

## **Note of the ENTERPRISE FORUM and RETAIL FORUM**

### **Joint Meeting - Tuesday 29 December 2020**

- The Tánaiste welcomed attendees and outlined the agenda for the meeting, which will focus firstly on an initial reaction to the Agreement, followed by a discussion on how prepared business is for the changes that are going to take place from the 1<sup>st</sup> January.
- The objective of Government from day one was to protect Ireland from the worst potential outcome which included avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland, making sure that our position in the Single Market was secured, ensuring that citizens' rights North and South were protected including in terms of the Common Travel Area.
- The Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland is in place now but the detail of that is going to be complicated over the next couple of months.
- The focus of the last year or so was trying to make sure that we avoided tariffs and quotas on exports from Ireland into the UK and vice versa. It appears that we have achieved that with this agreement.
- There will need to be more agreements down the line. There may also be disputes down the line around issues such as level playing field, state aid and fisheries, but we will deal with them as they arise. We will work to ensure we have a strong and good relationship bilaterally with the UK and maintain the alliances and goodwill we have built up within the EU.
- The Tánaiste touched on some areas of the agreement, highlighting the market access provisions, tariff and quota elimination and simplified customs procedures. He noted there will be an MOU on equivalence in financial services which provides opportunity for Ireland. The mobility of citizens will be similar to CETA when it comes to the recognition of professional qualifications.
- The Government is assessing the draft BAR regulation, published Christmas day, and we will be making a strong case based on the impact on us in terms of volume of trade with the UK and the fisheries outcome for a proportionate share of the Fund, noting also the volume of Exchequer funding already spent on existing measures or ring-fenced for Brexit contingencies as they arise.
- The Tánaiste drew attention to the new €100m Scheme for the food processing sector, which was announced on 28<sup>th</sup> December, in recognition of the sector's unique exposure to the impact of Brexit. The new Capital Investment Scheme will be managed by Enterprise Ireland and will open for applications in January.
- Minister English noted the positive aspects of the deal specifically around tariffs and quotas. There is still a lot of work to do but we are well-prepared and making progress on any outstanding issues.
- Minister Troy highlighted that the agreement is hugely positive for the country, considering the volume of trade between Ireland and the UK. We now have a new relationship with the UK which we will build upon going forward. Minister Troy stated that we must now look at how we can maintain and grow our trade with the UK but also to move our product to a wider market, diversifying into new markets around the globe.
- Philip Kelly, Assistant Secretary, informed the group that one of the areas in which there may be some complications is the myriad of committees and working parties needed to implement, monitor, and evolve the agreement. There will be a whole range of guidance required to work out in practice how things on data, procurement etc. are going to work out. There is likely to be several months mining into the agreement to produce guidance and to produce operational frameworks to give effect to the deal.
- Declan Hughes, Assistant Secretary, provided an update on enterprise supports. He welcomed the dedicated chapter on SMEs in the agreement and noted the commitment on both sides to ensure SMEs can navigate through the complexities in the new arrangement. The EU will lead on providing this guidance to the SME community and we will share this with members as soon as possible. The range of supports currently available through the Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland remain available to help with transition.
- The Tánaiste called on members to provide their initial reaction to the agreement. Areas of concern included:

- The lack of a formal implementation period.
  - The readiness of Holyhead Port.
  - The importance of a functioning traffic plan at Dublin Port to avoid bottlenecks.
  - How the Landbridge will operate in coming days.
  - The exposure of SMEs to additional costs around importing products.
  - Access to direct routes to mainland Europe.
  - The increased cost of using direct routes and potential supports.
  - The need for clarity around checks between GB to NI (DAFM noted there is a document from the Department of Agriculture in NI about the SPS checks in NI which covers GB to NI movements that DAFM can circulate).
- DTTAS provided an overview of the deal from a transport perspective. The agreement is positive. It doesn't give same level of seamless travel as we currently have but it does provide for the majority of our transport needs. Traffic plans in Dublin port are in place with the focus on trying to keep the port free moving. Details of the plan are available online. Regarding direct services, we have seen a big increase in capacity with additional services now operating by Stena and Irish Ferries and a new Rosslare to Dunkirk sailing with six services per week. These services provide much more substantial frequency and capacity. Whilst the Landbridge remains a concern, it is thought that we have suitable alternatives in place. DTTAS are asking businesses to look at supply chains and options now.
  - Revenue highlighted that even with the agreement, declarations are still required from 1<sup>st</sup> Jan. The key for avoiding delays at the port is getting the documentation right.
  - Enterprise Ireland informed the group that they will be focusing on making sure supports are available to help companies get up to speed with the new requirements. Additional supports and initiatives are planned to focus on the new relationship with the UK. The EI website is being updated.
  - DAFM noted the importance of the trade specific committee on SPS, which was echoed by members. The particular provision to go back and review SPS measures will play a key role and it is critical that the committee gets up and running as soon as possible. DAFM will be doing their absolute best to ensure delays are minimised but the seamless trading arrangements do not apply so some amount of delays must be expected.
  - SFI highlighted the opportunity for Ireland regarding the Erasmus scheme. Both in Horizon Europe and Erasmus there is a real opportunity for Ireland to lead and win. There is additional opportunity in the Agri food sector. The single largest investment area of venture capital globally in 2020 was in Agri food. The sector is transforming enormously, and the research area stands willing to help Ireland adapt to this opportunity.
  - Anne Coleman-Dunne (DETE Brexit Unit) provided an overview on consumer rights, noting that the Brexit Omnibus Bill covers duty free. With regards to consumer rights in general it is not possible to be definitive currently but there is positive language in the agreement about protection of consumer rights. The CCPC are at the fore with their consumer campaign.
  - Cathy Madden (DETE Communications Unit) noted that, from a business perspective there are two things to be aware of. Firstly, the papers today have ads for the various call centres which are operational over the critical few days ahead. The ads include contact details for Revenue, DTTAS, DAFM and DETE, should someone need urgent and immediate advice and assistance. The ads are available on the gov.ie website and will also run on social media over the coming days. Secondly, there will be three briefings over the next week held at the port by officials from DTTAS, Revenue, DAFM and the Gardai. The first briefing takes place tomorrow and will be a scene setter around things people will need to be aware of. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> January will see additional briefings and will be operational pieces around the port and how things are looking. In January, EI will be pushing out again their Ready for Customs Grant and, on consumer side, the CCPC will be running a new consumer campaign.

- The Secretary General informed the group that the feedback we get from forum is extremely important and stressed the need to continue this feedback, highlighting issues arising over the next few weeks.
- The Tánaiste thanked members for their attendance and inputs. He noted that it is inevitable there will be issues, but we will work to resolve them as quickly as we can.

Members of the Retail Forum (not listed) attended along with regular members of the Enterprise Forum as follows:

Leo Varadkar	Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise & Innovation
Damien English	MoS for Business, Employment and Retail
Robert Troy	MoS for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation
Giles O'Neill	Enterprise Ireland
Kieran Donoghue	IDA Ireland
Mark Ferguson	Science Foundation Ireland
Mark Redmond	American Chamber of Commerce
Ian Talbot	Chambers Ireland
Paul Kelly	Food Drink Ireland
Linda Stuart-Trainor	Food Drink Ireland
Simon McKeever	Irish Exporters Association
Ann Marie O'Brien	Irish Exporters Association
Danny McCoy	Ibec
Neil Willoughby	Ibec
Pat Ivory	Ibec
Neil McDonnell	ISME
Cormac Healy	Meat Industry Ireland
Duncan Graham	Retail Excellence Ireland
Arnold Dillon	Retail Ireland
Brian Donaldson	Retail Ireland
Tara Buckley	RGData
Elizabeth Bowen	Small Firms Association
Claire Hayes-Curtin	Department of An Taoiseach
Nigel Clarke	Department of An Taoiseach
Brian Murphy	Department of An Taoiseach
Nick Barwise	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Paul O'Hara	Department of Foreign Affairs
Eddie Burke	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
Ray Ryan	Revenue
Dr Orlaigh Quinn	DETE
Philip Kelly	DETE
Declan Hughes	DETE
Anne Coleman Dunne	DETE
Nina Brennan	DETE
John Hughes	DETE
Eugene Lennon	DETE
Fionna Hallinan	DETE
Cathy Madden	DETE
Mathew Lynch	DETE
Stephen Foley	DETE
Sandra Mullen	DETE
Helen Keane McDonagh	DETE
Helen Pyke	DETE
Siobhán Murphy	DETE

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