



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Brexit talks progress on Ireland says negotiator

The European Commission's chief Brexit negotiator has said talks with the British government have yielded "genuine progress" on Britain and Ireland's Common Travel Area.

Michel Barnier also acknowledged there had been some "fruitful" discussions on the issues surrounding the relationship between the Republic and the north.

However, he bemoaned the lack of headway on the other substantive issues being considered in the negotiations and said the two sides were still "quite far" from being in a position to begin discussions on future trade arrangements.

At a joint news conference with Britain's Brexit minister David Davis, Mr Barnier said that no "decisive progress" had been achieved after the third round of Brexit negotiations in Brussels lasting four days.

The UK wants to begin trade talks as soon as possible but Brussels insists that discussions about the post-Brexit relationship can only begin once "sufficient progress" has been made on the arrangements for withdrawal - including on the so-called divorce fee.

"At the current state of progress we are quite far from being able to say that sufficient progress has taken place, sufficient for me to be able to recommend to the European Council that it engage in discussions on the future relationship between the UK and EU at the same time as we would, during the course of 2018, go on working on finalising the exit and withdrawal agreement," Mr Barnier said.

But Mr Davis insisted there had been "some concrete progress" and suggested Mr Barnier was playing down the level of progress.

"Our discussions this week have exposed yet again that the UK's approach is substantially more flexible and pragmatic than that of the EU, as it avoids unnecessary disruption for businesses and consumers," he said.

Speaking in Dublin after a meeting with British chancellor Phillip Hammond, Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney said the pair had reflected on the two countries' "positive bilateral relationship".

The minister said he had underlined to Mr Hammond the importance of making sufficient progress on citizens' rights, financial matters, separation issues and "the unique Irish issues".

"I urged the chancellor to listen to those who stand to be most negatively impacted by Brexit across these islands," Mr Coveney said.

"I shared with him some of the concerns that I have heard in my conversations, north and south, with business and community representatives and other stakeholders, about the pressures and risks that the UK withdrawal from the European Union raises for them."

The minister repeated the Dublin government's desire for the UK to remain in the Customs Union and the Single Market.

Last month a British government position paper on Ireland said there would be no new infrastructure or additional personnel deployed along the border after Brexit.

The British government also highlighted the importance of upholding the Good Friday Agreement and safeguarding the Common Travel Area, which enables free movement between Ireland and Britain.

The paper also advocated continued peace funding for the north and border counties, which has amounted to nearly £1.4bn over the past 20 years.

Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams said the British Brexit plans have been exposed as "unworkable and unrealistic" and he described the UK government papers as "confused and contradictory".

"In relation to Ireland, the British government said it is committed to safeguarding the Good Friday Agreement, opposing an EU frontier in Ireland, and upholding Irish citizens' rights," he said.

"However, the position of the British government on leaving the Customs Union, Single Market, EU Court of Justice, and refusing to deal with the long term future of the European Convention of Human Rights directly contradicts their commitments on Ireland."

Source: The Irish News

2 September 2017

Jobs department clashes with Stormont on funding for cross-border trade body

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI) clashed with its Northern counterpart over a €224,000 subsidy for the cross-border business agency InterTrade Ireland, internal documents show.

The subsidy of £206,000 was granted by the Northern Ireland government in 2015/2016, but attempts by Stormont's Department for the Economy to strip it out of this year's budget were met with opposition from Dublin.

Richard Scannell, the head of the DJEI's inward investment and North-South unit, wrote to his counterpart in the Northern economy department, stating: "We do not agree with this cut being reintroduced. Our view is that ITI continues to carry out important work, in both jurisdictions, to assist SMEs on what is a very modest - and virtually irreducible - budget.

"We also anticipate that demand for ITI's services is likely to increase significantly on account of Brexit."

The £206,000 grant had been given on a one-off basis, but it was effectively used to plug a funding hole caused by cutbacks imposed on the previous year's budget. When it was granted, it was stipulated that it would be for one year only.

However, the DJEI complained that "the imposition of this budget cut could therefore not but have very difficult implications for the body and the programmes it carries out to help businesses, North and South".

ITI was set up to fund programmes for SMEs, but also to help them negotiate tendering processes, navigate cross-border sales, raise finance, and also provide business intelligence and innovation support services for firms.

In his email, Scannell also mentioned "general challenges we are facing in connection with the oversight and operation of ITI", but did not elaborate on the nature of such challenges.

In June of this year, the permanent secretary of the Department for the Economy wrote to the chairman of InterTrade Ireland confirming that there would be no reduction in funding for the year, and that the baseline indicative figure for the coming year would be the same as the previous year, £2.789 million.

Source: The Sunday Business Post

3 September 2017

Cross-border sharing of police expertise 'will be difficult after Brexit'

Vital cross-border sharing of policing expertise is going to become extremely difficult post-Brexit, former police chief Judith Gillespie has warned.

The former Police Service of Northern Ireland deputy chief constable and member of Ireland's Policing Authority said that Brexit is going to pose many challenges for law enforcement.

In an interview with the Press Association, Ms Gillespie said one of the main threats to policing post-Brexit will be the sharing of important experience between the Garda and the PSNI.

Recent Garda superintendent and chief superintendent promotion competitions have seen a number of PSNI officers being successfully recruited.

Ms Gillespie said this was a welcome step in terms of "sharing policing experience across the two jurisdictions where there are unique and shared challenges."

"But post-Brexit this movement of staff will become even more difficult than it is now," warned Ms Gillespie.

She added: "I think Brexit is going to pose so many challenges for law enforcement - European arrest warrants, exchange of information, intelligence, fingerprints, DNA, all those things. I have much concern.

"And any type of hard border will have very significant costs both north and south.

"In the context of shrinking public sector costs that is going to be a real challenge - to continue to deliver policing, in the context of additional costs to policing a hard border. It is a big concern," she said.

Ms Gillespie, who retired from the PSNI in 2014 after 32 years, joined the Republic of Ireland's Policing Authority in January 2016.

She said the Garda oversight body has a really important part to play "as a critical friend and in ensuring pace in delivery of change".

"That's important not just for the public but also for the very many good people within the organisation," she added.

Since joining the oversight body the Garda has been hit by a number of controversies and Commissioner Noirin O'Sullivan has faced calls to resign.

However, Ms Gillespie believes that the commissioner should be given a "fair chance" to transform the force - but warned that the Policing Authority will be watching her performance "very closely".

"I think the Commissioner should be given a fair chance to prove she can transform and modernise the organisation.

"I think Noirin is an incredibly resilient person. I have known her for many years. I think she has had a very difficult job to take over with the history of the organisation.

"I do think she has had difficulties with her own team as well and that has posed internal challenges as well as external challenges she has had to face.

"I think she has to be given time to turn the organisation around. You are never going to be able to make these cultural changes overnight. It is going to take time," said Ms Gillespie.

However she added: "There will soon be a time when we expect to see tangible evidence of changes delivered, and the Authority is watching very closely in terms of the implementation of the Garda Inspectorate report."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph