



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Newry to debate: 'Can we afford to leave Europe?'

Former taoiseach Bertie Ahern is among a panel of speakers confirmed for a major business debate in Newry this Thursday - the first of its kind in the north - looking at the pros and cons of a British exit from the European Union.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council will host 'Brexit - The Big Debate' in the Canal Court Hotel from 9am-1pm, which is free to attend (though you must be registered at orla@newry.com).

The potential impact on Northern Ireland of the UK exiting Europe following the proposed referendum in 2017 cannot be underestimated, and Newry will articulate the arguments for and against and focus on the impact of a Brexit on the peace process, the future economic prosperity of the region and border control with the Republic.

There will be a keynote address from Daithi O Ceallaigh, former ambassador to the UK, UN and WTO, alongside panellists including Mr Ahern, and Labour's shadow minister for Europe Pat McFadden. The debate will be hosted by Len O'Hagan, chairman of NI Water.

Councillor Naomi Bailie, chairperson of Newry Council, said: "A conference of this calibre in Newry will really kick start the discussion about the impact of a Brexit decision on the north of Ireland and across these islands.

"We believe there is a lack of understanding about how detrimental an exit would be, particularly for the north of Ireland, as we would be the only region with a land border with an EU member.

"It would severely affect civic society, trade and free movement particularly in border regions where we have many **cross border** workers, **cross border** businesses and cooperation between organisations.

"While we are opposed to an exit we welcome the opportunity to get a full understanding of the arguments for and against during a comprehensive debate with some of the best informed politicians and commentators in Britain and Ireland."

Deborah Loughran, president of Newry Chamber of Commerce and Trade, added: "This debate is essential for business and civic leaders, politicians, students, educationalists, economists and anyone who has a general interest in the future growth and prosperity of Northern Ireland."

Source: <http://www.irishnews.com/business/2015/10/26/news/newry-to-debate-can-we-afford-to-leave-europe--303692/>

27 October 2015

Cross-border electricity link essential for growth

A new electricity interconnector between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is vital to ensure security of supply for businesses and domestic electricity customers, according to System Operator Northern Ireland (SONI).

Part of the EirGrid Group, SONI is the electricity system operator for Northern Ireland and is responsible for the consistent, cost effective and reliable transmission of electricity across Ireland.

SONI is currently planning a new grid connection between the electricity networks in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

In conjunction with the existing undersea connection to Scotland, this new interconnector will make the network stronger and more secure and will result in cheaper electricity for domestic and business users.

"If the new interconnector gets up and running, savings to customers overall could be up to £45m per year by 2030," said Robin McCormick, SONI general manager.

"There has been an interconnector between **north and south** since 1995.

"However, now with much more electricity being generated another interconnector is needed.

"Also, new European legislation on emissions is affecting some of the older fossil-fuelled generators which means the amount of power they can generate will be restricted.

"If we don't have the new interconnector in place by 2021, we can't be confident we can keep the lights on.

"SONI have been working with large energy users and the business community to make it clear that the electricity system is not currently working as well as it could and customers (**north and south**) are currently paying around £14m per year more than they would with the new interconnector.

"We are also in constant communication with politicians, businesses and government bodies.

"People need to understand the critical nature of the project and the absolute necessity of getting the new interconnector delivered - not just to the existing market, but also in attracting new business.

"When foreign investors consider Northern Ireland, one of the first questions they ask is, 'Do you have a secure, quality supply of electricity?'

"If there is any doubt, they will question whether Northern Ireland is a viable option for them.

"The benefits of the new **north-south** interconnector to the economy are tenfold - stable, secure, and cost efficient electricity will enable business expansion, global investment, job creation and increasing Northern Ireland's use of sustainable energy.

"Securing electricity supply isn't just about making sure you can keep the lights on, it is essential to the future economic growth of businesses and the community."

A public inquiry into proposals for the interconnector is expected to take place early in 2016.

Costing just over £200m the project which will connect an overhead powerline between Co Tyrone and Co Meath, will facilitate everyone across Ireland having the same generation capacity.

"If we get the go-ahead, we believe it is possible to have the new interconnector up and running by 2019," said Mr McCormick.

"The views of the community are important to us, from business to residents, we are on the ground, listening and responding. People across Northern Ireland are calling out for more affordable electricity and the **north-south** Interconnector is the key to making this happen."

Source: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/news/crossborder-electricity-link-essential-for-growth-34143386.html>

29 October 2015

Ex-taoiseach Bertie Ahern warns Brexit could spark Ireland referendum

Bertie Ahern has warned a UK exit from Europe could force a new referendum in Ireland.

The former Irish taoiseach said the Republic should be as helpful as possible to Britain as it seeks concessions from the EU ahead of a poll on whether to exit as early as next year.

But he recalled his experience of European referenda showed they opened up new issues not envisaged by treaty negotiators and could be exploited by foreign interests.

Mr Ahern said: "Treaty change is difficult, if you have treaty change it means every one of the 27 (other member states) have to ratify in national parliaments or in referendums.

"I don't see how you can make the changes the Prime Minister (David Cameron) is looking for without some sort of treaty changes."

The former Fianna Fail leader served as taoiseach between 1997 and 2008. In 2004 he held office as president of the European Council during which European leaders agreed a new European constitution.

The British Government wants that constitution to be significantly reformed if it is not to leave the EU, touching on issues of sovereignty, competitiveness and immigration.

Mr Ahern supported the Irish Government's position that Ireland should be a helpful good neighbour to Britain.

But he recalled battles over Irish referenda on the Lisbon and Nice European reform treaties in the first decade of the 21st century.

"When you negotiate these huge agreements and bring it to the people you get different issues.

"Pollsters said it was about Irish neutrality or about abortion and there was interference by several countries who could not get their own way in their own country so came over to try to influence us in our country."

Ireland voted twice on the Lisbon Treaty, which centred on the creation of a European constitution, approving it in 2009.

Mr Ahern was in office during the poll on the Nice Treaty, which reformed the institutional structure of the EU to accommodate eastern expansion. The referendum was passed with a yes vote in 2002.

He told a conference in Newry, Co Down, his views had changed since the referendum on Ireland entering the EU.

"I don't love Europe as much as I did in 1972. The alternative is something that we sure don't want."

He said Ireland had strong reasons for wanting its major trade partner the UK to remain within the EU, particularly preserving trade links.

But he acknowledged: "I understand many of the UK's objectives, the Irish Government have said they are open to considering sensible proposals."

Those include immigration and benefits.

"Preventing any abuses of freedom of movement will serve to strengthen the freedom of movement in the long run."

He said there was a "simplistic" view about the impact on trade agreements if the UK pulled out, leaving the Government to negotiate individual agreements with many countries or blocs.

"When it comes down to it (Europe) is still a huge part of our economic life, it is a huge part of trade and business.

"The reason we are successful, the reason we managed to book our work through another recession, the reason we can give good employment and educate people and keep things going **North/South** is because we are part of a trading block that is the EU."

Source: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/extaoiseach-bertie-ahern-warns-brexit-could-spark-ireland-referendum-34152418.html>