

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

24/02/2017 - 03/03/2017



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved at 00:01 on Thursday 26 January 2017.

The elections will take place on Thursday 2 March 2017.



Tuesday 28 February 2017

Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance the customs arrangements that he and his Department expect to apply between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in the event that the United Kingdom leaves the customs union as part of its exit from the European Union; the impact he expects these customs arrangements will have on trade and the day-to-day movement of persons across the Border; and if he will make a statement on the matter

Michael Noonan: The Government's headline priorities in response to Brexit are well known: minimising the impact on trade and the economy, protecting the Northern Ireland peace process, maintaining the common travel area and influencing the future of the European Union. It is quite clear that there are major challenges ahead for the EU, the UK and for Ireland.

The position in relation to the Border with Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit is very clear and has been articulated by the Taoiseach on several occasions. Continued freedom of movement, absence of a hard Border and minimal impact on business and trade are key objectives. The Government is clear that any manifestation of a hard Border would have very negative consequences. A key priority is to ensure the continued free flow of trade on the island and the need to avoid a hard Border. Clearly, in this regard the closer the trading relationship between the UK and EU is more generally, the better.

My Department has been preparing for the impact of Brexit since well before the referendum on 23 June 2016, with this work now intensified. The primary areas for the Department of Finance relate to the economic and financial sector implications stemming from Brexit. This work is being undertaken within the whole-of-Government framework established by the Department of the Taoiseach and will be an important input role to ensuring Ireland's interests are protected in the upcoming negotiations at EU level and in terms of minimising any adverse impacts on our economy.

The precise arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK after formal notification under Article 50.

Michael McGrath: I thank the Minister very much for his reply. A number of weeks ago, he spoke about a traffic light-type system, whereby the vast majority of goods going over the Border could be dealt with by way of electronic scanning. He also said that a small percentage of goods going over the Border might be subject to random physical checks. Given that the EU is already trading with third-party countries that are outside the customs union, there must be a precedent as to how this might work in practice. Whether we like it or not, the Border between the Republic and Northern Ireland is likely to become the border between the EU and a third-party country that will be outside the customs union. That has serious potential implications for the conduct of trade, cross-Border shopping and the day-to-day life of tens of thousands of people crossing the Border.

Can the Minister give his assessment of what are the options? We know that Revenue has been looking at different scenarios and contingencies. Where would the Government like to take this debate about the nature of a customs border on the island of Ireland?

Michael Noonan: The Government's policy position is clear. We want to continue with the invisible Border as it is now or to put it another way, we do not want any hard Border reimposed between ourselves and Northern Ireland. What I described in committee was not anything that would happen or is happening on the Border. I described how goods from third countries under WTO rules are now treated at the point of import into Ireland. I particularly referenced Dublin Port because many of the goods come in through there. I noted that with advances in technology, all the necessary documentary clearance is done electronically.

The Deputy referred to the traffic-light system. Some 92% of imported goods from third countries are now cleared electronically before they come to the port of import in Ireland. They pass through without further examination.

A further 6% of imported goods are in the orange category. In those cases, if the method of transport is by container the Revenue will expect a manifest of the contents to be supplied. Revenue checks the

manifest but there is no physical inspection of the goods in that respect. Less than 2% of goods are physically examined at the port of import.

Michael McGrath: I thank the Minister for his reply. If the UK leaves the customs union and if there is no agreement on the conduct of trade, then the default position is World Trade Organization terms. That means there will have to be some control in place. It cannot mean there will be nothing in terms of the oversight and regulation of goods going over and back across the Border. We need to know what is the Government position on the use of technology, including electronic scanning. The Minister referred to imported goods coming through Dublin Port from third-party countries, some of which would be under WTO terms. Can that have practical effect across a land Border of up to 500 km with several hundred major and minor crossing points? Tens of thousands of people cross the Border every single day of the week. Can technology be deployed in such complex circumstances? I appreciate that this negotiation is only about to commence, but it would be useful for people to hear what is the Government's objective, recognising that the UK is likely to leave the customs union. That must mean something in terms of controlling the cross-Border movement of goods.

Michael Noonan: The Government's policy position on its approach to the negotiation has been expressed in our contacts with the UK authorities both at the political and Civil Service levels. It is that people, goods and services should pass without let or hindrance from North to South and vice versa and there will be no change in the present position. We know that the British negotiation position is to have a free trade agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union. We suppose that they will make some progress in that negotiation and that if there is not a full free trade agreement, at least there will be something that would be significantly better than the default position of a World Trade Organization arrangement with the UK, treating them as absolute outsiders in a third-country category.

Effectively, therefore, we will have to wait to see what the results of the negotiations are. In the meantime, various Departments and State agencies are looking at the implications both of the free travel area and the invisible Border policy objective which we have. In that context, various options are being examined but it is not possible to make decisions until we see the outcome of the negotiations between the EU and the UK or until they are well advanced.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2017-02-28a.348&s=cross-border+2017-02-24..2017-03-03#g352>

Wednesday 1 March 2017

Department of Education and Skills

Brexit Issues

Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on meetings and discussions he or his officials have had with counterparts in other EU states with regard to the impact of Brexit on third level fees that would be charged to Irish or other EU citizens studying in the UK or Northern Ireland and-or other barriers to access for Irish or EU students to studying in the UK or Northern Ireland.

Richard Bruton: Firstly, let me say very clearly that negotiations on the UK/EU relationship post Brexit have not yet begun. Ireland is part of the EU27 in terms of preparing for such negotiations and we will continue to respect our role in that process.

I have had meetings in recent months with the EU Commissioner for Education and other EU Ministers and officials at which such barriers and other Brexit-related issues were discussed.

Our principal concerns relate to protecting to the greatest extent possible student mobility between Ireland and Northern Ireland, the UK and within the EU and to support our strategy to increase non-EU student flows. We are particularly concerned to facilitate the continued feasibility of the UK as an option for our further and higher education students, of whom almost 11,000 attend UK higher education institutions.

The other principal concerns in education relate to the possible impact of the UK withdrawal from EU Funding Programmes such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, PEACE IV and INTERREG, and the impact this could have on both funding streams for our system and on consequent resource demands on the Irish system to replace UK investment and contributions in these programme areas. There are also risks around research collaboration and opportunities for Irish institutions to partner with UK institutions and around the continued success of cross-Border co-operation in special education needs, educational underachievement, teacher mobility and school, youth and teacher exchanges.

I and the UK Secretary of State for Education have communicated on matters of shared concern including the likely implications of Brexit for research collaboration; student access to higher education, and student fees. We have agreed to take forward our consideration of these issues at a meeting to take place in the very near future. I had previously discussed a similar agenda with my counterparts in the Northern Ireland Executive on the margins of the North South Ministerial Council meeting in July 2016.

My Department's Secretary General attended the UK/Ireland Permanent Secretary/Secretary General Summit in London in October 2016 at which he and his UK counterpart considered the implications of Brexit for our respective education systems including possible impacts on Ireland/UK student and academic flows and third level student fees and supports.

My officials meet with their EU counterparts regularly in Brussels and at EU events and they take every opportunity to speak to as many as possible of them, including on Ireland's particular Brexit challenges. My Department has also held four Brexit stakeholder consultation events - one overall information event, one for the schools sector, one for the further education and training sector and one for the higher education and research sector where we heard from all interests on the issues and challenges faced by the education community, both North and South.

As part of the Government's overall preparations for Brexit, Ministers will continue to meet and engage with their EU counterparts over coming weeks to emphasise Ireland's concerns and to ensure that they are fully reflected in the EU position once negotiations commence. I myself hope to meet with the UK Secretary of State in March.

This activity is reinforced by extensive engagement at diplomatic and official level. The Government is acutely aware of the potential risks and challenges for the Irish economy and will remain fully engaged on this aspect as the negotiations proceed. An important part of our preparations for the

Brexit negotiations is ensuring that our particular concerns are heard and understood across Europe, and engagement with our EU partners and with the EU institutions is therefore critical.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-03-01a.21&s=cross-border+2017-02-24..2017-03-03#g23.r>