



**Joint Committee on European Union Affairs**

**Report**

**Committee Travel to Brussels**

**7 – 8 February 2017**

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**An Comhchoiste um Ghnóthaí an Aontais Eorpaigh**

**Tuarascáil**

**Cuairt ag an gCoiste ar an mBruiséil**

**7 – 8 Feabhra 2017**

**32ENUA0006**

## **BACKGROUND**

As part of its 2016 Work Programme, the Joint Committee recognised the strong impact that the UK's decision to withdraw from the EU was going to have and that the negotiations between the EU and the UK were going to be of great importance to Ireland. The Committee committed to undertake adequate scrutiny of the process.

As part of discussions and engagements at its meetings, it was clear that it would be important for a delegation from the Joint Committee to travel to Brussels to meet with the key individuals involved in the negotiations. Members of the Committee felt strongly that such a delegation visit should take place in advance of Art. 50 TEU being triggered by the British Government.

The Joint Committee wishes to express its gratitude to the all of those that they met across the European Institutions, and their staff for their assistance in organising the meetings. The Committee particularly thanks the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the EU, Ambassador Declan Kelleher, and his colleagues in the Irish Permanent Representation for their assistance and support in preparing the visit.

## **OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this visit was to discuss the following issues with relevant stakeholders:–

- the state of preparations for the EU's negotiation with the UK on their withdrawal from the EU ('Brexit');
- deepen understanding of the impact on Ireland of Brexit;
- deepen understanding of the impact on the EU of Brexit;
- ensure that the principal stakeholders' understand the key, unique Irish concerns;
- improve understanding of the priorities and positions of key stakeholders in the negotiations;
- other issues based on the work of the Committee.

In total the Committee delegation held 12 meetings with a variety of stakeholders (*reference Appendix 1 for full programme*).

## DELEGATION

1. Michael Healy-Rae, TD, Chairman of the Joint Committee on EU Affairs and Leader of the Delegation [Ind - Kerry]
2. Seán Crowe, TD [SF/GUI, Dublin South-West]
3. Bernard J Durkan, TD [FG/EPP, Kildare North]
4. Seán Haughey, TD [FF/ALDE, Dublin Bay North]
5. Senator Gerard Craughwell [Ind]
6. Senator Neale Richmond [FG/EPP]

### Accompanied by

Heidi Loughheed	Clerk to the Joint Committee on EU Affairs
Cáit Hayes	Representative of the Houses of the Oireachtas to the EU
Liam O'Brien	Oireachtas, Communications Unit

## MEDIA

As the programme for this visit was strong, it was considered that it would be beneficially to have a Communications Unit presence attached to the delegation.

Through both traditional interviews with journalists (for TV, radio and print press) as well as ongoing social media (mostly Twitter), it is felt that the delegation visit received good coverage.

Media coverage: All Members of the delegation had the chance to speak to at least one media outlet during the programme.

**Television:** RTÉ attended the opening of the meeting with Michel Barnier with a cameraman and interviewed four of the Members afterwards. The resulting piece was shown on the news at one o'clock, six o'clock and nine o'clock.

**Newspapers:** As a result of interviews with journalists, pieces were carried in the Financial Times (Thursday 9 February) and Farming Independent (Tuesday 13 February).

**Radio:** The Chairman featured on Today FM, Radio Kerry and LMFM to discuss the benefits of the visit.

### Social Media:

**Twitter** was used for its immediacy and reach and, across all Tweets the delegation visit received almost 32,000 impressions and over 1600 engagements. The impact came from both the Oireachtas twitter account and the fact that many of those the Committee had meetings with also tweeted images of meetings. This

included Mr Guy Verhofstadt (who tweeted an image of the meeting, from his official photographer) who received 203 retweets and 467 'likes'; Mr Michel Barnier (who also used an image in publicising the meeting and gained 84 retweets and 75 'likes'). For this visit the hashtag #JCEUA was used for most posts.

**Facebook:** a wrap up video with Senator Craughwell was recorded and loaded on the Oireachtas Facebook account. It reached almost 1600 people.

## **SUMMARY OF MEETINGS HELD**

*Tuesday 7 February 2017*

### **1. Meeting with Commissioner Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development**

The delegation met with Commissioner Hogan, who was accompanied by a Member of his Cabinet, Mr Dermot Ryan. There was a broad discussion on issues of importance to the European Union and its future.

Related to Agriculture, the importance of the upcoming Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy was discussed.

In connection to the British withdrawal from the European Union, the delegation from the Joint Committee raised a number of the issues that they believe should be priorities for Ireland as part of the negotiations. The importance of developing solutions and road-testing them and of holding discussions with all the main parties and stakeholders to the negotiations was stressed.

### **2. Meeting with European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly**

The European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, was joined by Koen Roovers and Aidan O'Sullivan from her office. She began the meeting by giving a general description of the work of the European Ombudsman and the powers that the office has. In particular, she described the establishment of a strategic investigations office, which has done work on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), composition of Expert Groups, Former President of the European Commission (Mr Barroso) beginning to work with Goldman Sachs, and some work of the European Investment Bank (EIB).

In relation to the upcoming negotiations on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, she stressed the need for those negotiations to take place in as transparent a manner as possible, while protecting the necessary confidentiality of negotiations.

The delegation had a very open discussion around the work of the Ombudsman, the need to put citizens at the heart of European Affairs and appropriate transparency in negotiations.

**3. Informal Lunch with Minister Dara Murphy TD, Minister of State for European Affairs, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection**

The delegation met for an Informal lunch with the Minister for European Affairs, who was in Brussels attending the General Affairs Council Meeting (GAC). They had a useful, informal discussion on the work of GAC and preparations for the negotiations.

**4. Orientation Meeting with Declan Kelleher, Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union**

Ambassador Kelleher, the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the European Union, met the delegation and was accompanied by Ambassador Hackett (the new Deputy Permanent Representative) as well as two Members of the 'Brexit' Unit: Émer Deane and David Brock.

The Ambassador underlined the importance of the negotiations for Ireland and the role of the Permanent Representation as the frontline for Ireland's efforts in understanding the positions and priorities of others in Brussels, and helping them to understand Ireland's concerns. He explained that while 'Brexit' is clearly important for the Permanent Representation and substantial efforts are being made in that regard, the ordinary business of the EU continues and they must also achieve the best possible outcome on all those fronts too. He gave the delegation an overview on the process of the triggering of Article 50 and the negotiations, and the timelines that he expects.

The delegation had a broad discussion with the Ambassadors on the key areas of concern for Ireland, efforts being made to prepare for the negotiations and levels of understanding of Ireland's concerns amongst key stakeholders.

**5. Roundtable Discussion with Representatives of Irish Organisations in Brussels**

Members held a Roundtable discussion with the Brussels-based representatives of:

- *The Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS)*
- *Ibec*
- *ETUC (Congress)*
- *Banking and Payments Federation Ireland (BPMFI)*
- *Irish Farmers' Association (IFA)*
- *Enterprise Ireland (EI)*
- *Institute of International and European Affairs*

The meeting began with the organisations detailing the impact that the upcoming Brexit negotiations have already had on their organisations and members, what steps their organisations were taking to input into the negotiations and what issues they saw developing as key issues for Ireland. The Members of the Committee and the representatives then had a broad discussion on several of the potential challenging areas and possible solutions for some of those. The discussion covered both short-term issues that will need to be dealt with during the negotiations as well as solutions and supports that may be needed to be considered for the longer-term future. Finally, the discussion touched-upon how the European Union is perceived and its value to citizens was discussed.

*Wednesday 8 February*

#### **6. Meeting with Michel Barnier, Chief Negotiator, Task Force for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiation with the United Kingdom under Article 50 TEU, European Commission**

The Committee met with Mr Barnier, as well three other members of the Task Force for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiation with the UK under Article 50 TEU (TF50). Mr Barnier described the negotiation process and the expected timelines for that process. The Task Force Members stressed the importance of understanding each other and the issues that were likely to be part of the negotiations and challenging for individual or several Member States. The Committee stressed Ireland's full commitment to the European Union. The Committee Members described and detailed the key challenges for Ireland during the negotiations and areas which will require special consideration. The need to

continue to build understanding of the issues for all parties was agreed, and the need now to start to move towards developing solutions. There was agreement that this was the first of a longer-term engagement process between the parties, which should be followed-up in both Brussels and/or Dublin.

#### **7. Meeting with Alyn Smith, MEP (UK, Verts/ALE)**

Alyn Smith MEP described the particular situation for Scotland in preparing for the negotiations and in longer-term aspirations, as well the current state-of-play within the European Parliament. The Committee Members described their priorities for Ireland and the challenges they see ahead.

#### **8. Meeting with MEPs from Cyprus**

The Committee met with Neoklis Sylikiotis MEP and Takis Hadjigeorgiou MEP from Cyprus at which they explored the particular challenges in the negotiations for smaller Member States, for Island Member States and for those with long historical links with the United Kingdom. Both sides described the challenges, positions and priorities of their Member States

#### **9. Meeting with MEPs from Malta**

The Committee met with Alfred Sant MEP and Miriam Dalli, MEP from Malta and both sides described the positions, priorities and challenges of their Member States, particularly as small Member States that are Islands, with a long historical link to the United Kingdom and are neutral. The additional challenge of connectivity and being an 'energy island' was explored. Some of the technical work being undertaken by European Parliament Committees was also considered.

#### **10. Meeting with Guy Verhofstadt MEP (ALDE, BE), European Parliament Representative on Brexit**

Guy Verhofstadt MEP met with the Committee's delegation alongside some members of his Cabinet. Mr Verhofstadt described the European Parliament's understanding of its involvement in the negotiations, his approach to those negotiations and his understanding of the timelines involved. The European Parliament's detailed, technical work, undertaken by Committees, was described and the volume of issues

that are emerging as needing to be dealt with. Mr Verhofstadt invited the Committee to remain involved in developing ideas and imaginative solutions to send to the European Parliament and other stakeholders for consideration. The Committee Members described the work being undertaken by the Houses of the Oireachtas and the particular challenges to Ireland.

### **11. Meeting with Irish MEPs**

The delegation met with a number of the Irish MEPs on their visit (*Vice-President Mairead McGuinness MEP, Sean Kelly MEP, Lynn Boylan MEP, Nessa Childers MEP, Matt Carty MEP, Deirdre Clune MEP and Luke 'Ming' Flanagan MEP*).

The delegation had a very frank discussion with the MEPs on the preparations that the European Parliament is currently undertaking for the negotiations and the work that the Oireachtas is undertaking. MEPs stressed the importance of engaging with the work of the European Parliament directly and the value in the Committee delegation's visit. The challenges for Ireland, the impact on several current practices, and the need to stay engaged and develop solutions were all stressed.

### **12. Meeting with James Nicholson, MEP (ECR, UK)**

The Committee met with Mr James Nicholson MEP and discussed the particular challenge for Northern Ireland as it prepares to leave the European Union with the rest of the UK. Particular attention was paid to the issues related to the border, EU funding and cross-border workers. The impact of Brexit on rural communities on the Island of Ireland and the differentiated impact that some of the potential solutions that have been put forward may have on urban and rural communities was explored.

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Michael Healy-Rae, TD

Chairman

15 February 2017

## Appendix 1 - Programme



# Delegation visit by Joint Committee on European Union Affairs to Brussels 7 and 8 February

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### *Monday 6 February*

22.10 Arrival of delegation at Zaventem airport, Brussels  
Transfer to Radisson Red Hotel, *Rue d'Idalie 35, 1050 Brussels*

### *Tuesday 7 February*

**10.00-11.00 Meeting with Commissioner Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development**  
*Berlaymont Building, 200 Rue de la loi*

**11.30 Meeting with European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly**  
*European Parliament Complex, Rue Wiertz*

**13.30 Informal lunch with Minister Dara Murphy TD, Minister of State for European Affairs, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection**  
*Grand Central, 190 Rue Belliard (on corner with Place Jean Rey)*

**14.30 - 16.00 Orientation Meeting with HE Declan Kelleher, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the European Union**  
*Irish Permanent Representation to the EU, Rue Froissart 50*

**16.15 Roundtable Discussion with Representatives of Irish Organisations in Brussels**  
*Irish Permanent Representation to the EU, Rue Froissart 50*

**17.30 Reception hosted by HE Declan Kelleher, Permanent Representative of the Ireland**  
*Irish Permanent Representation to the EU, Rue Froissart 50*

**18.30 Return to Hotel**

**19.00**                      **Informal dinner/ free time**

*Wednesday 8 February*

**9.40**                      **Arrive at Berlaymont Building**

**10.00 - 11.00**            **Meeting with Michel Barnier, Chief Negotiator, Task Force  
for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiation with the  
United Kingdom under Article 50 TEU, European  
Commission**

*Berlaymont Building, 200 Rue de la loi*

*From 11.30 onward meetings will take place in the European Parliament, Rue  
Wiertz, 1047 Brussels*

**11.30**                      **Meeting with Alyn Smith MEP (UK, Verts/ALE (SNP))**

**12.30**                      **Meeting with MEPs from Cyprus**

**13.00**                      **Meeting with MEPs from Malta**

**13.45**                      **Lunch in the Members Restaurant, with Irish MEPs**

**15.00**                      **Meeting with Guy Verhofstadt MEP (ALDE, BE)  
European Parliament Representative on Brexit**

**16.00**                      **Meeting with Irish MEPs**

**17.00**                      **Meeting with James Nicholson MEP (ECR, UK)**

**17.45**                      **Depart for airport**

**19.35**                      **Flight Brussels to Dublin**