



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

25 August 2017 – 1 September 2017

28 August 2017

£200m cross-border electricity plan could face disruption from border opponents

Angry groups of landowners in border counties - in the Republic and Northern Ireland - are considering "strong-arm" tactics to block a huge electricity scheme which would economically benefit both regions.

They are furious over a recent Dublin High Court ruling which approved plans for the scheme, after it was challenged by the North-East Anti-Pylon Campaign Committee.

Farmers are claiming the pylons, with the overhead power lines proposed by EirGrid, would pose a huge environmental threat - and would mean their property values could take a substantial hit.

The £200m North-South Interconnector project was first put forward for planning approval in 2009 - but, eight years later, it has still not received the final go-ahead

The current plan is for an 85 mile-long overhead electricity link to run from Charlemont, through Co Armagh, crossing the border near Keady into Monaghan and Cavan, ending north of Kells in Meath.

Plans to link the two power grids mean the construction of huge pylons to carry high-voltage cables.

The decision by the High Court in Dublin last Tuesday to reject a challenge by the North East group against An Bord Pleanála's decision to provide planning permission for the (EURO)380m overhead North-South scheme, is to be appealed.

But despite the appeals process, it emerged yesterday that several landowners in counties Meath, Monaghan, and Cavan - three of the counties where the pylons are proposed - have now held private talks aimed at disrupting the scheme, with the clear aim of preventing it from going ahead.

It is understood the scheme's critics are planning to act independently, and are not connected to any political organisation or group, although it is believed they may have the support of some angry Irish Farmers Association members in the region.

The landowners have already declared they are not opposed to the cross-border electricity interconnector scheme in principle, but are demanding that the power-lines should be buried underground, rather than be carried on dozens of overground pylons.

Speaking after the Dublin High Court decision, Sinn Fein MEP Matt Carthy was forthright about his opposition to the erection of the pylons and overhead power-lines.

He said he felt the North South Interconnector "cannot proceed" unless it is underground, and he added he was not in favour of the High Court court ruling.

He said: "The North-South Interconnector is a project of significant importance for the whole island and its energy market.

"However, it will never go ahead unless it is underground.

"Communities across Cavan, Monaghan, Meath, Armagh, and Tyrone, have fought the plan to overground this project for a decade, and they will not give up now.

"Since this project was first mentioned, the costs of undergrounding the project have fallen dramatically to the point where it is arguably more efficient than constructing massive pylons while the technology that would allow undergrounding has been hugely advanced."

"Next month I will be hosting a delegation from all the counties involved in the anti-pylon campaign, including elected representatives and energy experts, to visit the Aachen-Liege project, which runs between Germany and Belgium.

"This project is comparable in many ways to the proposed EirGrid line but it is underground."

The MEP concluded: "The government needs to understand how fiercely opposed local landowners and communities are to the project, as it currently stands, and their resolve to resist it."

Business organisations north and south have called for the interconnector to be built as soon as possible.

Speaking at a public inquiry into the project earlier this year, Kirsty McManus, of the NI Chamber of Commerce, said delivering the interconnector was a "top priority" for its membership.

The Northern Ireland section of the interconnector is the responsibility of SONI Ltd, a subsidiary of Dublin-based Eirgrid PLC, which in turn is owned by the Irish government.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

28 August 2017

Passport seekers will need public service card

CONTROVERSIAL Public Services Cards (PSCs) are set to be made a requirement for passport applications here just months before Britain is due to leave the European Union.

Amid ongoing uncertainty over the future arrangements at the Border with Northern Ireland, the Government plans to make the cards necessary for all adult passport applications and renewals as little as three months before March 2019 when Brexit is scheduled to take place.

Former President Mary McAleese raised fears at the weekend that a passport or ID may be necessary to cross the Border despite pledges by both the Irish and British governments to maintain the common travel area.

The Department of Public Expenditure's eGovernment Strategy lists the fourth quarter of 2018 as when the Department of Foreign Affairs has committed to adoption of the PSC for passport applications.

Fianna Fáil TD Willie O'Dea has said he is "concerned" at the timing due to fears that a hard Brexit could lead to Border passport checks. He has already accused the Government of trying to introduce a mandatory card "through the back door".

That was after Social Protection Minister Regina Doherty said that while the cards are "not compulsory", they're needed for services provided by her department.

Mr O'Dea said requiring a PSC for passport applications is further evidence of its mandatory nature, adding: "Increasingly, there'll be no section of the population that's not affected."

He said the Government should "back off" on its plans for the card and that he'll be raising the matter when the Dáil returns.

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar responded to Mrs McAleese's concerns, telling RTÉ he's "very sure" there won't be passport checks at the Border. He said that's because all sides in Dublin, Belfast, London and Brussels want to continue passport-free travel over the Border and "there's nobody looking for controls".

Mary McAleese fears ID will be required at the Border

Source: The Irish Independent

30 August 2017

Brexit - Coveney: North should stay in customs union after Brexit

Northern Ireland should retain the benefits of the European customs union after Brexit, the Republic's foreign affairs minister has said.

Simon Coveney said this could be achieved through a soft Brexit whereby the UK remains in the single market or the customs union.

He made the remarks at an event in Belfast, where he addressed local business leaders and urged them to lobby for the UK to stay in the single market and protect the cross-border movement of 118,000 vehicles a day.

He said: "There is one clear way in which we can preserve these arrangements - and that is for the UK to remain a member of a customs union, and of the single market.

"As long as we are still at the stage of considering options as regards customs ... the best solution for Northern Ireland is for the UK to remain within the customs union.

"Failing that, we need a solution which sees Northern Ireland retain the benefits of the customs union, and the associated responsibilities."

"For example, how can the UK expect to maintain an open border, an objective we all share, while asking Ireland and other EU member states to accept that beef that doesn't meet European standards can be easily brought into Ireland from Northern Ireland without the necessary controls?

"This simply doesn't tally with the UK's other stated objective of not wishing to undermine the integrity of the single market and customs union and doing nothing that damages Ireland and our political, social and economic interests. Continued membership of this customs union and single market - or something very like it - is the answer."

The minister said that the Brexit referendum vote did not bind the UK government to leaving the customs union.

"We were distraught at the UK vote to leave the EU, we don't deny that. But we have accepted it," he said.

"What we won't accept is that people voted explicitly to leave a customs union or single market. They didn't, and history shouldn't be rewritten to pretend that they did."

Earlier this month, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar also used a speech he delivered in Belfast to address the issue of the UK's future relationship with the customs union.

Speaking at Queen's University, he said: "If the United Kingdom does not want to stay in the customs union, perhaps there can be a EU-UK customs union.

"After all, we have one with Turkey. Surely we can have one with the United Kingdom?"

Source: The Irish News