



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Farmers accuse EU of playing political 'football' over cross-border trade;

Conservative and Labour MPs were also accused of ignoring the impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland.

The European Union has created fear and uncertainty among farmers in Northern Ireland by treating the region as a political football in Brexit negotiations, MPs have been told.

Co Tyrone poultry farmer Thomas Douglas said it was time for the EU to "wise up", suggesting political posturing was preventing a workable solution to cross border trade post Brexit.

Mr Douglas, who was one of a number of farmers who outlined their concerns to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, also claimed Conservative and Labour MPs in Great Britain were not concerned about the impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland and stressed the need for power sharing to be restored at Stormont.

Committee members travelled from Westminster to Belfast on Monday to hear evidence from farmers from a range of different agricultural sectors.

Mr Douglas told the evidence session at Stormont: "The biggest thing, and I think all of us would agree, is we need to know what is going to happen in Brexit, whether it's good, bad or indifferent, let us know so we can organise the Northern Ireland agriculture to deal with it.

"Europe is playing a game, let's be quite honest.

"Europe is playing a political game using the Northern Ireland border as the football and they are using the Republic of Ireland as one team and the UK as the other team, to put it in a football perspective, and letting them kick the ball back and forwards and that is suiting Europe at the minute and the European negotiators.

"And it's time that people in the UK parliament tells the European negotiators to wise up here.

"Because they are putting the fear and the uncertainty into Northern Ireland because they are using it as a football."

The Dungannon-based farmer, who breeds chickens for producer Moy Park, added: "We have the Conservatives in power and you have Labour, they are not one bit worried about Northern Ireland.

"Their electorate is in UK mainland and they will say and do what suits the UK mainland to get re-elected.

"We need ministers here that are sitting in Westminster as part of the ministers from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to fight our corner."

Fellow Co Tyrone farmer Malcolm Keys, Northern Ireland's second biggest pig producer, raised concern that a Brexit deal could see Northern Ireland operate under a different trade regime from the rest of the UK.

"What we would like to see soon is clarity of what this Brexit is going to mean because as pig producers our main market is the UK market, the UK retailer in mainland UK which is the premier market for us and it must be protected after Brexit," he said.

He said Northern Ireland farmers could not become "second class British".

Fermanagh farmer Peter Gallagher, who has a business half a mile from the border, said protecting the European market was just as important.

"We would be very reliant on cross-border trade and would be very concerned about any barriers to free movement of animals trade and anything of that nature," he said.

"I would like to emphasise that while we need to protect the UK market we can't afford to be losing the European or southern Ireland market - that would be detrimental to us here in Northern Ireland."

Cereal producer Allan Chambers expressed concern that EU subsidies in the form of the Single Farm Payment would not be maintained when the UK leaves the European Union.

"Everybody is saying the Single Farm Payment will either disappear or be vastly reduced," he said.

"If my counterpart in Co Louth is getting the equivalent of £30 a tonne subsidy to grow grain how can I stay in business, that's my profit level?"

Mr Chambers also bemoaned the lack of administration at Stormont.

"We elect them and therefore we should either tell them to call another election or dismiss all the local MLAs and go again and try to find somebody who can sit there and work together.

"It's not beyond the powers of possibility to do that," he said.

Democratic Unionist MP Ian Paisley said it was "unthinkable" that state subsidies would not continue post-Brexit.

"It is unthinkable that there would not be a single farm payment system, probably British or UK farm payment, post 2022, unthinkable that that would happen," he told the farmers.

"We are talking about a £20 billion industry, we are talking about food security for the whole of the UK, you guys are at the heart of that.

"No government, it would be madness, it would be suicide for a government to walk away from that."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

19 July 2018

NI political leaders issue joint Brexit statement claiming "significant areas of concern" remain around impact in Northern Ireland

The leaders of some of the north's political parties have signed a joint statement claiming "significant areas of concern" remain around the impact of Brexit in Northern Ireland.

Sinn Féin assembly leader and party vice-president Michelle O'Neill, SDLP leader Colum Eastwood, Alliance leader Naomi Long and Green Party leader Steven Agnew agreed and issued a statement last night in which they said the north was at "a crucial point in the Brexit negotiations".

"Guarantees were given in the Joint Report between the British government and the EU in December that there would be no diminution of rights as a result of Brexit, on the rights of people resident here and that the Good Friday Agreement would be protected".

"These guarantees have yet to be fully translated into legally binding text and reflected in the Draft Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland".

In the statement, the leaders said "significant areas of concern remain and there is little sign of any tangible progress on a range of important matters" including continued access to third-level study with the status of EU students; continued access to the European Health Insurance Card; continued provision for cross border health services, such as the Northwest Cancer Centre and the Children's Heart Centre; and safeguards for EEA migrant workers in Northern Ireland, as well as a broad range of other areas reflected in our earlier Joint Declaration on Human Rights and Equality.

"We note the proposals put forward by civic society groups for amendments to the draft protocol and we urge further dialogue and consideration of changes to ensure that the protocol is amended in a manner that faithfully reflects and translates into law all rights and equality commitments made in the first phase of the negotiations".

Source: The Irish News