

# Brexit – the Irish angle

Nigel Dodds, the Deputy leader of the Democratic Unionist Party who leads the party's MPs in Westminster, responded to the recent Queen's Speech by saying, "Let me make it very clear – I believe when people voted in the European Union referendum to leave the European Union that they voted to leave the single market and customs union. And I believe that Northern Ireland must, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, do likewise." He added, "We must not get into a situation where we have borders erected between the island of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom."

The status of the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic – the only land border between a newly-independent UK and the EU – is one of three issues which the EU wants to settle before trade talks can begin. Professor Anthony Coughlan, the veteran Irish Anti-EU campaigner, has proposed that the best way of resolving this problem is Irexit – in other words, the Republic of Ireland should leave the EU as well. He argues that it is logically the best thing to do, even though it is "unpalatable" for many in the Republic. "If one quarter of the Irish people and one fifth of Ireland's land area are going to leave the EU because they are part of the UK, has the rest of the country any real alternative but to follow, however reluctantly?" he asks.

It is the Republic, not the UK, which will be the big loser from Brexit if it stays in the EU, he argues. "Dublin and London want to maintain the common Anglo-Irish free travel and trade area. But if the Republic opts to stay in the EU when Northern Ireland and Britain leave it, it is the Republic of Ireland, not Britain, that will be putting the common area at risk. London has Dublin over the proverbial barrel on this.

It can bend Dublin to its will if it so wishes. There is no international law or moral right to a free-movement facility like this between two different sovereign States."

He also highlights the problems caused by the EU's desire for closer military integration, a subject which Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, highlighted as a priority three days ago. "If the Republic remains in the EU when the UK leaves, it means that it will become part of an EU military bloc under German hegemony. That can hardly be in the security interests of the UK."

As an aside, it is interesting that Professor Coughlan, looking at our current situation from across the Irish Sea, takes a far more measured approach than some of the ridiculous headlines we have seen in the press recently. "The fundamental point to grasp about the post-UK-general-election situation is that Brexit is going to happen, whether under Theresa May, Jeremy Corbyn or someone else. The UK is going to cease being an EU Member State. The only issue still open is how long this will take."

Absolutely. What is more, a recent communication from the European Council on the subject of relocating the EU agencies currently based in the UK (the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Banking Authority (EBA)) says the same thing:- "As the United Kingdom has notified the European Council under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union of its intention to leave the Union, it is necessary to move the two United Kingdom-based Agencies to other locations within the Union's territory." Whatever the rhetoric, the EU is gearing up for Brexit.

Yes, we are going to leave, even if the timescale and route of our exit are still uncertain. As far as the impact of Brexit on the Irish Republic is concerned, the next few years will be very interesting. The country has recovered from the Great Recession better than the other so-called "PIIGS" (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain). Unemployment stood at 6.4% and youth unemployment at 12% in April, compared with more than 20% and 45% respectively for Greece. Furthermore, the Irish housing market, which took a battering in the Recession,

has recovered. Nonetheless, the country is one of few in the Eurozone which may return to deflation. Given that the €uro has been the culprit for all of Ireland's recent economic woes, the chance to escape its straitjacket may become more appealing as Brexit draws nearer.