

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

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Northern Ireland
Assembly

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



Tuesday 9 May 2017

Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources

Brexit Issues

Brian Stanley asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has made provision with regard to roaming charges when Britain leaves the European Union in view of the abolition of roaming charges across the EU in 2017.

Denis Naughten: The EU Roaming Regulations aim to abolish retail roaming charges within the EU on 15 June 2017, subject to Fair Use Policy. At that point in time, the UK will still be a member of the EU and will thus be required to abide by EU law in place at that time.

It is not yet possible to say what impact Brexit will have on cross border roaming charges once the UK formally leaves the Union. This will be largely dependent on the future relationship between the EU and UK.

The UK Government White Paper on Brexit sets out that the UK wishes to ensure that the UK telecoms companies can continue to trade as freely and competitively as possible with the EU.

I can assure the Deputy however that my Department will continue to engage with the key stakeholders on this matter both domestically and at EU level and has identified this policy area as a priority.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-05-09a.54&s=cross-border+2017-05-05..2017-05-12#g56.r>

Tuesday 9 May 2017

Ireland and the Negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU: Statement from the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny

I am glad to have the opportunity to say a few words on Ireland's negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU. As I have said previously, Brexit is a British policy, not an EU policy or an Irish policy. The Government believes it is bad for Britain, for Europe and for Ireland. It presents challenges to our peace and challenges to our prosperity. We have, however, been consistent and clear that in these negotiations Ireland will be negotiating from a position of strength as part of the EU team of 27 member states. Our work confirms that membership of the European Union has underpinned our national values, has helped our economy to prosper - not least by unhindered access to a vast Single Market - and has assisted our transition to a less isolated society that is more equal and open. It also underscores the unequivocal conclusion that Ireland's interests are best served by remaining a fully committed member of the European Union and working with our EU partners to deliver more for our citizens. At the same time we will maintain our close relationship with Britain, which reflects our unique economic, political, cultural and people-to-people links. These two essential objectives need not in any way be mutually exclusive.

It is our aim, and it will continue to be in all of our interests, to emerge from the overall Brexit process with the closest possible relationship between the UK and the EU. This is something that Prime Minister May has also said that she wants. Of course we need to see greater clarity and certainty from the British Government about how it expects that this can be achieved.

Given the challenges that Brexit presents for this island, it is vital that we prepare thoroughly for its consequences, both at a national level and as part of the European Union. That is why for more than two years, we have been analysing the issues and engaging with sectors across the island of Ireland, including through the all-island dialogue, to identify our main areas of concern and to develop our priorities. These are to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process, including by maintaining an open Border; to retain the common travel area; to minimise the impact on our economy and to work for a positive future for the European Union.

We have been extremely active at political and official level in engaging with our EU partners and the EU institutions. This has involved highlighting and explaining the significant implications for Ireland

arising from Brexit and the need to take account of our particular concerns in the negotiations. This ensured that our unique concerns and particular circumstances regarding the UK-EU withdrawal negotiations were reflected in the EU negotiating guidelines, which were adopted by the European Council on 29 April. These are to support and protect the achievements, benefits and commitments of the peace process, to avoid a hard border and to protect the common travel area. This builds on the significance of the clear references to our specific Irish issues in Prime Minister May's letter confirming the UK's intention to leave the EU under Article 50, and in the European Parliament resolution on the Brexit negotiations.

These outcomes are a major endorsement of the Government's approach and a reflection of the Government's focused campaign of strategic engagement with EU member states and the EU institutions over the past ten months, which has seen more than 400 engagements at political and official level. It was by no means a given that Ireland's position would be seen as a priority for the negotiations but this has come about thanks to our strategic, persistent and patient work and the understanding and support of all our European partners.

Furthermore, the statement agreed by the European Council acknowledges that in the event of a united Ireland brought about in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement, by peace and consent, the entire territory of such a united Ireland would legally be part of the European Union. This provides reassurance on this aspect of the Good Friday Agreement, regardless of the status of the UK within the European Union.

Once the overall approach to the negotiations was set out by the European Union, the Government published its comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union. This document reflects the findings and outcomes of the extensive preparatory work and consultations undertaken to date and demonstrates how these will be brought to bear in Ireland's approach to the negotiations in the weeks and months ahead. Building on our work to date, this document comprehensively sets out the positions and priorities that will underpin our engagement in the Brexit process as it unfolds over the next two years. It explains the various factors and issues that will be at play and what Ireland's position will be. The focus of the paper is primarily on the withdrawal negotiations and the conclusion of an exit agreement with the UK, which will include addressing a number of Ireland's specific and unique concerns. It also looks ahead to the negotiations that will shape the future relationship between the UK and the EU, which are also of critical importance to this island.

With regard to the Article 50 process itself, it is vitally important that the withdrawal of the UK from the EU is done in an orderly fashion. We have consistently urged both sides to adopt a constructive approach to the negotiations. As part of the EU 27, the Government will vigorously pursue and defend Ireland's national interests.

I will now turn to the issues that are unique to Ireland. The Government has made clear its priority that there will be no visible, hard border on the island of Ireland. We will also ensure the protection of the rights of those in Northern Ireland who choose to exercise their right to hold Irish, and thus EU, citizenship and we will advocate for continued EU engagement in Northern Ireland. Along with the UK, we intend to maintain the common travel area and in this context, the recognition of existing bilateral arrangements in the EU negotiation guidelines is important in underpinning relationships across this island.

Both the UK and the EU share the objective of establishing a close partnership after the UK's departure. In light of this, it is very welcome that the EU guidelines also recognise the desirability of moving on to discuss the shape of the future relationship between the EU and the UK once sufficient progress has been made on the withdrawal issues. The recognition of the need for transitional arrangements is also very welcome.

It became very clear early in the Government's analysis of Brexit that the economic impacts of Brexit would be deep and extensive across the economy and society as a whole. Our work, therefore, has prioritised analysis and engagement on sectoral issues and how we can best manage the impact on the people, the businesses and the communities of Ireland. While in recent years we have been diversifying increasingly to other markets, Ireland is still heavily reliant on the UK as a trading partner. A number of key sectors will be impacted significantly, including, but not limited to, agrifood, fisheries, financial services, transport, energy and tourism. More generally, impacts will be seen on enterprise and trade and on Irish-owned companies in particular, as well as in the regional and rural economy. The great bulk of these issues will not be addressed in the initial withdrawal agreement, but in the subsequent EU-UK future relationship agreement or agreements. Given that the EU's initial negotiating position is now clear, the Government will intensify its focus on the economic implications of Brexit, including on domestic policy measures to reinforce the competitiveness of the Irish economy, to protect it from potential negative impacts of Brexit and to pursue all possible opportunities that might arise. In order to underpin this, Government is now working to prepare a further paper on the economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments and will reflect the core economic themes of my speech to the Institute of International and European Affairs, the IIEA, on 15 February last.

This includes sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit; policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns and to strengthen competitiveness; prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit; realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers; and making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support and recognition of areas where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy. Policy decisions in support of these objectives arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming national planning framework, Ireland 2040; the new ten-year national capital plan; the review of the Enterprise 2025 policy; and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy. It is essential that we ensure our economy is Brexit-ready, both to protect against the potential impacts of Brexit and to capitalise on any opportunities arising.

In this context, I also want to mention Ireland's bids for the two EU bodies currently located in London, namely, the European Medicines Agency and the European Banking Authority. I believe that Ireland would be an outstanding location for each of these agencies, particularly when the priority is to ensure a smooth transition from their current location and a sustainable future path for them. This decision will be made in the autumn by the European Council. We are in competition with quite a number of other countries for the two agencies.

The undertaking of our work on the negotiation process to date and on the economic implications that may follow, underlines the fact that we are at the beginning, rather than the end, of what will be a long and complex process. The negotiations that we now face are among the most important in the history of the State. I recognise that there is a desire to have clarity and certainty on every detail of the future EU-UK relationship as quickly as possible. However, we need to be realistic about the process we are heading into and the time it will take to reach a full conclusion. We need to be calm, clear-eyed and strategic. The Irish Government is ready. Analysis and consultation is well under way. Our key priorities and positions are clear. We will continue to be proactive, concerted and strategic in our approach. We have in place a team of very experienced diplomats and officials. We will continue to engage with our EU partners and with stakeholders through regular ongoing consultations, including the all-island civic dialogue process, to ensure that Ireland's concerns and priorities continue to be reflected in the EU's negotiating position as it evolves, and that we work towards a strong and constructive future relationship with the UK.

I will have further discussions on next steps with EU Brexit negotiator and chairman of the task force, Michel Barnier, during his visit this Thursday. The Government will now examine the draft negotiating directives, ahead of considering them with our EU partners, with a view to their adoption by the General Affairs Council on 22 May, which will be attended by the Minister of State with responsibility for European affairs, Deputy Dara Murphy. The adoption of the negotiating directives will mark the formal launch of the negotiations with the UK, which will begin soon after the UK's general election on 8 June. The specifics of key negotiating points will become clear in the period ahead and the Government will work to ensure that our interests are protected as we negotiate as part of the EU 27. The Government is well prepared for the Brexit process and will continue to work to protect and promote Ireland's interests. Together with our EU partners, we will be successful in getting the best possible deal for Ireland and the EU.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2017-05-09a.441&s=cross-border+2017-05-05..2017-05-12#g467>