



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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'Brexit has put the Border back into people's psyches';
Many Donegal residents have more affinity to Derry than Dublin

"I'm Donegal through and through, but Derry is my city."

School principal Marie Lindsay is typical of many residents in the Border village of Muff in Co Donegal.

Born and raised there, she still lives across the road from the family home, but crosses the Border every day to work at St Mary's College in Derry.

"I remember what it was like to have a 'hard Border', but I have also learned to live now in an area where the checkpoints are gone and there is fairly free movement and I have learned to think of Derry and Muff as almost seamless.

"Yes, the signs change from kilometres to miles and the currency changes, but the flow of traffic is hassle-free.

"Everybody has connections, everybody has family on both sides of the Border. You take any child in Derry, they'll have an aunt or a granny or some relation from Bunrana, and they'll all go to Malin Head or Culdaff for their holidays.

"I have more affinity to Derry than I have to Donegal town, and I don't think anybody in Dublin would really understand that.

"Living on the Border gives us almost a dual citizenship or dual identity."

In Muff - and the other villages which ring the Border to the west of Derry city - that sense of duality is simply a feature of cross-Border life.

Most carry two purses, or have change in two currencies in their pockets. Some carry two mobile phones. The news comes from the BBC and UTV as well as from RTÉ. Garages, shops and pubs take sterling as well as euro.

Many send their children to school in the North, and are treated by the National Health Service - some officially, others unofficially - through what's become known as "grannyng", or the use of relatives' addresses in Derry.

The North is the area's biggest employer, with almost half of Muff's working population employed across the Border.

Employed

The 2013 Letterkenny Gateway Report put the figure at 48.5 per cent or 333 people; in another Border village, Killea, the figure was 48 per cent (or 261 residents) employed in Northern Ireland.

Catherine Woodrow is typical of many Derry people who moved across the Border in the early to mid-2000s because of spiralling property prices in the city and the construction of new, more affordable housing developments just across the Border.

"There was no real opportunity in Derry at the time for us to buy a house, but five minutes down the road in Muff we could get a house that was cheaper and much better than anything we could have afforded in Derry. Most of our neighbours moved here from Derry, and most of them still work in Derry."

Uncertainty

"I love living in Muff to be honest, and although I send my daughter to school in the North my son always went to the youth club down the road and my daughter goes to the Brigini [girl guides] , so we've always tried to do things here so that we are part of the village."

After 15 years in Muff, Ms Woodrow says Brexit has created fresh uncertainty.

"The main impact for me was the drop in the value of sterling, because I'm paid in sterling and pay a mortgage in euro, so if sterling weakens it's more expensive for me to pay my mortgage, but the latest is I've heard is that Brexit might actually strengthen the pound which would benefit me.

"If there is a 'hard Brexit', how is that going to work in terms of even simple things like shopping? It makes sense to shop in Derry because it's so close and I get paid in sterling, but what if you got stopped at the Border with shopping in the boot?

"I'll be honest, we have started looking at property websites.

"Not in a serious way, it's just a consideration, but we're at the stage of asking ourselves, if we were to move to Derry, where would we move to?"

'Huge amount of fear' Emma McLaughlin is in a similar position. She's from Muff, but works in the IT sector in Derry.

"I've seen a real drop in salary, at the minute it's probably 10 per cent but when the Brexit vote happened it was probably 20 per cent, and it's going to keep fluctuating.

"A lot of my colleagues are the same, they work in the North and live in the South and they're under pressure to pay their euro mortgages.

"Brexit wasn't the only factor, but I do know people who've left jobs in the North and are now working in the Republic just to get away from all the negotiations and challenges over Brexit.

"I'm trying to weigh up my options . . . I'm used to living on the Border - there's always been that element of two countries and two sets of rules - but now there's a huge amount of fear and there are no answers because it's just such an unknown.

"There's very little in terms of the economy in Inishowen, and outside of Letterkenny jobs are extremely limited.

"We contribute a lot to Derry and its economy, but we also depend on that economy for our jobs, so if that door's going to be locked to us I want to know what the Government are doing about it.

"Dublin is very far removed from the northwest and I don't see anybody on the ground trying to understand the implications of Brexit for us Border people and that's very worrying."

Getting paid in sterling Mrs Lindsay's son, Denis, returned from Canada 18 months ago and set up his own plumbing business a few months before the UK voted to leave the EU.

"It was awful timing. Brexit is creating uncertainty in the construction industry and I'm depending on the construction industry for work.

"I have two houses I'm working on a couple of miles from here, new houses which are being built at the moment, and one of them is going to come to a standstill because the owner is earning in sterling and he can't get a euro mortgage.

"When you start to get that sense that people aren't building houses, you then worry that there could be a potential exodus out of all these Border villages and towns.

"That means empty houses, so even if I do manage to live round here all my immediate client base is gone.

"If there's a hard Border people will move, and I would have to choose a side.

"Derry is probably the safest bet, but I want to live in Donegal."

"It's been nice to see the area regenerated," says his mother, Marie.

"Muff is vibrant at the moment, we've a wee boutique now, and a great hairdressers.

"I think of places like the primary school. A lot of the pupils are from families who have moved out from Derry and you would worry about what would happen to the life of the school if families stop relocating out here and bringing new life to the area, or if families that are here make the decision to move back North.

"The Border had almost dissolved but now Brexit has put the Border back into people's psyches.

"At a family level, at a community level, and at a business level, that can only be detrimental."

Source: The Irish Times

May 10, 2017

No easy solution to border issue warns ex-Taoiseach Bertie Ahern

Former Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern has warned there is no easy solution to resolving the border issue between the north and south of Ireland after Britain leaves the EU.

Mr Ahern also said that now was not the time for a border poll on a united Ireland, saying the country still had a "divided society".

One of the key players in the landmark Good Friday agreement also told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that Brexit "was creating more problems than we would have liked", adding that he did not see where a compromise solution could be found between all the different institutions.

Mr Ahern said resolving the border issue was "crucial" for Ireland in terms of jobs, investment and employment, adding there was a will there from all parties to find a solution.

He added: "Nobody has yet put a solution that does not mean customs checks.

"You can have all the technology you like, but there doesn't seem to be any easy solution."

Mr Ahern, who left office in 2008, told the programme that now was not the time for a border poll.

"There still is a divided society, the institutions are not operational, and the big issue for the Irish and the UK government on the other side of June 8 is to try to help to broker a deal to get the institutions back up and running," he said.

"Certainly, having a border poll in the foreseeable future will not help that process."

He went on to say the General Election was "huge" for Ireland, given the implications it could have for Brexit and restoring devolved government in Northern Ireland.

Mr Ahern said: "Brexit is creating more problems than we would have liked to have.

"But we're realists. The fact is, people voted and now we have to find solutions.

"I spent my life involved in negotiations but normally you can see where the compromise lies.

"This time it's complicated because you have the EU, you have the UK government, you have the Irish government, you have Northern Ireland.

"It is tricky to say the least and the compromise and the solution and the way forward are not easy."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

May 11, 2017

Return of NI power-sharing is crucial as process of leaving the EU picks up momentum

The year 2017 has already given us more than a year's worth of political drama. The collapse of the Executive at Stormont and the subsequent Assembly election. Weeks of talks between the five main parties in which I and Secretary of State Brokenshire have been actively involved.

The calling of a UK general election. And, perhaps most significantly of all, formal notification of the UK's departure from the EU and the formal responses by the EU.

This week I am bringing the EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier to the border area to see first-hand the unique situation here on the island of Ireland and the potential impact on people's daily lives.

Mr Barnier already knows the border area well from his time as EU Regional Affairs Commissioner in the years immediately after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, something he emphasised to me when he visited Dublin last October.

Now, in his role as the EU's Brexit negotiator, he wants to build on that experience and see first-hand the border region as it is today.

Many of us are old enough to remember what the border used to mean.

We have witnessed the historic transition of the border from a visible symbol of division to an invisible product of peace. The Irish Government's priority is to protect that position and ensure no return to any kind of "hard border" as a consequence of Brexit.

In pursuit of that objective and the broader interests of all of the people of this island, the Irish Government has, over the last nine months, engaged intensively with Mr Barnier and European Council President Donald Tusk and their teams, the European Parliament, the UK and every single one of our fellow 26 remaining EU member states.

I have explained the Good Friday Agreement and the unique circumstances on our island to every EU foreign minister in multiple discussions. At the European Council on April 29, the efforts of the Irish Government resulted in the explicit prioritisation of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland in the core phase of the withdrawal negotiations.

The European Council's negotiating guidelines, which will guide Mr Barnier's work, are clear: "Continuing to support and protect the achievements, benefits and commitments of the peace process will remain of paramount importance", while "flexible and imaginative solutions will be required, including with the aim of avoiding a hard border."

When Mr Barnier visits the border region, his focus will be on the many ways which Brexit could affect people's everyday existence across this island. Informed by the All-Island Civil Dialogue consultations

on Brexit, an ongoing series of sectoral dialogues and my own meetings with civil society and business representatives in Northern Ireland, I have emphasised this dimension in all my formal meetings.

But I believe Mr Barnier will find a visit to the region very valuable and I am pleased that he has accepted my invitation.

During his visit, I will be ensuring that there is a good understanding of the realities for people who live on one side of the border and work on the other; the importance of cross-border medical services; the movement and trade of agricultural goods such as milk and milk products; the cross-community peace and reconciliation initiatives underpinned by the EU; cross-border transport links by bus and rail; our shared energy needs; our co-operation on tourism; and much more besides.

I will be highlighting the fact that virtually everyone born in Northern Ireland is entitled to Irish and, therefore, EU citizenship.

Having done the groundwork to ensure that the unique situation in Ireland is a shared priority for the EU as a whole, we must now begin to seek solutions as part of the negotiations between the EU and the UK.

The UK Government has set out its initial stall for the negotiations, including the avoidance of a hard border and other key Irish-British issues, such as maintaining the Common Travel Area. Open minds and a willingness for give and take will be required on all sides.

At this crucial time, the return of a power-sharing Executive by June 29 is vital. The Irish Government will play its part and will not let up on the pace and momentum, but there can be no substitute for an active, constructive Executive, bolstered by the voices of people across the community in representing the unique interests of Northern Ireland. There is no room for complacency now - not in Dublin, not in Brussels, not in London and not in Belfast.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph