



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

29 June 2018 – 6 July 2018

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EU warns May about dangers of hard Brexit; Varadkar stepping up preparations for Britain crashing out of EU with no deal

EU leaders last night warned British prime minister Theresa May ▼ of the danger of a no-deal Brexit, with several - including Taoiseach Leo Varadkar ▼ - saying they would step up preparations for the possibility of Britain crashing out of the union next year.

Mr Varadkar said contingency arrangements would have to be made at ports and airports, but senior Government figures insisted that there would be no preparations made for the possibility of a hard border in Ireland. The Government says it is contingency planning for trade barriers between the island of Ireland and Britain, but not between North and South.

No-deal Brexit Brussels sources confirmed that a no-deal Brexit is being increasingly discussed, given the slow pace of negotiations and the precarious position of Ms May in London. They heard little yesterday to change their view, they said. EU leaders are expected to set out a timetable of negotiations today to solve the Border problem

and agree a formal legal arrangement with the UK - the withdrawal agreement - by October, but several stressed the central barrier to progress on Brexit is the resolution of the Irish Border issue.

"I believe the first, second, third priority now is to solve this issue of the Irish Border. When that is solved then some of the other issues will be easier to discuss," Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte said.

Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker ▼ said: "I wouldn't like us to be in a situation where the last remaining problem would be the Irish one. I don't like that." But there was little sign of British movement on the Irish Border at the summit, with the British pointing to the forthcoming white paper due to be agreed by the British cabinet at the end of next week. Senior EU figures say that Ms

May will have to go significantly beyond anything suggested so far if the talks are to see any progress.

Progress on border

Mr Varadkar again stressed the need for progress on the Border but also forcefully rejected the idea of the UK staying in the EU single market for goods, saying that the "four freedoms" of the single market could not be compromised.

Compromising the rules of the EU single market to allow the UK special access is "not a runner in any shape or form", one senior Government figure said. Last night at the summit dinner, Ms May urged EU leaders not to endanger security co-operation between the UK and the EU after Brexit, saying EU negotiators were putting obstacles in the way of reaching agreement on security issues in the Brexit talks. Earlier, Mr Varadkar held a bilateral meeting with Ms May, urging her to bring forward a legal text giving effect to the backstop "in the very near future", one official said.

However, Mr Varadkar and Ms May agreed that an Ireland-UK Intergovernmental Conference - a provision of the Belfast Agreement - should meet at the end of July, the first move to break the deadlock in Northern Ireland in months. The Irish Government has been seeking such a move since last year.

EU leaders wrestled with the migration crisis in the Mediterranean until late last night, with Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conte initially refusing to agree to any summit conclusions because he was not happy with the sections on migration.

Mr Conte's government came to power promising to block illegal immigration into Italy, which has been the destination of thousands of African migrants crossing the Mediterranean. German chancellor Angela Merkel said that the migration challenge was a "make-or-break" issue for the EU.

EU leaders are to discuss Brexit this morning, but Ms May will not be present.

Source: The Irish Times

5 July 2018

If we act now, Brexit could be a catalyst - not a catastrophe - for our universities

YANIS Varoufakis famously compared Brexit to the Hotel California, in that you may check out, but you can never leave. From the outset, Britain has stated its intention to remain within the European research and innovation community.

Indeed, amongst the pillars of Theresa May's 'Plan for Britain' (January 2017) was an ambition to "remain the best place for science and innovation" through "close collaboration with our European partners". Former World Trade Organisation boss Pascal Lamy, too, described "full and continued engagement" as a "win-win" for both the UK and the EU, and such shared sentiments comforted

commentators who expected that, in the research and innovation space at least, "Brexit would not happen".

That complacency appears misplaced, and debate has scarcely advanced from the initial "Brexit means Brexit". In essence, the education issue will only be clarified in the context of the overall resolution but, in this arena, too the UK seeks to strike a favourable bargain.

Sam Gyimah, Britain's higher education secretary, has restated the intention to remain within the European programmes, but "not at any price", and while London's 'Framework for the UK-EU partnership; science and innovation' (May 2018), is cast in terms of a "deep science partnership" it, too, demands a "suitable level of influence" in return for "an appropriate financial contribution".

As in trade and services, then, Britain has rejected passive "pay-per-play" participation.

In spite of Michel Barnier's conciliatory assurances on future research collaborations, delivered at Dundalk, the European Commission appears determined to reduce the UK to "third county" status in Horizon Europe - behind Albania and Israel. Relegated to a third division, along with Canada and South Korea, the UK would be required to pay higher contributions, excluded from certain innovation programmes, and disqualified from the new European Innovation Council.

Critically, too, the UK would be explicitly prevented from receiving any "net transfer from the EU budget". This draconian prospect, dismissed as Scrooge-like by the European University Association (EUA), is untenable and certainly not in Ireland's interest.

The UK is a vital part of the European research ecosystem; her higher education sector is the "collaborator of choice", and the excellence of British research is reflected in the disproportionate success enjoyed in the flagship Horizon 2020 programme.

In the humanities and social sciences too, British researchers received more than 30pc of European Research Council awards in the period 2007-15.

Yet while this is an indicator of research excellence, it illustrates the exposure of UK universities to a 'Brexit shock', from funding loss and a feared exodus of the 50,000 EU academic staff working in British universities.

Within the UK, Brexit presents particular challenges to Northern Ireland and 96pc of respondents to a Royal Irish Academy task force survey predicted negative effects in the region.

Sustained action is required to enhance cross-Border collaboration and, as a logical extension of the 'backstop' proposal, the Irish Government should lobby for the creation of an island of Ireland 'education area' for the transition period and beyond.

Clearly, Brexit and the threatened exclusion of our closest partner from the European research community has significant implications for Ireland. Niall FitzGerald, chair of the Leverhulme Trust, characterised these as a "catalyst rather than a catastrophe", but determined action is required if Ireland is to experience any 'Brexit bounce'.

Richard Bruton's 'Action Plan for Education 2018' includes measures to make Ireland 'Brexit-ready'. His department has indicated existing reciprocal student arrangements will continue with the UK

and Science Foundation Ireland has launched an ambitious (EURO)100m post-graduate training programme in the digital, data and IT fields.

However, more will be needed if Ireland is to attract top-flight researchers or to fill the proposed joint-professorships between the UK and Irish institutions.

Brexit has come at the end of a decade of austerity which has eroded the quality and standing of Irish universities, as graphically illustrated by their continued decline within the global rankings.

That slide frustrates attempts to attract the best researchers to a system defined as 'in danger' by the EUA, or international students in an environment when prestigious European universities are increasing their English language offerings.

CRITICALLY, Ibec and both the American and British-Irish Chambers have warned declining rankings have damaged Ireland's international reputation and ability to draw foreign direct investment in technology and innovation.

Ireland's response to the education and research challenge posed by Brexit will determine our economic and social development for decades. Cosmetic initiatives will not compensate for indecision or a failure to invest in line with the Government's own 'Innovation 2020' strategy.

However, as Christine Lagarde (left) observed at Dublin City University, the necessary investment in education cannot be borne by the State alone. There is little political appetite to tackle the recommendations of the Cassels Report (2016), but inaction will undermine the opportunities posed by Brexit and determine whether it proves a catalyst or catastrophe.

Daire Keogh is deputy president of DCU and chair of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce Education and Research Committee.

Source: The Irish Independent