



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

**SEANAD ÉIREANN**

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*  
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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## SEANAD ÉIREANN

*Déardaoin, 11 Bealtaine 2017*

*Thursday, 11 May 2017*

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 11.30 a.m.

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*Machnamh agus Paidir.*  
*Reflection and Prayer.*

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**Dáil Éireann agus Seanad Éireann: Suí i gComhchoiste**

**Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann: Sitting in Joint Committee**

### **Exchange of views with Mr. Michel Barnier, Chief Negotiator of the Taskforce for the Preparation and Conduct of Negotiations with the United Kingdom**

**An Ceann Comhairle:** A Chomhghleacaithe, tá fáilte is fiche romhaibh go léir chuig an gcomhshuí speisialta seo den Dáil agus den Seanad chun plé a dhéanamh ar cheann de na dúshláin pholaitíochta is mó atá roimh an oileán seo i láthair na huaire, agus go deimhin, roimh an Eoraip ar fad, is é sin, an Ríocht Aontaithe a bheith ag fágáil an Aontais Eorpaigh. On behalf of both myself and the Cathaoirleach, I wish to welcome the Members of both Houses and Mr. Michel Barnier to this sitting in joint committee. We are here for an exchange of views with Mr. Barnier, who, as Members will know, is the chief negotiator of the task force for the preparation and conduct of negotiations with the United Kingdom. We will now go into committee. Accordingly, I invite Mr. Barnier to take his seat in the Chamber.

Monsieur Barnier, au nom de tous les Membres du Dáil Éireann et du Seanad Éireann, soyez le bienvenu ici aujourd'hui. Nous sommes ravis et honorés que vous ayez accepté notre invitation à vous adresser aux chambres de l'Oireachtas, réunies en séance commune.

The decision by the United Kingdom last year to withdraw from the European Union will have a profound effect on Europe and its citizens but it also raises a number of specific and important issues that are unique to Ireland. For instance, concerns have been raised about its

impact on Northern Ireland and the peace process as well as its impact on the common travel area between Ireland and the United Kingdom. Since the formal notification on 29 March 2017, of the UK's intention to withdraw, preparations for the start of the negotiations have intensified. As Members will be aware, the European Council agreed guidelines for the first phase of negotiations on 29 April 2017. Last week the European Commission published its draft negotiating directives.

Our exchange of views today is therefore very timely and we hope it will contribute positively to the preparations for the negotiations. Let me also say I firmly believe today's sitting demonstrates how national parliaments can contribute effectively to public debate on matters of concern to the Union, which of course is one of the principal objectives of Article 12 of the treaty.

Mr. Barnier, we are conscious of the very challenging road ahead. We wish you and your task force well in your important work and it is our sincere hope that an agreement can be reached that protects the principles of the Union and the interests of its member states while maintaining a strong relationship with the United Kingdom. With those few thoughts, I invite you now to address us.

**Mr. Michel Barnier:** I thank the Ceann Comhairle for his perfect French. Mr. Speakers, Taoiseach, Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, a chairde, I am very happy and honoured to address both Houses of the Oireachtas and to greet you, as the representatives of the people of Ireland, in all your political diversity. I take this honour as a responsibility: the responsibility to listen to all those who will be affected by the decision of the UK to leave the European Union; the responsibility to listen to your concerns, build our positions together and negotiate in our common interest; and the responsibility to explain that we need each other - that Ireland is stronger in the Union, and the EU is stronger with Ireland.

Your country has had deep historical, cultural and intellectual ties to continental Europe for many centuries. In the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, Irish colleges were set up around Europe - from Madrid, where I was yesterday, to Leuven, Paris, Rome and Prague. They contributed to writing the history of Ireland and the history of Europe, and they spread Irish culture to the Continent.

Centuries later, in 1972, the people of Ireland massively voted to take part in the European project. At that time I was 21 - that was the last century. France had a referendum on the accession of Ireland, the UK, Denmark and Norway. It was my very first vote. I campaigned for a "Yes" vote. For the UK's accession, back then, voting "Yes" was not so easy for a member of the French Gaullist Party. I did it with my full heart and I never regretted it. I regret that Brexit is happening now. I would have liked to have seen the UK staying in Europe, with Ireland and all the 26 other member states, but we are where we are.

Since 1972, we have accomplished great things together. The European Union has helped Ireland become what it is today, and Ireland has complemented and strengthened our Union. The Irish people are known as hard working and open minded. They saw EU membership as a chance to modernise their economy and society. We see this now in innovative companies and in the creation of new jobs. Investors see Ireland as being central in the European market, not peripheral. We see it across Irish cities, towns and villages. They have been enriched by fellow Europeans who have come here to work, study, travel and live.

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As Seamus Heaney said to mark the enlargement of the EU in 2004:

So on a day when newcomers appear

Let it be a homecoming and let us speak ...

Move lips, move minds and make new meanings flare.

Ireland has welcomed, like you were welcomed 30 years earlier.

Ladies and gentlemen, for 44 years, Irish people have shaped the Union. They have helped turn Europe into a more open and innovative Continent. Ireland's first European Commissioner, Patrick Hillery, played a major role in improving equality between women and men before serving as your President. Another Irish Commissioner, Peter Sutherland, supported the creation of the Single Market and he established the ERASMUS programme, bringing young Europeans closer together for 30 years now and showing what free movement of people really means. Today, Phil Hogan is in charge of developing what is the Union's most complete economic policy, the Common Agricultural Policy. Speakers, ladies and gentlemen, for my part, I am proud to have been Minister with responsibility for the farmers and fishermen in my own country.

Some in large countries with imperial pasts like my own seem to think that the EU makes them smaller. This is simply not true. In smaller countries, people are often more aware that being part of the EU increases influence and opportunities, and that being part of a common project and identity does not prevent a country from keeping its own identity and making a name for itself in the world, as Enda Kenny reminded us all in his excellent St. Patrick's Day speech in Washington.

Pooling national sovereignty increases our European sovereignty. Since they are part of the EU, citizens of all our countries can study, work and settle down in another member state and be treated like nationals. European consumers can access high-quality food and agricultural products from across the EU because they all meet strict standards. Suppliers do not have to worry about border checks. Since they are part of the EU, citizens travelling to another EU country will soon be able to call without roaming charges as if they were calling from home.

Airlines, from whatever member state they come, can offer direct flights between any two EU airports. They can rely on our Open Skies agreement with the US. The EU has made travel easier. Irish airlines have been among the first to take advantage of these benefits and have profoundly changed the market. I experienced it first hand myself when I flew to Dublin last night on a rather well-known low-cost carrier - there was still no coffee but there was a little bit more seat space than before.

Honourable Members, being together makes us all stronger. Since we are part of the EU, businesses can trade goods without customs duties and documentation requirements are very simple. As part of the EU's Single Market, companies can rely on fair competition and a level playing field. Because the EU has consistently put in place high levels of environmental protection, citizens enjoy cleaner air and water. Governments can resist a race to the bottom and fight climate change more effectively together.

EU companies have privileged access to 60 foreign markets such as South Korea, Vietnam and recently Canada - thanks to the free trade agreements negotiated at EU level. Banks, in-

insurance or investment funds can provide services throughout the Single Market, based on their establishment here in Dublin, thanks to the so-called passporting rights.

Since they are part of the EU, judges can rely on the European arrest warrant. It ensures the rapid treatment of requests for surrendering suspected criminals from another member state to bring them to justice. Since they are part of the EU, universities receive funding for research and innovation. They form one of the widest academic networks in the world.

Speakers and honourable Members, as a Union member, this is what we enjoy, and this is what a member state loses when it leaves the Union; but let me also be clear: Brexit will come at a cost also to us, the 27. I am fully aware that some member states will be more affected than others. As chief negotiator, my objective is to reach a fair deal, one that defends the interests of the entire EU but also of individual member states.

Due to its historical and geographical ties with the UK, its shared Border and strong economic links, Ireland is in a unique position. With the fall of sterling, Brexit is already having an impact on the value of Irish exports to the UK, particularly in the agrifood sector. Many in Ireland fear the return of tensions in the North. Today, in front of these two Houses, I want to reassure the Irish people that in these negotiations, Ireland's interests will be the European Union's interests. We are in these negotiations together and a united EU will be there for Ireland.

Tomorrow I will travel to the Border with Northern Ireland and will meet farmers and workers in a dairy co-operative. I want to learn from them and listen to their concerns about how they are affected by Brexit. Some might be concerned about exports to the UK or the return of customs checks at the Border while others might fear a return to the instability of the past. In Northern Ireland, lifting the Border took time and it was only 15 years ago that checkpoints and controls totally disappeared, thanks to the Good Friday Agreement that ended decades of violence. I was the European Commissioner in charge of the PEACE programme and I have not forgotten my conversations with Mr. John Hume and Mr. David Trimble on that point. I understand the European Union's role in strengthening dialogue in Northern Ireland and in supporting the Good Friday Agreement. European integration helped to remove borders that once existed on maps and in minds. Now, Brexit changes the external borders of the EU but I will work with Ireland to avoid a hard Border.

The UK's departure from the EU will have consequences. Together, we have a duty to speak the truth in that regard. Customs controls are part of EU border management. They protect the Single Market, as well as our food safety and standards. However, as I have said many times, nothing in these negotiations should put peace at risk. This was recognised by the 27 Heads of State and Government two weeks ago. They were very clear that the Good Friday Agreement must be respected in all of its dimensions. I also made it very clear that the Border issue will be one of my three priorities for the first phase of the negotiations, together with citizens' rights and the financial settlement. We must make sufficient progress on these points before we start discussing the future of our relationship with the UK. The sooner this happens, the better.

If the conditions are right, a close partnership with the UK is in everybody's interests, particularly Ireland's. Currently, Ireland exports 14% of its goods and 20% of its services to the UK, which is twice the EU average. The agriculture and energy sectors are fully interconnected on the island of Ireland. Of course, such facts must be put in perspective. Before Ireland's accession to the EU in 1973, the UK accounted for over 50% of Irish trade. Today, Ireland exports much more to the other EU countries than to the UK and the Single Market is a key asset for

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its financial and pharmaceutical industries. Nevertheless, the specific issues that Ireland faces deserve all our attention. Ireland shares a land border with the UK and most of its trade to the EU goes through the UK. This is why I engaged with the Dáil and Seanad, the Government and its administrators, as well as all the Irish Members of the European Parliament immediately after taking up my position. Ireland has done remarkable preparatory work and we must use our combined strength and work together to deliver solutions.

I want to listen to the concerns of the Irish people but I also want to pass on a message of hope and determination. For all the problems it creates, Brexit also reminds us of what the EU has built together, what each of us enjoys as EU citizens and how we can further improve the European project. The EU is not perfect; we know that. President Juncker put it candidly on the occasion of Europe Day this week. There are lessons to draw from the crisis and not only in Ireland. There are lessons to draw from Brexit and from the rising scores of populist parties in many countries, including mine. Let us not confuse public opinion with populism. We should listen to people's feelings and respond with policy change. This is how we will fight populism. I am convinced that Ireland will play a major role in these changes, as a centre for innovation, a strong and sustainable agrifood producer, a bridge across the Atlantic and as a supporter of the future relationship that we need to build with the UK.

Our objective is clear - we want these negotiations to succeed. I want us to reach a deal. The UK has been a member of the EU for 44 years and it should remain a close partner. We will need to negotiate a bold, ambitious but also fair free trade agreement. We will also need the same ambition for our research and innovation networks and for the fight against climate change, as well as in foreign policy, international co-operation and development. Almost 27 years ago, Nelson Mandela spoke in this very room just a few months after he was released from jail. He praised Ireland's leadership within the European Community to maintain strong pressure on the apartheid system in South Africa. Tomorrow, our international partners should be able to turn to the EU and the UK and find in them strong and united advocates of our shared European values. We also need the same ambition in the field of our internal and external security, whether it is the fight against terrorism, the exchange of information, the fight against hybrid threats or cybersecurity.

If we put things in the right order, if we negotiate with mutual respect, without any aggression or naivety and are open to finding solutions, there is no reason our strong Europe cannot maintain a strong relationship with the UK.

Dear Speakers and honourable Members, I have been a national parliamentarian for more than 17 years, both in the National Assembly and the French Senate. I will now listen carefully to the views of the Taoiseach and of all party leaders. In these negotiations and the public debate that now starts you have, as a national parliament, an essential role to play together with the European Parliament and civil society. That is why I have been so honoured by your invitation to address the two Houses of the Parliament of Ireland. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Merci, Monsieur Barnier, and thank you for that valuable overview of the major challenge that lies ahead for us all. I call the Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** I am pleased to address the Houses today in the presence of Michel Barnier. Thank you for your fine contribution, Michel.

I thank him for his statement in which he outlined the complexities of the Brexit negotia-



tions and for his acknowledgement of their importance for Europe and of course for Ireland.

Michel Barnier is a long-standing friend of this country, not just as a leading French politician and Minister, but also as a European Commissioner. Indeed, his time as Commissioner for Regional Policy gave him a particular insight into the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, which will be central to the talks ahead.

I also want to thank him sincerely for his willingness to engage with Ireland since his appointment as head of the Commission Brexit task force last July. This is his second visit to Dublin since that appointment but we have also met on other occasions, including on my visits to Brussels in February and March, and at the European Council.

Michel and his colleagues in the Brexit task force have been more than co-operative and accessible to our Ministers and senior officials. I know that he has also been open to a range of other important stakeholders from Ireland. I thank him for this engagement. The challenges for this country arising from Brexit are extremely serious; and it is essential that all those affected have the opportunity to make their voices heard.

This has also been the approach of the Government here. Along with ongoing sectoral analysis across Departments, we have engaged widely with industry and civic society, holding almost 280 separate meetings. The all-island civic dialogue, which I convened with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Flanagan, has included 16 sectoral events and two plenary meetings, with more than 1,200 delegates representing industries and organisations from across the country. This kind of consultation has informed our positions on the negotiations, and enabled us to publish our thinking in a comprehensive Government document last week.

Events have moved on quickly since Prime Minister May formally notified the European Union of the UK's intention to leave. The European Council agreed the EU negotiating guidelines on 29 April and on 3 May, the European Commission proposed its draft negotiating directives, which build on the guidelines and provide more detail on the issues to be addressed.

The extensive preparation by member states, the EU institutions and Mr. Barnier's task force meant that the guidelines were agreed very quickly. This was by no means a given. We know just how complicated and serious the issues are for Europe as a whole and particularly for Ireland.

For over two years, the Government has been analysing the issues and engaging with sectors across this island to identify our main areas of concern and to develop our priorities. Some of these have been referred to here by Michel Barnier. These are the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process, including by avoiding a hard Border; to retain the common travel area; to minimise the impact on our economy and to work for a positive future for the European Union.

We have also been extremely active at political and official level in engaging with our EU partners and the EU institutions, with a view to highlighting and explaining the significant implications for Ireland arising from Brexit, and the need to take account of our particular concerns in the negotiations ahead. Indeed, since the UK referendum last June, we have had over 400 engagements on Brexit with our EU partners. In all these meetings, we have explained the background and context of the Northern Ireland peace process and emphasised the need to avoid the re-imposition of a hard Border on the island of Ireland. As I have stated previously,

this is a political challenge and we will have to be both flexible and imaginative to deal with it.

Thanks to this strategic and patient work, and the understanding and support of our European partners, I am pleased that Ireland's specific concerns - Mr. Barnier has mentioned this specifically - and the unique circumstances that apply here are fully acknowledged in these guidelines. Supporting and protecting the achievements, the benefits and commitments of the peace process, avoiding a hard Border and protecting the common travel area will now be addressed as part of the withdrawal negotiations. The guidelines provide an excellent basis for the negotiations. It was crucial that we got this right from the start and again, I would like to thank Mr. Barnier for his role in making that happen.

In more general terms, we are pleased with the tone of the guidelines, which is open and constructive, while nevertheless clearly and firmly outlining the EU's objectives and principles. They highlight the importance of getting clarity in respect of EU citizens' rights, a key issue across member states and important in terms of providing certainty for people and for families.

The approach to the sensitive question of the United Kingdom's financial liabilities is also welcome. It is only reasonable that the United Kingdom be asked to honour the commitments it entered into as a member state of the European Union. Mr. Barnier's approach to this is sensible: to focus first on the principles and methodology before considering the numbers or the structure of payments that might be involved.

Importantly from our perspective, the guidelines acknowledge the need for transitional arrangements. This will be crucial in order to provide a level of continuity and certainty for our citizens and businesses. As Ireland stands to be more affected than any other member state by the departure of the UK, we believe it is necessary to begin work as soon as possible - and I am glad you referred to this - on scoping out the future EU-UK relationship. I am pleased therefore that the guidelines acknowledge that the shape of the future relationship can be considered once the European Council, that is, the Heads of State and Government of the 27 member states, agrees that "sufficient progress" has been made on the withdrawal issues. This phased approach is also a sensible and pragmatic way forward.

From Ireland's perspective, our objective is for a close and positive future relationship with the UK, and we are pleased therefore that the guidelines indicate the EU wants an ambitious agreement, not just in economic terms but also in areas such as security. We will continue to work with partners to achieve such an outcome.

Consequently, I welcome the European Council guidelines from a substantive perspective and that their principles and approach have been carried forward into the draft negotiating directives. I appreciate the thorough preparatory work carried out by Mr. Barnier and his task force, as well as the European Council team and other EU partners, whose willingness to listen to us, to listen to our story and to acknowledge our unique and special circumstances has brought us to this point. The outcome is an endorsement of the approach by Government and a clear recognition of the specific challenges we face.

The Government has robustly defended the Good Friday Agreement process throughout these negotiations so far, making clear that, as a legally binding international treaty, it provides a unique political and constitutional framework on the island of Ireland. We know that it was vital to provide reassurance that Brexit does not in any way undermine any provision of the Good Friday Agreement. In that context, we secured an acknowledgement that, in the event of



change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, brought about in accordance with the principles of the Good Friday Agreement and the principle of consent, the entire territory of such a united Ireland would be part of the EU. I have been consistent in my view that now is not the time to have such a referendum on Irish unity and that the conditions set out in the Good Friday Agreement for the calling of a Border poll do not currently exist. However, the statement agreed by the Heads of State and Government of the 27 EU member states, which will be recorded in the minutes of the European Council, was hugely important in order to dispel any doubt or uncertainty that the UK exit from the EU would negatively impact on this crucial constitutional provision of the Good Friday Agreement.

With the EU guidelines now adopted, including the language about our unique concerns, the Government last week published a comprehensive document which reflects the findings of our extensive preparatory work and consultations on the island of Ireland and at EU level, and outlines the positions and priorities that will underpin our engagement in the Brexit process over the next two years. At EU level, the more detailed draft negotiating directives are now being discussed at ministerial and official level with a view to agreement at the General Affairs Council on 22 May. These are again broadly positive from Ireland's point of view. Mr. Barnier and his team have shown that, in addition to being open to meet with us, they are also listening very closely to what we have to say, which is why I welcome the Ceann Comhairle's decision today. This is vitally important if the negotiations are to proceed in a calm and ordered way, and end up at a point which is as good as possible for all sides.

As I said in my statement to the Dáil on Tuesday, it became very clear at an early stage of our analysis that the economic impacts of Brexit would be severe. With the EU guidelines now adopted and work under way on the directives, the Government will intensify its focus on the economic implications of Brexit, including on domestic policy measures to protect it from the potential negative impacts of Brexit, to reinforce the competitiveness of the Irish economy, which is so important, and also to pursue all opportunities that might arise. In this context, I should also mention Ireland will bid, along with other countries, for the two EU bodies currently located in London - the European Medicines Agency and the European Banking Authority. I believe that Ireland offers an excellent opportunity as a location for these.

As I have said before, and in conclusion, Brexit is a British policy. It is not an Irish policy and it is not an EU policy. For its part, Ireland remains committed clearly to the European Union and its future. Indeed, a poll published on Europe Day this week showed that 88% of Irish people agree that Ireland should remain a member of the European Union. Participation and membership have transformed our country, as Mr. Barnier is well aware, over the last 40 years. We are committed to playing a strong and active role as a member of the EU 27. We are well prepared and will continue to ensure that our concerns and priorities are reflected in the European Union negotiating position as it evolves, and that we work closely with our EU partners, the EU institutions and Mr. Barnier and his task force, towards a strong and constructive future relationship with the United Kingdom.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** On behalf of the Fianna Fáil Party, I would like to thank Mr. Barnier for taking the time to address this session today in such an effective and comprehensive manner. His eagerness to listen and respond to the concerns of Ireland continues an approach seen during the many important roles which he has held in the French Government and in the European Commission.

This is not an occasion where we can or should get into the deep specifics of the negotia-

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tions. I am confident that Mr. Barnier's team and the European institutions will continue to be accessible for constructive discussions. Fianna Fáil sees this exchange of views as an opportunity to link our approach to these negotiations with the fundamental issue of Ireland's place within Europe. This is not just about the outcome of the Brexit process but also about how we see the long-term future of relations on this island, with our neighbour and with our partners in the European Union. No one underestimates the scale and complexity of the task Mr. Barnier faces.

Last year's referendum was an ugly and negative affair. No amount of warm words and earnest statements can cover this up. There was no strategy for implementing Brexit. There was just a strategy for winning the vote through a combination of bluster and aggression. It was not a positive assertion of sovereignty; it was the culmination of 30 years of an increasingly corrosive scapegoating of Europe and immigrants for the homegrown divisions in British society. Those false prophets who promised an economic bonanza are now claiming that they have defied the critics and Britain is booming. This is nonsense. Public borrowing and taxes have already risen since the vote and the long-term damage to employment and standards of living is becoming ever more certain. Fundamentally, the narrow Brexit majority represented a rejection of strong rule-based co-operation between states. It asserted a narrow vision of sovereignty that developed in the 19th century and directly led to the two bloodiest wars in history.

Let there be no doubt about where Ireland stands. We want nothing to do with a backward-looking idea of sovereignty. We remain absolutely committed to the ideals of the European Union. We see the Union for what it is - the most successful international organisation in world history. While the extremes of right and left join together to attack it, they have no credible response to the fact that every member state has secured a significant rise in living standards and a Continent once defined by conflict is today defined by co-operation. The Union is flawed, but its successes are undeniable. There are certainly different views here. There are those who buy into the anti-EU narratives, but the overwhelming majority of the Irish people are determined that Ireland's future will remain a European future.

It is important for Mr. Barnier to understand that Ireland's approach to Europe and to international commitments is deeply intertwined with our national identity. Last year, we marked 100 years since the most important founding event of our Republic. The nationalism of the Rising of 1916 and the Proclamation of Independence is a generous one. It defines the Irish nation as having diverse elements and seeks a State which works with others. Our republican Constitution, adopted in 1937 at a dark moment in world affairs, goes even further and explicitly recognises the role of international law and co-operation. We have no nostalgia for a lost empire and no wish to assert superiority over others. We have never sought to stand apart from the world, jealously guarding the right to say "No" to everything. We fully understand that only when states work together can they secure peace, progress and prosperity for their people. That is why we will remain active and constructive members of the European Union.

The most basic challenge for the agreement that Mr. Barnier will negotiate is to protect the essential contract that underpins the European Union. This essential contract is that all members must have the opportunity to achieve progress. When new circumstances arise, new responses must be possible. If Europe ceases to be a vehicle of hope then it ceases to have a purpose. Brexit represents a dramatic disruption which poses permanent challenges which are unevenly spread within the Union. The referendum result and the British Government's decision to opt out of both the Single Market and the customs union are deeply destructive for businesses and communities on this island. The only long-term option for us is to take a more

ambitious and urgent approach to diversification and innovation. Even more importantly, we must now find a way of fixing the damage caused to the agreed approach to building a lasting reconciliation in the place of sectarian division.

I remember well that when a Government of ours approached Mr. Barnier concerning EU support for the peace process, he was active, engaged and generous. We have no doubt that he will do everything possible to honour the clear support for the Good Friday Agreement contained in the negotiation guidelines. It is important to emphasise that the Good Friday Agreement establishes structures and policies which are intended to evolve over time. It is not a question of having either the *status quo* or reunification. In fact, the real spirit of the Agreement is to be found in provisions which facilitate greater shared action over time in important practical matters. The text incorporated in our Constitution permits this Parliament to delegate functions to bodies which are not solely under its direction. Tourism, trade and European Union funding programmes are three of the areas already covered. Whatever is agreed in the negotiations, it must do nothing to undermine the ability to permit shared cross-Border institutions and action to develop.

On the issue of wider trading arrangements, Fianna Fáil considers that the maintenance of a close trading relationship with the United Kingdom is in Europe's best interests. Given the scale of disruption Brexit will cause even with a soft border, a form of special status should be considered in the negotiations. There are many models of special economic zones across the world which could be adapted here.

The rights of long-term residents of and persons born in Northern Ireland to Irish and therefore European citizenship must be protected fully in the final agreement. We welcome the reassurances provided in this regard as well as the commitment to maintain the common travel area. As Mr. Barnier knows, the commitment is referenced currently in Protocol 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The protocol is, in essence, meaningless once the UK leaves the EU because Ireland's rights are defined in terms of its relations with another contracting partner to the treaty. This raises what may be a fundamental practical issue in the negotiations, namely, the status of the agreement which emerges.

The guidelines limit what measures can be agreed to those which conform to the existing European Union order and laws. It is, frankly, very difficult to see how issues having to do with Northern Ireland or the common travel area, as well as essential economic adjustments, can be addressed without some new EU legal measures. We hope Mr. Barnier will be willing to recommend new legislation where it is necessary. However, where a doubt exists in relation to the treaties, the final agreement should provide a means to adopt new measures, following Council unanimity, such as an enabling provision to facilitate new North-South arrangements.

The ratification process for the British agreement is similar to the one adopted for accession treaties. It should be possible to agree minor treaty provisions at the same time where such provisions are essential to meeting basic objectives. This session does not allow me to go into more detail, but my party will forward to Mr. Barnier specific proposals once the negotiations are under way.

On this very day 45 years ago, the votes were counted in our accession referendum. An overwhelming 83% voted in favour of membership. The campaign saw the promotion of many scare stories about how Europe would reduce Ireland to a barren wasteland, build nuclear plants at every crossroads and parade missiles down our main streets. The people, however, chose to

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place their faith in the positive vision of Ireland growing and prospering within the European community of nations. Our European path was, in fact, the final public contribution of our great revolutionary generation. As a 16 year old boy, Seán Lemass escaped from home in order to fight in the 1916 Rising. As a politician a decade later, he read and was inspired by the idea of a united Europe proposed by the great French statesman, Aristide Briand.

When Seán Lemass became Taoiseach at the end of the 1950s, he called for our country to open itself up. His Governments laid the foundations for sustained progress, central to which was securing agreement to apply for membership of the then European Economic Community. He told us that while there would be challenges, the opportunities would be far greater. This father of our European path and of modern Ireland died on 11 May 1971, exactly one year before the result of our accession referendum was announced. His legacy is as important today as it has ever been.

Europe faces a moment of great uncertainty and, in many ways, of fear. There is no positive side to Brexit. If, however, we look to our shared history, we will see that we have come through many difficult times before. If we remember the core ideals of the Union, we will get through this process and secure for another generation the promise of shared progress and prosperity among the nations of Europe.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** Céad míle fáilte, cuirim fáilte - bienvenue - roimh an Uasal Barnier go hÉirinn, go dtí Baile Átha Cliath, agus chuig an Oireachtas. Tá súil agam go mbeidh cuairt fhaisnéiseach agus shuimiúil aige. Is mise an Teachta Gerry Adams agus is uachtarán Shinn Féin mé. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I welcome Mr. Barnier's presence and his remarks and I would like to tell him a wee bit about the party. Sinn Féin is an Irish republican party. It is an all-Ireland party and it has the largest group of Irish MEPs in the European Parliament. Sinn Féin members include TDs, MLAs, Senators, MPs, MEPs and local authority members. It has a significant mandate and is the only party which is substantially organised across the entire island.

Sinn Féin is opposed to the partition of Ireland. Ours is a united Ireland party and we want an end to British Government involvement in Irish affairs. We are working for the unity of all the people of the island based on equality, respect and reconciliation. We believe absolutely in the core values of equality, liberty and fraternity and that the foundation of these values is in the 1916 Proclamation. Like others, Sinn Féin has played a central role in the development of the peace process, the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements. We helped to bring about and engaged in the international efforts which ended conflict on this island, not least those of the European Union which has been a critical partner for peace over the past 20 years. For those who were previously denied the right to work peacefully for a united Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement commits the governments to legislate for that if the people consent.

Sinn Féin campaigned against Irish membership of the EEC in 1973. Since then, every European treaty has taken further powers from the Irish State. Sinn Féin wants a different type of European Union. We want a social Europe which promotes peace, demilitarisation, economic and social justice, international solidarity and greater democratic accountability. Today's European Union is wedded to neoliberal policies which have created widespread hardship as austerity, deregulation and privatisation have undermined the social function of states and the rights of citizens and workers. As Mr. Barnier acknowledged in his remarks, people across the EU are increasingly uncomfortable with this state of affairs and this discomfort has assisted the growth of far right parties which exploit people's fears. Brexit is a consequence of that.

During the Brexit referendum, Sinn Féin campaigned for a remain vote in the North. It is clearly not in the interests of the people of this island, whatever their background or views, to have one part of the island outside the EU while the other part is inside. Mr. Barnier values the peace process and the Good Friday agreement. He has worked for peace going back to the time of John Hume and David Trimble. I am sure he is aware that any EU agreement which violated an international treaty, which is what the Good Friday Agreement is, would contravene EU treaty obligations.

Brexit is not only an issue for the North. It will adversely affect the entire island if we let it. As such, it is vital that its challenges are met on an all-island basis. As Mr. Barnier and the Taoiseach acknowledged in their remarks, it is clear that Brexit will have a serious and detrimental effect. It is already having this effect on Irish jobs and businesses, in particular in the agriculture and agrifood sectors.

The aim of the European Union, if I may say so, should be to prevent a land frontier between the European Union and Britain on the island of Ireland. That should be the key objective and the priority. To achieve this, we have advocated that the North be afforded designated special status within the European Union. We also believe that Ireland should have a veto on any agreement reached between the European Union and the British Government that does not include this position. Designated status is the best and only way to ensure that the entire island of Ireland will remain within the European Union. I commend this proposal to Mr. Barnier. It is an imaginative solution that addresses the complexities of the problem. It does not affect the constitutional status of the North. That will be changed only by a referendum.

Designated special status within the European Union is the position endorsed by this Dáil. It is the position of this Parliament. It is endorsed by the majority of MLAs in the Northern Assembly. It recognises that the people of the North voted to remain part of European Union. Is that just going to be placed to one side, ignored and driven over? It is a solution being advocated by representatives of Border communities, some of whom are here in the Visitors Gallery. I welcome them. The Tory Government in England should not be allowed to reject the vote in the North and set aside the decision of people there. It should not be allowed to drive the North out of the European Union against the democratic wishes of citizens.

Designated special status for the North within the European Union is not about a hard Brexit or a soft Brexit; it is about the best interests of our economy, our peace process and our people. It is also a democratic imperative. It is about retaining the freedom of movement of goods, people and services on the island of Ireland. Any restriction whatsoever on freedom of movement would represent a hardening of the Border. Believe me, this will severely damage social and economic cohesion. It would be unacceptable to those who live in Border communities but also to people right across our island. Special status would ensure the North's trading relationship with the rest of Ireland and the European Union, particularly in the context of business, tourism, the all-Ireland energy market, agriculture and the agrifood sector. All the relationships in this regard would be maintained. It is about allowing all of Ireland to remain in the customs union and the Single Market and under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. It is about maintaining the European Convention on Human Rights and it is about protecting the rights of citizens in the North who have a right to Irish citizenship and, therefore, to citizenship of the European Union. Access to EU rights and services across employment, workers' conditions, social security and health care must also be protected.

None of this is beyond our collective wisdom or ability. It will require political flexibility



from the European Union. Of course, the little Englanders may object. Let me remind Mr. Barnier and them that they are looking for special arrangements with the European Union for themselves. There are already unique arrangements in place for other states. Therefore, the European Union has been flexible on these matters. There are different forms of integration and relationships for member states and non-member states. These include overseas countries and territory status, the European Free Trade Association and the separate customs union.

In light of the provisions for Irish unity in the Good Friday Agreement, the European Union should not diverge from these norms. Sinn Féin, unlike the Taoiseach, would like to see a referendum on Irish unity within the next five years. The immediate challenge facing the European Union and the people of Ireland, however, is how to meet the threat of Brexit. This is all about what kind of Ireland will emerge after Brexit. The only way to shape that positively is through special designated status for the North within the European Union. Merci beaucoup, Monsieur Barnier. I thank you for your presence. Go raibh míle maith agat. Go n-éirí an t-ádh leat. Míle buíochas.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** I am standing very close to our guest. I add my welcome and that of my Labour Party colleagues to Monsieur Barnier. Although my speaking time is very brief, I will use my proximity to him to emphasise the points I want to make. Mr. Barnier and I met many years ago. We were both environment Ministers. I know his commitment to the ideals of Europe. I also know he appreciates that the Brexit negotiating mandate is about our vital national interests and the vital interests of this island as a whole.

We have many concerns. We are an island off an island off the mainland of Europe. Inevitably, our geography must dictate our policies and our priorities. The negotiating guidelines, with their insistence on an orderly first-things-first approach, postpone until later consideration of what for us will be, in fact, most vital interests. To be specific, while the guidelines do recognise the special position of Northern Ireland, albeit with the real challenges that others have already underscored, they do not sufficiently recognise the unique challenges that would be faced by us south of the Border. For us, Brexit means that the idea of achieving the European Single Market has been set back a generation. That is the undeniable truth. To put it bluntly, once the United Kingdom leaves, it will no longer make any real, practical day-to-day sense for us to talk about membership of a true single market in regard to the goods and services that we import and export. Talk of the Single Market will, from our perspective, revert from being almost a practical reality that we almost had fully achieved towards something more closely resembling an aspiration.

As I stated earlier, the basic reason is one of geography. There will, in future, be a large chunk of non-Europe between us and the rest of the Union. Brexit will impact on every aspect of our economic, social and cultural lives. It will impact on every network to which we are already connected. This includes, in physical and infrastructural terms, our transport, energy and telecommunications networks. Therefore, it will impact on Ireland's ability to adhere to EU law. It will affect, for example, our ability to comply with the EU directive requiring a single EU market in electricity since our only power connections are with Northern Ireland and Britain. Another directive requires EU-wide television without frontiers when most of our external television programming comes from Britain.

EU directives are based on internal markets, common markets and interconnectedness. They are designed to cover enormous territories and immense distances and to bring them together as one. They are not designed to leapfrog over other countries operating completely



distinct and separate rules, to which we in Ireland will nonetheless remain truly tied in terms of geography, infrastructure, networks and trade. Our challenge after Brexit, therefore, is for Ireland to adhere to policies and laws that were designed for an internal EU market when we will find ourselves removed from direct access to that market, having few direct infrastructural connections and remaining connected instead to a country outside the Union. All these factors make Ireland's case unique in the negotiations Mr. Barnier is about to lead on our behalf. I hope the views expressed by Members in the few short minutes we have here and in the ongoing dialogue we will have with him will make sure that he will bring as effective as possible a conclusion in our interests.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** As a representative of the People Before Profit alliance and a socialist, I am a thorough internationalist, an implacable supporter of international solidarity and an implacable opponent of the racist and far-right forces that are now rising in Europe. I ask in all sincerity if we can trust Mr. Barnier with the issues of international solidarity or free movement of people as they pertain to Europe or to this country.

This week, 250 desperate refugees fleeing north Africa drowned in the Mediterranean because of the EU's fortress Europe policies. These are not free movement policies, rather they deny free movement to desperate people. Can we trust Mr. Barnier with international solidarity when Jean-Claude Trichet threatened to let off a financial bomb in Dublin if our Government even suggested burning the gambling bondholders who crippled our economy and whose activities inflicted cruel and vicious austerity on hundreds of thousands of our citizens? This has left us today with the legacy of the worst housing and homelessness crisis in the history of the State, a health service which has been savaged and incredible hardship imposed on some of our most vulnerable citizens. Even now the EU fiscal rules, of which Mr. Barnier was a significant architect, cripple our ability to deal with those problems. I do not trust the European Union to do a deal that will vindicate the needs and aspirations of the citizens of this country because it has failed to do so in recent years. Indeed, it has imposed similar hardships on countries like Greece, Spain and Italy.

If we are to give Mr. Barnier any credibility in his commitments today I would like answers to a few simple questions. Will Mr. Barnier guarantee - not consider - that Europe will not try to break up the free travel area between Ireland and the UK? Will Mr. Barnier guarantee that the European Union will not impose a hard Border between the North and South of this country? If the EU believes in democracy as it professes to do, will it give us a vote on the final deal in the negotiations between the EU and the UK in order that we can decide democratically whether we believe the best deal has been done? If Mr. Barnier cannot give those guarantees, frankly all the noble aspirations mean very little indeed. It is the failure to give guarantees and promises on democracy and rights and to vindicate genuine international solidarity that has caused the existential crisis the EU is now facing. The EU should address itself very quickly to that issue, if the dangerous forces that are rising in Europe are not to gain further advance.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Pringle.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Deputy Coppinger is to speak.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Boyd Barrett consumed all the time, I am afraid.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Everybody else went over their time.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** They did, and so did Deputy Boyd Barrett.

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**Deputy Bríd Smith:** That is very unfair. The Labour Party went over time.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputies should organise the time among themselves.

**Deputy Bríd Smith:** We timed everyone and they all went over time.

*(Interruptions).*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Let us not have a scene. Deputy Coppinger for a second then, please.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** I thank the Ceann Comhairle. Solidarity also must stand against the consensus expressed by Mr. Barnier and most of the other parties. The growing alienation against the EU - which Mr. Barnier has labelled “populism” - is actually largely a reaction to years of a neoliberal agenda within the EU that has favoured the interests of big business and banks against those of workers and the poor. EU directives, state aid rules and fiscal compact treaties are continually cited in this country to our successful anti-water charges movement, to striking Bus Éireann workers and to the thousands on the housing waiting lists here as reasons nothing can change. What Mr. Barnier represents actually has more in common with the Tories than he would have us believe. Both camps want bargain basement societies.

The issue of a hard Border is causing huge uncertainty and anxiety in Northern Ireland and we should just put an end to the idea. Nobody wants, and there is no requirement or need for, a hard Border. Speaking of borders, the Mediterranean has become a graveyard for thousands of people thanks to fortress Europe, which Mr. Barnier favours. It is a migration policy of which Donald Trump would be envious.

The big business-dominated agenda of the EU consistently undermines the standards of living of the majority in the EU. Today’s attempt at a neatly packaged consensus will be challenged by those of us on the left who seek to create a society where the needs of the millions, not the millionaires, are fundamental.

**Deputy Thomas Pringle:** I welcome Mr. Barnier to the Chamber today to engage with this committee of the Dáil and Seanad and to hear directly about our concerns surrounding the UK’s decision to leave the European Union and the negotiations that are about to take place on the future relationship with the UK. I believe the EU does not have a history of having at heart the interests of the Irish people in dealing with us in the past. Hopefully, through the negotiations around Brexit, an outcome can be achieved that will change that.

I represent the constituency of Donegal, which is the most northerly part of Ireland. Donegal has a land border of approximately 15 km with the rest of the Republic of Ireland. We stand therefore to be the most impacted region of Ireland from Brexit. My county has suffered from its isolation since the partition of Ireland after independence in 1921, and has only in recent years started to recover from that isolation. A hard Brexit, if it comes, will have a huge impact on the county. There are three main areas that could particularly be affected, which are the economy - and the fishing industry in particular - cross-Border workers and students, and the provision of health care. While an arrangement for trade will probably dominate the negotiations, access to fishing stocks is vitally important for the entire Irish fishing industry but particularly for the industry in County Donegal. Unfortunately, the EU does not have a good record when it comes to the treatment of Irish fishing, going back to when we negotiated to join the EEC, as it then was in the 1970s. It will be vitally important that access to fishing grounds is

negotiated alongside the trade negotiations that will take place. This is the only way to ensure the survival of communities that depend on fishing. As more than 35% of the Irish quota that Irish fishermen catch is caught in UK waters, the continued access for fishermen to the fishing grounds is vital. Indeed, the value of fish caught in UK waters is higher than the percentage would suggest, being almost 50% of the total value of our catch. The importance of a fair negotiation and outcome cannot be over-stressed for us.

There is a compelling case for special status for Northern Ireland after Brexit that will recognise that we will have the only land border with a UK jurisdiction and that the possibility of a future reunification, as has already been outlined, has been provided for in the Good Friday Agreement. Approximately 30,000 people cross the Border to work every day, and many more thousands of students are studying in the North. Maintaining the common travel area in order that these workers and students can continue to participate is vitally important for us. Donegal's isolation has meant we have suffered from under-developed health services and neglect in provision from successive Governments that have had a totally Dublin-centred model for the provision of services such as health. Just last year, a radiotherapy centre was opened in Derry city, part-funded by the Irish Government, to give access to cancer patients from Donegal within a reasonable journey time from their homes for treatment. The future relationship with Northern Ireland has to ensure bilateral arrangements such as these can continue to be developed for the betterment of all our citizens, North and South.

**Deputy Michael Harty:** I will not speak in French as it is not as polished as the Ceann Comhairle's. I want to say bonjour, Mr. Barnier, and welcome him to our Parliament, Dáil Éireann, on behalf of the Rural Independent Group.

This is a landmark occasion for this country as we, together with our European Union colleagues, enter negotiations on the UK's exit from the EU. These negotiations are as profound to Ireland today as those when we applied to join the European Economic Community almost 50 years ago. For Ireland, disentangling from our closest neighbour will be more difficult than for any other member state due to our common border and our common economic and cultural connections. Mr. Barnier's presence here today is a tangible recognition of the unique difficulties we face.

Our main concerns relate to the still delicate nature of the peace process underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement, the nature of the border between the UK and the EU on this island, the close trading relationships between Ireland and the UK and the free passage of people, goods and services. These are all critical to Ireland.

Our farmers tell us that Brexit presents the most serious economic threat to our agricultural sector, such is the large percentage of our high-quality exports which go to the UK. Border tariffs and customs, border checks and regulatory changes will cause serious restrictions on these exports. The negotiators must make every effort to secure favourable trading relationships between Ireland and the UK to avoid direct negative impact on our farm incomes. We must also find alternative markets in Europe and beyond for these goods and we request that Mr. Barnier assist us in that regard.

As we will have a new land border with the EU, this needs special attention from Mr. Barnier in his negotiations with the UK. Ireland needs to know what this future border will look like in every scenario of British withdrawal. Economics may well dictate if a united Ireland will be the best option for all on this island. Only time will tell. We are a resourceful people

and we must not be sacrificed to a hard Brexit because of our geography or because of our small size. Brexit makes us think of new opportunities and new potentials and there are new potentials in relation to developing our maritime and deep-sea ports. For instance, we have the asset of a number of uncongested deep-sea ports in the Shannon Estuary which should act as a trans-shipment location for the distribution of goods throughout Europe and should offer freight and cargo companies shipping to the United States preclearance facilities similar to those enjoyed by air passengers flying from Shannon.

From a Brexit point of view, this is an opportunity to attract industry from right across Europe which is exporting into the United States and would benefit companies throughout the region. United, we will negotiate the best strategy for both the EU and the UK. There is nothing to be gained by making life difficult for everybody. After all, the UK will still be our nearest neighbour after these negotiations have been completed.

We must appeal to people's hopes and not to their fears, and in adversity there is also opportunity. A united Europe can deliver a more prosperous Union where Ireland plays a prominent role.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We now move to Deputy Róisín Shortall who is sharing time with Deputy Eamon Ryan.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** On behalf of the Social Democrats, I warmly welcome Mr. Barnier to our Parliament today. In regard to Ireland's geography and small population, our big fear is that our voice will not be heard clearly at the negotiating table. Our fate is inextricably linked to that of the UK and for that reason it is essential that our concerns and interests are kept to the fore. Many Irish people continue to have to endure the cruel reality of austerity arising from the bank bailout. Ireland was forced to carry a burden for Europe on that occasion and we have no desire to do so again. If there is one message that might be taken back from today's engagement, I hope it is that the preservation of unrestricted free movement across the island of Ireland and between Ireland and the UK for people, goods and services must remain. This is vital to Ireland's national interest but it is also vital to the success of the European project, a project which must encompass all citizens of Europe working together to achieve a strong, equal, fair, economic and social Europe.

**Deputy Eamon Ryan:** Nous vous souhaitons bonne chance dans votre travail. Je suis avec les Verts. I am with the all-island Green Party, proud, united, part of the European Green Party and best of mates with our Green Party colleagues in Scotland, England and Wales. We are very glad that in the first phase of these talks, Mr. Barnier has agreed that one of the three conditions we have to work on is the border issues, particular to Ireland and Gibraltar, but we are concerned about our Border issues here. I am glad that is front and centre stage. I have one request about how Mr. Barnier might approach the work that he has to do. As Mr. Barnier said, we are in a unique position that we are very close to Britain. We are closely connected to Whitehall and as a country we are well-regarded in each capital and in every European council, that is my experience. We should use this position, this place we have that is close to Berlin as well as Boston. Let us use this position.

Mr. Barnier said today that one of the things we should seek in these negotiations is ongoing co-operation in innovation, research and particularly on climate change. I agree. We can play a role in this. I ask Mr. Barnier to start straight away, perhaps in informal but flexible, safe space talks, which we can provide here in Ireland, to start working with the British imme-

diately. What are the regulations on which we can agree in order that we make this necessary great climate change leap? What are the digital rights that we have to agree in the information revolution that is taking place? What are the standards in the transport revolution that we need to do to improve our urban system and our quality of life in every way? Those three issues are not contentious. They are some of the critical issues that we will have to get right here. Do not wait until the Brexit bill or all the other citizens' rights are all sorted. Let us start straight away on those areas of co-operation. Doing that will be good for all of Europe. We can test it here, as Mr. Barnier said, in the first phase when we think about the Border relations between Ireland and the UK. That is what is good and strong about the European Union, that is against the race to the bottom, and that will raise all our spirits in the Union and set a future of which we can be proud.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We now move to the illustrious members of Seanad Éireann. I call Senator Michael McDowell.

**Senator Michael McDowell:** Monsieur Barnier est vraiment bienvenu en Irlande aujourd'hui. He has pointed out that the issues Ireland faces call for imaginative and flexible solutions. Many things have been said here today with which I agree, and others with which I disagree, but it is up to the Irish now, North and South, to participate in the process of devising imaginative and flexible solutions and coming up with models for consideration by Mr. Barnier. Some people here have impugned the good faith of the European Union institutions and perhaps Mr. Barnier himself. I have trust and confidence that he does appreciate our needs and that he will be open to imaginative and flexible solutions which address the real problems in Ireland if we come forward with them to him. No institution or politician has a monopoly on imagination or flexibility. What we need in Ireland is a coalition of the willing, North and South, including all aspects of civil society and all economic interests, to try to ensure the implementation of Brexit is done in a manner which is least harmful to all the people of Ireland, North and South, over the next few years. We in the Senate are conducting an examination of these issues. We think the common travel area will survive and is no threat to general principles of European law such as freedom of movement but there are other issues, as Mr. Barnier mentioned. There is a need to have, as far as possible, free trade in goods with Britain, as a close partner of the EU after its exit, as well as the need to have, as far as possible, the free movement of goods on this island and between these islands.

I draw to the attention of Mr. Barnier that prior to the reunification of Germany, East Germany was given a special status for the export of goods to West Germany. It was regarded as inside the customs union in the days of the European Economic Community. That is the kind of flexible arrangement we should aspire to if we can. It has been suggested, in particular by Deputy Adams here today, that Northern Ireland should effectively remain within the European Union. It is not a practical possibility but there is a great opening to explore special status for the island of Ireland and its two parts without going that far. I agree with the Taoiseach that we do not need a Border poll now as part of the process of sorting out where Ireland should be in the short or medium term. I agree with Deputy Martin very strongly that the all-Ireland institutions contemplated by the Good Friday Agreement provide a framework, for instance, for a new agrifood dispensation on this island and a new cross-Border body to deal with all of those kinds of things. I will finish on that note.

Mr. Barnier has said there is a need for flexible and imaginative institutions. The Irish people have to play their part in developing those responses to Mr. Barnier's challenge.



**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** On behalf of the Civil Engagement group in Seanad Éireann, I thank Mr. Barnier for his presence here today and for the special and appropriate consideration he has given to Ireland in advance of the forthcoming negotiations. The four fundamental freedoms must be protected, in particular the freedom of movement, which is of great importance for Irish citizens and all those who live on this island.

Although the question of the Border has already been discussed, I will raise one further point on it. Can Mr. Barnier assure us the EU will not lead to any militarisation of Ireland's Border with the UK, as we have seen in other EU external borders, or attempt to press ahead with any further development of an EU military that could risk or compromise Ireland's neutrality, something of deep and valuable importance to our State and citizens and to our international role in peace building? Others have spoken about the importance of our peace process. One crucial pillar of the Good Friday Agreement was the co-guaranteeing of human rights. The Human Rights Act in the UK was brought in alongside the Good Friday Agreement to underpin that commitment. It is therefore of great concern to see the UK recently speak of repealing that Act. Will Mr. Barnier, in his negotiations, seek to protect this important Act, ideally linked to the European Court of Human Rights, or, at a minimum, demand a commitment to full and ongoing equivalence on human rights standards?

On the wider question of standards, it is vital that European and international principles and policies that have been agreed in areas such as employment, equality and the environment do not face a roll-back in this process. A race to the bottom is a race nobody wins. On the environment, the prospect of the UK moving away from common rules and commitments could seriously endanger collective progress in this area and could risk direct environmental damage for those of us in Ireland. How does the Commission see negotiations with the UK proceeding in the area of environmental regulation and what leverage can be employed to secure them? How, for example, will we guarantee that any deal with the UK preserves the principles and measures of sustainability which currently underpin the Common Fisheries Policy? Access to and transit through UK territorial waters will also be vital for Irish fishermen. It is an area Mr. Barnier understands with great depth. Others have spoken of transport, telecommunications and energy but there are other areas of important co-operation between the two parts of the island, as well as between Ireland and the UK more broadly. There are areas of practical co-operation, many of which predate or operate outside and alongside the EU's remit. Practical co-operation in areas such as education, health and social protection, particularly pensions, is of immense importance to the real lived lives of our citizens and must not be lost in these negotiations.

We, in Ireland, will be watching the forthcoming negotiations with great attention. They will also be watched by many across Europe and across the world at a time of great difficulty following periods of austerity and conflict. The nature and tone of the negotiations will send an important message about Europe and about what Europe is. It is vitally important the message is not simply of a Europe that is strong or a Europe of the economy but that it is a Europe grounded in social rights and social cohesion and which works for peace, values all its members, values democracy and listens to civil society. The message should be of a Europe committed to all its citizens, all who live in it and to positive leadership and partnership in our shared world as we face the challenges ahead. We entrust Mr. Barnier to convey that message.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank all Members for their considered contributions. I now call on the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad, Senator Denis O'Donovan, to make the concluding remarks.



**An Cathaoirleach:** Gabhaim buíochas le Monsieur Barnier as an aitheasc a thug sé don dá Theach anseo inniu. I thank Mr. Barnier for his address today to the Dáil and the Seanad. The potentially adverse political, economic and social consequences of Brexit for Ireland have been highlighted by the Houses and by the Irish Government both before and after last summer's referendum in the United Kingdom. Mr. Barnier's presence here today has afforded a valuable opportunity to hear directly the concerns of the Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas. His direct engagement with the Members of a national parliament of the EU also speaks to the strength of his commitment to the spirit of treaty principles. The outcome of the Brexit negotiations will very much set the framework for the foreseeable future for decision-making for Ireland and for all of our fellow member states of the European Union. We, in Ireland, fully appreciate the enormity of the task Mr. Barnier and his team face as they negotiate the withdrawal of the United Kingdom. We wish him well in his work and we hope he will be strengthened in his endeavours by the goodwill of the Members of these Houses. We look forward to continued engagement with Mr. Barnier on this crucial issue in the period ahead. As he conducts the negotiations and seeks to achieve the best outcome for the European Union we ask him to keep in mind the particular situation we have here in Ireland. *Merci beaucoup.*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** That brings our special sitting to a conclusion.

The Seanad adjourned at 1.10 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 16 May 2017.