

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

26/02/2016 - 04/03/2016



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Monday 29 February 2016

EU Referendum Date

Summary: Ms McGahan asked the deputy First Minister for his assessment of what damage would result from an exit from the EU.

Mr M McGuinness: This will obviously be a huge debate over the next weeks and, indeed, months. People have said that, if there was a decision to exit Europe, we would effectively be walking into the unknown. The reality for us is that we have received significant support from the European Union, and we would, for example, lose access to the structural funds, which were something in the region of £982 million over the period 2014 to 2020. That is made up of things like the European regional development fund, INTERREG, Peace IV and the European social fund. Common agricultural policy funding is worth approximately £2.5 billion in 2014-2020, and we would lose access to competitive EU funding, which, in the four years from 2011-12 to 2014-15, amounted to £95 million. So there are implications.

When we have to answer questions of this nature in the Assembly, particularly from the perspective of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I am always very conscious that there will be differences of opinion at times about how we should answer them. I say that respectful of the positions of other parties, like, for example, the DUP. Everybody is obviously entitled to their position in the debate. My sense of it is that we would lose out considerably for our farming community, our business community and the work that is going on in our universities. A lot of parties in the Assembly have expressed their opinions, and we await with interest what the Ulster Unionists have to say. It will be a big debate in the time ahead.

Source: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-29-02-2016.pdf>

Summary: Mr Attwood asked the deputy First Minister if he agreed that the fact that the Prime Minister was in Northern Ireland at the weekend demonstrates that the votes of people in Northern Ireland will be critical come the June referendum.

Mr M McGuinness: I think that the Member is correct. It is certainly my view that there is no doubt that the strength of opinion in the North among the business community, farming organisations, the community and voluntary sector, the universities, educational establishments and, of course, the majority of parties in the Assembly is for staying in Europe. David Cameron was here at the weekend. Boris Johnson was here this morning, and the First Minister and I met him in what was a good news story with the £62 million investment in 200 more buses from Wrightbus that will secure jobs for 300 people for the next short while. During our visit to Antrim this morning, the media were very focused on the fact that he was here and on his views and opinions. He was asked about it, the First Minister was asked about it and I was asked about it, and we all stated our positions. I am in the "stay in" camp, and I think that the damage that would be done to us in the North and to the island of Ireland by an exit from Europe makes a compelling case for staying in. Look at the number of organisations and political parties in the North who are in favour of staying in. I believe that, when it comes to a vote, an overwhelming majority will vote to stay.

Source: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-29-02-2016.pdf>



The Houses of the Oireachtas are in their Election Recess at this time.