

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

15/07/2016 - 22/07/2016



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Summary: There is no Assembly Business scheduled for this week.



Wednesday 20 July 2016

United Kingdom Referendum on European Union Membership:

Summary: Gerry Adams asked the Taoiseach to report on his conversations with the First and Deputy First Ministers on the work of the North-South Ministerial Council and the cross-Border bodies and the impact of Brexit

Enda Kenny: Deputy Adams raised a number of points. We had a good meeting last week with the different leaders of the groupings here. It was a positive and constructive engagement. I should make it clear that what is actually unique in respect of our position here is the Good Friday Agreement, as we are a co-guarantor of the Agreement with the British Government. It deals with all the aspects of life in Northern Ireland and, by implication, North and South and east and west. My point in Donegal was that the authors of the Good Friday Agreement in their vision put a clause in the agreement, and at some point in future - we are nearly 20 years on now - a Secretary of State might have evidence that would trigger that clause. That evidence is not there now. My following point was that, were it to happen at some point in future, the negotiations as part of the overall reflection on the Good Friday Agreement should ease the way if the majority of people in Northern Ireland said they wanted to leave the United Kingdom, and, having found themselves removed from the European Union and wishing to join a country - the Republic of Ireland - that continues to be a member of the Union, the road should be made easier for them. It is just that point, and it might

never happen. As part of the overall discussions, the position should be catered for. Clearly, there is no evidence of a majority in Northern Ireland voting for that now or in the immediate future. One can consider the discussions we will have, and the Good Friday Agreement is central to that. It is an issue the original authors foresaw and, whether it happens or not, they put in a clause that will allow for it to happen. I am just continuing that for the time ahead.

I would like to think we could have this engagement and conversation in September. I agree completely with everybody that this is far bigger than any individual party, as it is about all the people. This process should be enthusiastic, forward-focused, welcoming and inclusive, allowing for every person's view, whether he or she is an entrepreneur, a researcher, a farmer, a worker, a housewife or whatever type of citizen. It is much too important not to have that happen. In the 1980s, when the New Ireland Forum was set up, not all the parties agreed to join, and I remember the McGimpsey brothers attended on behalf of the Unionist party to give evidence in a personal capacity. When one considers the implications of what we may have to deal with, it is very important that people have the opportunity, or whatever term we put on it, to have their point of view put forward. Whether it is an island conversation, conference or opportunity, the issues need to be heard so that everybody understands the scale of what we are at. I am receiving much interest from businesses North and South that want to express their opinions. I would like that to be done in a non-divisive way, as it is in the interests of everybody that this should happen. I am quite sure the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Flanagan, has been in touch with his counterpart asking for a meeting, and I spoke with British Prime Minister, Theresa May, saying that when it is appropriate, and as early as possible, we should arrange a meeting to build on the relationships we have had for quite some time.

With regard to Deputy Barry's question, we have the North-South Ministerial Council, cross-Border activities and agencies working with each other because of social issues, as they reflect on the challenges, disadvantages and unfairness in many areas of society. That is why the peace process has been backed by the European Union for all these years, and there is €3 billion on the table between now and 2021 for fragile communities coming out of a conflict situation in which 3,000 people lost their lives over 30 years. The overall intention is that Northern Ireland should be peaceful, prosperous and outward-looking and should be able to provide opportunity for its citizens. That involves trade and business. That is why we have the many discussions and activities going on and why we support, in both monetary and political terms, the likes of the A5 project and the north west gateway. It is why we continue to be strong supporters of the Narrow Water bridge, the Ulster Canal and so many other activities North and South, including medical, educational and infrastructural projects. These are social issues that have an impact in enclaves and areas where there have been difficulties - where the peace walls apply and outside them.

Cross-Border trade is of greater importance to firms in Northern Ireland dealing in goods and products with companies and people down here than *vice versa*. The Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has been in touch with both IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, which have contacted their companies and small and medium enterprises individually.

The point made by Deputy Brendan Smith made is true. One can leave the Republic with a lorry load of machinery and drive to the Ukrainian border but if controls and checks are in place, they will add to the amount of paperwork on the way in and out. While hard borders have disappeared in many

cases, there is the capacity with modern technology to track the movement of goods and conditions apply in terms of country of origin for raw material, products sourced for manufacturing and so on. Ireland has improved greatly in terms of its competitiveness and we do not want to see anything happen that would damage it. For us, one of the outcomes following Brexit should be that Britain would be as close to the Single Market as possible because that impacts on us and our interests including the common travel area, trade links, the peace process, the common Border and the opportunity to continue to expand.

We have discussed it before and I agree with Deputy Martin that the kind of conversation we should have should be about the future. It should involve as many as is possible from across the spectrum, including young business entrepreneurs, academics, researchers, politicians and so on. I agree it is not a static forum such as that of the 1980s, but it is an opportunity to be able to reflect on the many issues.

The British Government has stated that it is not accepting the EU Presidency now. I know that others have expressed an interest. Belgium has been referred to in this context. There may be a statement later in that regard.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2016-07-20a.167&s=cross-border#g191>