



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

07/04/2017 - 14/04/2017

April 7, 2017

Charlie Flanagan warns of Brexit 'pain'

Brexit could be "painful" for both Britain and Ireland, Charlie Flanagan has warned.

The foreign minister also called the Brexit vote "a bad decision", adding that Ireland should not be placed at more of a disadvantage than the UK as a result of its decision to leave.

He also urged the UK and the EU to maintain the common travel area between Northern Ireland and the Republic in order to protect the Belfast Agreement, which he dubbed "the foundation stone of our peace".

His comments came after British prime minister Theresa May warned European Council president Donald Tusk that the sovereignty of Gibraltar would not be up for negotiation in the Brexit talks.

The future relationship between the north and south in Ireland is emerging as one of the most complex areas of Britain's split from the European Union, where the UK has its only land border with the bloc.

Mr Flanagan told BBC Two's Newsnight: "I believe it's important, in our context, that we have a situation at the end of these negotiations in two years' time, or maybe even longer, where a member of the European Union, namely Ireland, cannot be placed in a position of more disadvantage than somebody who is leaving."

Asked if he thought leaving the EU would be painful for Britain, Mr Flanagan said: "I do, I believe it's going to be painful for Britain, I believe it's going to be painful, potentially, for Ireland."

Mr Flanagan went on to say it was "absolutely essential" that there was no return to a hard border between the north and south of Ireland.

He added: "The Good Friday Agreement remains the foundation stone of our peace, and anything adverse to that agreement will not be acceptable."

The minister said he believed there was no intent to punish Britain among EU members, while the relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland was now at its "warmest ever".

He added: "I believe it (Brexit) was a bad decision, but of course as a democrat I fully respect and recognise the will and wishes of the British people. We've got to deal with that now.

"The Article 50 process has commenced, and I believe it's essential now that we get through the negotiations in such a way that the end result can be as close as possible a relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom, albeit with the UK gone."

On Thursday Mrs May met Mr Tusk for the first time since triggering Article 50, as both sides sought clarity on the issue of Gibraltar.

Mr Tusk suggested last week that Spain - which also claims sovereignty of Gibraltar - could veto its inclusion in any trade deal between Britain and the remaining EU member states.

The move caused fury in Gibraltar - which accused the EU of "bullying" - while former Conservative Party leader Lord Howard even suggested Mrs May could go to war to defend the Rock.

In a statement following the meeting, a No 10 spokesman said the Prime Minister had been clear she was determined to achieve the "best possible deal" for Gibraltar as well as the UK.

"The PM also made clear that on the subject of Gibraltar, the UK's position had not changed: the UK would seek the best possible deal for Gibraltar as the UK exits the EU and there would be no negotiation on the sovereignty of Gibraltar without the consent of its people," the spokesman said.

EU sources said it had been a "good and friendly" meeting, with the talks running on for almost two hours.

"They agreed to stay in regular contact throughout the Brexit process to keep a constructive approach and seek to lower tensions that may arise, also when talks on some issues like Gibraltar inevitably will become difficult," one source said.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

April 8, 2017

Potential Brexit Border crossing headache for Guinness exports

The story of Guinness exports shows the potential cost of the UK's decision to leave the European Union.

Brewed at St James's Gate in Dublin, what's in almost every bottle and can of the stout crosses the Bordertwice before reaching beer drinkers.

Ingredients from all over Ireland arrive in Dublin, where the water, barley, hops and yeast are mixed and brewed. The beer is then pumped into tanker trucks and carried 165km north to Belfast. There, it's bottled and canned before being sent back South for distribution.

Guinness highlights the concern over what happens to Britain's only land Border with the EU. While politicians and diplomats in Dublin, London and Brussels insist there will be no return to a hard Border, the reality may be more complicated. EU leaders are scheduled to hold a summit on April 29th to pave the way for two years of Brexit talks.

Cross-

Border trade "For me, there's no question, there has to be some sort of customs visibility on either side of the Border," said Robert Murphy, a former customs official at the Irish tax authority who later worked at the European Commission in Brussels.

"The idea of having a seamless and frictionless Border is lovely, but I do wonder how realistic it is." Cross-Border trade is worth more than EUR 3 billion a year. For London-based Diageo, the owner of Guinness, it means the company's trucks can head North and South unencumbered.

Each year, they make 13,000 beer-related Border crossings in Ireland. Add in Baileys, the whiskey and cream-based liqueur, and the number rises to more than 18,000. A hard Border could cause delays of between 30 minutes and an hour, costing an extra EUR 100 for each journey, the company said.

That alone would add EUR 1.3 million to the cost of Guinness and other beers Diageo produces in Ireland.

Brexit could cut trade flows between Ireland and the UK by as much as a fifth, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) estimated. In draft guidelines for negotiating the UK's exit, EU president Donald Tusk said "flexible and imaginative solutions" will be needed to avoid a hard Border.

"For big companies like Diageo and brands like Guinness, there might be solutions, whether that be electronic tagging or some sort of trusted trader programme," said Mr Murphy.

"Customs officers don't want to waste people's time. But it's not going to be easy." - (Bloomberg)

Source: The Irish Times

April 10, 2017

Northern Ireland 'could join European free trade association post-Brexit'

Northern Ireland could join a European free trade association after Brexit, researchers said.

It would maintain membership of the EU's single market and address many of the concerns surrounding a hard border with the Republic of Ireland, the European Policy Centre (EPC) pro-Europe think tank added.

The European Economic Area (EEA) agreement unites the EU member states and Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway into an internal market.

It allows free movement of goods, capital, services and people for work, the latter a contested provision ahead of Brexit talks .

The EPC said: "The European Economic Area (EEA) option would, however, ensure a high degree of continuity with the status quo.

"With the EEA there would be clarity; the economic uncertainty surrounding Brexit would therefore be reduced."

Britain is seeking privileged access to the EU's single market at the same time as controlling EU immigration once the UK has left the EU.

The policy centre acknowledged joining the EEA would be no panacea for the challenges associated and would pose political and constitutional problems for the UK while requiring its founding agreement to be amended.

It said the measure would address a range of the concerns set out in the only substantive statement so far to emerge from the Northern Ireland Executive on Northern Ireland's interests in the case of Brexit: the August 2016 letter of the then First Minister Arlene Foster and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness to the Prime Minister.

The letter stressed that Brexit could not be allowed to compromise cross-border efforts to tackle organised crime and those opposed to the peace process.

The ministers also said it was critical to the economy that businesses retained their competitiveness and did not incur additional costs.

It highlighted the need to retain access to sources of skilled and unskilled labour in the EU.

The vulnerability of an agri-food sector reliant on EU subsidies was also raised, as were concerns that a proportion of billions of euro of EU funds for projects in Northern Ireland may not be drawn down due to the exit.

The report from the EPC said under its proposal there would be no participation in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) or the EU's structural funds; and Northern Ireland as part of the UK would be outside the customs union, which would allow the UK Government to conclude its own trade agreements with other states.

Sinn Fein has supported a vocal campaign calling for special status for Northern Ireland post-Brexit.

Northern Ireland Secretary James Brokenshire has ruled the move out, and DUP MP Sammy Wilson, who represents the largest party in the country, has said all parts of the UK should leave the EU on an equal basis.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

April 10, 2017

Opinion - Politics changed utterly as uncertainty rises

We live in a strange time where nothing is guaranteed any more.

Pretend you have been taken in a time-travel machine back to 1997. Imagine having the nerve and/or the insight at that stage to predict some of the things that are happening now.

Few of us would have dared forecast that in 20 years the United Kingdom would be leaving the European Union. After all, there had been a referendum back in the mid-70s where the vote was 67 to 33 per cent in favour of staying in the Common Market, as it was then known.

The number of Scottish National Party MPs after the Westminster election of 1997 was six out of 72 whereas Labour had 56 seats in Scotland. In the 2015 election, the SNP won 54 seats and Labour only one, out of a total of 59. Meanwhile, the devolved administration in Edinburgh is pressing for a second referendum on independence. Talk about "Scots Wha Hae"!

In the elections to Dail Eireann 20 years ago, Sinn Fein won a single seat. That was 11 long years after they dropped abstentionism towards Leinster House, but today the party has 23 TDs and seven senators.

In the USA in 1997, Bill Clinton had started on a second term as president and, although a colourful character in his own right, we could never have predicted the type of person who would be doing that job today. Nor would we have forecast that in 2017, a candidate on the far right would be in with a serious chance of becoming president of France.

There is a real sense nowadays that all bets are off and anything can happen. Many of those who voted for Brexit were motivated by a combination of British or English nationalism and a desire to reduce the immigrant presence in the UK, but they could end up losing Scotland in the process and perhaps even Northern Ireland in the longer term (they might not all be heartbroken over the latter).

Back in 1997, the issue of a united Ireland was hardly mentioned in political discourse. Since Brexit, it has been receiving serious and thoughtful attention in mainstream media and politics because it is no longer seen as a poetic fantasy voiced mainly in late-night singing sessions after a good intake of drink.

The predominant feeling these days in the politics of this island, north and south, is febrile uncertainty. At Leinster House, the minority government led by Fine Gael appears more fragile than ever. The arrangement with Fianna Fail in opposition is a marriage of convenience which could end in divorce at any moment.

In the old days, politics in the south was a fairly decorous arrangement whereby Fianna Fail would generally take turns in government with a Fine Gael-Labour coalition. Now all is changed, changed utterly, because of the growth of Sinn Fein and the recently-renamed Solidarity-People Before Profit.

Fianna Fail is walking a political tightrope. On the one hand, it is keeping the current minority administration in power until the opportune moment comes to pull the plug. On the other, it is seeking to contain the rise of the 'Shinners' in particular, as they will be serious rivals at the ballot-box when the election finally takes place.

After the next general election there is a real possibility that neither Fianna Fail nor Fine Gael will be able to form a government without Sinn Fein participation. That would require some wrestling with consciences on both sides, not to mention a lot of hard bargaining, but Sinn Fein might be able to achieve more as part of a southern government than it has been able to bring about in the north.

A partnership based in Leinster House would not be plain sailing but could still be more productive than the power-sharing administrations at Stormont have been. New life could be breathed into the north-south relationship and, given the right coalition deal, a fresh element of social justice injected into southern society where there is a serious level of inequality and underprivilege.

As the talks drag on in Belfast, it is hard to imagine that any of the participants wants a return to direct rule, and an election at this early stage can't be very attractive either. One of the problems for Sinn Fein is that any unpopular decisions taken by a new executive will be highlighted by their political opponents down south. When Gerry Adams and Co were criticising welfare cuts by the Dublin government, they were quickly reminded that similar measures were taking place in the north.

Meanwhile, the only certainty seems to be that Adams himself will not be retiring any time soon but that speculation about it will continue, as it has done for the past ten years or more.

Source: The Irish News