



European Chamber of Ireland



Represented by Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey

Report on the Visit of the European Chamber delegation to Brussels. 26th-28th February 2019

1. From 26th-28th February a delegation from the European Chamber of Ireland visited Brussels as part of a Brexit engagement mission. The specific purpose of this trip was to ensure that key EU decision-makers understand the challenges Brexit presents for businesses operating in Ireland. The Chamber delegation comprised of eight members from a variety of leading companies in Ireland and was led by Dr Jack Golden, the President of the European Chamber and formerly a director at CRH, and Mr. Ralf Lissek, Chairman of the European Chamber and CEO of the German-Irish Chamber of Commerce.
2. The delegation's first port of call was a meeting in the European Parliament with German MEP and Vice President of the European Parliament Rainer Wieland, Irish MEP Deirdre Clune, and a number of German MEPs. The delegation made the MEPs aware of their concerns regarding the impact of Brexit on business in Ireland. Particular focus was placed on the UK Land Bridge, and the consequences any change to current procedures would have on Irish and European business. The delegation also stressed the importance of the backstop. This is important for political reasons, but also for economic reasons. The delegation cited the legal status of the common electricity market on the island, and the threat to key Irish industries such as tourism if a hard border were to come into place.
3. The delegation then met with Ambassador Declan Kelleher, the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the EU, and Amal Koaua Ba Ma, Deputy Director of the Brexit Unit. Again the delegation presented the case for a Sea Bridge to operate in addition to the UK Land Bridge. The Ambassador showed interest in this idea, and reiterated the support for Ireland in Europe. He noted that there is no indication that this show of goodwill will be used as a bargaining chip in future Europe wide initiatives. Ambassador Kelleher mentioned plans to intensify the relationship between Ireland and continental Europe.
4. Ambassador Kelleher and Ms. Koaua Ba Ma gave the delegation a detailed briefing of the steps being taken by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Ireland's diplomatic service to ensure that the other EU member states were fully aware of the dangers that Brexit posed to Ireland. A useful discussion took place on the points that the delegation could most productively raise in the various meetings over the course of their visit to Brussels.
5. The delegation travelled to the Berlaymont Building, the official headquarters of the European Commission, to meet with Dorte Christensen, Head of European Commission's Brexit Preparedness Unit, and Pierpaolo Settembri, Assistant to the

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Director-General of DG Move which is in charge of all logistic and transport issues. The purpose of this meeting was to find out what plans are already in place in terms of the transport of goods to and from continental Europe. The four representatives from DG Move gave a comprehensive overview of the aviation, marine, and road transport initiatives to counter potential disruption caused by Brexit. Dorthe Christensen ensured the group that 'Ireland is at the centre of our concerns', and that work around Ireland is a specific feature of their work.

6. The delegation next met with MEP Werner Langen, Former Chair of the Panama Papers Committee. The Financial Service Sector was the central topic of this meeting. The delegation noted that Financial Fraud/ Anti Money Laundering legislation enacted in recent years has been extremely strict and effective. Werner Langen noted that if Pending Financial Services Initiatives do not get through the European Parliament by March, they will have to go to the next Parliament. Effectively discussion will resume in new committees with new members towards the end of 2019. Those committees might have different views. Werner Langen explained that that the European Supervisory Authorities regulation went through the Parliamentary Committee last week and would go through the remaining stages in this Parliament.
7. The delegation then met with Florian Laudi, Team Leader Brexit Permanent German Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to the European Union, and Patrick Schäfer, Councillor, German Permanent Representation to the European Union. During this meeting the group discussed the challenges to Ireland which arise from Brexit. Mr. Laudi ensured the delegation of the European Union and Germany's commitment to Ireland's economic and political well-being.
8. The delegation's next meeting of the day was with Koen Dillen who coordinated the UK EU withdrawal process within DG AGRI. Mr. Dillen described the negotiation process in depth. He shared the delegation's opinion that it is important to avoid checkpoints between North and South. He explained that Ireland's agriculture is uniquely affected by the possibility of a hard border due to the cross border cooperation.
9. The delegation then met with Dermot Ryan, Senior Adviser and Communication Advisor, DG Agriculture & Rural Development. Commissioner Hogan and DG Agriculture and Rural Development are well prepared for all eventualities regarding the UK's exit from the EU and the potential consequences, in particular for Ireland.
10. The last meeting of the day was in the Berlaymont Building with the European Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources, Günther Oettinger. Commissioner Oettinger pointed out that Brexit will impinge severely on Germany's trade and that Britain's exit will mean changes to the EU budget. The Chamber delegation raised a number of concerns, including the fact that Ireland had a special case, as the

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remaining EU member that would be most affected by Brexit. Special emphasis was placed on the fact that Ireland would need the support of the EU or this could lead to anti-EU sentiment in Ireland. Commissioner Oettinger took these points on board and offered to meet with the Chamber on a future visit to Brussels to keep this dialogue open. He also noted that the commission would take a flexible approach to applications for assistance from Ireland to counter some of the negative impact of Brexit and that there was some scope within existing programmes.

11. In summary, the European Chamber's visit to Brussels allowed Irish business leaders to underline the key concerns faced by the island of Ireland arising from Brexit. The Chamber made clear in all of its meetings that Ireland, as the EU member state most connected with Britain, will suffer most from the market volatility and unpredictability that Brexit brings in its wake. The Chamber also stressed that Ireland needs the full support of its EU partners to mitigate the impact of the UK leaving the EU. During each meeting it was stated that the chamber's reporting on issues was useful for decision makers in Brussels. We are expected to travel to Brussels again in the near future for similar meetings. It was clear that all organisations have the safeguarding of Irish economic and political interests on their agenda.

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