

Mr McGuinness said: "It's odd that Theresa Villiers should now be advocating withdrawing from the EU when its benefits for the North are quite obvious.

"It's not surprising, however, given the fact that she is not elected by and does not represent the people of the North that she should be so cut off from public opinion."

Mr Eastwood said Mrs Villiers had chose to "join the extremists and the eccentrics" and used her ministerial office "to lend weight to a campaign whose goals are in direct conflict with the interests of the people of Northern Ireland."

He said Mrs Villiers would have little choice except to resign if the result of the referendum on June 23 is to remain within the EU.

But a spokeswoman for Ms Villiers responded: "The Prime Minister has made clear ministers would be free to campaign in a personal capacity ahead of an EU referendum.

"The Secretary of State remains totally focused on her ongoing and determined efforts to build a brighter, more secure future for NI. To suggest otherwise is ludicrous."

Sinn Fein, the SDLP and Alliance Party are all campaigning for the UK to remain inside the EU.

The DUP are backing Brexit while allowing individual members to vote to stay, and the executive of the Ulster Unionist Party is planning to meet next week to decide on their position.

But leader Mike Nesbitt has already said: "I would hope to recommend that we stay in."

The party had wanted to see the outcome of Mr Cameron's negotiations with the EU on a range of issues, but Mr Nesbitt had indicated a vote to leave could pose an "existential threat" to the UK.

That is due to fears that if a majority of voters in Scotland are in favour of remaining, another independence referendum in Scotland could be triggered.

"As I see it, as a unionist, Brexit is about uncertainty," he said at an event organised by the Centre for **Cross-Border** Studies.

DUP leader and First Minister Arlene Foster said: "At every stage in this European negotiation process we had hoped to see a fundamental change to our relationship with Europe.

"We see nothing in this deal that changes our outlook. Therefore we will on balance recommend a vote to leave the EU.

"We fully expect that DUP members and voters will hold a range of differing personal views as to what is in the best interests of the UK.

"They are entitled to do so during what will be a momentous political debate about the direction of travel our nation chooses."

Source: Belfast Telegraph

23 February 2016

Brexit 'would not mean UK-Ireland border checks', says Villiers

Northern Ireland Secretary Theresa Villiers has rejected suggestions that UK withdrawal from the EU would require border checks to be reinstated with the Republic.

Ms Villiers, who is campaigning for Brexit, said there was "every reason to suggest" that the UK and Ireland could maintain free movement under the kind of common travel area arrangement which existed before the two countries joined the EU in 1973.

She dismissed calls for her to step down from her Cabinet position while campaigning for a Leave vote, telling BBC Radio 4's World at One: "I think it's perfectly reasonable for me to have chosen a side in this referendum. The great thing is that every single person in the UK, including in Northern Ireland, will get to take this decision, not just the Secretary of State.

Asked whether Brexit would mean tighter border controls with the Republic, Ms Villiers said: "That's not inevitable at all. We've always had a much closer relationship with the citizens of the Republic of Ireland than with the rest of the EU.

"It's perfectly possible to maintain that free movement with Irish citizens. After all we give them privileges in the UK which we accord to no other EU citizens, like the right to vote in our elections."

It was "certainly not impossible" to manage the risk of migrants from third countries crossing into the UK from Ireland, she insisted.

And she added: "I don't think anyone should assume that border checks should be introduced as a result of a UK exit.

"We are in the area of scare stories. We do need to recognise that the relationship between the UK and Ireland when it comes to this common travel area is decades older than our EU membership and doesn't depend on it.

"We've run an effective common travel area for many decades with the Republic of Ireland and there's every reason to suggest that that would continue whether we leave the EU or we don't. It's manifestly in our interests to ensure that ease of passage across the border between **North and South** is as easy as possible. No-one is wanting to wind the clock back and to introduce the kind of security checks at the border that there were during the Troubles."

Ms Villiers played down the risk that companies would relocate south of the border to the Republic in order to remain in the EU, insisting Northern Ireland will remain an "immensely competitive" place to do business.

"I think Northern Ireland would still be immensely competitive outside the EU," she said. "It has a phenomenally successful manufacturing base. It has companies that are selling all round the world. And there are many large global companies that have made it absolutely clear that they would continue to invest in the UK if we withdraw from the EU, and they wouldn't face the same costs that come with the European Union at the moment."

Source: Belfast Telegraph

24 February 2016

Ferguson: Food prices would rocket with 'Brexit'

The cost of food will rocket by at least 30 per cent without EU subsidy support, the future leader of the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) has warned.

Ivor Ferguson, said the UK's withdrawal from the Europe would be a "step into the darkness" that would create uncertainty for the north's farmers.

The UFU has yet to say whether it is in favour of the UK leaving the EU, but its deputy president's remarks suggest the prospect of a so-called 'Brexit' would create major difficulties for an industry already under severe pressure.

As well as concerns over funding, other negative impacts from EU withdrawal highlighted by the future UFU president at a recent Centre for **Cross Border** Studies conference in Dundalk, included the tightening of **north-south** trade controls and an influx of poor quality meat from the United States and South America.

Mr Ferguson also said agrifood companies would be unlikely to invest in the north without access to the huge European Single Market.

"Although farmers have many questions, overall the EU has served us very well in the farming community," Mr Ferguson told last Friday's conference.

His comments are unlikely to make comfortable reading for the eurosceptic DUP, which has long cast itself as a champion of the north's agriculture industry. DUP leader Arlene Foster has said her party will recommend that the UK leaves the EU.

Mr Ferguson said he had some misgivings about an EU pesticide ban and the Common Agricultural Policy's increased focus on the environment. However, the UFU deputy president appears unambiguous in his support for continued EU membership, saying there are "lots of positives for staying".

Among the issues he highlighted were:

- Access to Single European Market of 500m people "absolutely critical for farmers";
- EU regulations "certainly provide us with a lot of benefits";
- "Very doubtful" if companies like Moy Park-owner JBS would invest in the north following Brexit;
- £330m of EU subsidies "important to keep the price of food down".

Mr Ferguson, a mixed farmer from Markethill in Co Armagh, is expected to become UFU president in just over two years' time.

The union's current president Ian Marshall said the Common Agricultural Policy was crucial for farm incomes and allowed consumers to enjoy low food prices.

"It accounts for over 40 per cent of EU spending, and is one of its few common policies," he said.

"Our 12,000 plus members will individually decide where they stand on this issue and vote accordingly themselves."

He said the union was so far unable to analyse the pros and cons of the UK's EU membership because neither the 'in' nor 'out' camps had yet to detail their respective visions for the north's agriculture industry.

SDLP agriculture spokesman Sean Rogers said EU membership was "invaluable" to the farming industry.

He said that between 2007 and 2013 the north drew down more than £1.3 billion in Single Farm Payments.

"We should be seeking to enhance our export market, not reduce it," the South Down MLA said.

"Leaving the European Union would introduce the very real risk of new trade barriers for our farming industry that would critically endanger our opportunity for growth and which may destabilise market prices."

Source: The Irish News