

# Some thoughts on the Irish backstop conundrum

*CIB committee member **Michael McGough** offers some thoughts on the ongoing Irish backstop conundrum. As if a Brexit-blocking parliament isn't enough, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is still faced with an intransigent Leo Varadkar and his career Euro-federalists, who are more committed to the EU project than the best interests of Ireland. They will continue to co-operate with Brussels and UK Remainers to stop a real Brexit at any costs.*

I cross the seamless border between the counties of Donegal (Republic of Ireland) and Fermanagh (Northern Ireland) several times a year. Sometimes Irish Customs hold minor roadblocks to check for smuggling, which results from the price differentials for fuel, alcohol, tobacco etc. But they only stop a few vehicles; the roadblocks serve more as a warning than anything. On my last visit I only realised I had crossed the border when in Belleek I tried to use Euros to buy a newspaper.

Speaking at a Spectator event in Westminster, economist Liam Halligan pointed out that while negotiations with the previous Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny had progressed well, Leo Varadkar deliberately introduced the border as an artificial problem in order to receive cuts in future contributions to the EU.

Former UK Ambassador to the US Sir Christopher Meyer has questioned how a UK Government could have allowed the weaponisation of the border. As Meyer rightly stated:

“Here's the problem. The backstop is not a device to solve a genuine border problem, but a political weapon to shore up a minority Irish government, open the door to a

united Ireland and punish us for daring to leave the EU.”

Bertie Ahern, who as Taoiseach was the major Irish architect of the Good Friday Agreement, has stated that border issues could be solved by using existing technology and trusted trader schemes, with all else being insignificant.

It is hard to avoid the suspicion that Varadkar, Barnier, May, Robbins and Barwell colluded to introduce the backstop as a means to *permanently* keep the UK within the Single Market and Customs Union in order to create a Brexit In Name Only (BRINO).

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Professor Anthony Coughlan of The National Platform EU Research and Information Centre suggests a new strategy for the new PM. If Dublin continues to be hostile to time-limiting the backstop, the UK should no longer guarantee to maintain the Anglo-Irish Common Travel Area (CTA).

Many UK families have some connection with Ireland and the CTA makes travel hassle free, avoiding long queues at passport control, although passports are needed to fly. Travelling by boat from both Liverpool and Holyhead in recent years, I have never had to show a passport. The CTA is far more important to the Irish than the UK, because for generations the ability to travel to work in the UK has acted as a safety valve for poor Irish economic performance.

There is no automatic right to the bilateral CTA. Varadkar must be reminded that if he insists on no time limit to the backstop and the UK ends the CTA, he and his government will never be forgiven by the Irish people.

Anybody reading the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) will see that membership of the EU is in no way necessary to support the co-operation that underpins the agreement, be it North-South or UK-Ireland. Leaving the EU is not prohibited by the GFA – there just needs to be a bilateral agreement to ensure continuance of its provisions. Varadkar will not countenance this; yet he, the EU and the UK have all said there will not be a hard border.

Former Irish Ambassador to Canada Dr Ray Bassett has stated the reality that in its own best interests Ireland should leave the EU. Sadly, the Irish establishment is in awe of the EU and has gone too far down the Eurofederalist road to turn back. This may change in the future when the European Foreign and Security policy and an EU Army threaten Ireland's traditional position of neutrality.

Germany would better fulfil its ambitions without the two English-speaking members of the EU.