



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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May splits cabinet in bid to reach Brexit agreement

British Prime Minister Theresa May ▼ has split her senior ministers into two groups in an attempt to work out differences of opinion over the UK's future customs arrangements.

Resolving the issue is central to ensuring there is no return to a hard border on the island of Ireland.

The British cabinet is considering two options – one is a customs partnership with the European Union which Mrs May is understood to support.

Under this proposal, the UK would collect tariffs on goods entering the country on the EU's behalf.

Pro-Brexiters in the Conservative Party oppose this saying it would keep the UK too closely bound to the EU.

The other option is known as "maximum facilitation" or using technology to track goods.

Traders on an approved list or "trusted traders" would be able to cross the border freely with the aid of automated technology.

Remainers say this would result in border checks and the technology for such a solution has not been invented.

The EU has said it does not consider either solution workable.

Brussels is expecting Mrs May to have made progress by a summit next month, and both sides want to reach an agreement by October.

Source: RTE

15 May 2018

Brussels presses UK for progress on border issue

THE EU is pressing for “substantive progress” from Britain on the future of the Irish border in time for a crunch European Council summit just six weeks away.

Chief negotiator Michel Barnier told ministers from the remaining 27 member states that “little progress” had been made on the issues of Ireland and governance since the council last met in March.

His comments came as Tánaiste Simon Coveney again called for legal certainty on maintaining a free-flowing border after Brexit.

Last December, the UK and EU agreed the need for a “backstop” option that would ensure no return of a hard border – through an alignment of regulations across the island – even if a wider Brexit trade deal failed to materialise.

The UK rejected a subsequent attempt by the EU to translate that agreement into legally operable text in a proposed withdrawal treaty. A political stand-off has ensued over the vexed issue.

After talks with Mr Barnier, Mr Coveney again stressed the need for the backstop to be resolved ahead of June’s crunch European Council summit.

“Michel Barnier has made it very clear, and I agree with him, that there will be no withdrawal treaty if there isn’t a backstop dealing with the Irish border in that treaty,” he said.

The Irish government is hopeful a comprehensive resolution could lie in the concept of shared customs territory.

Mr Coveney has suggested Theresa May’s vision of a partnership – where the UK collects tariffs on behalf of Brussels – could provide the basis for negotiating a solution.

However, the UK cabinet is at odds on the issue. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has branded the prime minister’s idea “crazy” and he and other detractors of the partnership concept instead contend that new technology and trusted trader schemes can provide for smooth cross-border trading.

“Nobody is saying everything has to be resolved by the end of June but we certainly need to see a solution on the Irish border backstop issue taking shape by the end of June,” Mr Coveney said.

British transport secretary Chris Grayling last night sought to downplay fears of a hard border before failing to guarantee trade barriers will not exist.

The Cabinet minister said the UK is introducing measures to ensure there is “no issue our way” but acknowledged the Irish government could “put barriers in the way of trade”.

He added he “cannot for a moment believe” the Irish government will put administrative systems in place which are not introduced by the UK.

Mr Grayling’s stated confidence appeared to do little to ease opposition concerns as MPs debated the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Bill.

Shadow transport secretary Andy McDonald said there was an increasing frustration and anger among the freight and logistics industry at the government’s “cavalier it’ll be alright on the night” approach.

The Bill is viewed as the first major piece of Brexit contingency legislation and contains powers to allow the British government to create a travel permit scheme to enable commercial cross-border transport to continue if no agreement was reached with the EU.

Source: The Irish News