



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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European Union must help protect our hard-won peace

Does Europe care? Let's hope so, because it is crucially important.

I refer to the need to ensure that any agreement between Brussels and the United Kingdom on the latter's departure from the European Union takes full and proper account of the hard-won peace on this island of ours.

Much has been written about the work that went into the Good Friday Agreement. John Hume and David Trimble were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts. Fr Alec Reid, George Mitchell, Bertie Ahern, Tony Blair, Mo Mowlam and Bill Clinton were among those who went the extra mile back in 1998.

Gerry Adams and the late Martin McGuinness led the bulk of the republican movement out of the blood-soaked swamp that we call the Troubles. Violent conflict is always dreadful but surely the one that took place in the 1970s, 1980s and part of the 1990s has to be among the most miserable and horrific of the genre.

Even though the present writer lived in the south for most of those years, he knew people whose lives came to a premature end in that terrible time. Some of them were political activists who were part of the Dublin scene of public meetings and protest demonstrations on the issues of the day but, after they died, turned out to have had another, covert existence as armed militants. Most of them were young and, had their lives not ended so tragically, would have made a significant contribution to Irish society and a fairer, more just world.

Their faces flash before me as I write: intelligent, sharp-witted, hungry for social change. But they privately came to the conclusion that the pursuit of justice necessitated taking up the gun and shooting other members of the human race who happened to be wearing particular uniforms. Growing-up, I never expected my adult years to be overshadowed by a "dirty war" characterised on all sides by inhumanity and pointless bloodletting.

We can't go back to that. No more generations on this island can be exposed to the type of tragedy that unfolded here in the past. There are soothing words from London and Brussels about the importance of the peace process but we need to have these guarantees spelt out in unambiguous black-and-white terms.

The EU has a well-deserved reputation for achieving compromises that leave all sides feeling more or less content. However, this characteristic was not greatly in evidence prior to the Brexit referendum. Surely prime minister David Cameron could have been granted sufficient concessions to help him get the ball over the line and win a majority in that crucial vote? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that complacency reigned.

There's no room for complacency now. And vagueness could quite literally be fatal. When German reunification took place at the end of the Cold War, the former German Democratic Republic merged seamlessly into what was then called the European Economic Community. Provision for a similar process must be put in place in the event that a majority vote for Irish unity comes about.

This would not imply that the EU supports or seeks to promote Irish unity. But it must not allow a situation to develop where the Good Friday Agreement is undermined by critics who say that, even if there is a majority vote in each jurisdiction, north and south, for a 32-county state, the EU will block rather than facilitate such an outcome.

This weekend, the leaders of the 27 remaining EU states are due to sign off on their position for the negotiations on the UK's departure. Since the Common Market, as we used to call it, began as a peace process to ensure there were no more wars between France and Germany, surely they will understand the crying need to avoid doing anything to hinder the cause of peace on the island of Ireland?

Source: The Irish News

May 1, 2017

Warning of power cuts and soaring power prices in Northern Ireland

The lights could go out in Northern Ireland during its centenary celebrations due to an energy crisis, an MP has warned.

Ulster Unionist Danny Kinahan urged people to have their candles ready for Northern Ireland's 100th anniversary - but for power blackouts rather than a birthday cake.

The warning came after an influential committee of MPs reported that the province will need more energy than can be supplied in 2021.

Power bills are set to soar unless work begins now on a cross-border interconnector, according to the report by Westminster's Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. The province already faces the highest energy prices in the UK but this is set to get worse unless a secure electricity supply is established quickly.

The committee has also warned that the UK's withdrawal from the EU will probably see the removal of energy funding.

Improving electricity connection between Northern Ireland and the Republic will help alleviate concerns, the report says.

The report warns it is "crucial" that the North/South interconnector clears the final planning stages and construction begins as soon as possible to ensure it is operational ahead of 2021.

Mr Kinahan, a member of the committee, said the clock is ticking to remedy a crisis that has been looming for years.

He said that unless the interconnector is established or new means of generation are developed "this could mean 'the lights going out' for local households and businesses".

The South Antrim MP said that the lack of an Executive was exacerbating the problem, "with no minister in place to even take strategic decisions".

Mr Kinahan said that in their evidence to the committee, business leaders in the CBI noted that the lack of long term certainty over Northern Ireland's energy supply has hindered its ability to attract foreign direct investment.

"If action is not taken soon we could find ourselves drifting towards an energy crisis," he said.

The report also highlights how the Moyle interconnector, between Northern Ireland and Scotland, is under-utilised.

This system ensures cheaper electricity and security of supply between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. However, it currently operates at half capacity due to technical restrictions which are imposed by the National Grid.

Mr Kinahan said: "The interconnector from the Republic of Ireland is stalled. The Moyle interconnector is only working one way. We're about to pull out of the EU, we've got old power stations that are coming to the end of their useful life, and we have an electricity grid that doesn't reach everywhere, so that not all the wind farms we are building can get onto it. Added to that, we have a slow planning process.

"Put all that together, and we are lacking a long-term strategy. None of the emergency measures really tackle the long-term problems thoroughly and properly.

"Get your candles ready.

"I do hope it won't come to that, but we do need to take this seriously."

Laurence Robertson MP, chairman of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, said that establishing a secure electricity supply must be a priority for both the Stormont Assembly and Westminster, warning: "The region already faces the highest energy prices in the UK, causing significant harm to the competitiveness of businesses based here and creating unacceptable levels of fuel poverty. This must not be allowed to get any worse."

The report recommends there should be further investment in the Scottish grid to enable it to work at full capacity.

It also says that whenever the Executive is restored it must work to encourage investment in the energy market.

"Difficult decisions about where future electricity supply will come from will need to be taken quickly if the current situation is not to get worse," said Mr Robertson.

Angela McGowan, CBI NI Regional Director, said earlier this month: "The business community is justifiably concerned that Northern Ireland is projected to face an electricity supply deficit from 2021," she said.

"The interconnector can address this problem, as it will reduce the risk of power shortages and blackouts, while simultaneously reducing costs."

A Department for the Economy spokesperson said it will give the report "careful consideration".

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

May 2, 2017

'It's going to be a long road';

As the EU fires the first salvo on Brexit negotiations, Ken Whelan talks to farmers on the Border about what Brexit may mean for them

FARMERS along the border are viewing the upcoming Brexit talks with a mixture of fear and nervous anticipation. They are worried whether a 'hard' or 'soft' frontier will emerge once the disengagement of Britain from the European Union takes place in two years' time.

Brian Treanor, a dairy man from Emyvale, Co Monaghan, said whatever emerges from these talks will have a negative impact on farming in the region - with the emergence of a "hard border" the worst possible outcome.

Dairy farmers in the region deal with Lakelands and Lac-Patrick, with the supply base for both processors straddling the border.

Apart from the likelihood that a hard border would make what now is a seamless trading relationship more difficult, it would have knock-on effects on the 200 plus milk processing jobs in this region.

"Probably the worst scenario would be that Britain is forced to leave the European Union without doing a trade deal," he told the Farming Independent this week.

"This would see tariffs and other sorts of barriers emerging which would cause real problems. Farmers here need an open border and any return to the previous border would cause problems for everybody," he said.

"We have two milk processors in the region - LacPatrick and Lakelands - and some 30pc of the milk processed by Lakelands comes from the North of Ireland.

"Any new barriers would impact processing and employment," Brian added.

He also believes that a hard border would have serious implications on the animal health front and recalled how difficult it was for farmers to achieve a brucellosis-free status for the Republic while the herds in the North had the disease under similar control.

"We had gotten on top of the problem in the South but we had to wait for the North to get its brucellosis-free status for the entire area to be recognised as disease-free," he pointed out.

Brian said the huge cooperation on animal welfare issues, which was evident between farmers North and South these days, could be negatively affected if a hard border was reintroduced.

He has no doubts about Britain leaving the EU once the upcoming talks are completed.

Indeed, he described as a "non-runner" the belief held by some of his farming colleagues that the British government would hold a second referendum on the issue.

"Britain will be disengaged from the EU in two years even if it takes another 10 years to re-instate some kind of trade deal between Britain and the EU," he said.

Brian is happy with the manner in which Irish politicians are dealing with the question and believes they are totally up to speed with the finer details of these Brexit negotiations.

However, while Irish and British politicians are aware of the implications of Brexit, Brian is concerned that the hard realities of this development might be lost on some member states in the south and east of the Union.

And they have the same voting rights on whatever deal emerges at the end of this process, he pointed out.

"This is going to be a long road," he predicted.

Source: The Irish Independent