



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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21 October 2015

Fears of energy crisis by 2019 without an interconnector in place

THE proposed **north-south** interconnector must be in place by 2019 "if the lights are to stay on," the Utility Regulator has said.

Jenny Pyper spoke at the Eir-Grid Group conference in Belfast yesterday, where she said businesses and households would "pay dearly" if the interconnector is not put in place.

And she said it was a "myth" that building an underground inter-connector was a solution to the planning row surrounding the infrastructure. Campaigners against the line in **border** areas **north and south** have said it should be built underground.

Ms Pyper described the north-south interconnector as "the single most important energy issue". She added: "What is clear is that the option of undergrounding the interconnector would not only jeopardise the expected delivery date of 2019 but it simply could not be delivered by 2021 when our electricity capacity margin becomes critical.

"We need to make a choice. Do consumers and businesses want the lights to stay on and as cheaply as possible? If so, the interconnector that is in planning is the only option," she stressed.

Robin McCormick, general manager at the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI), which runs the grid, said "politicians, business and the community need to grasp the critical need for the interconnector if Northern Ireland's lights are to stay on".

The **north-south** interconnector is a joint project between SONI and its equivalent in the Republic, EirGrid.

The overhead line would link the electricity networks in Northern Ireland and the Republic in a £204m capital investment, crossing Tyrone, Armagh, Monaghan, Cavan and Meath.

Source: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/news/energy-crisis-fears-by-2019-without-northsouth-interconnector-34126841.html>

22 October 2015

Body to tackle paramilitary activity 'an option'

Taoiseach Enda Kenny is open-minded about setting up a "well-resourced" cross-border body alongside the British government to tackle paramilitary activity and linked crime in the area.

He hinted his support for such a move during a tense leaders questions debate in the Dáil, dominated by revelations of the Provisional IRA's continuing existence in Northern Ireland.

The debate also focused on the Provos crime legacy in the Republic and claims of money finding its way into Sinn Féin's accounts.

The Taoiseach, who on Tuesday had failed to respond to Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin's call for such a group to be set up, told his political rival yesterday the issues raised in the MI5 and Garda reports into the Provisional IRA's existence must be responded to.

However, while not making the call himself, he strongly indicated he would not be opposed to such a measure as a well-resourced cross-border unit involving both governments, along the same lines as collaborative efforts to tackle fuel and cigarette smuggling as recommended in response to the Stormont talks.

Mr Kenny, who was criticised yesterday for not putting in place any specific measures other than already planned fresh talks to respond to the provisional IRA reports findings, stressed he is open to the option on five separate occasions during yesterday's debate.

The position, welcomed by Mr Martin and which Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams argued his party had previously suggested to tackle dissidents, came during a leaders questions debate fraught with tension.

In a series of hard-hitting claims, Mr Martin had been heckled by Sinn Féin's justice spokesperson Pádraig MacLochlainn who told the Fianna Fáil leader he was a political gurrrier and more hard-line than MI5 or the DUP you re worse than the DUP.

Mr Martin had said the reports highlighted a fundamental question for our republic.

He also said there was a threat to democracy from an organisation involved with politics but which retains a military structure, with an active intelligence gathering department and access to weaponry.

We must ask whether people are absolutely certain any of the proceeds from organised crime being committed by alleged individual provo republicans is not finding its way to the political project. I do not say that lightly, he said.

Mr Adams, meanwhile, said elements of the reports findings have been seized upon by opponents of Sinn Féin.

Along with others, he said, they had paid a high price with bomb threats at their homes and other attacks.

Criticising Mr Kenny for weasel words which had welcomed Mr Adams focus on peace, the Sinn Féin leader said: We are wedded to democracy.

However, Mr Kenny hit back, asking: Is Paudie McGahon wrong? Is Mairia Cahill wrong?

Source: <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/body-to-tackle-paramilitary-activity-an-option-360676.html>

23 October 2015

Banks in the UK tempt NI savers into switch with cash offers

CASHBACK offers, fee-free overdrafts and savings on household bills are tempting more and more people to move their current accounts from Northern Ireland banks to larger UK rivals such as Halifax and Santander.

Across the market generally, customers who remain in credit could save themselves on average £70 a year by switching, and people who heavily use their overdraft can save up to £260 a year, according to a Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) report.

Halifax's Reward Current Account gives customers a £5 reward for each month they pay in a minimum of £750, stay in credit and have at least two active direct debits coming out. Plus the bank offers a £100 switching bonus paid within three working days of completion when customers use the Current Account Switching Service (CASS).

The Santander 123 current account gives cashback on certain household bills and interest (currently 3% AER variable) on balances from £3,000 to £20,000 for a £2 monthly fee if more than £500 is paid into its 123 account and at least two active direct debits come out.

Almost 5,000 people have moved their current accounts from Northern Ireland's big four - Danske Bank, Ulster Bank, First Trust and Bank of Ireland - to UK rivals in just three months, the Belfast Telegraph revealed yesterday.

However, trying to get new business by encouraging customers to switch from one bank to another is not an attractive idea, according to economy expert John Simpson.

"A lot of these tactics can be self-defeating," he said. "The search for new accounts will increasingly be directed to the young new account holder or the account holder who signs up for a loan or a mortgage.

"It is no accident that the banks are now so active in offering mortgage finance (even with tighter official policy restricting excessive loans relative to income).

"The high street banks are facing a long-term squeeze which is more serious than the immediate customer fall-out from the recent glitches in day-to-day business," he added.

"In Northern Ireland, banks are now trying to rebuild profitability after serious losses caused by the bust in the property market.

"Banks need to make money but are now lending at interest rates which are low by the standards of recent history.

"The knock-on effect is that the banks would have difficulty maintaining a system of free banking to current account customers.

"Charges for operating current accounts, charges for specific banking services and incentives linked to maintaining minimum balances are becoming normal.

"Local banks are now profitable again, but less profitable than a decade ago. New arrivals, such as Santander, have sharpened competition.

"Cross-**border** banking poses new threats as the exchange rate for the euro and sterling has become more volatile. Risks of exchange rate losses have emerged and will influence some big cross-**border** businesses."

Source: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/news/banks-in-the-uk-tempt-northern-ireland-savers-into-switch-with-cash-offers-34133048.html>