Section One: State of Play

UK Government Withdrawal Bill

The UK Government’s European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 31 January 2017. At the Committee Stage, the Government rejected more than a hundred Amendments and the Bill was passed unaltered by the Commons by 494-122, on 8 February. The Bill was then introduced in the House of Lords on 20 February 2017, with a two-day Second Reading debate. On 1 March 2017, the House of Lords voted by 358 to 256 to amend the Bill.

The amendment proposed by the Lords requires the government to introduce proposals within three months of Article 50 to ensure EU citizens in the UK have the same residence rights post-Brexit. An official from the Department for Exiting the EU said: “We are disappointed the Lords have chosen to amend a bill that the Commons passed without amendment.”

The next step is a return to the House of Commons where the amendment may be included in the Bill or rejected. If the proposed amendment is rejected, the Bill will be returned to the House of Lords for further debate.

UK Government White Paper

On 2 February, the UK Government published a White Paper ‘The United Kingdom’s exit from and new partnership with the European Union’ The paper builds upon Prime Minister May’s Lancaster House speech, reiterating the UK’s desire to leave the Single Market and Customs Union, and to subsequently establish a ‘frictionless’ trade environment between the UK and the remaining Member States. The paper provides no specific insights on how this goal can be achieved.

The white paper also addresses potential legal conflicts arising from the UK’s decision to leave the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, noting that ensuring a fair and equitable implementation of the UK’s future relationship with the EU requires provision for dispute resolution. The paper refers to the recent EU-Canada
Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) which established a ‘CETA Joint Committee’ that supervises the implementation of the agreement.

In keeping with Prime Minister May’s speech, the White Paper also contains significant references to Ireland. Chapter 4 of the paper, entitled Protecting our strong and historic ties with Ireland and maintaining the Common Travel Area, notes the strong links between the UK and Ireland, and references the Common Travel Area, saying: “We want to protect the ability to move freely between the UK and Ireland, north-south and east-west while protecting the integrity of the UK’s immigration system.”

The paper also includes a detailed Annex on UK-Ireland issues. In this Annex the UK Government commits to the Good Friday Agreement and to maintaining a frictionless land border. The Annex also notes the UK’s desire to continue strong cross-border cooperation on policing and justice.

Valletta Summit

The Heads of State or Government of the EU27 met in the Maltese Capital, Valletta, on 3 February 2017 for a discussion on the future of the Union after Brexit. The discussions built upon the political reflection launched immediately after the UK voted to leave the European Union on 23 June 2016 and continued at an Informal summit meeting in Bratislava on 16 September 2016. The leaders will make a Declaration at a summit in Rome on 25 March marking the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Rome Treaty. The session followed a more formal meeting of the leaders of the EU28 which addressed the external aspects of the on-going migration situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Malta Declaration was agreed upon by leaders of the EU28.

Section Two: The Evolving Debate

Northern Ireland Election Results

The Northern Ireland Assembly elections took place on 2 March. The results were as follows: the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), 28 seats, Sinn Fein (SF), 27 seats, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), 12 seats, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), 10 seats, the Alliance Party, 9 seats and Independent and others, 5 seats. There was a turnout of 64.78%, the highest since the election which followed the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

The result leaves no party with an outright majority, compounding the political uncertainty left in the wake of the EU referendum, in which 56% of the Northern Ireland electorate voted to remain in the EU. The parties now have three weeks to reach an agreement to restore the power-sharing executive. Failure to do so could result in a return to Direct Rule for the first time in a decade. Reacting to the result, the Northern Ireland Secretary, James Brokenshire, said: “There is a limited window in which the Assembly and Executive can be restored. Urgent discussions need to take place to ensure inclusive devolved government resumes.” Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Charles Flanagan, insisted that “the onus is on the parties themselves” to ensure that devolution takes place.

Tony Blair

The former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, made a major intervention on 17 February with a speech at Bloomberg – where David Cameron first signalled his intention to hold a referendum on EU membership – which was characterised as ‘a rallying cry to opponents of Brexit, urging them to fight Theresa May’s plans to take Britain out of the EU.’ In this speech he claimed that, although he respected the will of the British people, they voted “without knowledge of the true terms of Brexit.” He argued that as these terms become clearer the British people should have a right to change their minds.

This intervention was met by mixed reactions, with some pro-Remain commentators suggesting that it was the right message, but perhaps the wrong messenger. Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg said that he “agreed with every word” of Mr Blair’s speech. Meanwhile, Former Conservative leader and prominent Leave campaigner, Iain Duncan Smith, called the speech “arrogant”, and dismissed the claim that the British people were misinformed about the terms of Brexit.

Another former Prime Minister, John Major also made a notable intervention appearing to echo the sentiments of his successor. Speaking at Chatham House, he demanded those concerned about Brexit be allowed to speak up, denying they are “opposing the will of the people”, and instead stating “they are the people.”

Moody’s Investors Service report on Ireland

On 2 March, the credit ratings agency Moody’s, released a report in which it said that Ireland is the “European country most exposed” to the risks posed by Brexit and changes to US tax policies. The report claimed that Ireland would be particularly exposed should the UK fail to agree a comprehensive free trade deal with the EU.
Failure to do so would result in trade between the two being conducted under World Trade Organisation rules, which would mean the imposition of tariffs on goods and the emergence of other barriers to trade.

The report conceded that Ireland may benefit from increased foreign direct investment as a result of Brexit, but warned that Ireland faces a number of capacity constraints that could limit its ability to take advantage of these opportunities. The availability of housing to buy or rent was seen as a significant factor.

Dáil Motion on Special Status for Northern Ireland

In Dáil Éireann on 15 February 2017, Sinn Fein introduced a Motion calling on the Government to “negotiate for Northern Ireland to be designated with a special status within the EU and for the whole island of Ireland to remain within the EU together.” Fianna Fail tabled a Motion along the same lines which was accepted by Sinn Fein and advanced as a single text.

For the Government, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Charlie Flanagan, sought to amend the Motion, specifically rejecting the concept of ‘special status’. He argued that “the cold reality is that, notwithstanding the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, concepts and terms like ‘special status’ give rise to serious concerns for other EU partners about precedents that might be set elsewhere.

The Dáil rejected the Government text by 84 votes to 59 and then adopted the Sinn Fein-Fianna Fail Motion by 77 votes to 65.

Seanad Éireann Special Committee

On 23 February, Seanad Éireann agreed a Motion to establish a Special Select Committee on the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union to consider the implications for Ireland of such withdrawal, with particular reference to the implications for the Irish economy of hard and soft exit scenarios. The Fine Gael Senator, Neale Richmond, will chair the Committee.

Government meetings and visits

As part of the Government’s efforts to raise awareness of Irish issues in the negotiations, Taoiseach Kenny travelled to Warsaw on 9 February, for a meeting with the Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydlo and to Brussels on 23 February for meetings with the Belgian Prime Minister, Charles Michel, and the Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker. He also attended the Valletta meetings of EU Heads of State or Government on 3 February 2016 and met the Maltese Prime Minister, Joseph Muscat for a bilateral discussion on Brexit.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Charles Flanagan, T.D., travelled to Brussels on 9 February for meetings with European Commission Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, and with key members of the European Parliament. He then visited Helsinki to meet the Finnish Foreign Minister, Timo Soini.

The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Frances Fitzgerald, T.D., met the UK Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, for discussions on the Common Travel Area. Meanwhile, the Minister for Health, Simon Harris, T.D., met the EU Commissioner for Health, Vytenis Andriukaitis, to discuss the possible move of the European Medicines Agency from London to Dublin. The Minister of State for European Affairs, Dara Murphy, T.D., visited Bratislava, Vienna and Budapest for Brexit-related talks on 20-25 February 2017.

Visitors to Dublin

Brexit concerns have also brought a growing number of visitors to Dublin.

The First Vice President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, met the Taoiseach and addressed the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Affairs on 20 February. On 22 February the French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault met the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs Minister and addressed the IIEA. The President of the Bundestag, Norbert Lammert, visited the Houses of the Oireachtas, met the President, the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and addressed the IIEA on 23 February. The House of Commons’ Exiting the EU Committee, led by Hilary Benn MP, visited Leinster House on 23 February for discussions with the relevant Oireachtas Committees.

Oireachtas Committee Visit to Brussels

A delegation from the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, led by its Chairman, Michael Healy-Rae TD, visited Brussels on 7-8 February 2017. The delegation held twelve meetings with, among others, the EU Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, the European Parliament representative on Brexit, Guy Verhofstadt MEP, Commissioner Phil Hogan, Ireland’s Permanent Representative to the EU, Declan Kelleher and Irish MEPs and MEPs from other EU states.
All-Island Civic Dialogue

The second plenary session of the All-Island Civic Dialogue took place at Dublin Castle on 17 February 2017, following a series of fourteen consultative events – attended by more than 1,100 people - on key sectors such as agri-food, energy, transport, tourism, education and training and the Good Friday Agreement. The forum was again facilitated by IIEA Director General, Tom Arnold.

House of Commons on Common Travel Area

On 1 February 2017, the House of Commons briefly discussed the Common Travel Area with the Northern Ireland Secretary, James Brokenshire, stating that maintaining the common travel area is one of the Government’s 12 priorities in negotiating exit from the EU, “while protecting the integrity of the UK’s immigration system.”

Welsh White Paper

The Welsh Government, jointly with Plaid Cymru, published a White Paper – ‘Securing Wales’ Future’ – setting out Wales’ key strategic interests and priorities as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

Section Three: Relevant Research and Events

Recent IIEA Events

Ship of Fools? The UK Sets Sail for Brexit, Tony Barber, Europe Editor and Associate Editor, the Financial Times. 23 January, at 12.45p.m.

In this address to the IIEA, Tony Barber argued that Theresa May’s government will no longer be able to evade necessary choices between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Brexit, and that these decisions may expose the internal contradictions of the political and electoral coalition that rejected EU membership in June 2016. Mr. Barber analysed the possible impact this will have on British politics in 2017.

Ireland at the Heart of a Changing European Union, An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, T.D., 15 February, at 3.00p.m.

As a small country with one of the most globalised economies in the world, Ireland is profoundly influenced by changes on the global political and economic stage. In this address to the IIEA, Taoiseach Enda Kenny examined the challenges posed by these volatile times, with particular reference to the UK’s EU withdrawal, and discussed how Ireland should respond to the rapidly changing global environment.

Brexit, Ireland and the EU, Phil Hogan, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, 16 February, at 6.30p.m.

In his address to the IIEA, Commissioner Hogan discussed the future of Ireland in the EU, and the EU’s role on the global stage in the post-Brexit era. He also discussed the need to defend European achievements and values in the face of growing populism.

The Need for Europe, Jean-Marc Ayrault, French Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development, 22 February, at 2.30p.m.

Minister Ayrault’s address, entitled: The Need for Europe, was part of the Institute’s EU27 Perspectives lecture series. The UK’s forthcoming EU withdrawal negotiations, the rise of populist parties in Member States, the continuation of the migration crisis, and prolonged instability in Europe’s neighbourhood will impact on key elections in the EU this year. The elections in the Netherlands, Germany and France will have considerable implications for the future course of the EU. Against this backdrop, Minister Ayrault argued that the need for Europe as a countervailing force is compelling.

Democracy and Populism, Professor Norbert Lammert, President of the Bundestag, February 23, at 11.30a.m.

The European Union finds itself in uncharted waters. In 2017, populist parties will contest important elections in Germany, France and the Netherlands, which come at a time of profound uncertainty in the wake of the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union. Against this backdrop, Professor Lammert, drawing on experience gained during his distinguished parliamentary career of nearly forty years, reflected on the implications of and possible responses to this highly pertinent situation.

Third party research

European Parliament

As many as twenty-one reports on aspects of Brexit have been produced by the Committees of the European Parliament. These reports are expected to serve as the basis of a resolution to be adopted in April setting out the position of the European Parliament as negotiations get underway. The Committee on Constitutional Affairs report on ‘Brexit and the European Union: General Institutional and Legal Considerations’ examines the political and institutional steps taken, or to be taken, both by the UK and the EU in the context of the Brexit
vote and discusses the possibilities of a future relationship between the Union and its departing member. It also examines the potential for institutional progress that opens with the departure of the UK.

French Senate

The French Senate, on 15 February 2017, produced a major Information Report on the Process of Exit of the UK from the European Union. The report raises the issue of the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, arguing that the Common Travel Area is under threat which could call into question the peace process and calling on the EU to find solutions which will underpin that process.

Centre for European Reform

The London-based Centre for European Reform has produced a series of studies and research papers on key aspects of the Brexit process and debate. These cover the emerging deal, the role of parliamentarians in the coming talks, the 'Brexit Bill', the future of the transatlantic trade consensus, free movement, populism, European defence and the impact of Brexit on the EU itself.

Continental Think Tanks

Brexit is a priority concern for many think tanks and research centres across Europe. Among recent reports and studies are: ‘Will Brexit Revive the Franco-German Engine?’ (EPC Brussels); ‘After Brexit: It’s a brave new world’ (CEPS, Brussels); ‘Brexit: implications for the EU and the World’ (German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin); ‘Is Brexit an opportunity to reform the European Parliament?’ (Bruegel, Belgium); ‘Brexit and the EU Budget: Threat or Opportunity?’ (Notre Europe, Paris).
23rd June 2016 The UK votes to leave the EU
24th June 2016 David Cameron signals his intention to resign as UK Prime Minister
26th June 2016 European Council appoints Didier Seeuws as head of Brexit Taskforce
27 - 28th June 2016 June European Council
13 July 2016 Theresa May becomes the new Prime Minister of the UK
9th September 2016 European Parliament names Guy Verhofstadt as the European Parliament’s Brexit negotiator
18th September 2016 Bratislava Summit of 27
1st October 2016 Michel Barnier starts role as Head of EU Commission Brexit Task Force
13th October 2016 Nicola Sturgeon announces new Scottish independence bill
20 - 21st October 2016 October European Council
3rd November 2016 High Court Judgement on Article 50
6th December 2016 Michel Barnier holds first press briefing on Brexit, notes Northern Irish issues
8th December 2016 Sinn Fein calls for Northern Ireland to have designated special status within the EU after Brexit
14 - 15th December 2016 December European Council
3rd January 2017 Resignation of Ambassador Ivan Rogers, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the European Union
9th January 2017 Martin McGuinness Resigns as Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive
17th January 2017 Theresa May outlines the objectives and principles for the UK’s withdrawal
24th January 2017 UK Supreme Court Ruling on Article 50
2nd February 2017 Informal Meeting of EU27 as part of Bratislava roadmap
9th February 2017 House of commons final vote on Article 50 Bill
1st March 2017 House of Lords votes to amend Article 50 Bill to preserve rights of EU citizens in UK
2nd March 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly elections

[See full interactive timeline here]
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<tr>
<td>7th March 2017</td>
<td>House of Lords expected to approve Article 50 Bill on this date</td>
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<td>9-10th March 2017</td>
<td>European Council summit</td>
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<td>15th March 2017</td>
<td>Dutch Parliamentary Elections</td>
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<td>25th March 2017</td>
<td>60th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome</td>
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<td>31st March 2017</td>
<td>Article 50 to be triggered before this date</td>
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<td>May 2017</td>
<td>Theresa May’s Great Repeal Bill to be introduced</td>
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<td>7th May 2017</td>
<td>French Presidential Election run-off</td>
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<td>22-23rd June 2017</td>
<td>European Council Summit</td>
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<td>24th September 2017</td>
<td>German Parliamentary Elections</td>
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<td>19-20th October 2017</td>
<td>European Council Summit</td>
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<td>14-15th December 2017</td>
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<td>22-23 March 2018</td>
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<td>28-29th March 2018</td>
<td>European Council Summit</td>
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<td>October 2018</td>
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<td>December 2018</td>
<td>European Council Summit</td>
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<td>31st March 2019</td>
<td>Possible deadline for UK withdrawal</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2019</td>
<td>European Parliament Elections</td>
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Section Four: Background Material and Further Reading

Background Material

Enda Kenny TD  Address by the Taoiseach at IIEA, 15 February 2017. (www.taoiseach.gov.ie)

Enda Kenny TD  Speech by the Taoiseach at the Second Plenary Meeting of the All-Island Civic Dialogue on Brexit. Dublin Castle, 17 February 2017. (www.taoiseach.gov.ie)

Dail Eireann  Report of Joint Committee on European Union Affairs Visit to Brussels, 7-8 February 2017. (www.oireachtas.ie)

Seanad Eireann  Motion on establishment of Special Committee on Withdrawal of United Kingdom from European Union, 23 February 2017. (www.oireachtas.ie)


Dail Eireann  Private Members Motion on Northern Ireland and the UK withdrawal from the EU, 15-16 February 2017. (www.oireachtas.ie)

UK Government  European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill, 26 January 2017


UK Government  White Paper: The United Kingdom’s exit from and new partnership with the European Union. (www.gov.uk/government/publications)


House of Commons  Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. Oral Evidence on Future of the land border with the Republic of Ireland, 1 February 2017. (www.data.parliament.uk)


French Senate  Interim Report on the process of exit of the UK from EU, February 2017. (www.senat.fr)

Tony Blair  We need a movement which stretches across Party lines. Speech at Bloomberg London, 17 February 2017. (www.tonyblairofficer.org)

Brendan Howlin TD  Address to IIEA, 2 February 2017. (www.labour.ie)

Minister Paschal Donohoe  Address to IIEA, 30 January 2017. (www.per.gov.ie)

Commissioner Phil Hogan  Address to IIEA, 16 February 2017. (www.ec.europa.eu)

Politico  13 Things you didn’t know about Brexit. Politico, 15 February 2017. (www.politico.eu)

Hansard  Article 50 debate in House of Commons, 24 January 2017. (www.hansard.parliament.uk)


The UK in a Changing Europe  A Successful Brexit: Four Economic Tests. (www.ukandeu.ac.uk)


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SWP (German Institute for International and Security Affairs)  Brexit: Implications for the EU and the world.  SWP, November 2016.  (www.swp-berlin.org)

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Dahrendorf Analysis.  What impact would a Brexit have on the EU?  Dahrendorf Forum Debating Europe, March 2016.  (www.dahrendorf-forum.eu)

Kevin O’Rourke  ‘No special deal possible to stop the return of Border control.’ Irish Times, 20 February 2017.  (www.irishtimes.com)

Tom Healy  The Future of Europe, the UK and Ireland – A Christian Response.  Talk to Church of Ireland European Affairs Working Group, 25 January 2017.  (www.ireland.anglican.org)

Further Reading

Tim Shipman  All Out War: The Full Story of How Brexit Sank Britain’s Political Class.  William Collins


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