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Cross Border Studies

# MEDIA WATCH

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**26 October 2018 – 2 November 2018**

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## Don't sleepwalk into 'no-deal', CBI boss warns Northern Ireland politicians

Head of one of the UK's top business groups has urged politicians here not to "sleepwalk into a no-deal Brexit" and to learn from the compromise which led to the Good Friday Agreement.

John Allan, the president of the CBI, said he wanted to address local politicians directly.

He urged them to take heed of the views of members, 90% of whom believe a backstop agreement for the province is to be preferred over a no-deal Brexit.

Mr Allan was speaking at the annual lunch of the CBI in Northern Ireland, which took place at Titanic Belfast yesterday.

He also urged politicians to get back to power-sharing at Stormont to enable local decision-making on key infrastructure projects such as the North-South Interconnector and the upgrade to the A5.

Mr Allan said: "I want to speak directly to the politicians. You're arguing about Northern Ireland.

"Why not learn from recent history what compromise can achieve? We're 20 years on from the Good Friday Agreement that put people, peace and prosperity first; we need that spirit now.

"Specifically, over 90% of CBI Northern Ireland members believe the proposed backstop is a better outcome for the economy than 'no-deal'.

"Does anyone want history to say a reasonable exit from the EU was thwarted by a generation of politicians who would not compromise? Let's not sleepwalk into a no-deal Brexit."

A new report published by the CBI yesterday on the impact of a 'no-deal' here said businesses trading north/south and east/west would face significant disruption.

While Britain is Northern Ireland's largest market for goods by value (£14bn), the report noted that more businesses trade across the border (7,659) than across the Irish Sea (7,046).

Mr Allan said the whole of the UK needed a workable post-Brexit immigration system.

"Northern Ireland doesn't have an immigration problem - it has an emigration problem," he said.

"With all the uncertainty in the air, people we need are going elsewhere. Many go back to their home countries in the EU. A third of young people leave Northern Ireland to complete their education. Many don't come back.

"Year by year, Northern Ireland's reliance on international workers, whether via the EU or the Common Travel Area, has increased. So businesses need action now to address the shortfall, support prosperity and secure vital public services."

And he repeated a warning by the CBI that not securing enough migrant labour could result in a fall in our GDP of nearly 10% in the long-term.

A report by the Migration Advisory Committee, which emphasised the importance of 'skilled' labour over 'unskilled' labour and announced a possible salary threshold of £30,000 for immigrants, "left people scratching their heads a bit".

"Reducing access to lower-skilled workers - through a £30,000 salary threshold - simply won't work for Northern Ireland, or for anywhere else.

"A single, global immigration system is a huge change from where we are today. So businesses right across the UK will need ample time to adjust."

Mr Allan said leadership and compromise was needed to restore the power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland. He told politicians: "It is time to do what you were elected to do - govern.

"It's not just Brexit. It's about a billion pounds worth of Northern Irish infrastructure projects awaiting a decision.

"It's failure to reform the health system, failure to deliver a regional industrial strategy.

"Northern Ireland deserves better."

Adrian Moynihan, the head of First Trust Bank in Northern Ireland, also addressed the event, and said the growing economic and governmental trend towards protectionism was at odds with business.

"As we enter the final stages of Brexit and in the absence of a devolved government in Northern Ireland, it is critical that the business community continues to prioritise partnership and collaboration, working together to ensure our collective voice is heard. Equally, we believe there is a huge opportunity for the business community to come together to develop and create the future vision for Northern Ireland Inc., helping to shape the future business environment for years to come."

**Source: The Belfast Telegraph**

**2 November 2018**

## **No deal with EU could sever cross-border transport links**

TRANSLINK chief Chris Conway has voiced concerns that cross-border transport services could grind to halt if there was a no-deal Brexit.

Speaking to a House of Lords committee yesterday, the public transport boss said issues around the licensing of drivers and vehicles needed to be resolved. "In a no-deal situation, there would have to be some sort of bilateral agreement between the UK and Ireland as to how cross-border services would operate," he said.

"The alternative would be that those services would no longer operate."

Sinn Fein MEP Martina Anderson said she was concerned by Mr Conway's remarks. "The loss of all-Ireland services would be disastrous for communities north and south as it would remove vital transport links between the major cities on the island.

"Students in particular would be hit hard as they depend on this service to get to and from their place of study.

"All of this shows the huge levels of uncertainty around Brexit because of the chaos within the Tory party and their approach to the negotiations."

However, Translink said in its written submission to the committee that the Government had already promised it would pursue bilateral agreements with the Irish Government to ensure the continued smooth functioning of cross-border services.

**Source: The Belfast Telegraph**