



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

1 June 2018 – 8 June 2018

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10 mile-wide trade buffer zone along Northern Ireland border proposed in bid to break deadlock;

Northern Ireland could be given joint EU and UK status and a "buffer zone" on its border with the Republic, under new plans being drawn up by David Davis, according to reports.

[The Sun reports](#) the province would operate a "double hatted" regime of European and British regulations at the same time, so it can trade freely with both.

[Theresa May's](#) ▼ Brexit war cabinet is split down the middle between the Prime Minister's preferred "customs partnership", under which the UK would gather tariffs on behalf of the EU, and the so-called "maximum facilitation" solution using technology to avoid the need for border checks.

With pressure mounting to agree a position before a summit of EU leaders on June 28, Mrs May set up two working groups to find amendments to the two schemes which could unite her feuding ministers.

According to The Sun, Mr Davis - who heads the Max Fac group - is ready to drop his support for technological solutions, after police warned that infrastructure like numberplate recognition cameras would become a target for sectarian attack.

Instead, he is reportedly drawing up a new plan based on the "double-hatted" model in place in Liechtenstein, which would allow the province to operate both UK and EU regulations at the same time.

A 10-mile wide "special economic zone" would be created along the 310-mile border, within which local traders could operate under the Republic's trade rules.

An unnamed Whitehall source told the paper: "Max Fac 2 is tremendously complicated, but it's at least something the Cabinet can unite around."

The source acknowledged it would be a challenge to secure backing for the plan from the Democratic Unionist Party, which props up Mrs May's Government at Westminster and has made clear that it does not want Northern Ireland treated differently from the rest of the UK.

A DExEU spokesperson said: "We have set out two viable future customs arrangements with the EU and work is ongoing to refine these.

"Both of these would deliver on our commitments to ensure UK-EU trade is as frictionless as possible, avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, preserve the integrity of the UK's internal market and enable us to establish an independent international trade policy."

Sinn Fein MEP Martina Anderson said the new proposals would not solve the border issues.

"The latest reports of a new plan on Brexit and the border from David Davies are light on detail and do not take into account the reality of life along the border, particularly in areas such as Derry, Strabane and Newry which are essentially cross-border," she said.

"Once again this shows the lack of knowledge of border areas and the concerns they face - David Davies obviously didn't learn much on his flying visits.

"The creation of a buffer zone would merely move the problem away from the border and hide a hard border in a buffer zone.

"While it appears that the British government is finally accepting that a unique solution is required for the north of Ireland, it must also accept the backstop option which it has already agreed.

"This proposed plan, which is still being devised, focuses solely on trade and does not take into account the huge impact Brexit will have on the rights of people in the north.

"The best way to protect trade, agriculture and the rights of people living in the north, as well as ensuring full protection for the Good Friday Agreement is for the north to remain in the customs union and single market and to have special status within the EU."

Source: Belfast Telegraph

7 June 2018

Q&A: What is the Brexit 'backstop'?

A British government position paper has said that temporary "backstop" arrangements to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland should not continue beyond December 2021.

UK govt publishes 'backstop' plan to avoid hard border

Here are some key questions answered.

1. What is the backstop?

Downing Street is planning to prevent a hard border at the UK's only land frontier with a European Union state after Brexit if no preferred trade agreement is reached on withdrawal.

Ensuring frictionless passage of goods and services through the border is one of the most vexed issues facing negotiators and the "backstop" is the UK government's option of last resort if current talks fail.

Maintaining customs harmony would make border checks less likely or unnecessary, but keeping common food or other regulatory standards covered by the EU single market for goods and services could pose other challenges.

2. What is the British government's latest position?

The UK has said that a "backstop" customs arrangement would be temporary and only in place until a future deal is introduced.

It expects a permanent future arrangement to be introduced by the end of December 2021 at the latest.

3. What would it mean?

Elimination of tariffs, quotas and customs processes on all UK-EU trade.

Applying the EU's common external tariff at the border.

The UK would be able to negotiate, sign and ratify free trade agreements with other countries and implement those elements that do not affect the functioning of the backstop.

4. When would the "backstop" be introduced?

Following the Brexit implementation period, in "specific and narrow" circumstances, such as delay in the implementation of a permanent customs arrangement, and would be time-limited.

The transitional period will last from Brexit day on 29 March 2019 to 31 December 2020.

5. What does this mean for trade?

Common Irish cross-border processes and procedures for VAT and excise, some administrative cooperation and information exchange between enforcement agencies.

Applying preferential tariff rates for trade with the rest of the world as set out in the EU's existing agreements.

Participating in any new EU free trade agreements that come into force during the period of the backstop.

6. Why is Brexit such a difficult political issue for the British government?

Ministers are split over how to manage customs arrangements with the entire bloc, including the Republic of Ireland, long term.

The British Prime Minister has established two groups of ministers to try to reconcile their differences.

7. What options are on the table?

Brexiters like UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson oppose a "customs partnership" with the EU, whereby the UK would collect tariffs set by the EU customs union on goods entering the country on behalf of the bloc.

The other possibility is maximum facilitation and, rather than scrapping customs checks, would use technology to minimise the need for them.

Brexit Secretary David Davis has talked of trusted trader arrangements, which could allow companies to pay duties in bulk every few months, rather than every time their goods cross a border, and automated number plate recognition.

Source: The Irish Independent