



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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EU willing to be flexible and creative with Northern Ireland, says Taoiseach

The European Union is willing to bend the rules for Northern Ireland after Brexit - something that the province should take full advantage of, the Taoiseach has said.

Leo Varadkar was speaking to BBC NI's Spotlight as the talks to restore Stormont reach a critical stage. He told interviewer Jim Fitzpatrick that the peace process could be scuppered if Brexit is not handled well by the UK.

"We've had enormous progress in the last couple of decades. Increased prosperity on both sides of the border and almost total peace. Potentially those things are in jeopardy if the wrong decisions are made," the Fine Gael leader said.

Mr Varadkar was critical of how the Conservative government has handled the Brexit negotiations and the financial 'divorce' settlement with the EU.

"You can't have the benefits of being a member of a club if you don't obey the rules and you won't pay the membership fee," he said. "So ... it is quite a difficult negotiation when people who want to leave the European Union in Britain don't really seem to agree among themselves what that actually means."

Mr Varadkar has previously urged the UK to pursue a 'soft' Brexit, staying within the customs union - an option that the Tory government has ruled out.

But he suggested that there could be bespoke arrangements for Northern Ireland - although unionists are opposed to any 'special status' for the province - which could place the province in an advantageous position.

Mr Varadkar said European leaders have "a real understanding that Northern Ireland is unique".

"And because of that there will be enormous flexibility shown towards Northern Ireland," he said.

"Whereas a hard line may be taken in negotiations with Britain and with London, there is a real willingness across Europe to be flexible and creative when it comes to Northern Ireland, to create a unique solution for Northern Ireland if that's required.

"And I just hope that the people and the politicians in Northern Ireland understand that's actually ... [it] could be a big advantage for this part of the world, and this part of the country. And not to see it as some sort of threat to the constitutional settlement or some sort of threat to the Union. It isn't.

"There is a willingness to be flexible, to bend the rules for Northern Ireland and I really hope that Northern Irish political leaders and the community here in Northern Ireland takes advantage of that."

Mr Varadkar also put the issue of a united Ireland on the backburner, saying he would prefer it happened through consensus when it did.

"One of the best things about the Good Friday Agreement is that it did get very strong cross-border support - that's why there was a 70% vote for it. I don't think that there would be a 70% vote for a united Ireland in the morning, for example, or anything remotely to that. And I really think we should focus on making the agreement that we have work," he said.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

17 October 2017

InterTradeIreland launches Brexit planning event

ALL but 2 per cent of businesses in Ireland have a Brexit plan in place, according to cross-border trade and business development body InterTradeIreland.

And it is appealing to firms from across the island to register for a major event in Titanic Belfast on Tuesday October 24 entitled 'All Fact: No Noise. Practical Help to Plan for Brexit'.

The free half day event, hosted by the BBC's Mark Simpson, will see input from Dr Vincent Power, a partner at A&L Goodbody in Dublin, and an expert in EU law who will draw delegates' attention to the key things they should be looking at as negotiations proceed.

Attendees will also benefit from practical workshops on the potential impact of changes in areas such as Rules of Origin; taxation, VAT, human resources and customs, as well as panel discussions featuring Northern Ireland businesses that have started planning for Brexit.

Renowned international business speaker David Meade will also deliver a keynote address on tackling challenges such as Brexit with a positive mindset.

Ken Nelson, chairman of InterTradeIreland, said: "Our latest All-Island Business Monitor highlights 98 per cent of local companies have no plans in place for Brexit and we're committed to offering firms practical support to start preparing.

“Brexit will become a reality and now is the time for firms to prepare for different scenarios that might emerge.”

InterTradeIreland launched its bespoke Brexit Advisory Service in May, offering help and assistance for SMEs including a £2,000 Brexit Start Planning Voucher, which allows individual firms to work with an approved panel of experts to devise a tailored action plan.

As well as advice on topics surrounding Brexit such as currency hedging and information on cross-border supply chains, InterTradeIreland has developed a comprehensive database of all goods traded cross-border on the island of Ireland.

This covers thousands of individual product categories and businesses can access information on possible tariffs for products, should certain customs duties be introduced.

“While businesses may have experienced minimal impact due to the impending Brexit at this point, this may not always be the case and companies need to be prepared,” Mr Nelson said.

“At next Tuesday’s event InterTradeIreland will be discussing our recent World Trade Organisation tariff report findings, highlighting the importance of contingency planning for firms on both sides of the border to prepare for any barriers to exporting.

“We appreciate that the lack of clarity around Brexit is complicating planning efforts, with our latest Business Monitor highlighting uncertainty is making it difficult for more than three quarters of local businesses to plan.

“But now is the time for firms to take the steps to make sure they are ready for Brexit and we are already seeing a marked increase of companies actively seeking guidance on Brexit matters.

“Planning for Brexit is a complex process with the potential for many repercussions so InterTradeIreland has devised content to suit all businesses no matter what stage they are at with their Brexit plans.

“I encourage local SMEs and stakeholders to find out about how InterTradeIreland can help their Brexit planning and sign up for this free event.”

Source: The Irish News

19 October 2017

Brexit stand-off a horror show, warn civil servants

THE 'Irish Question' will remain unanswered when the latest round of Brexit talks end, because Theresa May will not bring forward any new ideas for a frictionless Border today.

As a result, EU leaders meeting in Brussels for a two-day summit will not be supporting British demands to move on to the next phase of negotiations.

EU heads of state and government "want to see more of what the British position is and the mechanics of how north-south co-operation should work" after Brexit, according to senior sources.

Back in Dublin, senior civil servants are worried about the disarray in Westminster and the British government.

"It's a horror show," said one source, adding that the constant feuding meant UK ministers were not issuing orders to civil servants.

A copy of the draft conclusions of this week's summit, seen by the Irish Independent, said that the EU "acknowledges that, as regards Ireland, there has been some progress" on protection of the Good Friday Agreement and maintenance of the Common Travel Area. But it warned that further "refinement" of these principles was necessary "taking into account the major challenge that the UK's withdrawal represents", including as regards "avoidance of a hard Border".

The conclusions also said the expectation was for the UK to "present and commit to flexible and imaginative solutions" called for by the "unique situation of Ireland".

However, Fine Gael MEP Brian Hayes warned a "Mexican standoff" was brewing if the EU did not become more flexible about moving on to the next phase of negotiations.

Source: The Irish Independent