



Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

UK-EU relations (BrExit)

London 1-3 March 2015

Report of the Delegation

Background

1. As part of the EU Affairs work programme, the Joint Committee agreed that it would examine the issue of a possible exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union (commonly referred to as 'BrExit'). At the end of the process, the Committee will report on the critical issues for Ireland that require further detailed analysis by various stakeholders (i.e Government), in preparation for any eventuality.
2. As part of the Joint Committee consideration of this issue, it was agreed that a delegation would travel to London to meet with various stakeholders to explore the issue further. A series of meetings were arranged in conjunction the Irish Embassy in London. The Joint Committee wishes to express its gratitude to the Irish Ambassador to the UK, Mr. Dan Mulhall and to his staff for their assistance in relation to this visit and to all the stakeholders who met with the delegation, while in London.

Objective

3. The objective of the trip was to -
 - Discuss this issue with Irish business in the UK and Irish government agencies the possible impact of such on Ireland
 - Explore the politics surrounding the proposed referendum, and,
 - Raise awareness of this strategically important issue (for Ireland) among the Irish community in Britain who may be voting in such a referendum.
4. In total the delegation attended 12 separate meetings (reference Annex 1 for full programme). Two of the meetings held related to subject matters unrelated to the core issue of UK-EU relation, but were nonetheless valuable from the Committee perspective. In addition to the meetings held, the Chairman delivered a speech on UK-EU relations as part of a cultural event hosted by the Irish Ambassador as part of 'Seachtain na Gaeilge 2015' (reference Annex 2). The content of the discussions held while in London will be reflected, as appropriate, in the final report of the Committee on 'BrExit'. As such, this report sets out the themes that emerged during discussions and summaries in brief, the meetings held.

Emerging Themes

5. Set out below are the key themes of the discussions held during the meetings with stakeholders:-
- i) The position of the current UK government is to be part of a reformed EU.
 - ii) The Irish government should have a voice during the any referendum debate with all aspects of the special relationship between UK and Ireland cited as justification.
 - iii) Uncertainty exists about the holding of a referendum in the near future, however, a view remains that to settle the UK membership question, a referendum is be needed at some point.
 - iv) If a referendum is held, there is uncertainty on the 'question' that will be put to the electoral – will it be 'reformed EU' or an 'out' question?
 - v) The outcome of the general election in May 2015 and the composition of the next UK government will have a significant impact on the EU membership question, in the short term.
 - vi) A Labour government will made the holding of a referendum less likely in the short-term.
 - vii) Big business is (generally) pro-European. Smaller businesses less so.
 - viii) Big Businesses are very aware of the impact of exit, it is unclear whether small businesses are as well informed.
 - ix) For business, reform of EU regulations is needed in particular in the areas of Procurement and Working Time regulation
 - x) Employees are less well informed on the potential risks associated with the exit scenario
 - xi) Public opinion is currently driven by a certain media view however, it is expected to change when a factual-based balanced debate takes place on EU membership.

Summary of Meetings Held

Sunday, 1 March

Meeting with Representatives of Votes for Irish Citizens Abroad (VICA)

6. Votes for Irish Citizens Abroad (VICA) is a London based campaign group calling for voting rights for Irish citizens living abroad. On Sunday evening, the Committee delegation met with Mr. Dean Duke, Mr. Pádraig Noone, Ms. Sue O'Halloran and Mr. Austin Harney to discuss the Joint Committee's Report on 'Voting Rights for Irish Citizens Aboard', which was published in November 2014. An extensive discussion took place centring on the wishes of VICA in terms of voting rights, possible the impact on elections in Ireland and various options currently used in other jurisdictions in this regard. As the Report of the Committee has been submitted for debate in the Houses, the representation undertook to forward its research on this issue to the secretariat.

Meeting with Embassy Staff

7. A working dinner was held with Embassy staff, Deputy Head of Mission, Barbara Cullinane, Counsellor Don Sexton and Political Affairs Officer John Lynam, for purposes of briefing the delegation in advance of meetings with stakeholders.

Monday, 2 March

Meeting with the representatives of Irish State agencies based in the UK

8. The delegation met with Mr Gavin McWhirter, Enterprise Ireland, Ms Michelle Butler, Bord Bia, London and Mr. Paul Donegan, Kinetica Sports. This meeting served to provide the delegation an overview of the representatives' 'on the ground' insight on the potential impacts a British exit from the EU from an Irish business perspective. The lack of factual debate of this issue; the need for Irish government to have a voice in the debate; the need to assist the UK, at EU level, to achieve reform in the EU in particular in cutting red-tape for small business was cited during the discussions.

Meeting with Representatives from the Irish International Business Network (IIBN)

9. The delegation met with Mr. Pol O Morain and Ms. Liz Shanahan of Irish International Business Network (IIBN). This organisation is a global, not-for-profit organisation which

brings together top Irish business people. Its objective is to facilitate greater communication and connectivity between successful Irish business people all over the world. A key aim is to establish IIBN 'Chapters' in all of the major cities which have strong Irish networks.

Working Lunch with members of the British Chamber of Commerce

10. A working lunch was hosted by Ambassador Mulhall. The delegation met with members of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) who were representing businesses with substantial interests, including employees in the Irish economy. The BCC an independent business network, with Chambers across the UK. Attendees from the BCC were Mr. Michael Cooper Royal Bank of Scotland, Mr. Peter Gordon, Barclays, Ms. Cecilia Ackerman, Citi, Mr. Ciaran O'Brien Ladbrokes and Michael Keaveney, British Irish Chamber of Commerce. The discussion centred on the potential impact of a BrExit on business in general terms and in particular on UK businesses with Irish operations. How business could engage meaningfully in the debate on Europe was also explored.

Meeting with Chair of the House of Commons EU scrutiny committee

11. The delegation met with two members of the EU Scrutiny separately, the Chairman, Sir Bill Cash, Conservative MP and Mr. Kelvin Hopkins Labour MP, in Westminster. The role of the House of Commons EU scrutiny Committee is to assess the legal and political importance of draft EU legislation deposited in Parliament by the UK Government. Both members are publically in favour of a UK withdrawn from the EU. The discussion centered on the reasons for their respective positions. Sir Bill Cash's position relates mainly to the loss of UK sovereignty, while Mr. Hopkins concerns reflects such issues as wage deflation, over regulation, and unemployment.

Meeting with Representatives from 'Mixed Race Irish'

12. Mixed Race Irish (MRI) is a group working to raise awareness of Irish people with mixed heritage and to campaign for recognition and redress for victims of racial abuse while in institutional care as children in Ireland. Ms. Evon Brennan, Ms Rosemary Adaser and Ms. Carole Brennan attended on behalf of the organisation. This meeting heard details of the racially motivated mistreatment of children and the efforts made to date by the

organisation in seeking recognition and redress. The delegation undertook to assist the organisation, if possible.

Meeting with Irish in Britain

13. 'Irish in Britain' is a community network and the leading portal for creative discussion, active partnership and community outcomes. The delegation met with Ms Jennie McShannon (CEO) and Ms Mary Tilki (Chair) of 'Irish in Britain' and discussed the possibility of 'BrExit', also the level of awareness among the Irish community in the UK of the issue and to the need for the Irish community to engage in this debate in the UK and in particular to be registered to vote.

Tuesday, 3 March

Meeting with Shadow Europe Minister Mr. Pat McFadden Labour MP

14. The delegation met with Mr. Pat McFadden, Labour MP for Wolverhampton South East. Mr. McFadden is pro-Europe and the discussion centered on UK-EU relations; the forthcoming UK election and the ramifications the outcome will have on a decision to hold a referendum on UK exit, internal pressure in that regard; the impact on Ireland of any change in the status of the UK relationship with the EU; and external security threats to the EU.

Meeting with Ms. Laura Sandys Conservation MP

15. The delegation met with Ms. Laura Sandy, Conservative Party MP for South Thanet. Ms. Sandy is pro-Europe is heavily involved in the European Movement UK and is due to assume the role of Chair of that organisation, later this year. She confirmed that European Movement UK will advocate strongly on behalf of the pro-Europe side of a referendum on UK exit from the EU. Again, discussion centered on the political landscape in the UK and its impact on the Europe question; issues driving anti- EU feelings; impact of the media; the need for balanced debate of all issues and implications which have not yet been discussed.

Working Lunch with Members of the House of Lords

16. A working lunch was hosted by Ambassador Mulhall. The delegation met two pro-Europe Members of the House of Lords, Lord Alfie Dubs (Labour) and Baroness Scott (Liberal Democrat). The focus of this discussion was the political landscape in the UK (in particular Scotland and Northern Ireland), the possible composition of the next UK government, likely coalition partnerships and the impact of this on the EU membership question.

Meeting with Minister for Europe David Liddington MP

17. The Vice-Chair, led the delegation in a meeting with the Minister for Europe, Liddington at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. During this discussion the Minister outlined the UK's vision of a reformed European Union, based on the Prime Ministers' Bloomberg speech (2014). He pointed the common ground which the UK and Ireland shared in this regard. The need to protect the current Irish–UK relationship was discussed, particularly in the context of the existing common travel area, the shared land border and broader cultural ties between both countries.



Dominic Hannigan, TD
Chairman

2 April 2015.

Annex 1.

**Visit to London of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Union Affairs
1-3 March 2015**

Programme

Sunday 1 March

- 13.50 Depart Dublin
- 15.20 Arrival Gatwick – Transfer to Victoria by Gatwick Express
- 19.50 Collected from hotel by Embassy staff
- 20.00 Programme briefing and dinner

Monday 2 March

- 10.00 Meeting with the representatives of the Irish state agencies based in the UK
Enterprise Ireland – Gavin McWhirter, UK Manager
Bord Bia – Michelle Butler
IDA –TBC
- 11.15 Meeting with Irish International Business Network (IIBN) –
Liz Shanahan – Co-Chair
Pól O Morain –Member of the Export Trade Council (Private Sector)
Ambassador Mulhall also to attend
- 12.30 Briefing over lunch hosted by Ambassador Mulhall with British Chamber of
Commerce members to discuss the implications of the UK-EU relationship
Venue: Embassy of Ireland
Michael Cooper – Senior Public Affairs Manager, Royal Bank of Scotland
Peter Gordon – VP Government Relations and Public Policy, Barclays
Cecilia Ackerman – Assistant VP Government Affairs, Citi
Ciaran O’Brien – Corporate and Government Affairs Director, Ladbrokes
Michael Keaveney, Director Great Britain, British Irish Chamber of
Commerce
- 14.30 Depart Embassy
- 15.00 Meeting with Chair and members of the EU Scrutiny Committee (Westminster
– room TBC)
- 16.00 Depart Westminster
- 16.30 Meeting at the Embassy with representatives from Mixed Race Irish
- 17.00 Meeting at the Embassy with Mary Tilki and Jennie McShannon from Ireland
in Britain
- 18.00 Oíche Ghaelach at the Embassy
An opportunity to meet with a diverse group of Irish people living in Britain
who are involved in the teaching and learning of Irish
Performances begin:
Marianne McAleer (sean-nos singer)
‘Racker’ Donnelly – seanachai and storyteller
Ambassador reading WB Yeats poems in translation
Mohammed Al-Hussaini (sean-nos singer)
Storyteller from North London (tbc)
Dominic Hannigan TD speaking on work of the Oireachtas Committee on
European Affairs

St Patrick's Troupe (14 teenagers from North London singing as Gaeilge)

Tuesday 3 March

- 10.00 Meeting with Shadow Europe Minister Pat McFadden MP
11.00 Meeting with Laura Sandys MP
12.30 Lunch hosted by Ambassador Mulhall with Members of the House of Lords involved in the UK-EU debate
Venue: Embassy (Vice-Chair Sean Kyne and Senator Aideen Hayden and officials)
12.30 Delegation departs Victoria for Gatwick
14.45 Delegation depart from Gatwick
14.45 Delegation departs Embassy for FCO
15.15 Meeting with Minister for Europe David Liddington MP
(Vice-Chair Sean Kyne and Senator Aideen Hayden)
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Downing St Ambassador's entrance)
17.00 Vice-Chair Sean Kyne and Senator Aideen Hayden take Gatwick Express from Victoria
19.00 Vice-Chair Sean Kyne and Senator Aideen Hayden depart from Gatwick

Delegation members

Dominic Hannigan TD (Chairman)
Seán Kyne TD (Vice Chair)
Kathryn Reilly (Senator)
Terry Leyden (Senator)
Aideen Hayden (Senator)
John Halligan (TD)

Officials

Bríd Dunne, Committee Clerk
Fiona Cashin, Policy Advisor

Speech by Chairman Dominic Hannigan TD

Dia dhaoibh, a Ambasadóir agus a Chairde.

Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom mé féin a chur in aithne daoibh. Dominic Hannigan is ainm dom, agus is ball mé de Dháil Éireann, agus tá mé i mo Chathaoirleach ar an gComhchoiste Oireachtais um Ghnóthaí an Aontais Eorpaigh. Tagann gach ball den Choiste seo, ó dhá Theach ár bParlaiminte – an Dáil agus an Seanad.

Thar mo cheann féin, agus thar ceann an Choiste, ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an Ambasadóir, as cuireadh a thabhairt dúinn a bheith libh, ag an oíche iontach seo.

Cén fáth, a deir sibh, go bhfuil mise i mo sheasamh thuas anseo? Bhuel, mar chuid d’obair

an Choiste, táimid ag breathnú ar an nasc idir an Bhreatain agus an tAontas Eorpach.

Ar ndóigh, dhírigh cuid mhór den díospóireacht pholaitiúil sa Bhreatain, le déanaí, ar an gceist seo, agus is rud an-tábhachtach dúinn é, mar go mbíonn tionchar díreach, ag an nasc idir an tAontas Eorpach agus an Bhreatain, ar Éirinn, ar bhealaí difriúla – cúrsaí eacnamaíochta, polaitíochta, sóisialta agus cultúrtha.

Mar sin, caithfidh muid a thuiscint cén tionchar bheadh ar Éirinn má thagann athrú ar an nasc sin.

Chun an cheist seo a scrúdú, chuir an Comhchoiste go leor cruinnithe ar bun, le daoine a bhfuil eolas acu ar an gceist seo.

Thosaíomar i mí Feabhra, agus tá muid tar éis a bheith i dteagmháil, cheana féin, le roinnt daoine sna hOllscoileanna maidir le ceisteanna difriúla, cosúil le: conas a dhéantar gach cinneadh san AE; na ceithre shaoirse (earraí, seirbhísí, caipitil agus daoine ag bogadh gan bac); agus rudaí eile, mar shampla, ceisteanna réigiúnacha.

Tar éis na gcrúinnithe seo, tá tuiscint níos fearr againn ar na dúshláin a bheadh roimh Éirinn, agus muintir na hÉireann, má thagann athrú ar an nasc idir an tAontas Eorpach agus an Bhreatain.

Is é an Bhreatain an comhpháirtí eacnamaíochta is tábhachtaí atá ag Éirinn. Is leis an mBreatain, a dhéanann Éire, níos mó ná fiche faoin gcéad (20%) dá trádáil.

Tá an nasc trádála sin, ag dul ó neart go neart, toisc go bhfuil an dá chóras eacnamaíochta, ag obair le chéile, faoi margadh aonair an AE. Is ar an gcúis sin atáimid imníoch, faoin tionchar eacnamaíoch, a bheadh ar Éirinn, agus ar an trádáil, idir an Bhreatain agus Éire, má fhágann an Bhreatain an margadh aonair.

Ach, má thagann athrú ar nasc na Breataine leis an AE, tá seans ann go mbeadh fadhbanna eile ann freisin.

Níor cheart dúinn a dhearmad, go bhfuil teorainn idir an dá thír, agus go bhféadfaí go leor bacanna praiticiúla a chruthú, dá mbeadh an teorainn sin, le bheith ina teorainn idir tír amháin atá san AE, agus tír eile nach bhfuil.

Ar ndóigh, is faoi rialtas na Breataine, agus faoi mhuintir na Breataine atá sé, an cineál naisc a bheidh idir an Bhreatain, agus an tAontas Eorpach a chinneadh. Tuigimid go hiomlán gur mar sin atá sé.

Ach ba mhaith liom a iarraidh ar gach duine, gan dearmad a dhéanamh, ar an ról tábhachtach a bhí ag an AE, ó thaobh feabhas a chur ar na ceangail pholaitiúla, agus eacnamaíochta, atá idir an dá oileán.

Ar deireadh, tháinig Éire agus an Bhreatain isteach san AE an t-am céanna, sa bhliain míle naoi gcéad seachtó trí (1973), agus d'oibrigh muid go maith le chéile i gcónaí, san AE.

Fáth amháin atá leis an gcomhoibriú maith sin, ná, an bealach go bhfuil go leor de na spriocanna céanna againn, i rudaí cosúil le: trádáil, fostaíocht, airgead a chur ag obair, agus fás san eacnamaíocht.

Agus, fáth eile atá leis, ná, stair an dá thír a bheith an-ghar dá chéile.

Ar bhealach amháin nó ar bhealach eile, bímid ag tacú lena chéile san AE, agus b'fhearr linne in Éirinn, go mbeadh glór na Breataine le clos ag an mbord sa Bhruiséil.

Go raibh maith agaibh.