



MEDIA WATCH

30/09/2016 - 07/10/2016

October 1, 2016

Theresa May: I don't want to see return of manned border

Prime Minister Theresa May says she wants to see free movement across the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic preserved following the UK's departure from Europe.

She has said she agrees with the Irish government and Northern Ireland Executive about not wanting to see a return to the hard militarised Irish border of the past.

Mrs May has also committed to work "closely" with them to ensure free movement between the north and south.

She told BBC Northern Ireland she is in discussions with the Irish government at the moment over "how we can develop these ideas in ways that are going to ensure that we deliver on the intention of all parties".

The UK voted in June by a tight margin to leave the EU.

Some 52% voted to leave against 48% who voted to remain. However, in Northern Ireland, a majority (56%) voted to stay in the EU.

Speaking during a visit to Northern Ireland in June, before the referendum, Mrs May warned a Leave vote would end an open north-south border.

She said then that it was "inconceivable to suggest a Leave vote would not have a negative impact on the border".

"If we are out of the European Union with tariffs on exporting goods into the EU, there would have to be something to recognise that between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland," she said at the time.

"And if you pulled out of the EU and came out of free movement, then how could you have a situation where there was an open border with a country that was in the EU and had access to free movement?"

However, the Prime Minister has denied making a u-turn in her views.

"What I said was that, of course if we leave and there is a land border with a country within the European Union, that does bring a change to that relationship across the border," she said.

"All parties are clear about the intent and will to ensure we have an arrangement that isn't a return to the borders of the past."

To leave the EU, the UK Parliament must vote to trigger Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon on European Union.

No date has yet been given for when this will happen, with some speculation that it may happen in 2017.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

October 1, 2016

Brexit wounds take toll on Border counties; The UK's vote to leave the EU has already left scars in communities close to the North and elsewhere.

KIM BIELENBERG talks to those affected

It's 100 days today since Brexit, and the only certainty among those living in the Border counties is that there will be more uncertainty.

In three months after the UK stunned the world with its vote to leave the EU, nobody can be sure what will happen, but the vote has already left scars in Border communities and elsewhere.

Overnight bookings from the North and the rest of the United Kingdom for hotels in the region collapsed immediately after the vote. Restaurateurs saw a 20pc fall in business from diners coming across from the North.

Mushroom-growers, who employ 3,500 in the South and rely on British sales, saw their profits decimated, and are now struggling to stay in business. Three big farms on this side of the Border have already closed.

The steady flow of shoppers from the North to South quickly went into sharp reverse. Shops on the other side of the Border are expected to enjoy a Christmas bonanza.

Most of the turmoil has been caused by the dramatic fall in the value of sterling. Thousands of workers who travel North to work and are paid in pounds saw their incomes plummet 10pc overnight after the Brexit vote.

Those living along the Border tend to be resilient, and have seen wild currency fluctuations before. But what makes them anxious is that the end result of Brexit is still so unpredictable. Their ultimate fear is that there will be a hard border, and the invisible frontier will be replaced by customs posts and checkpoints.

Paul Diver, owner of the family-run Sandhouse Hotel in Rosstown, Co Donegal, says there was an immediate downturn in business after the vote.

"Initially, the reaction on the ground was one of shock. Sterling fell sharply and it made Ireland look 20pc more expensive than it was on the day before the vote.

"People stopped booking from Northern Ireland and the UK. Holidays and weekend breaks were put on hold.

"There was huge uncertainty. Many people thought that the Border would go up right away."

While there was near panic in the early days after the Brexit vote, hotel-owner Paul says the atmosphere has calmed down since.

"Once people realised that it would take a few years to sort out, things settled down a bit, and customers started booking again."

With up to 30,000 commuters travelling across the Border to work every day, there are inevitable concerns about what form this new frontier will take under Brexit.

In the bad days of the Troubles, when there were army and customs checkpoints, up to two hours could be added to a journey.

"There are a lot of people who cross the Border to work at companies such as PayPal in Dundalk," says Paddy Malone of Dundalk Chamber of Commerce. "They'll have to worry about things like what time they leave their work to pick up their kids. If you have to pick up your kids from a crèche at 6, and there's a checkpoint, what do you do?" Many workers who work on one side of the Border and live on the other have free medical benefits under Northern Ireland's National Health Service. They fear they might lose this if Britain leaves the EU.

When Co Monaghan businesswoman Emma Gollogly woke to the news of Brexit, she joked to her husband that he would have to take his passport with him as he went to work across the Border. "We were devastated when we heard the news. Because my husband's salary is paid in sterling, he had an immediate pay cut."

In the Border counties, you can tell a lot about the state of the euro and sterling by the direction of the traffic jams.

Last Christmas, the traffic was flowing South as a strong pound encouraged shoppers to come from the North. But already there are signs that shoppers are flocking to the North for bargains.

The owners of Outlet retail village at Banbridge, off the main Dublin-Belfast road, this week said there has been a double-digit jump in visitors from south of the Border since Brexit.

Anxious shopkeepers in the South believe the steady flow could turn into a flood before Christmas if the euro rises in value by a few more cents.

Emma Gollogly, who is treasurer of the Carrickmacross Chamber of Commerce in Co Monaghan, is almost ashamed to admit that she will do her Christmas shopping in the North this year.

"That is the harsh reality and I would make no secret of it. My husband is paid in the North. So we have decided that we are not taking that money down South - and we are doing our shopping in the North." No sector has suffered such a cataclysmic collapse in business as mushroom growers, who depend on Britain for 90pc of their business.

Profits have been wiped away, not only in the Border counties, but on mushroom farms across the country.

Schiele and McDonald, a mushroom business in Tipperary, became one of the first casualties of Brexit when it closed with the loss of 70 jobs during the summer. Two more businesses have since closed.

Gerry Reilly, chairman of the Irish Farmers Association's mushroom producers committee, says he was absolutely shocked when the British voted to leave the EU.

"We woke up on the morning of Brexit with a kick in the teeth, and we have not recovered from it. The problem is the fall in sterling," says Reilly, himself a mushroom producer.

"We don't know where we are... We are in freefall."

A recent Brexit survey by the employers' group IBEC painted an alarming picture of what could happen to food and drink companies if the euro strengthens further against the pound.

The survey said food and drink companies were much more worried than other business sectors about the downside risks brought about by Brexit.

IBEC said a 1pc drop sterling results in a 0.7pc drop in Irish exports to the UK. If sterling was to weaken further towards the £0.90 mark (currently around £0.86) against the euro, this would translate to losses of over €700m in food exports and about 7,500 Irish jobs.

The arrival of Brexit is making business more difficult for the Temple family, who run the 150-year-old Magee tweed business in Donegal.

"It is not just the fall in the value of sterling that affects us, with fewer people from the North shopping in Donegal," says company chairman Lynn Temple, whose son Patrick and daughter Charlotte are also in the business.

"The other great problem is the uncertainty of what is going to happen.

It is like looking into a black hole and nobody knows what's in it."

The family Tweed business has survived through partition and the Troubles, and now Lynn Temple dearly hopes that there will continue to be a "non-border" between Donegal and the North.

Virtually all politicians, North and South, agree that they would not like to see a hard border emerging as a result of Brexit.

EU citizens will continue to enjoy free movement into Ireland but it will be up to Britain and the EU to agree whether they can continue to move freely across the Border.

There has even been speculation that a new frontier between the North and EU could be patrolled by drones and CCTV cameras rather than traditional checkpoints.

John McGrane, director-general of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce, says: "The fact that there isn't a hard border has been a significant help to the durability of the peace process.

"Therefore, it is universally acknowledged that we shouldn't have a hard border. The problem is that it is hard to conceive a position where a country that is voluntarily leaving the EU has an open border of such size without some kind of control in both directions."

In Dundalk, they are well used to handling the vicissitudes of frontier life - with currencies going up and down, and accompanying cycles of boom and bust.

Paddy Malone of Dundalk Chamber of Commerce says: "Last Christmas was the best one yet for Dundalk shops because of the high value of sterling."

Like Letterkenny in Donegal, Dundalk has virtually created its own currency - and Paddy Malone hopes this will help to avert the threat of cross-border shopping.

Local employers are being encouraged to pay staff tax-free bonuses of up to €500 using vouchers that can only be spent in local shops. The vouchers come in denominations of €10, €20 and €50, and can also be given as presents by families for occasions such as birthdays, Communions or passing exams.

"Instead of giving people cash, where the money ends up in Newry or Blanchardstown, we encourage the vouchers, which keep money in the town," says Paddy.

While most Border residents would probably prefer if Brexit had never happened, it will open up new opportunities for smugglers. This region has always had a sub-culture of diesel-laundering, tobacco smuggling and mysterious truckloads of contraband crossing the frontier in the dead of the night.

John McGrane of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce says: "Borders can have a sinister side effect. The higher the border, the more likely it is that you will encourage illicit activity, and that encourages subversive activity."

Of course every economic cloud has a silver lining. This week, the head of the National Treasury Management Agency, Conor O'Kelly, suggested that in the long term, Brexit may make Ireland more attractive for foreign companies.

It was also reported that international banks are already exploring the possibility of moving some of their activities to Dublin.

There is no doubt that Brexit will open up new opportunities, but while a cloud of uncertainty hangs over the Border, those living in the region are justifiably anxious - and the reasons are not just financial.

Source: The Irish Independent

October 4, 2016

Brexit: More visible border between north and south a strong possibility'

The Cabinet is today expected to discuss Brexit after a landmark speech by British prime minister Theresa May who on the weekend outlined the timeline for Britain's exit and the possible terms.

Britain will control its own immigration, will negotiate its exit as one entity or kingdom, and will end the authority of EU law. She also signalled that Britain will not follow the route of Norway or Switzerland, which have access to the single market but also pay into the EU budget.

The immediate response to Ms May's speech was that it signalled a hard Brexit lies ahead. This also could have more worrying consequences around Ireland, our border with the north and result in tariffs being applied to trade.

Mr Flanagan said that the days of armed posts along the border could not return.

But, asked whether a more visible border may be put in place by 2019, Mr Flanagan told Newstalk's Breakfast: That scenario cannot be ruled out. The border isn't something that's going to be decided by the UK government. It's going to ultimately be decided by the 27 remaining EU states.

Elsewhere, Mr Richard Bruton said there could be no space for nationalist tendencies with Brexit on the horizon.

He said: We can manage the economics of this if people approach it in a proper fashion. The real risk in this is bad politics, the economics is easier than the politics, we need to manage that. If people get carried away, as we've seen, there are trends across Europe in very nationalist approach to policies, if that took hold it would not be good for either the discussions on Brexit or for Europe's longer prospectus.

Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness suggested that the British government hadn't a clue about how Brexit would work. Britain's plan to leave the EU by 2019 was disturbing, he said.

Fianna Fáil's Micheál Martin said that he was extremely concerned about the situation.

I think it is disappointing that Britain seems to be going for a hard Brexit, which basically means great difficulty for Britain ultimately being in a position to access the single market and that has very serious repercussions for Ireland as well.

Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald said the priorities here had not changed and still included maintaining the common travel area, making sure north-south peace continues and that trade is protected.

She warned that Dublin did not want to break policing relations with Britain.

The European arrest warrant has been very important. We don't want to go back to the days of extradition. We want to be able to continue to use the European Arrest Warrant, we want to continue to work with Europol and Interpol, she said.

Source: The Irish Examiner

September 30, 2016

Cross-border learning initiative 'unworkable'

A cross-border learning community to meet the needs of children in rural Fermanagh and Donegal would not work, the education minister has suggested.

It is two years since St Mary's High in Brollagh in Fermanagh was spared closure and education chiefs were tasked with exploring ways of working with schools in Leitrim and Donegal.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) had recommended that St Mary's shut as part of a review of post-primary education.

At that time it had just 121 pupils, considerably fewer than the 500 required to be "viable".

Accessibility is a major issue for children at St Mary's, however. If it shut, pupils would be expected to travel into Enniskillen.

However, the school is closer to Donegal than the county town.

The North West Education Action Group proposed the creation of an area learning community to cover north west Fermanagh and south Donegal as an alternative.

SDLP MLA for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Richie McPhillips tabled questions on the future of St Mary's.

In one, he asked education minister Peter Weir whether CCMS and the former Western Education and Library Board ever brought forward a pilot scheme.

"CCMS submitted an outline proposal for cross-border educational arrangements for the area as an alternative to the closure of St Mary's High School, Brollagh," Mr Weir said.

"My officials agree with the CCMS analysis that a cross-border approach would not meet required quality thresholds, nor would such an approach be cost effective."

Before it was asked to take a fresh look at the matter, CCMS considered two potential cross-border models.

It initially rejected a partnership model involving schools in the Republic because each component school would have to be sustainable in its own right.

Source: The Irish News