



MEDIA WATCH

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September 10, 2016

Brexit has put future of UK in doubt, says Kenny

BRITAIN'S vote to leave the EU has left doubts about the future existence of the United Kingdom, Taoiseach Enda Kenny told an audience in England.

During a debate in Oxford last night, Mr Kenny was asked directly if he believed the Brexit vote last June "would lead to the break-up of the UK?" Mr Kenny said there was a lot of confusion - but he referred to the prospect of another independence referendum in Scotland.

"There is a great sense of confusion about where it is all headed.

"It's a matter not for me but for the different electorates in the United Kingdom in any event. Clearly, there are comments about further votes in Scotland," Mr Kenny said.

"Nobody can answer that question now," he added later.

Wide-ranging The Taoiseach was addressing the conference of the British-Irish Association whose members gathered to consider the fall-out from the June 23 Brexit vote for Britain to quit the European Union.

In a wide-ranging address, Mr Kenny said he believed EU peace grants, which have contributed (EURO)1.5bn since 1995 to underpin the North's fragile peace, should continue.

Despite open rebukes last July from Northern Ireland First Minister Arlene Foster, he again insisted any new EU-UK arrangements had to factor in the longterm possibility of a United Ireland by consent.

In such a case, the North should be absorbed into the EU like the former East Germany was in 1990.

Mr Kenny also returned to the idea of some sort of all-Ireland mechanism for groups from both North and South to discuss the Brexit implications. This again provoked negative reaction from Ms Foster when first floated last July as an "allisland forum."

This time, the Taoiseach avoided the term "forum" but stressed that all the governments in Britain and Ireland were now committed to this kind of dialogue.

"My Government strongly believes that there is a need for the widest possible conversation on the implications of the referendum result in Ireland, both North and South. It is an all-island issue," he said.

Mr Kenny said the prospect of majority consent for a United Ireland was a long way off.

But it could not be discounted in framing new arrangements between the EU and the UK.

The Taoiseach said he was happy the core relationship between Britain and Ireland was strong as detailed Brexit negotiations approached.

But these would fundamentally recalibrate a whole new set of relationships.

"We will have a new set of relationships within the UK, between Britain and Ireland, between North and South on the island of Ireland, and between Britain and a 27-member EU which includes Ireland," Mr Kenny said.

The Taoiseach said he would be the only leader from any of the islands of Britain and Ireland at an EU summit in Bratislava next Friday.

This was a first in 43 years and framing a new EU-UK relationship will be hard, he said.

Source: The Irish Independent

September 12, 2016

Ireland shows caution at British reassurances over border after Brexit

Ireland is cautious of British reassurances there will be no hard or heavily militarised border on the island after Brexit, the Foreign Affairs Minister has warned.

On the eve of the UK's Northern Ireland secretary James Brokenshire's first official visit to Dublin, Charles Flanagan said the fate of the 310-mile frontier will be key during detailed talks in the capital on Tuesday.

The border between Northern Ireland and Ireland will also become an EU frontier after Britain leaves the bloc.

Dublin has insisted it must remain "invisible" after decades of work, as part of the peace process, to remove barriers between both jurisdictions.

Mr Brokenshire and UK Brexit minister David Davis have both voiced their backing for keeping an open border.

But Mr Flanagan has said he was "taken aback" by reports that British international trade secretary Liam Fox is pressuring UK Prime Minister Theresa May into leaving the EU customs union as well.

"There is an issue, of course, about the border," Mr Flanagan said.

"This is a matter of great concern to the communities, and public representatives, north and south.

"I was pleased to hear the comments of David Davis last week when he said that there would not be a hard border.

"I would however caution on two grounds: firstly I was somewhat concerned and taken aback by comments by the international trade secretary Liam Fox during the summer, when he suggested a withdrawal from the customs union.

"Now I fail to see how a withdrawal from the customs union can be compatible with an invisible border."

The European Union customs union is the biggest in the world and countries within it can trade more freely with each other, without tariffs, or taxes on imports.

If Britain were to leave the customs union as well, it would make it more complicated in maintaining a soft border in Ireland.

Mr Fox reportedly wants to leave the customs union to make it easier for Britain to strike new trade deals with non-EU countries after Brexit.

Mr Flanagan said his meeting with Mr Brokenshire in central Dublin will be detailed "on where we are in terms of Northern Ireland with particular reference to Brexit".

"I would also stress that ultimately the matter of the border is a decision that won't be determined by the UK and Irish governments, irrespective of how we feel about the issue, but this will be a matter for the remaining 27 EU countries, one of which of course will be Ireland," he added.

Mr Flanagan said he has met with all of his 27 EU foreign minister counterparts and has told them "we don't want a hard or heavily fortified border right across the island of Ireland."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

September 12, 2016

UK tourists 'spent 12% less this summer in Ireland after fall in sterling'

British tourists in Ireland spent 12% less this summer because of the drop in the value of sterling against the euro and high taxation, a survey suggested.

Excise tax and uncertainty over Brexit has caused the perfect storm for eateries in the Republic, according to Adrian Cummins from the Restaurants Association of Ireland. The border area with Northern Ireland has been particularly hard-hit as tourists stay north.

The Government should reduce excise by 15% in the next Budget, the chief executive added.

He said: "Excise is a tax on jobs, it is a tax on tourism and it is a tax on Irish consumers. In our recent poll, our members told us that they are already feeling the pressure, as they report an average 12% downturn for British tourists spend for July and August compared to the same time in 2015 with the effects of sterling exchange being cited as a factor.

"It is more worrying however when we talk to our members in the border counties who are seeing a drop of up to 20% on cross border spend in July/August compared to this time last year.

"The Support Your Local campaign warned earlier this year that we were about to face the perfect storm with high excise and Brexit - we in the restaurant industry are already feeling the chill winds."

Padraig Cribben, chief executive of the Vintners Federation of Ireland, said his members were feeling the pinch too.

"Members in the border counties are seeing a downturn of between 8 and 12% spend of British tourists compared to this time last year.

"We firmly believe that the Brexit vote has resulted in an even stronger case for a significant reduction in alcohol excise.

"Budget 2017 should compensate for the negative effect of Brexit, such as exchange rate uncertainty, impacts of a new border and the impacts that Brexit might have on British tourists and their spend in Ireland."

Meanwhile, Visa's Irish Consumer Spending Index (CSI) showed growth in household expenditure during August but said the rate of expansion eased from July due to less face to face expenditure.

Expenditure across all payment types (cash, cheques and electronic payments) rose 4.6% year-on-year.

The rate of growth was the slowest since May 2015 and below the average since data were first calculated in September 2014.

Spending via ecommerce channels continued to be the main reason for growth. Expenditure rose 13.5% year-on-year, up from 9.9% in the previous month.

Growth in face-to-face expenditure slowed to near-stagnation.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

September 12, 2016

Bordering on the ridiculous

As it becomes increasingly clear that the British government's attempts to find a viable Brexit strategy are floundering, Taoiseach Enda Kenny was fully entitled to stress over the weekend that, in all the circumstances, the option of a united Ireland must remain on the agenda.

Mr Kenny, addressing the British Irish Association at Oxford University, said he accepted there was no evidence to suggest that an early border poll might lead to unification, but drew a comparison to what turned out to be an unexpected but unstoppable sequence of events in Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

It can also be expected that Mr Kenny was fully aware of the deepening confusion over British intentions in the wake of last June's disastrous EU referendum.

Firstly, prime minister Theresa May last week had to publicly rebuke her Brexit minister, David Davis, over his assertion that it was unlikely the UK could remain in the EU single market after the forthcoming negotiations.

Then, at the weekend, Downing Street was forced to distance itself from another key Brexit figure, international trade secretary Liam Fox, who was caught on tape claiming that Britain's financial woes were caused by internal factors rather than any malign EU influence.

He alleged in colourful terms that the UK had become too 'fat and lazy' to achieve progress over exporting, with business people preferring golf to boosting the country's prosperity.

The gaffes from Mr Davis and Mr Fox, and the previous appointment of Boris Johnston to, of all posts, the Foreign Office strengthened the view that the British government may aspire to leave the EU by triggering Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty but has no real idea how or when it can reach such an outcome.

A potentially even more serious setback emerged when The Guardian newspaper reported on Saturday that, under post-Brexit legislation proposed by the European Commission, British passport holders would have to apply online and pay a nominal fee before they could travel to other parts of the EU.

It will be widely assumed that any such measures could not possibly apply to the only land border between the UK and the EU but the entire debacle illustrates why Irish citizens from all backgrounds, north and south, are so alarmed by the unfolding shambles.

The Welsh first minister, Carwyn Jones, on Friday became the latest senior politician to openly discuss the potential break-up of the UK, while the prospect of a second vote on independence for Scotland is rapidly gaining ground.

Brexit's grave implications for Ireland are also obvious, and the debate over reaching a democratic consensus on unity can only intensify in the coming months.

Source: The Irish News