

Brexit still on course – a statement from Anthony Coughlan (Dublin)

BREXIT STILL ON THE WAY AS THE EU/UK NEGOTIATION MOVES FROM PHASE 1 TO PHASE 2

Genuine democrats and EU-critics everywhere will welcome the news that Brexit is still on the way following the decision of the European Council of Prime Ministers and Presidents to move to the next stage of the EU/UK negotiation, i.e. on the two-year withdrawal period and the post-withdrawal trade agreement between the UK and the EU.

If there had been a failure to move the negotiation to Phase 2, ultra-Europhiles and Eurofanatics everywhere would have been delighted.

The European Council decision of the other day means that the hopes of such people that they can stop Brexit are significantly diminished, although they will continue to hope on and still do all they can to attempt to derail the process.

The less EU-besotted amongst Irish policy-makers and media commentators will now have to start thinking for the first time whether it is really a good idea for this State to attempt to remain in an increasingly federalizing EU when 1.8 million of our fellow-countrymen and women in Northern Ireland will be leaving it.

They will need to ask themselves do they want to be responsible for a new Partition of Ireland!

If the EU/UK negotiation leads to a meaningful Brexit, which means that the UK as a whole will leave the EU single market

and customs union at the end of the UK Government's proposed two-year transition/implementation period, as now looks probable, **ONE CAN BE CONFIDENT THAT THE REPUBLIC WILL FOLLOW THE UK OUT OF THE EU IN TIME** because the drawbacks of the Irish State seeking to stay in the EU when the UK leaves will become so obvious and be so painful that the Irish public will come to demand nothing less.

However, wishful thinking is still likely to prevail widely in the Republic for some time and among those "Remain" supporters everywhere who seek to overthrow last year's democratic UK referendum result – in particular the hope that Brexit can still be frustrated in the Westminster Parliament or by a change of UK Government during the negotiations; or that at the end of the day the softest of "soft" Brexits will mean that the UK will effectively remain under EU supranational jurisdiction.

Genuine democrats everywhere will now wish UK Prime Minister Theresa May and her Government every success as they move to implement a meaningful Brexit that gives citizens of the UK democratic control of their own law-making once again and removes them from the EU single market and customs union.

Anthony Coughlan

Associate Professor Emeritus in Social Policy, Trinity College
Dublin