

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

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Northern Ireland
Assembly

Monday 17 October 2016

Brexit: All-island Implications

Summary: Mr Sheehan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implications of Brexit for the island of Ireland, taking into account next week's Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) meeting.

Mr McGuinness: It is quite obvious that, in the upcoming discussions, we will make the case that, effectively, we are a special case. That is identified by the fact that the First Minister and I have written jointly to the British Prime Minister outlining quite a number of areas of concern, including our concern at the prospect that there might be a border of any description. It is also worth noting that, last week on RTÉ, Jeffrey Donaldson on two occasions made it clear that he thinks that the island of Ireland needs to be treated as a special case. He repeated that in Brussels 24 hours later. We are a special case. The prospect of the Brexit negotiations impacting on the political, social and economic life of the people of the North is so profound that we have a duty to work together to ensure that the interests of the people we represent are protected. The best way forward in this — I do not know whether it is possible to do it — and the strongest hand that we can play in any negotiation will be if we can come to an agreement between ourselves and with the Irish Government on what the ask is from our perspective. We will get the first indication of where all this is going when the First Minister and I attend the meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee, which will be chaired by the Prime Minister on Monday next week.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the deputy First Minister give any indication of whether any of our European partners are aware of the issues that face Ireland?

Mr McGuinness: The Member knows that I spent last Tuesday at the European Parliament engaged in 14 meetings, including meetings with some of the key negotiators on behalf of the European Parliament when the negotiations begin. I have to say that there was a very hardline position towards the British Government from almost everybody I met. That does not mean to say that it will

be a hard-line position when it comes to triggering article 50 of the Lisbon treaty. All of us who have been through negotiations know how all of this works. At the moment, the important thing from our perspective is that there is an appreciation among the powers that be in Europe of the fantastic achievements that we have had here through Peace and so forth in which they have made a major contribution. They are stakeholders in our peace process through the massive investments in INTERREG programmes, infrastructural projects, Peace funds and so forth. All that has contributed, along with all the other initiatives, to the transformation that has taken place over the last almost 20 years. People in Europe are under no illusions about the special nature of the problems that we have to deal with.

Source: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-10-10-2016.pdf>



Tuesday 11 October 2016

Written Questions

Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the papers his Department has put together on the implications of Brexit for cross-Border health co-operation; if he had any contact with his counterpart in the North outside of the NSMC on these issues; if he will be increasing frequency of contact on this in view of the fact the Brexit negotiation process is set to commence in March 2017; the number of whole-time equivalents and his Department assigned to work in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Simon Harris: My Department has built on initial work completed to undertake a full audit of the possible impacts, risks, opportunities and contingencies arising over the longer term as a result of the UK's decision to leave the EU, including in the area of cross-border health co-operation. This work is being conducted by a sub-committee of the Management Board set up to examine the potential consequences of a UK decision to leave the EU on healthcare in Ireland and for Irish citizens. This sub-committee is chaired at senior level and meets regularly, with each division within my Department providing support and analysis. In this way, work on Brexit-related issues is mainstreamed throughout the Department. The work of the Management Board sub-committee feeds into the Senior Officials Group on EU Affairs and the Interdepartmental Group on EU/UK Affairs, which are coordinated centrally by the Department of the Taoiseach.

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Plenary in July provided an important opportunity for an initial strategic discussion between the Government and the NI Executive on the impact of the recent UK referendum. In order to optimise joint planning and engagement on key issues arising following the UK referendum result, the NSMC agreed to work together to ensure that Northern Ireland's interests are protected and advanced and the benefits of North/South co-operation are fully recognised in any new arrangements which emerge as regards the United Kingdom's future relationship with the European Union. NSMC ministerial sectorial meetings will provide an important forum for consideration of the strategic and cross-cutting issues arising from the UK referendum. The next NSMC Health and Food Safety ministerial sectorial meeting will take place in Armagh on 9 November 2016. Minister O'Neill and I will continue our consideration of the potential implications of the leave vote for North/South co-operation on the areas for which we have responsibility.

Regular contact with counterparts at political and official level will be maintained and intensified in advance of and throughout the Brexit negotiation process. There will also be continued engagement with parliamentarians throughout these islands through the work of the North South Inter-Parliamentary Association; the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly and the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-10-18a.283&s=cross-border#g284.q>

Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his understanding of the current status of INTERREG and PEACE IV funding under the umbrella of the Special EU Programmes Body, SEUPB, in view of the UK decision to leave the EU; if the total funding allocated for INTERREG and PEACE IV cross-Border projects will be delivered; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Paschal Donohoe: As the Deputy will appreciate, the decision of the UK to leave the EU will have significant implications for EU-funded cross-border programmes where one Member State is leaving the EU and the other is remaining. Nevertheless, the Irish Government remains firmly committed to the full implementation of the two programmes.

A key issue is the basis on which Letters of Offer can issue to programme beneficiaries in circumstances where the UK's allocation under the European Regional Development Fund may not be available for the full period of the two programmes and for individual projects. My officials are working with their counterparts in Northern Ireland and the Special EU Programmes Body to ensure that Letters of Offer are Brexit-proofed so that project beneficiaries can have confidence as to the basis of the financial and legal commitments they are being asked to enter into.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-10-18a.924&s=cross-border#g925.q>