



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Two-thirds in Republic would vote for a united Ireland, survey reveals

Two out of three people in the Irish Republic would vote for a united Ireland, a major opinion poll has found.

Pollster Red C said its latest national survey - coming just weeks after the Brexit result - shows a sharp rise in support for reunification since a similar opinion poll six years ago.

Asked how they would vote if a referendum was held tomorrow, 65% of the sample electorate said they would vote in favour of reunification.

Some 30% said they would vote against it, while 5% said they were undecided.

The findings show an 8% jump in support for a united Ireland since Red C posed the same question in a poll carried out for the Sunday Times in 2010.

The shock Brexit result last month has sparked a renewed debate about a potential referendum on the Irish border.

A majority of voters in Northern Ireland want to remain as part of the European Union, with 56% voting Remain and 44% voting Leave.

Remain campaigners, including Sinn Fein Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, have insisted their wishes must be respected and voiced his support for a border poll.

However Leave backers, among them First Minister Arlene Foster of the DUP, have insisted the EU referendum result is a UK-wide decision.

The leader of the Republic's main Opposition party Fianna Fail, Micheal Martin, said he hoped the Brexit result would lead to a united Ireland.

However, Taoiseach Enda Kenny has in recent days retreated from his earlier talk of a border referendum.

The latest Red C poll also shows Mr Martin's Fianna Fail is the most popular party in the Republic.

Arch-rivals Fine Gael rely on his support for their minority government, formed after weeks of negotiations following a huge split in the vote earlier this year.

In a cross-border survey last year by broadcasters RTE and BBC Northern Ireland, 66% of people in the Irish Republic said they would like to see a united Ireland in their lifetime.

But only 30% in Northern Ireland held the same view, with 43% saying they would not like to see reunification.

For the poll, carried out for bookmaker Paddy Power, Red C interviewed a sample of 1,000 voters in the Republic between July 25 and 27.

Support for a united Ireland was equal at 65% among both men and women. More (69%) in less well-off social groups than better-off groups (59%) said they would vote for reunification.

Voters living in Dublin (56%) were less likely to vote in favour of a united Ireland than those living outside the capital (68% to 69%).

Sinn Fein (79%) and Fianna Fail (71%) supporters were most likely to back reunification, while Fine Gael (58%) voters were least likely.

There was a clear majority in favour among all age groups, particularly among those aged 55 to 64 (70%).

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

'My government does not believe that there is continuing evidence of a demand for a united Ireland'

The result of last month's UK referendum on EU membership was a political shock, which will have significant implications across Europe and beyond for quite some time.

The result of the poll is acutely felt in Northern Ireland, where the outcome was at odds with the UK-wide overall result. In the context of a debate and a result which has thrown up a number of constitutional issues within the UK, most notably in Scotland, it is unsurprising that related questions have come to the fore.

This especially true in Northern Ireland, where society and politics, although stable and increasingly reconciled, are still defined by differing constitutional aspirations.

My government's policy - and, indeed, our responsibility - arises from our status as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, which was approved by the people of this island and then enshrined in an international treaty, lodged with the United Nations, as well as in amended provisions of the Constitution of Ireland.

Ahead of the referendum, comprehensive cross-departmental contingency plans were put in place by the Irish government. In light of the result, these efforts are being intensified.

It is crucial that Ireland is well-placed to protect and advance our interests in the negotiations, which will take place between the EU27 and the UK.

The government is determined that Ireland's role in those discussions will be constructive, effective and influential.

One obvious priority for Ireland in these negotiations is the potential implications for Northern Ireland, as well as the British-Irish relationship. The Common Travel Area and cross-border trade are among the priority issues.

As the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister made clear at Downing Street earlier this week, both governments are determined to avoid any return to a 'hard border' and that the flow of people and goods on this island remains unimpeded.

The Irish government will fully play its part in securing this objective; both in bilateral engagement with the UK and, most significantly, as one of the countries integrally involved in the EU negotiations.

The detailed preparatory work that is ongoing includes the steps required to fully respect the status of the Good Friday Agreement and all of its provisions, irrespective of the UK's future status within the EU. This includes those provisions that relate to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland which, like all other aspects of the Agreement, must be fully taken into account in whatever new legal arrangements are agreed between the EU and the UK.

While the Good Friday Agreement recognised that a majority of people in Northern Ireland currently wish to remain as part of the UK, the Agreement also envisaged the possibility at some stage in the future of a united Ireland, provided a majority voted for that option. Crucially, all of this is subject to the explicit principle of consent and the Irish Constitution binds all Irish governments, confirming that "a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island".

The specific mechanism within the Agreement to test that consent in Northern Ireland - a border poll - has already been in place for more than 18 years and would be invoked when the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland believes it likely that a majority of those voting would opt for a change.

As of now, my government does not believe that there is convincing evidence that this test has been met and, in our view, such a vote now would only serve to increase uncertainty and division at an already difficult and sensitive time.

However, as the Taoiseach has made clear, the government is mindful of the need to ensure that this future option, as part of the totality of the Good Friday Agreement, is not in any way invalidated by a UK departure from the EU.

In all of our meetings with our EU counterparts over the last month, the Taoiseach and I have highlighted the unique status of Northern Ireland and the consequences for north-south interactions, which must be factored into any new EU relationship with the UK.

While this is only the beginning of the process, I am encouraged by the sensitivity and understanding of our partners to this issue, which is reflective of the enormously positive contribution which the European Union has made to the peace process.

The government's determination to protect the gains of that peace process and minimise any negative impact on Northern Ireland is unequivocal.

A prosperous and reconciled Northern Ireland is in the interests of all the people of this island.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

August, 1, 2016

Brexit vote sees more shoppers crossing the border

The Brexit vote has boosted business in Northern Ireland from shoppers across the UK's only EU land border, a leading retailer has said.

The number from the south visiting Newry in Co Down is up 50% since the June referendum as the pound slid in value against the euro, Buttercrane shopping centre manager Peter Murray added.

Other cities on the UK's western fringe benefited from the currency fluctuation as bargain hunters from the Republic head north.

The car park at Newry's Buttercrane included vehicles with Dublin registrations and even further afield.

Mr Murray said: "Their euro is going further because of the soft exchange rate against the pound.

"The devaluation of the pound makes their euro in their pockets go further and prices in Newry are the same."

The value of the pound fell to levels not seen since 1985 immediately following the UK's referendum vote to leave the EU. Currently a pound equals 1.19 euro.

Mr Murray said the proportion of Irish car registrations using the Buttercrane had increased from about 11% or 12% pre-referendum to about 18% since - a 50% rise.

However, importers from the eurozone are counting the cost.

Northern Ireland's second oldest shoe shop is nestled in one of the bustling main streets of Newry.

Cahill Brothers is having a sale - but as an importer of footwear from Spain, Italy, France and Portugal the strengthening of the euro means costs will go up.

Owner Declan McChesney said: "It is not possible to suddenly turn around and find a new location of expert manufacturers.

"Sixty per cent of the population of Ireland live within one hour of Newry so basically I am cutting my hinterland in half and for me to compete with towns across the border. I must now look to my margins to maintain my competitiveness I must reduce my margins."

Newry is around five miles (8km) from the frontier. It is hilly and rural, isolated in parts but a good road leads south towards neighbouring Dundalk and on to Dublin.

Old currency exchange signs are still in evidence, even though most transactions now are plastic. Former border posts lie abandoned, gathering rubbish from passing motorists rather than customs duties.

The only indication the driver has passed from **north to south** is when the road boundaries are marked in yellow rather than white and the signs turn from miles per hour to kilometres per hour.

Two decades ago, British army watchtowers looked down on traffic, soldiers checked vehicles for weapons and commerce was disrupted.

The Irish and British Governments, including Prime Minister Theresa May, have said there must not be a return to the borders of the past.

Mr McChesney said: "That is what we call in Newry a politician's promise and, let's be honest, that does not give us much room for hope."

He recalled the border lined with trucks waiting to carry goods across.

"I cannot see how they are going to have free passage and free movement of goods if they don't have a record of it and if you don't have a record of it there will have to be a way of finding it and there will have to be some sort of checks, we suspect, which means a hard border.

"A hard border is desperately dangerous for the peace of Northern Ireland and desperately difficult if you are in business."

Paddy Malone, a Dundalk accountant, said there were fewer northerners in town but not too many locals had gone north.

"I would like to think that sterling would track the euro and we could settle down to peaceful coexistence.

"I would prefer to think that we could actually live together without this disruption of trade because neither Newry nor Dundalk is benefiting from this boom and bust cycle.

"It does not help either of us to survive."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

August 2, 2016

Fianna Fail pushing for all-island Brexit forum despite Foster warning

FIANNA Fail leader Micheal Martin has continued to press for a north-south body on the UK's Brexit vote despite the First Minister querying its usefulness.

Mr Martin indicated that his party would seek the establishment of a "national dialogue" in the autumn as the economic fallout from the EU referendum begins to take shape.

Speaking at the North South Ministerial Council last month, First Minister Arlene Foster said there was no need for any formal all-Ireland talks.

"I believe that there are more than enough mechanisms by which we can discuss these issues on a north-south basis," she explained.

"Frankly, I don't believe there are any mechanisms needed because we can lift the phone to each other on a daily basis if that were so needed."

But the Irish opposition leader persisted in calling for the speedy establishment of such a forum, which, he said, should include stakeholders such as farmers, business organisations and civil society groups.

The Fianna Fail leader claimed the all-island body was essential to help contain the aftershocks of Britain's decision to leave the EU.

His intervention came as experts said the decision was beginning to have a negative impact on many sectors across both Britain and Ireland.

Opting to use the terms "civil dialogue or "national dialogue", Mr Martin said he saw no reason why the body should not be up and running in the autumn.

"This is about reaching out and establishing how Brexit is affecting people and businesses," explained the opposition leader. "It should be up and running in the autumn, absolutely."

But the decision to call for an almost immediate establishment of such a body will heap pressure on Taoiseach Enda Kenny to act in the near future.

Mr Kenny has been less vocal about the issue since the Irish government's original proposal for an all-island forum was shot down by Mrs Foster.

Tensions between Dublin and Belfast were stoked further after Mr Kenny placed the issue of a border poll firmly on the political agenda.

But Mr Martin previously said any new body could be set up without the support of the DUP.

Last night, DUP MP Gavin Robinson responded to the Fianna Fail leader's latest call.

"The United Kingdom Government will be negotiating on Northern Ireland's behalf with the European Union during the exit process," he told the Belfast Telegraph.

"However, there will be matters of mutual concern for Northern Ireland and the Republic. "There are obviously benefits to discussing such issues, but the question remains, why it would require a newly created body to achieve this goal? "It would be for anyone intent on pursuing a new body to explain exactly what they believe it could achieve that existing mechanisms to discuss cross-border issues cannot."

Source: Belfast Telegraph

August 4, 2016

All-Ireland forum on Brexit will require unionist co-operation, insists Flanagan

THE prospect of a new North-South forum on Brexit hinges on the backing of unionist parties in Northern Ireland, Irish Foreign Affairs Minister Charlie Flanagan has admitted.

Mr Flanagan said the support of "all parties" will be required for such a body to be set up, but that a forum is not necessarily essential to the post-Brexit negotiations.

"As regards the forum, I don't believe any forum is workable without the involvement and full engagement of all parties. But I do believe and certainly recognise the need for dialogue, North and South," Mr Flanagan said.

Pressed on whether this means the DUP must agree in advance for such a forum to be set up, Mr Flanagan replied: "Obviously the position of the DUP is significant in the context of it being the largest party holding the most ministerial positions."

His remarks put himself at odds with Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin who has said he wants to see a forum established in the autumn - and that the DUP's support is not necessarily required.

Reacting to the Fianna Fáil leader's remarks this week, the DUP questioned the need for a new body at all.

Meanwhile, on the issue of the border, Mr Flanagan said he could not elaborate on remarks by Enda Kenny in Downing Street that a virtual border could be agreed.

He said these issues will only be ironed out once Prime Minister Theresa May triggers Article 50.

"On the matter of Brexit, we need to acknowledge the fact that negotiations haven't even commenced," Mr Flanagan continued. "It's going to be early next year before Theresa May formally serves the notice under Article 50 which will result in the commencement of the negotiations which may take a number of years.

"It's too early to speculate on the type of detail you refer. I believe a heavily fortified EU frontier, whether it be for security and immigration on the one hand, or for trade and economic development on the other hand, I don't see it being workable. And we need to work on appropriate alternatives." Mr Flanagan yesterday discussed the fallout from Brexit with his EU counterparts.

Source: Belfast Telegraph