



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

28 July 2017 – 4 August 2017

29 July 2017

Taoiseach Varadkar insists Republic won't design border in Ireland for 'Brexiters'

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has launched an unprecedented attack on "Brexiters", warning that the Republic of Ireland will not help create a border that isn't wanted.

In a dramatic shift of policy, Mr Varadkar said Irish people have the right "to be angry" at the UK for risking economic prosperity and the Good Friday Agreement.

He said the Irish Government did not believe there should be any form of economic border between the Republic and Northern Ireland and therefore "we're not going to be helping them to design some sort of border that we don't believe should exist in the first place".

He said: "So let them put forward their proposals as to how they think a border should operate and then we'll ask them if they really think this is such a good idea because I think it will have a very severe impact on their economy if they decide to go down that route."

The statement was met with shock among unionists, with former First Minister David Trimble saying the Taoiseach needs to "calm down".

The British Government said finding a solution to the border question was a "top priority".

A spokesperson added: "As we have always been clear, our guiding principle will be to ensure that - as we leave the EU - no new barriers to living and doing business within the UK are created. We aim to have as frictionless a border as possible between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and we welcome the European Council's recognition that flexible and creative solutions will be required."

Suggestions that the UK/EU frontier could be in the Irish Sea have been rubbished by the DUP, who are propping up Theresa May's Government in Westminster.

The party's leader in Westminster, Nigel Dodds, said: "This apparent hardening of attitudes within the Irish Government is untimely and unhelpful."

Writing in today's Belfast Telegraph, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson said: "The DUP will not countenance or accept a post-Brexit border on the Irish Sea that makes it more difficult to live, work and travel between different parts of the United Kingdom.

"The Prime Minister has already reiterated this in the House of Commons and at Westminster."

Ulster Unionist leader Robin Swann said: "If the Taoiseach thinks he is going to use the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to make a name for himself he should think again."

UUP MEP Jim Nicholson urged Dublin to clarify its position over an "unwanted and unworkable" proposition.

"If this is their position, then it causes a major threat to the Belfast Agreement and would pull it asunder. Such an arrangement would totally undermine the principle of consent," he said.

Mr Varadkar was asked whether he was concerned that by ratcheting up the rhetoric he could upset Downing Street, but bluntly replied: "I hope there won't be any angry response from anyone.

"Anger isn't a policy and anger doesn't lead to solutions. But if anyone is angry it should be us."

The EU will reveal its thinking this autumn on how to preserve the Good Friday Agreement and Common Travel Area after Brexit. EU ambassadors were told this week that Brexit chief negotiator Michel Barnier's team will come forward with a position paper, most likely in September.

However, amid growing uncertainty over Anglo-Irish relations, the text will not deal with solutions for the border.

The EU paper will focus on the six cross-border implementation bodies set up under the Good Friday Agreement - including the special EU programmes body, which manages EU peace funds - and all-island co-operation on energy, healthcare, education and other areas.

Talks on the border are not planned until a second phase of exit talks, which are likely to be delayed due to differences over Britain's financial obligations.

Both sides had hoped there would be enough progress on money and other phase-one issues by October so talks could move on to trade, but EU diplomats are increasingly pessimistic.

"Autumn will be turbulent," said one source close to the talks. "The UK cannot continue the same tactics."

EU sources were more upbeat on citizens' rights, where some progress was made at a round of Brexit talks earlier this month.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

1 August 2017

Motoring bans to be recognised across the Border

Motorists banned from driving in Ireland for a range of offences will have their ban recognised in the UK, and vice versa, under a new provision signed by Minister for Transport Shane Ross today.

The new measures are underpinned by an international agreement between the two countries as well as various legislative provisions. All come into effect today.

The Government considers that clarity is needed on the issue as a result of Brexit.

The agreement concerns disqualifications arising from a range of traffic offences, such as reckless or dangerous driving, drink- or drug-driving, hit-and-run offences, speeding, refusal to submit to alcohol and drug tests, and driving while disqualified.

It also includes other conduct constituting an offence for which a driving disqualification of a duration of six months or more has been imposed, or of a duration of less than six months where this has been agreed between the contracting states.

No mechanism

At present there is no cross-Border mechanism for the mutual recognition of penalties for road traffic offences for such licence holders.

"The mutual recognition of driving disqualifications is an important road safety measure because it aims to target dangerous drivers on our roads," Mr Ross said.

"Maintaining the common travel area and our economic links with the UK are important priorities for Ireland, and this agreement will make a contribution towards that objective, as well as making an important contribution to road safety."

Under the Ireland/UK agreement, the driving disqualification is, in effect, transferred by the state which imposes it to the licence of the offender's home state.

The framework for the new arrangements is contained in the Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Driving Disqualifications between Ireland and the United Kingdom, signed on October 30th, 2015.

Yesterday, Gardaí said enforcement of drink-driving and speed restrictions was rising again on the back of increased numbers of Garda recruitment.

Full-time strength

Assistant Commissioner Michael Finn said another 70 Gardaí would be added to the Road Traffic Corps by the end of the year bringing the full-time strength of the corps to about 760 Gardaí.

In addition, Mr Finn said all Gardaí who graduated from the Garda Training College in Templemore, Co Tipperary, were required to spend 10 weeks in the Traffic Corps.

Mr Finn said the results of increased road traffic enforcement were already beginning to show with the number of people caught driving while drunk up 18 per cent on last year, while detection of speeding has risen by 25 per cent.

"I expect it will plateau as people realise the enforcement is rising again," he said.

He was speaking as the Garda released enforcement statistics for July.

The Garda warned drivers to be aware that the summer months were the most dangerous with seven people killed in the past seven days alone, including four motorcyclists.

Source: The Irish Times

4 August 2017

Irish passports issued in Britain double in a year

The number of Irish passports issued in Britain is set to almost double this year compared with the last full year before the EU referendum, Ireland's ambassador to the UK has said.

Dan Mulhall pinned the surge in demand on the Brexit vote, with Ireland remaining inside the European Union.

Around 50,000 Irish passports are issued in Britain each year, Mr Mulhall has previously said.

He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "I'm responsible, obviously, for our passport operation here in Britain, and for the five years up to last year the demand was pretty flat, and last year it rose by 40%.

"That rise was all in the second half of the year, so we have to attribute that to the impact of last year's referendum.

"So far this year we've seen another increase and it looks as if we are going to be close enough to doubling the number of passports this year compared with 2015, which was the last pre-Brexit year.

"So there has been a significant rise, not just in Britain but also in Northern Ireland."

Mr Mulhall said 500,000 Irish passports were issued to applicants around the world in the first half of 2017.

"That's an extraordinary number of passports, well up on our previous numbers, which means that people around the world - many of them may be British people living in Europe, living elsewhere, with Irish connections - are looking for Irish passports in order to safeguard their position for the future," he added.

Speaking ahead of Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's first visit to Northern Ireland since taking the role, Mr Mulhall said a hard border was "not feasible" and impracticable between the north and south of the island, as he stressed the need for flexible and creative solutions over the border.

"The clock is ticking now, time is moving on, and I suppose you're hearing a bit of urgency on our part, not least to have an Executive up and running in Northern Ireland so that they can contribute to this very important debate," he said.

Mr Mulhall also told Today that Ireland ideally wanted the UK to remain in the EU customs union.

He said: "I think people are now beginning to realise the complexities of leaving the European Union, and there's a debate developing here.

"We're making our position clear, which would be ideally we would wish Britain to remain in the European Union - but that's not going to happen."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

4 August 2017

**Why the solution to Brexit is not to have one border, but two;
A single 'hard' frontier between Northern Ireland and the Republic is
a multi-faceted disaster waiting to happen, writes Queen's University
academic James Anderson**

The DUP objects to a "sea border" as the answer to the problem of a "hard" land border, but provides no coherent solution of its own. If the UK leaves the EU and customs union, a hard border is inevitable as the EU's new frontier. The key question is: where? Borders around the island of Ireland are the only genuine answer. But if a proper UK-EU deal is not reached the default answer will be the land border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic - and that's a disaster waiting to happen.

Predictably, there were kneejerk nationalist calls for a border poll - unlikely to go ahead and, given present uncertainties, even less likely to get majorities north and south for political reunification.

Similarly, some unionists wrongly see the problem as the familiar "constitutional" sovereignty issue of political union with Britain. But dreaming of, or dreading, a "united Ireland" in the future is a distraction from dealing with the real and present danger of a new threat that would be damaging for most people north and south, unionist, nationalist and neither. It can only be prevented by their combined action.

Most are strongly opposed to Brexit; the 56% northern majority against included about a third of unionist voters; and few pro-Brexit voters want a hard land border.

It would disrupt, or sever, our now substantially integrated all-island economy, its border-crossing production processes, shared facilities, trade, commuting, socialising and shopping links and the cross-border funding and functional bodies which underpin the peace process. It would provoke mass demonstrations.

More ominously, new border posts would be attractive targets for dissident republican paramilitaries, also jeopardising the peace process. And this supposedly hard border would leak like a sieve - it did so even when militarised in the Troubles.

It would give illegal access to the single market to exploit price differentials, greatly magnified in size and number, making Ireland a smugglers' bonanza for paramilitary and criminal gangs.

For their own protection, Britain and the EU would need to have customs checks at their own ports and airports on goods and people coming from Ireland.

Rather than desperately trying to confine a multi-faceted disaster to Ireland, it would obviously be much better for all concerned if the island's borders were part of a proper solution.

Instead of the EU and the UK being separated by a single, supposedly hard (but leaky and insecure) border, they'd be better separated by two relatively "soft" borders, with Ireland benefiting from being in between them.

The island's position would be comparable to the "intermediate space" between the double security doors for entering and exiting banks, except here one "door" links Ireland with Britain, the other with the EU.

This would safeguard the all-island economy and place it in two partly-overlapping trade zones - with Britain and with the Continent (elsewhere these zones would be separated by the single hard border which Britain and the EU want for themselves, most notably the English Channel).

The north, as part of Ireland's all-island economy along with the south (a full EU member), would retain its trading access to the Continent; and the south, along with the north (politically in the UK), would retain access to vital markets in Britain, especially for its agricultural products, parts of which originated in the north anyway.

This damage-limitation solution can turn around the very real threat of Ireland being worst affected by Brexit - Northern Ireland much more than the other regions of the UK, the Republic more than any of the other 26 remaining EU countries.

Selective controls at the two soft borders surrounding Ireland would mostly enable the continuing free entry of people and goods from Britain and from the EU, and continuing free entry to both of them for goods made in Ireland and for people travelling from Ireland who have, or qualify for, Irish citizenship (and, hence, also for EU citizenship - ie, including all Northern Ireland's British citizens).

However, continuing free movement would not apply to people and goods which originated outside Ireland. There is no "back-door" for non-Irish immigrants to Britain or to the Continent, where they may be denied entry at their ports and airports.

Likewise, non-Irish goods imported into Ireland from elsewhere can be denied entry to the EU or to Britain.

This "double doors" scheme ensures minimum change, minimum disruption.

But trade patterns will change over time, including with the rest of the world, and sometimes in threatening ways (eg importing sub-standard food). Furthermore, EU regulations and any UK-EU deal must be administered in changing circumstances. Therefore, an all-island customs authority is also needed. Just as ports and airports already have appropriate physical infrastructures for handling freight and travellers, so Ireland (courtesy of the peace process) already has the political infrastructures - the North-South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference - with which to construct a customs authority and ensure it is democratically accountable to the two political jurisdictions, north and south.

If or when the UK, including Northern Ireland, leaves the EU and customs union, the solution requires that Northern Ireland then gets single market access, perhaps by joining the European Economic Area, or via a customs union.

This is not some special favour for Northern Ireland, but a necessary arrangement for the whole all-island economy, which also minimises the knock-on damage to Britain and the Continent.

The Republic's new Foreign Minister Simon Coveney recognised this in a significant policy shift when he suggested the new "bottom line" is maintaining the present invisible Irish border.

He (rightly) rejected the completely misleading notion (propagated by British Brexiteers) that a "frictionless" border could be achieved by technology (a non-solution, which often forgets the smuggler threat).

Instead, he called for a political solution, a "unique status connecting Northern Ireland to the customs union" (Irish Times, June 23) - adding, for good measure, that Michel Barnier is "on board".

DUP leader Arlene Foster (in an interview with Reuters, October 29, 2016) did state: "Northern Ireland could have a different relationship to the EU's single market, or customs union, from the rest of the UK following its exit from the EU".

And any such differential relationship to EU institutions inevitably requires sea borders of some sort.

Some unionists may oppose a "border down the Irish Sea", but we saw that's precisely what they'll get - and more - if there's a default leaky land border on which Britain cannot depend.

Anyway, many travelling from Northern Ireland to Britain already have to show ID (driver's licence, or passport). Reflecting unionist ambivalence, there are clearly contradictions in the DUP's position(s), but in a fluid situation it is perhaps politic to accept its stated preference for a soft border and hold the DUP to it, along with all the other politicians in Brussels, London and Dublin who claim to oppose a hard border.

It's disingenuous of the Irish Government to pretend it doesn't want a sea border and also incorrect to suggest a solution is only Britain's responsibility, for the EU needs secure borders as much, if not more. Who knows how it will all end? But if the UK leaves the EU and customs union, a hard land border will only be prevented if the main socio-economic borders are somewhere else.

Campaigning should start immediately. The only genuine answer is island borders and some version of a "double doors" solution.

James Anderson is Emeritus Professor of Political Geography in the Mitchell Institute and a founder-member of the Centre for International Borders Research at Queen's University, Belfast

The only genuine answer is island borders and some version of a 'double doors' solution

New border posts would make attractive targets for dissident republican paramilitaries

Source: The Belfast Telegraph