



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Brexit's implications for human rights provisions to be examined

The implications of Brexit on human rights provisions in the Good Friday Agreement will be examined in a civic dialogue event organised by the Irish government.

Foreign Affairs minister Charlie Flanagan, who is convening the "all-island dialogue" at Maynooth University on Monday, said it would be an "extremely valuable" exercise.

Issues such as the peace accord's commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights will be assessed, as will the potential impact on human rights commissions on both sides of the border.

"As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government takes with the utmost seriousness our duty to ensure that all provisions of the Agreement are upheld and secured throughout the process of the UK's exit from the European Union," said Mr Flanagan.

"Today's sectoral dialogue is an extremely valuable opportunity to hear directly from experts and practitioners on how the human rights provisions in the Good Friday Agreement should best be protected and upheld throughout the Brexit process.

"The Good Friday Agreement is a shared framework to uphold and to utilise as we work together to manage the implications of Brexit."

The event is one of 14 ministerial-led events on different issues related to Brexit.

"The detailed work of government departments and agencies has been greatly enriched by a series of all-island sectoral civic dialogues," said Mr Flanagan.

The event comes ahead of the second plenary sitting of the Irish government's main Brexit forum on Friday.

"The UK's decision to leave the European Union raises significant and complex issues for the island of Ireland," said Mr Flanagan.

"It is essential that the Government hears from all parts of society on how to manage Brexit collectively on an all-island basis."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

February 13, 2017

Brexit negotiations must produce Border solution; Ireland will be one of the most economically damaged EU countries post-Brexit if the right deal is not done

At the start of this month David Davis stood up in the House of Commons and presented the government's Brexit White Paper. Lacking substance in many vital areas, a notable omission was how the government will keep the soft Border in place between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland after Brexit.

Instead, the government made a fleeting reference to the fact it will aim to "minimise frictions and administrative burdens". This suggests that in one shape or form there will be an unwelcome return to checks at the Border.

There is a pattern here - the government doesn't appear to be taking seriously the negative impact Brexit will have on the people of Ireland, just as it dismisses other widespread concerns about Brexit.

Theresa May's desperation for a trade deal with the United States is one of her own making. She chose a hard Brexit, pulling Britain out of the largest borderless marketplace in the world and alienating herself from Europe. Her choices on Brexit so far have been baffling.

Right deal essential Ireland will be one of the most economically damaged EU countries post-Brexit if the right deal is not done. Representing the fifth-largest market for UK goods and the largest for the North's exports, the need to reach an agreement that safeguards both the UK and Irish interests is essential.

A "hard Border" if we leave the customs union will mean new tariffs and paperwork that will slow down trade, adding costs to consumers and businesses. Vague reassurances from Whitehall about the ability of "technology" to seamlessly check goods and services at Britain's new land border with the European Union have not so far been reassuring.

One significant impact will be on cross-Border agrifood businesses. All the wheat that is grown in the Republic, for example, is sent to the North for milling, then re-imported south of the Border.

The likelihood of a special UK-Irish agreement to sustain customs-free trade is unlikely due to the EU's exclusive competence to negotiate trade agreements with third countries.

In any event a new EU-UK trade agreement will take much longer to complete than the two-year period allowed for under the terms of article 50.

In the meantime, it is vital that the British government confirms that Irish and other EU citizens continue to have the right to reside in the UK.

Peace process

One of the most important underlying issues in this whole journey is how we protect the peace process in the North. Hardening the soft Border could create troubling effects politically, economically and socially.

As with many issues, the serious implications for the peace process were not given appropriate consideration during the EU referendum campaign. It is puzzling that the then Northern Ireland secretary Theresa Villiers, one of the key figures in the Leave camp, allowed this issue to be left largely unaddressed.

Belfast Agreement: The government must be clear on its direction now. Despite promising that it will stand by their commitments in the Belfast Agreement, its previous pronouncement to remove itself from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and to repeal the Human Rights Act appears to run in conflict with this.

The ECHR is a vital building block of the agreement - one of the many reason why I blocked Conservative attempts to undermine the ECHR when with them in the coalition government.

What is certain is that the increased implications of the vote on June 23rd for the Republic cannot be ignored. The Brexit negotiations must deliver the least disruptive, most workable solution to the operation of the EU's new land border with the UK in the island of Ireland, and once the final Brexit deal is on the table the British people should be made clear of these implications and get the final say on whether it is right.

We owe it to everyone on each side of the Irish Sea to make this work for us both.

Source: The Irish Times

February 14 2017

Brokenshire told of need for 'invisible' border

NI Secretary meets with Flanagan

Minister for Foreign Affairs Charlie Flanagan has told the Northern Ireland Secretary James Brokenshire that Irish people have high level of concern about Brexit and want the border to remain invisible.

Minister Flanagan met with Mr Brokenshire in Dublin today.

Mr Brokenshire also met business leaders including figures from the electricity market and the tourism industry.

In an interview with RTÉ News he said it was too early to talk about the UK policing customs being imposed on goods crossing the border.

"I'm here in Dublin to continue discussions with the Irish Government following on from the meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach two weeks ago," said Mr Brokenshire.

He said there was a "shared intent of both Governments to respond around the issues regarding Brexit and the particularly the border - where we want to see that seamless frictionless border continuing into the future."

Following their meeting Mr Flanagan said: "I stressed upon the Secretary of State the very high level of concern, indeed, anxiety on the part of many people about the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland and the need to ensure that the border north and south remains invisible."

Source: RTE News

February 17, 2017

Brexit poses huge challenges for us, but we're ready to meet them head-on

TODAY, Taoiseach Enda Kenny and I are hosting the second plenary session of the All Island Civic Dialogue at Dublin Castle. As was the case for the first one in November, the Irish Government has invited delegates from the North and Republic, from the worlds of politics, business, the community and voluntary sectors, and other leaders from across society. What we will learn from these delegates will help to ensure a comprehensive and effective national response to Brexit. It will feed into the vast work programme being undertaken right across Government. Since well before the referendum took place, the Government has taken a three-pronged approach to Brexit - analysis, consultation and engagement.

Today's All Island Civic Dialogue could not be more timely, or more pertinent. As the Taoiseach said on Wednesday, we stand at a crossroads - British Prime Minister Theresa May will trigger Article 50 of the EU treaties next month. This will begin the process that leads to the UK's departure from the European Union. A challenging negotiation process lies ahead. The objective must be an agreement which creates, on a fair and balanced basis, the closest possible EU-UK relationship, and which also recognises Ireland's unique circumstances. This creates an onus on everyone, and especially the British government, to adopt a constructive and realistic approach.

Only last month, Mrs May set out the UK's headline priorities for the negotiations. She definitively stated that the UK will leave the single market but made explicit her commitment to maintaining the common travel area with Ireland and the UK's commitment to the Good Friday Agreement and ensuring no hard border on this island.

Two days ago, in a major keynote speech, the Taoiseach set out further details of Ireland's plan. He set out our core principles and our firm resolve to uphold them.

Ireland will remain an active and constructive member state, at the heart of the EU. In the negotiations ahead, we will ensure recognition of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland. Our priorities include recognition of the special arrangements between Britain and Ireland, in particular the common travel area. As co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, we will defend its spirit and its letter. The Irish Government will firmly oppose a hard border, argue for free movement on this island, seek EU funding for cross-border projects and protect the rights of EU citizens, whether from the North or Republic.

We know our priorities. In fact, Ireland's priorities are clearly known in Brussels and in governments throughout the EU.

For eight months now, the Taoiseach and I have led an extensive diplomatic work programme emphasising Ireland's approach to the negotiations ahead and our key priorities. There have been discussions with the governments of every EU member state and with senior officials - I have had over 150 bilateral meetings advocating Ireland's priorities. Just last week, I had bilateral discussions with the Italian and Finnish foreign ministers. I was in Brussels twice, where I again met the European Commission's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, as well as the EU Parliament's representative, Guy Verhofstadt, along with a number of senior MEPs. While I was in Brussels, the Taoiseach was in Warsaw engaged in talks with the Polish prime minister. This week in Dublin I had yet another regular meeting with the UK Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire.

That intensive diplomatic engagement had led to the identification of Northern Ireland as one of four immediate priorities for the European Commission's chief negotiator, Mr Barnier. Mr Verhofstadt has publicly acknowledged the need to protect the progress made in the peace process and the need to ensure no hard border on the island of Ireland. The UK government's White Paper includes specific chapters and sections on Ireland.

The Government is acutely conscious of the challenges Brexit presents to our domestic economy.

In his keynote address this week, the Taoiseach has set out new economic measures to protect and continue to grow Ireland's economy against the background of Brexit. Twenty specific points were outlined - including the most ambitious trade and investment strategy ever from 2017, and a 10-year capital expenditure programme, building new houses, roads across the island, schools and other infrastructure. We will seek EU support for some of these major projects.

While government departments have been engaged in intensive analysis, All Island Civic Dialogue events are extremely valuable in deepening our understanding of perspectives from a wide variety of sectors right across the island of Ireland.

Since the first All Island Civic Dialogue, we have had 14 ministerled sectoral Civic Dialogue events around Ireland. On Monday, at Maynooth University, I convened a sectoral dialogue on human rights under the Good Friday Agreement and I found the contributions made on the day immensely valuable, and I know my colleagues at Cabinet share that view following their own events. Indeed, whether it be the concerns of hauliers, the agrifood sector, the tourism industry, exporters, human rights advocates or educators, my Government colleagues and I are grateful to all those who participated in these constructive discussions.

MANY of the outcomes from those sectoral dialogues will be examined today in the second Plenary Civic Dialogue in Dublin Castle and they are a vital part of that three-pronged approach of consultation, analysis and engagement.

As the Taoiseach said on Wednesday, we have a clear plan, but we keep listening, and as the negotiations commence, we'll keep making our priorities clear. We are anxious to share information and I'd invite those interested to sign up for free updates via www.merrionstreet.ie.

Brexit is undoubtedly a monumental challenge for Ireland but we have faced daunting challenges before and together we have overcome them more successfully than many imagined possible. We will meet the challenge of Brexit and that is a task that involves us all. I am confident that Ireland will not be found wanting on this occasion, either.

Source: The Irish Independent