



British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly: Committee B (European Affairs)

SECOND INTERIM REPORT ON EUROPEAN SECURITY COOPERATION AFTER BREXIT: PORT SECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Background to this interim report

Committee B of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly is undertaking an inquiry into European security cooperation after Brexit. We are considering:

- The potential impact of Brexit on cooperation between the UK and the EU on security matters, including cross-border policing cooperation, the fight against organised crime, counter-terrorism and cyber-security;
- Future security cooperation between the UK and Ireland in the context of Brexit; and
- The future direction of EU security policy, including implementation of the European Agenda on Security, and the implications of these developments for future security cooperation between the UK and EU.

As part of this inquiry, we took evidence in Dublin and Belfast on 4 and 5 October, hearing from a wide range of experts on European and UK-Irish security cooperation. We subsequently produced [a short interim report](#) on this subject, which was adopted by BIPA at the London Plenary on 23 October 2018.

On 28-29 March 2019, Members of the Committee undertook a visit to Dublin and Holyhead to take evidence on port security and infrastructure in the context of Brexit. We visited and toured Dublin Port, met with officials from the Dublin Port Company and Irish Ferries, and took the Dublin Swift crossing to Holyhead, visiting the Captain's Bridge while on deck. We then toured Holyhead Port and met Alan Williams, the Port Services Manager. We are grateful to all those who contributed to this visit and gave evidence to our inquiry.

Our findings and interim conclusions

- We received a fascinating presentation from representatives of the Dublin Port Company at their headquarters, outlining its strategic plans for the future and its contingency preparations for a 'no deal' Brexit.
- Dublin Port is a mid-sized port and a key point on the UK-Ireland landbridge. The port has experienced strong growth in 'Ro-Ro' (roll on, roll off) shipping, rather than 'Lo-Lo' (lift on, lift off) trade over the past few years as new European routes open up to replace land-bridge traffic. UK-Ireland ferry routes (to Liverpool and Holyhead) are its key source of goods traffic, but other routes are being developed further e.g. Zeebrugge and Rotterdam.
- The port is heavily constrained by its location, with previous attempts to reclaim land for expansion blocked by strong local opposition. The port makes excellent use of the space available to it, with 113,00 tonnes of cargo processed per hectare per annum, compared with 59,000 in Rotterdam and 44,000 in Barcelona.
- The port is expecting to handle 77m tonnes of cargo by 2040, at which point it will reach peak capacity. It is terminating leases or buying back land from other operators to maximise its capacity. Although this increase had been planned as part of the port's strategic Master Plan (reviewed in 2018), Brexit has intensified the need to adjust the port's workings. At least €30 million has been spent on buying back property in preparation for Brexit. The port is also actively developing its infrastructure, with the overall investment plan expected to cost €1bn.
- As part of its Master Plan and developments for Brexit, the port is moving its non-core elements to a site near the M50 orbital motorway and Dublin Airport, described as the "inland port". This is facilitated by the Dublin Port Tunnel, which is a key part of Ireland's national infrastructure.
- The port has run two Brexit workshops for state agencies, shipping companies and hauliers, to encourage them to prepare for a possible 'no deal' UK exit from the EU. A key concern is getting goods processed and shipped out of the port, to avoid wasting precious storage space. The port has developed several new areas in conjunction with the Office of Public Works (OPW) in order to prepare for Brexit. An integrated ferry terminal is being developed, as well as new inspection sites for agriculture and customs checks, which will be required by the EU in the event of a 'no deal' Brexit. With space being at a premium, the port needs to manage its existing infrastructure very carefully infrastructure and needs to utilise available space and work around existing tenants.
- We were told that there remains a huge amount of unknowns about Brexit, and other moving parts in the process. For example, there are currently only 50 customs clearance agents in Ireland, and it is estimated that this will need

to increase by 500%, with capacity to operate on a 24/7 basis. Given UK and Irish commitments relating to the border, port officials noted that North/South agricultural checks may need to take place elsewhere, so the port will need to have the capacity to allow for this.

- Dublin Port's officials emphasised that, with a 'no deal' Brexit, the EU's rules on importing agricultural and food products from third countries would add greatly to congestion and delay. They noted that, even with a deal, sample checks may be required which could still add significantly to current turnaround times for customs processing, resulting in added costs to both to the port and its users.
- **We were impressed by the level and extent of Dublin Port's contingency planning for a possible 'no deal' Brexit, which has been developed in close cooperation with relevant government partners. With the exception of the recruitment of customs officials, the port appears well prepared for all eventualities.**
- **We note that a significant amount of the additional infrastructure put in place for a 'no deal' Brexit will be integral to the port's growth plans, regardless of the type of Brexit that takes place. Nevertheless, we regret that preparations have been required that may subsequently prove unnecessary, if the UK's future relationship with the EU allows for the free flow of goods between the UK and Ireland without additional checks.**
- Dublin Port kindly hosted a meeting with Irish Ferries, at which we heard about the company's own preparations for Brexit, before setting sail for Holyhead. The company expressed concern about the uncertainty surrounding the future UK-Ireland relationship, and particularly about the risk of any regulatory differences between the North-South land border and the East-West sea border and how this would affect trade routes/flows. Representatives also expressed concern about the possibility of Brexit resulting in the imposition of additional checks for ferry passengers, which would have a significant impact on turnaround and boarding times.
- The company has reacted to demand by increasing the number of sailings from Dublin to Cherbourg since this route was launched in 2013. It is introducing new vessels for this route and for Holyhead.
- Irish Ferries and Stena Line have a 50/50 split on the Dublin/Holyhead route. Despite the competition, they have focused on working together to prepare for Brexit, through the British Chamber of Shipping in the UK and the Irish Chamber of Shipping in Ireland.
- **We regret the significant uncertainty being experienced by UK-Irish ferry companies. Regardless of the outcome of Brexit, it is essential that they are**

well-supported to continue operating effectively and profitably on this vital route between the UK and Ireland.

- Following a very comfortable journey to Holyhead and a visit to the Captain's Bridge, we met Holyhead's Port Services Manager, Alan Williams, and briefly toured the port. The port is run by Stena Line, and provides berthing and handling facilities for a range of vessels and commercial operations. There is a strong security presence at the port, with visible Border Force facilities and large radiation detectors.
- The UK Government's position is that it will impose no additional checks on goods entering the UK from Ireland in the event of a 'no deal' Brexit. As a result, there was a significant contrast in the approach to Brexit planning at Holyhead, compared with Dublin. Holyhead Port also has growth plans, with three new berths in preparation and plans for a cruise ship berth.
- In the event of a 'no deal' Brexit, Holyhead will be asked by Dublin to check paperwork before embarkation. It is predicted that this could add 30 seconds to the processing times, which could cause additional traffic at peak times. The Welsh Government is preparing contingencies for lorry parking and stacking in the event of delays.
- We discussed the absence of passenger name record (PNR) checks on ferry passengers, which are required of all passengers flying between the UK and Ireland. **We are concerned about the lack of PNR data on ferries, which might be helpful to the UK and Irish law enforcement agencies. We will explore this issue in further detail during our next visit, and consult experts in the UK and Ireland about the desirability of introducing compulsory PNR collection in future.**
- In light of Holyhead's role in delivering Irish freight to mainland Europe via Dover, there was also a brief discussion regarding competitor routes to the EU in the event of a 'no deal' Brexit, such as Dublin to Cherbourg. This is not cause for concern within Holyhead, because the route to Cherbourg is so much longer than the landbridge crossing via Dover.
- **We are grateful to all those who gave evidence and hosted us on our visit to Dublin and Holyhead, which was a fascinating insight into port preparations for Brexit. In light of the contrasting positions of the UK and the EU on additional checks in the event of a 'no deal' Brexit, it is inevitable that contingency preparations in Dublin are a lot more extensive than in Holyhead. Nevertheless, the impact on Holyhead would not be 'nil', and we call on the UK Government to ensure that all British ports have the support they need to thrive in the event of a hard Brexit.**

- **In light of our visits to Dublin, Belfast and Holyhead, we will conclude this inquiry by taking evidence in London on UK-EU security cooperation post Brexit.**