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Cross Border Studies

# MEDIA WATCH

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**May 12, 2017**

## We'll work to avoid a hard border, says EU envoy Barnier

Europe's Brexit negotiator yesterday said he hoped to visit Northern Ireland as part of EU talks.

During a two-day trip to the Irish Republic, Michel Barnier said there was no reason why the European Union could not have a "strong relationship" with the UK after it leaves - but Brexit will inevitably have consequences.

He declared he had "a duty to speak the truth".

"Customs controls are part of EU border management," Mr Barnier said. "They protect the single market. They protect our food safety and our standards."

While the diplomat will visit the border to see where Brexit will be most keenly felt, he confirmed he would not make an official visit to Northern Ireland.

A spokeswoman for the EU Commission said Mr Barnier was not invited here, but added that he "hopes" to visit in the future.

"Mr Barnier has a very busy schedule and only had time to visit Dublin and the border region this time, but he hopes to visit Northern Ireland at some point in the future," the spokeswoman explained.

In a historic address to the Oireachtas - both Irish houses of parliament - Mr Barnier said: "European integration helped to remove borders that once existed on maps and in minds. Brexit changes the external borders of the EU. I will work with you to avoid a hard border."

Addressing both the Dail and Seanad has been a privilege previously afforded only to visiting heads of State and prime ministers, and Mr Barnier joins luminaries such as Nelson Mandela and Bill Clinton in doing so.

He said Brexit would "come at a cost" to both the UK and the remaining 27 members of the EU, but his objective was to reach a "fair deal".

Today, he will travel to the border and meet farmers and workers in a dairy co-operative. "In Northern Ireland, lifting the borders took time," Mr Barnier said.

"Only 15 years ago did checkpoints and controls totally disappear.

"Thanks to the Good Friday Agreement, that ended decades of violence."

He also stressed that he understood the EU's role in strengthening dialogue in Northern Ireland and supporting the 1998 agreement, which largely ended the violence.

Later, Ulster Unionist MEP Jim Nicholson called for a "deep and comprehensive deal" between the UK and the EU. But he added: "Mr Barnier does not have a mandate to negotiate Northern Ireland issues with politicians in the Republic.

"Of course, in the absence of a functioning Executive in Northern Ireland, I fear we risk losing our voice.

"Brussels needs to be fully aware of the fact that the Belfast Agreement cannot be cherry-picked.

"While nationalist politicians and others may be keen to use Brexit as an excuse to try to break up the UK, Northern Ireland will remain a full, integral part for as long as its people wish to remain so.

"This also means that any special status that puts a de facto border between Northern Ireland and Great Britain would risk breaking the agreement."

But Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams insisted that Northern Ireland should be afforded such a status.

"The economic implications of customs posts for the two economies on this island, and especially for the border communities, are enormous," he said.

Mr Adams also warned that Brexit put cross-border trade worth billions of pounds "at risk and with it the jobs of those exporters who may now face customs posts".

SDLP leader Colum Eastwood spoke to Mr Barnier during his visit about the need for a "special dispensation".

He said: "This island has strong allies in Europe. Where Theresa May has run a coach and horses through the delicate and complex circumstances in Northern Ireland, EU leaders have demonstrated an immense understanding of this place and a willingness to protect the progress we have made."

**Source:** The Belfast Telegraph

**May 15, 2017**

**I'll fight Northern Ireland's corner in EU: Contender for Taoiseach Leo Varadka**

Irish minister Leo Varadkar will push to keep Northern Ireland in the EU Single Market as a part of his Brexit strategy should he win the contest to succeed Enda Kenny as Taoiseach.

Seeking special arrangements for Northern Ireland to ensure an "invisible" border is among five key principles in Mr Varadkar's plan for responding to Brexit, it has emerged.

Mr Kenny is expected to outline his intentions for stepping down at a party meeting on Wednesday.

Both Mr Varadkar, the social protection minister, and his main rival in the upcoming leadership contest, housing minister Simon Coveney, are understood to be poised to launch their campaigns this week.

However, Mr Kenny may once again confound expectations in Fine Gael on how long he'll remain in office.

Senior sources have said they believe Mr Kenny intends to represent the Republic at the next European Council meeting on June 22.

That's when Brexit negotiations will get under way in earnest, as the summit will be attended by the winner of the general election, widely expected to be Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative Party.

Mr Varadkar delivered a speech in Co Donegal over the weekend where he said there should be "no economic border at all between North and South".

He said if there are to be any customs checks they should be at the ports and airports, but that the Republic should advocate for Northern Ireland to stay in the Customs Union and Single Market.

Mr Varadkar wants to protect long-standing citizenship rights between the Republic and the UK, including arrangements relating to work and access to public services.

He also wants to maintain an "invisible border" including arguing for Northern Ireland to remain in the Single Market.

Other EU schemes Mr Varadkar wants Northern Ireland to maintain include access to the Common Agriculture Policy and the Erasmus student exchange programme.

**Source:** The Belfast Telegraph

**May 15, 2017**

**North is EU's business in Brexit negotiations;  
Peace process and impact on Republic make Northern Ireland a  
critical issue in EU bargaining**

At the European Union leaders' first Brexit negotiations summit, the 27 leaders unanimously approved a declaration which stated that "the entire territory" of a united Ireland would be part of the EU in the

event of a successful future referendum on unity, and that such a move would be "in accordance with international law". The declaration is designed to ensure that, if there is reunification of Ireland and Northern Ireland in the future, Northern Ireland would automatically rejoin the EU.

Some British politicians rushed to condemn this, accusing the EU of an "outrageous" attempt to threaten the future of the UK by using Northern Ireland as a Brexit bargaining chip. "STOP MEDDLING!" screamed the headlines in the Express and the Daily Mail.

Former Northern Ireland secretary Owen Paterson claimed the EU was interfering in issues that were "none of their business". Conservative MP Andrew Rosindell, chairman of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, claimed: "This suggestion about a united Ireland is another ludicrous empty threat by an EU elite which still can't accept that they were rejected by British voters in the historic referendum."

Iain Duncan Smith, the former Conservative leader, said: "This is the European Union playing their usual games. They are attempting to bully the UK and threaten the union. This is a deliberate and outrageous attempt to meddle in the affairs of a nation state, just like they did in Gibraltar. . . It is a childish and ludicrous attempt to stir up trouble."

But Northern Ireland is the EU's business, and these slurs are a gross mischaracterisation of the true position.

First, the declaration was no surprise. It simply reflects the 1998 Belfast Agreement - part of an existing international treaty between the UK and Ireland, registered with the United Nations - which states that Northern Ireland and the Republic have a right to unify if a majority agree north of the Border. This was not an issue to be freshly negotiated with the UK. Nor is this a novel measure: it is referred to as a GDR clause given the precedent of the arrangement which allowed East Germany to enter the European Community after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

EU partners Second, the EU was critical to the success of the peace process. The

agreement makes specific mention of the UK and Ireland being "friendly neighbours and partners in the European Union", and membership of the EU was central to the negotiations. A superb report published in December by the EU committee of the House of Lords, Brexit: UK-Irish Relations, summarised the positive role played by the EU in relation to the peace process, including the safeguards that EU membership provides in underpinning the agreement and the positive impact of EU funding in Northern Ireland.

Several witnesses who gave evidence to the committee commented on the transformative effect common EU membership had on UK-Irish relations. According to John Bruton, the joint decision to join the EU had transformed the relationship from a "bilateral unequal relationship, which had all the difficulties that go with any bilateral unequal relationship, whether in a family, between states or between businesses" into an equal membership of something bigger than either of them.

Many witnesses emphasised that common EU membership helped to diminish cross-community tensions in Northern Ireland, and expressed concern that Brexit could have a destabilising effect. SDLP leader Colum Eastwood told the committee: "To take the common EU membership we had with the

south of Ireland away has a tremendous destabilising effect on the Northern nationalist psyche . . . this shakes northern nationalism to the core."

Peter Sheridan said that whereas the Belfast Agreement had diminished "the tribal issue of identity", Brexit threatened to resurrect it.

Third, while there is understandable focus on the ramifications for the peace process, and the totemic question of a hard Border, we must remember that Brexit could damage Northern Ireland in many other ways.

An estimated 23,000 people cross the Border for work every working day, and statistics on the numbers of people who cross the Border to access services are not available. Arrangements to use cross-Border childcare facilities are currently covered by the Treaty on European Union and the services directive.

#### Lone parent

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has recently highlighted to a Westminster committee that it took a recent social security legal decision based on EU law to allow a lone parent on low-pay living in Northern Ireland to be able to use childcare facilities in the Republic and claim assistance within working tax credit. The implications of Brexit for the everyday rights of those living in the Border areas are far from clear, and these practical issues must not be forgotten.

Fourth, Ireland is undoubtedly the EU member most at risk from Brexit, and the EU's Brexit chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, was quite right to reassure both houses of the Oireachtas that in the negotiations, "Ireland's interests will be the European Union's interests. We are in these negotiations together and a united EU will be there for Ireland." This is not meddling or game-playing or interference in the UK's internal affairs. This is the EU, quite rightly, supporting the Irish people and reflecting the international law commitments made by both the UK and Irish governments in 1998.

**Source:** The Irish Times