

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

08/07/2016 - 15/07/2016



Northern Ireland
Assembly

There was no Assembly Business scheduled for this week.



Tuesday 7 July 2016

United Kingdom Referendum on European Union Membership:

Summary: Micheal Martin asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ms Theresa Villiers, since the result of the referendum on a British exit from the European Union; if they have discussed matters that concern the island of Ireland, such as implications for trade and Border controls; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Charles Flanagan: I have been actively engaged with both the Northern Ireland Executive and the British Government since the results of the recent UK-EU referendum became known. On the Friday when the result was announced I spoke with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the First and deputy First Ministers and the leaders of the Northern Irish political parties.

Last Wednesday, the Secretary of State and I convened the Quarterly Review Meeting of the Fresh Start and Stormont House Agreements, which was attended by the First and deputy First Ministers and the Northern Ireland Justice Minister and at which the referendum result was discussed. In addition to the Review Meeting, I held a separate bilateral meeting with Secretary of State Villiers during which we discussed the issue, as I did in meetings with the SDLP leader and the leader of the Alliance Party.

The referendum outcome was also on the agenda at Monday's NSMC Plenary hosted by the Taoiseach at Dublin Castle. My Cabinet colleagues and I participated together with the Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive led by the First and deputy First Ministers.

During the NSMC Plenary, there was a detailed discussion on the potential impact of the UK referendum result to leave the EU. At the meeting, the NSMC agreed on ten specific areas where there would be joint planning and engagement. Furthermore, the economy and trade; Northern Ireland and British Irish relations; the Common Travel Area; and the EU were highlighted as the four priority areas where implications arise as result of the referendum vote.

The NSMC Plenary followed on from last week's Quarterly Review Meeting of the Fresh Start and Stormont House Agreements and my separate bilateral meeting with Secretary of State Villiers. Naturally the outcome of the UK referendum on the EU was a key element of these meetings and I took the opportunity to assure all those present of the priority the Government attaches to the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland in the aftermath of the referendum.

I emphasised the necessity and importance of working together in the best interests of the people on this island. I reiterated the Government's commitment to work in support of stability, reconciliation and prosperity in Northern Ireland. In this regard the Government will use its influence with our EU partners to seek to persuade them of the need for specific arrangements which protect the key gains of the peace process on this island – a process to which the EU has already made a key contribution. In addition I outlined that the Common Travel Area and cross-border EU funding, are key priorities for the Government in the period ahead.

I am very conscious of the deep concerns and anxiety that have arisen for many people across the community in Northern Ireland about the referendum outcome. The fact that the majority within Northern Ireland who voted to remain now face their preference being set aside as a result of the overall result across the UK raises profound issues.

In this regard, in my bilateral meeting with Secretary of State Villiers we agreed that the Good Friday Agreement remains the foundation for the two Governments' approach to Northern Ireland. The EU referendum result does not in any way diminish the centrality of the Good Friday Agreement or the requirement of both the British and Irish Governments to uphold it. As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday and succeeding Agreements, the Irish Government is determined that its institutions, values and principles – including the right to be British or Irish or both - will be fully protected.

Furthermore, I noted that any future arrangements will not exclusively be determined by the wishes of the Irish Government, the British Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. They will also be influenced by the wider negotiations between the UK and the EU of 27 remaining Member States. One of the challenges, therefore, will be for Ireland to use its influence with our EU partners to persuade them of the need for specific arrangements which protect the key gains of the peace process on this island.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-07-07a.451&s=cross-border#g454.r>

Tuesday 12 July

AgriFood Sector

Summary: Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline his plans to assemble a cross-Border forum with all farming stakeholders to discuss the possible consequences for farmers North and South of the Border following the Brexit referendum result; the measures being taken by his Department on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Michael Creed: The result of the UK referendum has the potential to give rise to significant challenges for the Irish agrifood sector, particularly in a north-south context, and these are very much to the fore of the analysis that my Department has been conducting in the lead-up to, and in the period since, the referendum. Areas that will be affected include the veterinary, trading and animal health arrangements between North and South. There will also be very significant implications for the fishing fleet in both jurisdictions.

I met my Northern counterpart, Michelle McIlveen, MLA, Minister for Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs, at the North South Plenary Ministerial meeting which took place in Dublin Castle last week. I agreed with her that our officials should meet at the earliest opportunity to work through some of the potential issues involved, and I am committed to ensuring that our Departments work well together in the coming months in the best interests of farmers and the wider industry.

It is important also to emphasise that the trading relationship remains unchanged, and that the precise impact of a UK exit will not be apparent until the post-exit relationship has been agreed. In the meantime I look forward to ongoing dialogue in the context of the Government's co-operation with its counterparts in Northern Ireland and in the UK more generally.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-07-12a.1903&s=cross-border#g1904.q>

Wednesday 13 July

UK Referendum on EU Membership

Summary: Eamon Ryan asked the Taoiseach his strategy for Ireland in the event that the United Kingdom fails to negotiate access to the European Economic Area post invocation of Article 50.

Enda Kenny: At the informal meeting of 27 EU Heads of State and Government on 28 June there was a preliminary discussion about next steps, further to the outcome of the recent referendum. I should emphasise that a large degree of uncertainty persists on the UK side in regard to a number of key issues. These in turn will have a significant bearing on the process in the months ahead. To a great extent therefore, it is not possible to speculate on negotiation outcomes at this point.

Partner countries accept that UK politics has been going through a turbulent phase and we will have to wait until new Prime Minister May outlines her Government's approach and her strategy regarding its future relationship with the EU. Of particular note will be clarity around the timing of the triggering of Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, as well as the separate question of what type of relationship the UK will seek with the EU. Access to the European Economic Area is one of a number of options that might be considered by the UK in terms of its future relationship with the EU, but this will be a decision for the British Prime Minister to take in due course.

In the meantime, a number of important matters have been clarified. The 27 EU leaders agreed that there can be no negotiations until Article 50 is triggered, and that, while this will not happen

immediately, it should take place as soon as possible. In addition, it was agreed that the European Council, that is, the Heads of State and Government, will direct the process. The European Commission and the European Parliament will also play important roles. Indications are that the negotiations could take at least two years. In the interim, the UK remains a full member of the EU.

Regarding Ireland's strategic approach to negotiations, our overall interest lies in a stable, prosperous and outward-looking UK. The closer its future relationship is with the EU, the better from our perspective. We will need to make sure in due course that the negotiating mandate, which has to be given by the Member States, including Ireland, reflects our particular concerns. We have been emphasising our unique perspective, especially in regard to Northern Ireland, North-South relations, the common travel area and trade, to our EU partners for some time and I am confident that this is now widely understood by them.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2016-07-13a.145&s=cross-border#g149>