



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Border control between islands 'inevitable' post-Brexit

Border controls between the island of Ireland and Britain are inevitable if there is a Brexit, according to official sources on both sides of the Irish Sea.

A strict new regime for travel between the two islands is already under consideration if the UK votes next month to leave the European Union.

The impossibility of sealing the 500km border between Northern Ireland and the Republic has put the focus on new travel arrangements.

Such a move would mean British citizens travelling from Northern Ireland would be subject to customs and border controls at air and ferry ports in Britain.

The House of Commons Northern Ireland committee has warned that strengthened identity checks on travellers between the two islands may be a more feasible option than the reintroduction of controls along the land border between **North and South**.

Significant changes

There is no doubt among officials in Dublin and London that a vote to leave the EU will prompt significant changes in the operation of the common travel area between the islands despite claims by Northern Secretary Theresa Villiers that it will not make any difference.

One Irish Government source said: "Immigration is the major argument in favour of a Brexit so in the event of a vote to leave it is inconceivable that the British would allow Ireland to become a back door for immigrants who could avail of the common travel areas."

He added that Irish and British officials were acutely aware that it would be impossible to seal the land Border between Northern Ireland and the Republic so travel restrictions between the two islands would be inevitable.

The Commons committee warned in a report entitled Northern Ireland and the EU Referendum that imposing controls along the land Border, which is crossed by up to 30,000 commuters a day, would cause considerable disruption.

'Less disruption'

"An alternative solution might be to strengthen the border between the island of Ireland and the British mainland. There are fewer crossing points to enforce and it would be less disruptive as there are already checks in place," the report says.

It adds there must be doubts about the extent to which, in the event of a Brexit, the Border between Northern Ireland and the Republic could be effectively policed.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Charlie Flanagan told The Irish Times that restrictions on travel between the islands had not been raised with him to date.

However, he added that the reintroduction of controls along the land Border in the event of a Brexit would be "a nightmare of huge proportions."

"I fail to see how the introduction of customs and passport controls between Ireland the UK will not become a live issue if there is a vote to leave," he said.

Source: The Irish Times

June 1, 2016

EU has brought us decades of peace - what Europe needs now is reform, not a Brexit

THE following is an edited extract called 'Reflections on Peace in a Changed Ireland' from a speech made by former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern to Queen's University Belfast IAM glad to have the opportunity to share my reflections on peace in a changed Ireland. The word 'game-changer' has, in recent times, become popular in the political lexicon. I think that description - game-changer - aptly describes the transformation that we have seen on this island since the birth of the peace process in the early 1990s and, more particularly, since the conclusion of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Peace has changed Ireland, **north and south**, for the better and we are increasingly moving towards a new era of progressive politics that will consign to the dustbin of history the sectarian and territorial disputes of the past.

The island of Ireland has known many darks days and, unfortunately, our relations with Britain have often been controversial and stained by blood.

In our modern history, Northern Ireland hovered on the brink of allout civil war. Terrorism, atrocities, shootings, punishment beatings, bombings, murder and mayhem were a depressingly frequent everyday reality.

Peace did take root and this generation of undergraduates are among the first to have grown up in a society totally at peace. It is 18 years since the Good Friday Agreement was signed. Its commitment to democratic politics and inclusiveness, and its rejection of violence for political means, have been fundamental to the vibrant, progressive and more prosperous society that is emerging in Northern Ireland.

Politicians are often criticised - and maybe in a democracy that is a feature of accountability. But I sincerely believe that this island - and especially Northern Ireland - has been well served by a generation of political leaders from across the spectrum who put the cause of peace first, often at great risk to themselves.

The peace we enjoy today is the fruit of many people's labours and it is a multi-layered story of courage, persistence, hope, and a desire to ensure that the next generation would not have to live through the carnage of a conflict that saw ; 15,300 bombs; ; 36,000 shootings; ; 3,720 people killed, with an average of 10 people a month murdered over a period of 30 years.

The two islands of Ireland and Britain have come to know each other better not just through the prism of our shared history, but through exchanges of ideas and people. Our economic and cultural links have increased. We are interdependent in trade, investment and tourism.

Importantly, we have grown closer through our work together at European Union level where, for over 43 years now, Irish and British ministers and civil servants have worked intensively together, and with our partners, across the range of issues on the EU agenda.

Peace is never inevitable and, going back even a century, many people thought that the major political problems on the island of Ireland could never be resolved.

Winston Churchill's famous comments about the "dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone" reflected a fatalistic view that the integrity of the Irish quarrel would always be maintained. Happily, this fatalism has been replaced by a conviction that Northern Ireland's problems are capable of being resolved through democratic dialogue and political engagement.

The great lesson of the peace process has been that dialogue is the only way forward if profound differences, such as those which exist in Northern Ireland, are to be managed and resolved.

I don't wish to diminish the crucial involvement of many political leaders in Northern Ireland, in the United States and elsewhere to the cause of peace.

However, the entire process could not have thrived without a British Prime Minister of commitment and conviction, willing to persevere and take risks to bring about a lasting settlement. Gladstone, as far back as the late 19th century, had championed the cause of Home Rule in Westminster - and lost office because of it. His great mission was, in his own words, "to pacify Ireland". It is to Tony Blair's great credit that he did so much to deliver on Gladstone's stated objective.

So much has been achieved.

Twenty years ago, Northern Ireland was scarred by heavily militarised barracks and watchtowers, many border roads remained closed, and there was a very large troop presence across the North. The people throughout the island are Irish or British by birth, provided that is what they want to be - regardless of background, politics or creed. A great change that we have seen in our lifetime is a willingness to recognise in both the nationalist and unionist communities that we cannot coerce other people into our way of thinking. It is my belief that the future of this island is too vital for all of us to be constrained by the straitjackets of history. The Good Friday Agreement has delivered us to the point today where, in David Trimble's memorable phrase, Northern Ireland is no longer "a cold house for Catholics".

In politics, I have always made it clear that I passionately believe in a united Ireland. I think it is in the interests of everybody on the island. But I am also clear that there is absolutely no sense in engaging in the folly of trying to coerce a majority in the North into a united Ireland against their will.

I totally respect those who believe the best opportunities for Northern Ireland lie in continued union with www.Britain.No one on this island should be threatened or needs to feel under threat.

The EU has brought two generations of peace and profound international cooperation to Europe. It is simply bad economics that will cost jobs and investment throughout Northern Ireland if a Brexit occurs.

The EU does need to be modernised, and it does need to change, but that is something that political leaders in Belfast, Dublin and London should be working together on. What Europe really needs is fundamental EU-wide reform, not a UK departure.

Source: Irish Independent

June 2, 2016

EU Referendum - Under-fire Villiers continues to play down border implications

Secretary of State Theresa Villiers has come under unprecedented pressure over her insistence that the Irish border would be unaffected by Britain's exit from the European Union.

The Tory MP appears increasingly isolated in her assertion that the long-standing Common Travel Area between Britain and Ireland can prevail after a 'leave' vote in the June 23 referendum.

But despite doubts being raised by Taoiseach Enda Kenny, Irish foreign affairs minister Charlie Flanagan and former PSNI chief constable Sir Hugh Orde, left, Ms Villiers remains steadfast in her belief that free movement between **north and south** would continue unabated.

A report from her own government's Cabinet Office has contradicted the secretary of state's claim, while Lord Nigel Lawson, the chairman of the Vote Leave campaign, also flagged up the likelihood of a hard border being imposed should Britain sever its ties with Brussels.

However, according to Ms Villiers, the former Conservative chancellor "hadn't been fully briefed" when he made the claim in April on the BBC.

Last night, one of her predecessors accused the secretary of state of putting her personal beliefs ahead of her duty to the people of Northern Ireland.

Peter Hain said he has "always been of the view that there will be a need for border controls" if the UK leaves the EU.

"Open borders were the cornerstone of the Good Friday Agreement. I think Brexit will jeopardise future stability," he said.

"If I was a resident of Northern Ireland I'd be first in the queue to vote remain. Given all the security issues around Europe I cannot believe anybody will agree to open the border."

He added: "I think she is putting her own anti-EU dogma ahead of her duties as secretary of state."

"Her duty is to the people of Northern Ireland - not to freelance on an exit Europe crusade at the expense of hard-fought peace and stability."

In an interview with The Irish News, Ms Villiers again insisted that there need not be any controls along the Irish border should Britain leave the EU.

Despite Charlie Flanagan saying it would be the remaining EU states, rather than London and Dublin, that would decide the arrangements, the secretary of state remained adamant that nothing would change.

She said keeping an open border was in the interests of the United Kingdom and the Republic.

"There is no reason why we should have to scrap (the common travel area) and looking at the evidence given by the Irish ambassador to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in parliament, it was clear that it was in the interests of the Irish government to try and ensure that the open border continued," Ms Villiers said.

"I would find it surprising if either country set about trying to dismantle an arrangement which has served us both well for very nearly 100 years."

Responding to Sir Hugh Orde's sharply worded criticism of her previous claims about the border's post-Brexit status, the Chipping-Barnet MP said: "We are not going back to security towers. It's just not going to happen."

Earlier this week, the former chief constable said Ms Villiers's pledge that a British vote to leave the EU would not lead to border controls was "untenable".

He said the secretary of state "continues to keep her head firmly stuck in a peat bog".

Ms Villiers said there would be unrestricted movement between both parts of Ireland and Britain, with no passport or immigration controls.

"You don't have to have physical checks at a border in order to enforce immigration rules," she said.

The secretary of state said illegal immigration would be tackled using measures that were already in place, including restrictions on landlords letting to people without visas and sanctions for employers who used unauthorised foreign workers.

She said the Leave campaign had carried out research which looked at a number of scenarios and the consistent conclusion was that it was in the interests of the Republic and the UK to keep the border open.

Ms Villiers's immediate predecessor backed her claims about the border.

Fellow Conservative Owen Paterson, who helped negotiate the updating of the Common Travel Area in 2011, said it had "existed before the European institutions were even created and can continue after we vote leave".

"It is so clearly in our mutual interest that continuing it is a no brainer," he said.

"Similar arrangements exist elsewhere between EU and non-EU countries so the precedent already exist. To claim otherwise is scaremongering and myth making."

However, Fianna Fail leader Micheal Martin added his voice to those questioning the secretary of state's position, saying a Brexit vote would signal a hard border and "all the negative connotations that go with it".

"[The secretary of state] is either genuinely unaware of the reality of the border and its implications, which raises its own questions - the alternative, her claim that the UK's exit from the EU will have no effect on its international border, is simply not credible," he said.

Sinn Fein MEP Martina Anderson said Ms Villiers did not have a single vote in Ireland and her support for a Brexit was not in the interests of the north.

"We are opposed to the reintroduction of border controls on the island of Ireland as well as additional tariffs and barriers to trade," she said.

SDLP leader Colum Eastwood said Ms Villiers was failing to listen to those voices in authority who said "the back door could not be left open".

"Theresa Villiers forgets if you're not at the table then you're on the menu - we would be very much at the mercy of the EU when it comes to matters which affects it," he said.

"The crux of the matter is that there is no plan B, no guarantees of a happy ending."

Source: The Irish News