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# MEDIA WATCH

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**Back up border commitment with concrete proposals, says Coveney;** Simon Coveney said the UK must now provide the solution to how a hard border could be avoided.

Theresa May's commitment to no hard border on the island of Ireland must now be backed up by concrete proposals, the Irish deputy premier has said.

Simon Coveney said that while he welcomed the Prime Minister's vow not to allow Brexit to jeopardise the Northern Ireland peace process, the UK must now provide the solution to how a hard border could be avoided and the Good Friday Agreement protected.

Addressing Mrs May's speech on Friday, Mr Coveney said: "We welcome the Prime Minister's reiteration of the UK's steadfast commitment to the Good Friday Agreement and to the commitments made in the agreement reached last December, including on avoiding a hard border.

"These commitments now need to be translated into concrete proposals on how a hard border can be avoided and the Good Friday Agreement and North-South co-operation protected."

He added: "Our shared hope is that the future EU-UK relationship can achieve these goals.

"However, we, together with the Commission, are also committed to exploring other specific solutions, if proposed by the UK."

Mr Coveney said if no solution was reached, the fall-back mechanism, as agreed in December, would entail, if necessary, "full alignment in Northern Ireland with those rules of the single market and customs union necessary to protect North-South co-operation, the all-island economy and the Good Friday Agreement, and to avoid a hard border."

Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald accused Mrs May of failing "to grasp the hard truths and realities" of Brexit.

"The hard truth is that Brexit is incompatible with the wishes of the people of the north, acts against our economy and undermines our agreements.

"The British Government knows this and that is why they have failed to bring forward any workable solutions or new thinking," she said.

**Source: The Belfast Telegraph**

**5 March 2018**

## Theresa May looking at US-Canada border in search for Brexit solution

Theresa May has indicated she is looking at the customs arrangements between the US and Canada as a way of solving the Irish border issue created by Brexit.

But the UK Prime Minister, who has insisted she remains committed to avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, was mocked over the comparison - with one MP telling her the US-Canada frontier has armed guards.

The issue of the border is one of the most complex problems to be resolved in the Brexit process and Mrs May said the British Government was examining examples from around the world.

Updating MPs following her Mansion House speech on Brexit Mrs May said: "There are many examples of different arrangements for customs around the rest of the world.

"Indeed we are looking at those, including for example the border between the United States and Canada."

Brexit Secretary David Davis has previously highlighted the operation of the frontier near the Ford plant in Detroit as an example of how cross-border trade can operate smoothly.

But when it was later pointed out to the Prime Minister by shadow Brexit minister Jenny Chapman that there were "armed customs guards" at the US-Canada border, Mrs May said the Government was looking at arrangements "in a number of countries".

Labour MP Chris Leslie, a supporter of the pro-EU Open Britain group, said: "The Government has repeatedly ruled out any return to a hard border on the island of Ireland, as well as any new physical infrastructure at the border.

"But anyone who's visited the US-Canada border will know that it's a very hard border indeed, with customs checks, barriers and armed guards.

"Leave campaigners told us there'd be 'no change' to the border if we voted to leave the EU. That promise is looking less deliverable by the day."

In the Commons, Mrs May received support from Tories on both sides of the Brexit divide, significantly including potential rebels who could inflict defeat on the Government over the plans to leave the EU's customs union.

Leading rebel Anna Soubry said no-one could doubt Mrs May's "determination" to get the "very best deal for our country in these most difficult of negotiations" but warned there would be "considerable administrative costs".

Among the prominent Brexit-backers, former Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith urged the Prime Minister to send a message to Brussels: "When she gets into negotiations with her European counterparts about trade arrangements, could she remind them that cake exists to be eaten and cherries exist to be picked?"

Meanwhile Taoiseach Leo Varadkar ruled out formal three-way talks between the UK, Ireland and the EU to look at Mrs May's Brexit offer.

Updating MPs on her plans, Mrs May said the UK and Irish governments and the European Commission "will be working together" to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland.

But Mr Varadkar said it was not in Ireland's interests to take part in formal three-way talks regarding the wider Brexit issues, and that what was needed was for Downing Street to produce more detailed proposals.

Mrs May again told MPs there would be no return to a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

She has rejected Brussels proposals that would see Northern Ireland kept in an effective customs union with the EU as a fallback in case other solutions cannot be found.

"As Prime Minister I am not going to let our departure from the EU do anything to set back the historic progress made in Northern Ireland," she said. "Nor will I allow anything that would damage the integrity of our precious union.

"The UK and Irish governments and the European Commission will be working together to ensure that we fulfil these commitments."

Before Mrs May's statement, the Varadkar said: "There won't be tripartite or three-way talks.

"What will happen is that there will be talks between the EU 27 and the UK, and Ireland is part of the EU 27 and we're much stronger by the way as one of 27."

Mr Varadkar added consultations could take place between the two governments about issues that are unique to Ireland.

"We will of course have negotiations about what could be done to avoid a hard border, but what we won't be getting into is a negotiation with the UK, or a three-way negotiation," Mr Varadkar said.

"That's not in our interest and not the way that this can be concluded."

The Taoiseach told RTE's Morning Ireland programme that he gave Mrs May's Brexit speech on Friday a guarded welcome, but that detail "written down in black and white" was now needed from the UK Government.

Amid the ongoing row over the border, Sinn Féin leaders Mary Lou McDonald and Michelle O'Neill travelled to Brussels to meet EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier.

Mrs McDonald said: "The Taoiseach is absolutely correct to say that the substantive negotiation is between the British government on one hand and the EU member states collectively on the other and in our view it is important to maintain that dynamic."

Mr Barnier, who is due to meet DUP leader Arlene Foster and deputy leader Nigel Dodds in Brussels on Tuesday, said his discussions with Sinn Fein had been positive.

He tweeted: "Essential to listen to all voices in Northern Ireland."

**Source: Breaking News**