



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Frictionless Ireland border cannot in place in time for Brexit: MPs

The Government will not have time to introduce invisible customs arrangements on the border before Brexit, an influential group of MPs has warned.

Withdrawal is due in just over a year and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee said the UK may need to remain in or parallel to the customs union and single market throughout the two-year transition period.

Parliamentarians urged the Government to do more to clarify the rules, processes and technical measures that will allow the current frictionless North/South arrangements to continue.

They said ministers should develop an innovative system capable of delivering customs compliance without "ineffective and unworkable" physical infrastructure.

The committee inquiry failed to find a technical solution capable of avoiding a hard border anywhere else in the world. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson had suggested crossings could be monitored by technology, like travel between London boroughs.

Committee chairman Dr Andrew Murrison said: "It is now clear that a significant transition period is essential for the options in December's Joint Report (EU-UK) to be worked through."

"It is equally clear that regulatory and tariff alignment will be required during transition to avoid any hardening of the border before a definitive low-friction solution can be determined."

The committee report, representing Conservatives, the DUP and Labour, said the negotiating timeline made it "challenging" to expect full implementation of a new non-visible customs regime by March next year.

It added: "We have seen no evidence to suggest that, right now, an invisible border is possible."

The committee heard "numerous" proposals for how the UK and the EU could ensure customs compliance without physical infrastructure, including mobile patrols, data sharing and enforcement measures away from the border.

"However, we have had no visibility of any technical solutions, anywhere in the world, beyond the aspirational, that would remove the need for physical infrastructure at the border.

"We recommend the Government bring forward detailed proposals, without further delay, that set out how it will maintain an open and invisible border. These proposals should provide detail about how customs compliance will be enforced if there is regulatory and tariff divergence between the UK and Ireland."

It said the Government should conduct an impact assessment for the Irish border each time regulatory or tariff divergence from the EU was proposed and said regulatory exemptions may be sought.

The report rejected any proposals for a customs border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

"This would create a costly barrier to trade with Northern Ireland's largest market and would be incompatible with the spirit and intent of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement."

It also found that leaving the EU without a substantial agreement would have very negative consequences for avoiding a hard border.

And it said the Government should set out in detail how it proposes to manage immigration through internal controls, including whether there will be increased documentary checks to determine entitlement for residency and to access public services.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

17 March 2018

NHS waiting times will rise after Brexit, claims report

BREXIT will pose serious challenges to the health service in Northern Ireland, a new report has found.

Academic think tank The UK In A Changing Europe has said waiting times will rise and there will be increased pressure on an already overstretched workforce here.

There will also be a reduction in rights when travelling, and delays in the approval of lifesaving or life-prolonging medicines, according to its report, Brexit And The NHS.

The document adds weight to concerns already raised by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in Northern Ireland, which has warned that nursing numbers may decrease further as a result of Brexit.

Meanwhile, it has emerged that health officials have no idea how many EU nationals currently work in the health service here.

However, according to the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the number of nurses coming to the UK from other EU countries fell by 89% last year, while the number of EU nurses leaving the UK grew by 67%.

Janice Smyth (above), head of the RCN in Northern Ireland, said she was stunned to learn that the Department of Health was unable to provide such figures.

"I would have thought information like that would be crucial in working to mitigate any negative effect of Brexit on the health service in Northern Ireland," she said.

"The nursing workforce in Northern Ireland is in a very precarious position. We already have a shortage of 1,500 nurses in the service, and that doesn't include shortages in our private nursing homes.

"We cannot have any more nurses leaving the profession than already have, it would have a serious impact on our ability to deliver a safe and sustainable service."

Ms Smyth was reacting to the findings of Brexit And The NHS, which argues that while the health service already faces funding pressures, these might increase as a result of the UK leaving the European Union.

A spokeswoman from the Department of Health said it had identified a number of priorities and was working closely with other organisations in preparation of leaving the EU. She added: "It would be premature to form a view on the impact of EU exit on the provision of healthcare at this time.

"The department will continue to monitor the outcome of the UK Government's EU exit negotiations and will discuss any potential impact on cross-border acute services with the Department of Health (in the Republic) through our existing joint oversight arrangements."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph