



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Enda Kenny backs Theresa May's 'friction-free' trading goal post-Brexit

Ireland has backed Theresa May's goal of securing a "friction-free" trading relationship with the European Union after Brexit.

Taoiseach Enda Kenny said helping the UK Prime Minister agree a deal to keep UK-EU trade as close as possible would be an "absolute priority" for Ireland ahead of Brexit negotiations.

Setting out her strategy earlier this month, Mrs May strongly hinted that Britain could leave the European customs union (CU), stating she wanted "frictionless" cross-border trade, but had an "open mind" on whether it should be done through associate membership or a new agreement.

Speaking after talks with the PM in Dublin, Mr Kenny echoed her language, suggesting he would support the strategy during divorce talks.

"Our two governments are agreed that a close and friction-free economic and trading relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union, including Ireland, is in our very best interests," he told a press conference.

"And as the UK prepares for its formal notification under Article 50, we want to see that these deep trading ties between our two countries are recognised and facilitated.

"That will continue to be an absolute priority for my government, not just in our discussions with the British Government, but also with our EU partners as we prepare for the negotiation process on the EU side of the table."

Both Mr Kenny and Mrs May have insisted they do not want to see a return to the "border of the past" between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

There have been suggestions that leaving the tariff-free customs union could imperil the soft border and see the reintroduction of customs checks and controls unless an agreement can be reached.

Mrs May said staying fully in the customs union would leave the UK unable to agree free trade deals with other countries from around the world, which she is aiming to do.

But she said she was working towards maintaining the border rules currently in place and stressed that Britain and Ireland had open borders "long before either of us were members of the European Union".

"We have of course said we do not want to see a return to the border of the past - that isn't just a phrase, actually it symbolises the sort of seamless, frictionless border that we want to see in the future," the PM said.

"Of course there are elements of full membership of the customs union that would restrict our ability to trade and do trade agreements with other parts of the world.

"But I believe, and this is what we are working on, that we need to find a solution which enables us to have as seamless and frictionless a border as possible between Northern Ireland and Ireland so that we can continue to see the trade, the everyday movements, that we have seen up to now.

"And of course we also want to ensure that we carry on with the Common Travel Area, which was in existence long before either of us were members of the European Union or its predecessors."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

January 30, 2017

May to be pressed on vision for Irish links post-Brexit

BRITISH Prime Minister Theresa May will be asked to outline her post-Brexit vision for the relationship between the Republic and Northern Ireland when she visits Dublin today.

Following high-profile trips to the United States and Turkey, Mrs May will make the briefest of stopovers at Government Buildings for a meeting with Taoiseach Enda Kenny.

Foreign Affairs Minister Charlie Flanagan said the Irish Government has made it clear what it wants from the Brexit negotiations and must now listen to the British side.

He said that once Article 50 is triggered in the coming weeks "it will be 'game on' as far as Brexit is concerned".

"There are really important priorities for us here in Ireland, priorities for the island of Ireland having regard to the fact that Northern Ireland is in election mode," Mr Flanagan said. "Our priorities are well known to the British prime minister and I believe it's important that we hear her view on what again is a great challenge to the island of Ireland with particular reference to our economy, our trade with the United Kingdom, and of course the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process."

He added that there was a need "to ensure, in the context of the forthcoming negotiations that the letter and spirit of the Good Friday Agreement is fully adhered to".

The Department of the Taoiseach said the "summit meeting" will provide an opportunity for both leaders "to exchange views on a wide range of issues of mutual interest and concern, especially in light of the recent developments in Northern Ireland".

"Discussions will cover the current situation in Northern Ireland, the UK/Ireland Joint Work Programme, and key bilateral issues that the UK and Ireland are committed to working closely on as the UK prepares to leave the EU," the department said.

Mr Kenny said last night that he looked forward to welcoming the prime minister to Dublin.

"This meeting will provide an opportunity for us to have a strategic and constructive discussion on issues of mutual concern and how we are going to work together to protect the interests of all our citizens on these islands," he said.

Prior to her arrival in Dublin around lunchtime, Mrs May will be meeting with Northern Ireland's key political leaders at an event in Wales.

The DUP's Arlene Foster and Sinn Féin's new Northern leader Michelle O'Neill are likely to give contrasting views on how they believe Brexit should be handled.

The DUP supports the decision to leave the EU, while Sinn Féin is arguing that a majority of citizens of Northern Ireland voted 'Remain'.

In advance of that meeting, Mrs May said she hoped the talks would be constructive but warned they "will not agree on everything".

She highlighted how the Supreme Court ruling on triggering Article 50 had set out "beyond doubt" that relations with Brussels would be determined by the UK government. "We will not agree on everything, but that doesn't mean we will shy away from the necessary conversations and I hope we will have further constructive discussions today," she said.

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has warned Mrs May that she must take proposals from the devolved administrations seriously.

Ms Sturgeon wants Scotland to remain in the European single market even if the UK decides to leave.

She said the UK government was showing "no sign whatsoever" of taking Scotland's position "remotely seriously".

"It is becoming clearer with every day that passes that the UK government is determined to pursue a hard Brexit and I am determined to do all I can to protect Scotland from the devastating impact that would have," she said.

"Time is running out for the prime minister to demonstrate that she is going to uphold the commitment she made to me shortly after taking office that Scotland will be fully involved in discussions to develop an agreed UK approach and listen to alternative proposals for Scotland."

British-born potential buyers have cancelled plans to acquire holiday homes here, particularly in areas such as west Cork and Galway. They have been attracted here for a number of years by cheaper property and a better old-age pension.

West Cork agent Maeve McCarthy of Charles McCarthy Estate Agents said the UK factor has been among those traditionally to keep property prices of coastal holiday homes at premium levels. "What happens over the next few months in terms of Brexit will be very telling and it's very hard to predict what might happen with so much uncertainty," she said. Ms McCarthy also reported a rise in the number of British owners in west Cork selling up.

Brexit impacts on the Border county economies twofold - first of all cross-Border property buyers from the North have all but stopped acquiring second homes, while at the same time the influx of shoppers over the Border to Northern towns is hitting business, which indirectly impacts on demand for property. Monaghan

estate agent Dermot Conlon of REA Gunne in Carrickmacross said: "Brexit has a bearing on us more acutely than anyone."

Joe Reynolds of Property Partners Paul Reynolds in Letterkenny added: "The holiday home market has been affected. Lots of sales have fallen through in these areas because they were always popular with Northern buyers."

Postponed Homecomings Irish emigrants who left for Britain in the 1980s or after the recent crash are postponing plans to relocate here thanks to the resulting fall in sterling and also in their purchasing power. Most have property to sell in the UK and are waiting to see if the currencies will balance out again. This has impacted on all parts of the country but has particularly curtailed sales in trophy home markets like Dublin 4, Dublin 6, Dalkey and Killiney.

Brexit impacts on the property market in farming counties. Overall farm incomes are likely to be hit even harder and this means local buyers have far less money to purchase.

In north Tipperary, estate agent Eoin Dillon of REA Dillon says: "Brexit will hit farmers in a bad way which would have a big impact on our economy in these parts." He added that such an impact would have an effect on demand and prices of residential property.

Source: The Irish Independent

February 1, 2017

Cross-border tariffs will kill jobs says trade unionist

Tariffs and restrictions on cross-border trade post-Brexit will "kill jobs", a leading trade unionist has warned.

Gerard Coyne, who is vying to become leader of Unite, insisted Northern Ireland's economy could not be "expendable or an acceptable casualty" in the Government's push to deliver Brexit.

Mr Coyne was in Belfast at the start of his 'five capitals' tour of the UK and Ireland as he ramps up his campaign to replace Len McCluskey as Unite's general secretary.

"On Brexit the stakes for Northern Ireland could not be higher," Mr Coyne said.

"It is the only part of the UK to share a border with another EU state. That border is at the heart of a civil and political conflict that so many have worked so hard at placing very firmly in the past over the last 20 and more years.

"No-one with any sense wants to see a return to frontier posts or military checkpoints or to unneeded restrictions on travel or commerce within the island of Ireland.

"As a trade union with members north and south of the border, Unite must be a leading voice in arguing for a Brexit deal that maintains a common travel area and which avoids jobs-killing restrictions on trade, such as tariffs. Such a deal must also respect the Good Friday Agreement and maintain cross-border political and economic cooperation.

"Northern Ireland has been through some very tough economic times in the last four decades. Long-term unemployment and low paying jobs were the norm for far too many people.

"No-one can doubt the progress that has been made in the last 20 years - even though there is still so many problems here. This region's economy cannot be seen as expendable or an acceptable casualty of the need to deliver Brexit - instead it needs to be a top concern of the UK's negotiating team.

"As general secretary of Unite I will make the case for our members at all times.

"There is no difference in that, north or south, in Belfast or Ballina, Coleraine or Carlow, working people need strong and tariff-free trade to deliver good, skilled jobs, decent wages and a better standard of life. I will be on their side."

Unite has 44,000 members in Northern Ireland and 30,000 in the Republic.

Voting for the post of general secretary takes place between March 27 and April 19.

Source: The Irish News

February 3, 2017

Governments 'must begin consultations over border's future'

Early consultations must take place on dealing with the movement of goods and people across the border post-Brexit, a major all-island business body has said.

Liam Lynch, president of Chartered Accountants Ireland, claimed a hard Brexit appeared likely, with the UK out of the single market and customs union.

"This will be extremely challenging for the island of Ireland," he added. "We need to work now to establish how the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will work and how it can cause the least amount of economic disruption."

He also told how he was encouraged by indications that "some type of e-border or virtual border" could be set up, but added that "significant" consultation should now take place.

Taoiseach Enda Kenny and Prime Minister Theresa May said they envisaged a "seamless and frictionless" border.

Earlier this week, MPs voted by a majority of 498 to 114 in favour of a bill to start the process of leaving the EU.

Mr Lynch last night addressed the Chartered Accountants Ireland annual dinner. He said a solution to the border issue required "all the talent we possess on this island and beyond to come up with the most innovative and practical solutions".

"We need to find innovative ways to retain the common travel area with the UK, while at the same time maintaining and strengthening our position within the EU, because that is where our future lies," he added.

"We need to be open-minded to practical solutions which will respect the UK's desire for border controls, but also allow businesses to survive and thrive."

He also said chartered accountants should make their voices heard: "We need to bring these issues to the table ahead of Article 50 being invoked.

"We need to take a lead position with the other 27 EU States, the EU Commission and the EU Parliament to represent the concerns and opportunities of Irish business."

While the Taoiseach and PM have said they want a frictionless border, a former head of the European Commission's customs procedures unit has said strict border controls will be required to avoid penalties from the EU.

Michael Lux told a parliamentary committee that Northern Ireland could remain in the customs union for up to 10 years after Brexit to ensure border controls could be implemented.

He also said new arrangements would be needed to control goods being brought across the border by both private citizens and companies.

Asked by MP Lady Sylvia Hermon if a "seamless border" could be achieved, he replied: "If you define seamless as no border controls, then the answer is no, at least for Ireland as it is obliged to apply EU law."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph