

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

02/09/2015 - 09/10/2015



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Monday 05 September 2015

DFM Questions - NSMC: First Minister's Withdrawal

Summary: Mr Bradley MLA asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any work that has ceased or been delayed as a result of the First Minister's decision to withdraw from the North/South Ministerial Council.

Mr M McGuinness: Since the then First Minister's statement on 7 September 2015, two meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council have been postponed. A meeting of the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) sector, scheduled for 18 September, was postponed, and a meeting of the agricultural sector scheduled for 7 October was also postponed. A further North/South ministerial meeting in the north-west to consider the future strategic approach to the development of the region, which was scheduled for 1 October to fulfil commitments given in the North/South Ministerial Council and the Stormont House Agreement, has also been postponed. However, the operations of the North/South bodies are continuing as normal. Officials in sponsor Departments are in regular contact with the North/South bodies to keep them abreast of the position and to ensure that they are taking the necessary steps for the continued effective operations of the bodies.

I know that civil servants, officials and, I think, all parties in this Assembly are very keen to ensure that there is no financial loss as a result of the present situation. I am working on the basis that the work with Europe is continuing, and my hope is, as I believe is the hope of all Members in this House, that that money will be secured.

Source: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-05-10-2015.pdf>



Tuesday 6 September 2015

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - Northern Ireland Issues

Summary: Here, the leader of the Opposition asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he would provide an update on the talks process in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. The Minister outlined the Irish Government's current position and insisted: "I have continually encouraged the parties to resolve their difference for the sake of Northern Ireland's economic stability and the sustainability of public services."

Charles Flanagan: Following the request by the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Cameron, I and my colleague Minister of State Sherlock, together with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, facilitated a return of all the five main parties in Northern Ireland to round table talks. These talks resumed on 21 September and are continuing in a constructive atmosphere. The first two weeks of roundtable talks have been relatively positive and constructive with a clear willingness on all sides to address the issues around the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement and dealing with the legacy and impact of paramilitarism. I remain hopeful that, with committed collective engagement, we can make real progress on both of these critical issues. An agreed outcome would be an important step forward - not just for politics but for the further normalisation of society in Northern Ireland. In an effort to facilitate inclusive talks, the Secretary of State has announced a British Government assessment of the current profile of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. This is a one-off assessment which will be completed in the coming weeks and does not pre-empt the discussion of the paramilitary issue in the talks. It may indeed be of assistance to the parties as they consider how best to tackle the issue.

The issue of criminality stemming from the legacy of paramilitarism is also an important point for the talks. I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that there will be enhanced support and resources for tackling criminality in Northern Ireland. This is very much in keeping with our Government's strong determination to tackle crime, including organised crime. There is already very strong North-South cooperation involving the police and other relevant agencies when it comes to cross-border crime. My colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality had the opportunity to engage with the parties on these issues when she participated in the Stormont talks last week.

Of equal importance in the talks is the need to fully implement the Stormont House Agreement. This agreement, concluded in December 2014, offers a blueprint for overcoming current difficulties in the Executive, especially around financing, welfare reform and dealing with the legacy of the past. While financing and welfare reform is primarily an issue for the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, I have continually encouraged the parties to resolve their difference for the sake of Northern Ireland's economic stability and the sustainability of public services.

It is also crucial that the work started by the Stormont House Agreement on establishing institutions to deal with the legacy of the past is completed so that justice and truth can bring what healing is possible to victims and survivors of the troubles and their families. My officials and I are working intensively with the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Office to ensure the rapid establishment of the institutions, including the Independent Commission for Information Retrieval, the Historical Investigations Unit and the Implementation and Reconciliation Group.

A successful outcome to the talks, which will respect and protect the Good Friday Agreement and its power sharing institutions, is a crucial priority for the Government. It is essential that all of the five main parties in Northern Ireland, with the support of the two Governments, urgently get down to the serious business of fully implementing the Stormont House Agreement and addressing the impact and legacy of continuing paramilitary activity.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2015-10-06a.1366&s=cross-border#g1368.r>

Wednesday 7 October 2015

European Council Meeting Statements – UK Referendum on EU Membership

Summary: During a statement to the house on European Council Meetings, the Taoiseach outlined the Government's position on the United Kingdom's place in the EU and updated the house on his engagements with the British Government on this issue.

Mr Kenny: On the issue of the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union. Firstly, I understand that President Tusk intends to update Heads of State and Government at the Council on the state of play of the technical work that has been under way in Brussels between British and EU officials since the June European Council. I look forward to hearing from President Tusk and to finding out how he sees the process advancing in the weeks ahead. There is an expectation that the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, will present his latest thinking on the issues he has identified at some stage after the European Council meeting, and the hope is that this will lead to a phase of more detailed discussion. The arrangements for taking forward that detailed discussion are not yet clear, but there is likely to be further consideration by Heads of State and Government at the European Council meeting in December.

I set out the position of the Government at some length in answer to questions in the House last week. However, I would like to take this opportunity again to stress that the place of the United Kingdom in the European Union is of real national importance for Ireland, and this issue is a strategic priority for the Government. I have made clear to Mr. Cameron in my discussions with him how much value we attach to the fact that both of our countries are members of the European Union. We are therefore watching developments very closely. Officials in my Department, our permanent representation in Brussels and our embassy in London are in very regular contact with British and other colleagues. We will be open and pragmatic when it comes to sensible proposals to improve the EU and make it better able to meet the needs of its citizens, and also to address specific UK concerns, although of course we will be fully conscious both of our own national interests and of the views of other member states. We will work with the British Government and all our EU partners to

find a consensual basis for the UK's continued membership of our Union. I look forward to learning more about progress next week and, of course, to reporting to the House afterwards.

The European Council will, therefore, address a number of important issues. I expect that, in keeping with the urgency and complexity of the situation, migration will dominate proceedings, but the discussions of EMU and the UK will also be of considerable interest for the longer term. I look forward now to hearing Deputies' comments and perspectives.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2015-10-07a.612&s=cross-border#g617>