



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Why Brexit vote requires an all-Ireland response; Departure would be a snub to the Belfast Agreement and ignore the wish of a majority in the North to stay in the EU

The island of Ireland is facing the biggest constitutional crisis since partition as a result of the Brexit referendum. The negotiations in the lead-up to Easter 1998 concluded with agreement on three interdependent strands relating to: issues within the North, between the North and the Republic, and between Ireland and Britain. Like a three-legged stool, take away one leg and it collapses.

The Good Friday (or Belfast) agreement, as it became known, was endorsed by 94 per cent of the voters in the Republic and 71 per cent in the North. Bunreacht na hÉireann was amended, institutions North and South were established and 18 years of political progress proceeded on the basis of that democratic vote.

The decision by the Conservative Party to press ahead with the Brexit referendum was a snub to the agreement. The decision to press ahead with Brexit following the referendum fundamentally undermines the Belfast Agreement and other agreements. It represents a major setback for the political process in the North.

Brexit will undermine all-Ireland bodies and co-operation created by the peace process and it will harden partition. It will have consequences for human rights legislation which, again, is specifically referred to in the Belfast and subsequent agreements.

The agreements, the Irish economy, the views of the Irish Government and the wishes of our people have been set aside by the British government.

The current economic uncertainty is already damaging trade and investment and causing currency fluctuations which impact particularly on cross-Border business and exports. But all of that will become overshadowed if we see the imposition of tariffs and the restriction of free movement of goods, services and people on the island of Ireland.

An EU frontier, hard or soft, stretching from Dundalk to Derry, is not in our national interest. And it's all very well for Theresa May to say she doesn't want a return to the borders of the past. But when she was home secretary, she was absolutely clear that Brexit would inevitably lead to renewed border checks in some form.

I fear that this is exactly what will happen.

Hard border

I have raised all these issues directly with the British prime minister and with the Taoiseach. However, the simple fact is that neither Theresa May nor Enda Kenny can rule out a hard border. It is not within their gift. It will be a matter for wider negotiation between the British government and the EU institutions.

"Brexit means Brexit" is the rhetoric of the Tory Party, but nobody - not even May - has any idea of what it actually means.

It is abundantly clear from the engagements I have had with the highest levels of the Westminster government that they are scrambling in the dark.

They have no demonstrable plan to plot a way through this crisis because they didn't expect this to actually happen.

I personally warned David Cameron nine months ago that he was sleepwalking us all out of the European Union.

The British government recklessly caused this crisis for entirely self-serving reasons. It was a foolish attempt to placate UKIP racists and the loony right within the Conservative Party.

However, I am clear that the democratic vote in the North must be respected. Remain must mean remain.

From our perspective, what is needed now is an island-wide approach to dealing with this crisis.

That is why Sinn Féin called on the Taoiseach to establish an all-Ireland forum to discuss the impact of the referendum, to develop strategies and options to ensure that the vote in the North is respected and to safeguard our national interests.

This now needs to go ahead as a matter of urgency, including all interested groups and parties. Let those who want to work together come together, and let us get on with the work at hand. No party should be afforded a veto in this process. It is too important.

The people of the North voted to remain in the EU and we have to explore all options to give effect to that mandate. The example from Scotland has shown that such a debate can be carried out in a mature, reasonable and sensible manner.

The Brexit vote should also be a wake-up call for the EU institutions.

The Tories and the British government have demonstrated yet again that they care little for the people and economy of Ireland.

Taoiseach needs to lead

The Taoiseach needs to lead in defending our national interest in the working out of the Brexit vote. The clock is ticking. The economic impacts of the Brexit vote are being felt. The British have made clear that they will trigger Brexit early in the new year. This will be followed by at least two years of EU negotiations.

An immediate and first step would be for the Taoiseach to call together all interested parties and bodies to map out the options for the future.

Our party will play a full role in working along with the Taoiseach to defend our national interests and the democratic vote in the North.

I believe people here see their future as part of an outward-looking, positive and inclusive new Ireland in a changed EU. The agenda being pursued by the Tories is contrary to all of that, and it is time we had a genuine, mature and rational debate about the challenge of Brexit.

Martin McGuinness is Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland

Source: The Irish Times

August 20, 2016

Planned cross-border air route grounded by Brexit vote

THE impact of Brexit has contributed to a potential air link between City of Derry and Dublin airports being ruled out, it has been announced.

Isle of Man airline Citywing was to start up the link using money from the Government's regional air connectivity fund.

But City of Derry Airport said the route would now not go ahead, and Citywing was unavailable for comment.

Economist John Simpson said the loss of the potential route was another blow to the City of Derry Airport, where Ryanair is the only operator.

He also added that the more the road system on the island of Ireland improves, the less need there will be for routes of around 200 to 300 miles, such as the Dublin to Londonderry one.

An airport spokeswoman said the route required additional funding, as well as the government support. She added: "The impact of the referendum vote in favour of Brexit has led to significant devaluation in the pound. "Given that the airline industry operates in euro and dollars, the economics of the route deteriorated to a position which has made the operation of this route commercially difficult."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

August 24, 2016

Minister committed to cross border care

HEALTH minister Simon Harris says he is adamant that talks between his department and its equivalent in the North will continue to develop and blossom, despite Brexit.

Minister Harris told the Drogheda Independent while on a visit to the Louth County Hospital that he is committed to ensuring that cross border care pathways for patients in the Republic remain open and accessible and revealed that he is in regular touch with the Northern Executive's health minister Michelle O'Neill.

The Fine Gael TD said: 'Minister O'Neill and I had a really good conversation within weeks of us both being appointed about the issue of cross border healthcare. We met at the North South Ministerial Council meeting earlier in the summer and we both visited the facility in Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin in July'.

The ministers officially opened the new hybrid cardiac catheterisation laboratory (HCCL) at the hospital, the only paediatric interventional cardiology service on the island of Ireland.

Crumlin is the national centre for paediatric cardiology and cardio-thoracic surgery and the South's partner in the Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) All Island Network. The project was funded in full by the Health Service Executive at a cost of €5.6million.

Children from North and South are treated in Crumlin in what is a state of the art facility and a major development in terms of North-South co-operation on healthcare.

Minister Harris said: 'In terms of the North East, officials in the North and here have been instructed to carry out a scoping exercise, regardless of the political difficulties caused by Brexit. And I look forward to meeting Minister O'Neill again to discuss how this is going'.

The Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) group, which has been in existence for 23 years, has delivered cross border health programmes thanks to EU INTERREG funding Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) and vascular services, new sexual health, Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics, additional Eating Disorder therapy support, new day opportunities for people with disabilities.

Source: Drogheda Independent (Ireland)

August 25, 2016

Hard border would be a threat to economy, say business groups

BUSINESS groups in Northern Ireland have said special arrangements, including an open border, are crucial for the province following Brexit.

A coalition of groups said the geography of the province, as well as its economic and political structure, meant that "bespoke" arrangements were essential.

They identified agri-food, tourism and higher education as the sectors facing the most "severe" challenges from Brexit.

A statement was released by the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce on behalf of 11 top groups, including The Institute of Directors, Manufacturing NI and the Northern Ireland Hotel Federation, after a meeting in Belfast earlier this month.

It said business bodies "share the First Minister and Deputy First Minister's determination to keep the border open for trade and movement of people".

It added that agri-food's high levels of cross-border trade were in jeopardy from Brexit, while the benefit to Northern Ireland from the all-island tourism market could be undermined when the UK leaves the EU.

It also claimed higher education would be threatened if overseas students felt uncertain of residency and work rules, and that lecturers and researchers from EU countries were now more difficult to recruit.

The statement added: "Northern Ireland's businesses are uniquely affected by the perceived threat of a closed, or hard, border. Many of our businesses are reliant on cross-border flows of labour, trade and customers.

"UK/EU negotiations must recognise the importance for Northern Ireland businesses to retain the benefits to trade of access to the single market, including the customs union, and for the Common Travel Area to remain. Northern Ireland businesses must be allowed continued access to people and skills, customers and suppliers across the border."

Meanwhile, CBI representatives met yesterday with Finance Minister Mairtin Ó Muilleoir at Upstream in Belfast to discuss Brexit. "The key message left with the minister was the need for the NI Executive to be more ambitious and deliver faster and better outcomes, to offset the short/medium term challenges of Brexit," a spokesman said.

The CBI also said it had already discussed "shortcomings" in the Stormont Programme for Government with the First and Deputy First Ministers and senior officials. It said it will host a series of 'Question Time' events for members. The next will be with the Finance Minister on September 12 at the Stormont Hotel.

Elsewhere, it has emerged that Ireland's Revenue Commissioners are working to ensure a "practically invisible border" exists between Northern Ireland and the Republic once the UK formally leaves the European Union. A

special meeting between Irish customs officials and trade representatives after the Brexit vote on June 23 discussed the potential need for border posts. But customs staff hope electronic surveillance, like number plate recognition, can also be used to monitor vehicles crossing the border, so that traffic flow is kept as free as possible.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph