



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Stormont Talks - Major sticking points

Stormont collapsed amid a row about the RHI botched green energy scheme but the political friction also ignited a range of other long-standing disputes between the DUP and Sinn Fein. The major sticking points at the heart of the latest political meltdown include:

Irish Language Act

Sinn Fein want a stand-alone piece of legislation that would enshrine protections for Irish language speakers. The DUP appears willing to legislate, but only if the Ulster Scots language is also included.

The issue has become a touchstone for a wider debate on respect for Irish and British cultures. The very name is an issue - an Irish Language Act would be viewed as a win for Sinn Fein while the DUP want it to be called a 'culture act'.

DUP leader Arlene Foster comments prior to March's assembly election when she described Sinn Fein activists demanding Irish language rights as "crocodiles" polarised the issue further.

Same-sex marriage

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK and Ireland where same-sex marriage remains outlawed.

The DUP has used the petition of concern to prevent a law change, despite a majority of MLAs supporting the move at the last vote at Stormont.

Following March's election, the DUP no longer has the electoral strength to deploy a petition of concern in its own right, though it could still potentially combine with other socially conservative MLAs to do so, if powersharing is restored.

Bill of Rights

Sinn Fein believes a Bill of Rights is an unfulfilled element of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The DUP is not ideologically opposed to enshrining human rights protections but only if, in its view, they represent the interests of all sections of society.

The party has also previously raised concern that a separate Northern Ireland Bill might create a "disparity" with human rights legislation elsewhere in the UK.

Renewable Heat Incentive

While a public inquiry has been called into Stormont's ill-fated green energy scheme, an initiative that landed the executive with a potential £490 million overspend bill, the issue that brought down the administration is still causing political contention.

Sinn Fein had insisted it would not re-enter a coalition with DUP leader Arlene Foster as first minister until her role in the RHI (she oversaw its inception when economy minister) is investigated.

Legacy

Given the parties' different perspectives on the past, it is notable that quite a lot has already been agreed on how to deal with the legacy of the Troubles.

The problem is while a raft of initiatives, including a new investigatory body, a truth recovery mechanism and an oral archive, have been agreed, they are stuck in the starting blocks due to a small number of discreet impasses.

One of the main bones of contention is the issue of national security and republican fears the British government would cite that as a reason to withhold documents to bereaved families.

Brexit

With the parties taking opposing positions in the EU referendum (DUP - Leave/Sinn Fein - Remain) it came as a surprise that they were able to adopt a joint approach to the issue when Arlene Foster and Martin McGuinness penned a letter to Theresa May last year.

The letter highlighted the need to protect cross-border trade links and stressed 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.

Source: The Irish News

30 June 2017

**Brexit fallout could cost tourism €100m;
Industry chiefs warn that weak sterling is already hitting hospitality
businesses**

People and businesses along both sides of the 500km frontier face unprecedented change

Hospitality businesses face the loss of about EUR 100 million this year as the fallout from Brexit hits British holidaymakers' spending power, tourism chiefs warned on Thursday.

Official figures show that the number of British visitors coming to the Republic fell 7 per cent in the first five months of the year as the effect of a weakened sterling took hold.

Eoghan O'Mara Walsh, chief executive of the Irish Tourist Industry Confederation noted that the Central Statistics Office has calculated that those who are coming are spending 20 per cent less.

'The uncertainty'

"If you expand that out to 12 months, it's likely to be EUR 100 million less," he told a British Irish Chamber of Commerce seminar on Brexit and culture, arts, tourism and sport.

"There has been a lot of talk about the uncertainty created by Brexit, one thing that you can be certain about is that Brexit is having an impact on tourism already," he added.

Peter Collins, honorary treasurer of the Irish Hotels' Federation, acknowledged that Dublin is doing well, but pointed out that the recovery is only beginning take hold elsewhere in the Republic. He said that an effective 20 per cent swing in the euro-sterling exchange rate since last year meant that British tourists' spending power had suffered badly. Growth in visitors from North America and Australia and the Far East has boosted tourism this year and numbers are expected to beat the 10.3 million record set in 2016.

Less British

However, Shane Clarke, director of State agency, Tourism Ireland, confirmed that British tourist numbers so far this year were down 7 per cent at 702,000.

He said that there had been 90,000 less British visitors to Ireland north and south this year. "UK tourists are more likely to spend less," he said.

DAA, the State company responsible for Dublin and Cork airports believes that Brexit will have a negative impact, according to its chief communications officer, Paul O'Kane.

He added that DAA was doing everything it could to minimise this.

Brian Kavanagh, chief executive of Horse Racing Ireland, warned that Brexit posed a serious threat to the EUR 250 million earned every year from the sale of Irish racehorses to Britain. "It's not a market that can be replicated very easily," he said. "Cheltenham is in Cheltenham and Ascot is in Ascot."

Source: The Irish Times

30 June 2017

Want to avail of the Cross Border Directive? Here's how

Give me the gist of this EU directive?

Groundbreaking EU legislation means that you have the right to receive medical treatment in another EU member state (including the North) and skip Irish waiting lists. The HSE must foot your bill.

What does this new legislation cover?

Virtually all elective treatment, bar organ transplants. It includes everything from hip and heart operations to diagnostic scans. It also includes psychiatric and addiction treatment, as well as orthodontic treatment and rehabilitation. It does not cover long-term nursing home care.

I think I may have heard about this before. Is it related to the E111 or the Treatment Abroad Scheme that RTE reporter Tommie Gorman used?

No. It is completely different. The unprecedented patient rights differ from the European Health Insurance Card (formerly called the E111 for someone who falls ill suddenly) or the pre-existing Treatment Abroad Scheme (which is for treatments that are not available in Ireland). The EU Cross Border Directive deals with patients who need planned procedures (called elective procedures) that are provided in Irish hospitals. Think hip replacements, cataract procedures and so on.

How did this even come about?

Your right to travel overseas for care came about as a result of the European Cross-Border Healthcare Directive. It was fully introduced to Ireland in February 2015. The Department of Health fought hard to avoid signing up to this EU directive due to concerns about the pent-up demand and resulting costs, but was forced to do so.

Do I have to be on a waiting list for a certain amount of time?

No. In fact, you don't even need to be on a waiting list.

According to the Department of Health: "Referral for care under the Cross Border Directive can be made by a GP, a hospital consultant and certain other HSE clinicians." In other words, you can bypass Irish waiting lists altogether. Your GP can refer you directly overseas.

So if I am on a public hospital waiting list and have no private health insurance, the HSE now has to pay for me in a private hospital of my choosing overseas?

Yes. It is important to be aware that the HSE will only reimburse you up to the amount it would cost in the Irish public health system.

Are you telling me I can travel to a private hospital overseas and have the HSE foot the bill?

Yes!

It sounds too good to be true?

It may do, but thousands of patients have already done it. The Department of Health and the HSE have publicly confirmed that the legislation is in place.

Does the HSE really have to pay for this?

Yes. You must stump up the initial payment and the HSE then reimburses you. The HSE must pay the cost of that treatment in Ireland or the cost of it abroad, whichever is the lesser. The HSE promises to do that immediately, upon receiving the invoice.

How will I know what operations cost in public hospitals here to make the comparison?

The HSE office established especially for this (contact details below) can help you do that.

But can a private hospital overseas be cheaper than public hospitals in Ireland?

Yes. Our public hospital costs are extremely expensive – amongst the highest in Europe. Plenty of patients have already travelled to private hospitals in the North and Paris – where they were cheaper.

But I might still be out of pocket for a number of weeks?

That is true. However, credit unions are now providing medical loans to enable more people to use the scheme.

What about my travel expenses?

You must pay those costs yourself.

Why has my GP not told me about this?

Awareness among the medical community is lamentably poor, despite efforts by the HSE unit in charge. Many doctors simply have not taken the time to investigate this option for their patients.

Am I entitled to follow-up care such as physiotherapy at home afterwards?

Absolutely. The HSE has confirmed this in writing.

How do I know where to go overseas, or in the North?

That is up to you. The Department of Health said: “It will be a matter for the patient and his/her referring doctor to identify the clinician abroad and satisfy him/herself in relation to the qualifications, quality and safety of the services being availed of in the other jurisdiction.”

Do I need prior authorisation from the HSE before travelling?

The HSE has set up a National Contact Point Office to administer and oversee implementation of this directive. Prior authorisation is not necessarily needed, but it is required for in-patient treatment (overnight) and more complex care. It is recommended that you discuss your planned treatment with the National Contact Point Office before committing to anything.

How can I find out more?

The HSE's National Contact Point, Cross-Border Healthcare Directive Department, is based in Kilkenny (Tel: 056 778 4546; Email: crossborderdirective@hse.ie). Further information is available at the directive website, hse.ie/crossborderdirective

Source: The Sunday Business Post

3 July 2017

Growing alarm over Brexit

David Davis, as the UK's Brexit secretary, is at the centre of negotiations with the EU which are of crucial importance to everyone in Ireland, north and south, as well as the citizens of Britain.

The damning weekend assessment offered by his former chief of staff, James Chapman, can therefore only be regarded with enormous concern on a range of levels.

Mr Chapman ran the office of Mr Davis until the UK general election less than a month ago and is well placed to assess the way in which the key minister's role is developing.

The Brexit secretary is on record as claiming that he wants to reach a deal which would confirm what he described as a "frictionless" Irish border but considerable doubts have arisen over his ability to achieve such an objective.

Mr Davis is already in open conflict with the EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, over related issues, opposing the latter's proposal that Ireland's unique position should be considered in the first stage of the talks and describing their exchanges as "the row of the summer".

Mr Chapman has now cast major doubts over the wider prospects facing his former boss by saying bluntly that Mr Davis had already been "hamstrung" by Theresa May in his dealings with Brussels.

Mrs May, according to Mr Chapman, had obstructed the vital process by setting down 'red lines' over matters including the European Court of Justice, and he predicted that the prime minister would fail to get any Brexit deal through the House of Commons unless she displayed more flexibility.

He is of course only one voice among many linked to the debate, but, as a senior adviser to Mr Davis and someone with detailed inside knowledge of what has been happening, his views must be taken very seriously.

Mr Chapman's intervention, through a BBC Radio Four interview, has firmly reinforced the perception that the Brexit process is going badly for Britain and the final outcome, and in particular the plan for the Irish border, is surrounded by confusion and uncertainty.

Mrs May has repeatedly given the impression that she is a weak prime minister, who has little interest or insight when it comes to Irish affairs, and is desperately clinging to power after her ill-judged decision to call a premature general election.

Her attempts to insist that the status quo could be maintained between the north and south of Ireland, after previously declaring barely a year ago that it was inconceivable that the existing border arrangements would remain in place post-Brexit, have become embarrassing.

There is every prospect that she could soon be forced out of Downing Street by her own party, and the favourite to succeed her is none other than the struggling Mr Davis.

It all represents a mess of astonishing proportions, at a stage when the Conservative administration is only being kept in office through a pact with the DUP which, as yesterday's astonishing revelations about the RAF flight organised to bring Arlene Foster home from London, is being placed under an increasingly harsh spotlight.

In many regards, the Stormont inter-party discussions, which are drifting to another expected adjournment later today, appear of limited consequence when compared to the full implications of the Brexit debacle.

Source: The Irish News