

Email from Simon Coveney T.D in response to the Committee Invitation of 24th October.

Date Received: 19 November, 2019

Dear Ms. McGoldrick,

The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Coveney T.D., has asked me to thank you for your invitation to attend a meeting of the Belfast City Council Brexit Committee, along with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, The Rt. Hon Julian Smith.

Due to prior commitments on the dates suggested, the Tánaiste regrets that he is unable to accept the invitation to contribute to your discussions on the impact of the Revised Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, and Brexit more generally.

The Government of Ireland welcomes that an agreement has been reached between the EU and UK negotiating teams on a revised Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration on the future relationship, and that this has been endorsed unanimously by the European Council.

We hope that the extra time provided by the recent extension will be used to ratify the Agreement. It is a good deal, which meets our objectives including protecting the Good Friday Agreement, avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland and protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Customs Union. Both sets of negotiators have worked long and hard to achieve this decisive progress, with flexibility and compromise shown by both sides. A no deal outcome, in particular, is in no one's interests.

As you will of course be aware, a UK General Election has been called for 12 December. We await the outcome of these elections, and look forward to working closely with the new Government.

Ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement and endorsement of the Political Declaration will provide much needed certainty and, through the transition period it provides, gives time and a solid basis for negotiations on a close and comprehensive future relationship between the EU and the UK.

You and colleagues may be aware of the Tánaiste's recent visit to Belfast on 23 October, during which he delivered a speech at the Belfast Chamber of Commerce. Those remarks may be of relevance and interest to the Committee and can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/speeches/speeches-archive/2019/october/speech-for-tanaiste-simon-coveney-td-belfast-chamber-of-commerce.php>

Even with an agreement, it is still the case that the UK is leaving the EU and this will bring change. We will continue our preparations for all scenarios, including the risk of no deal Brexit on 31 January 2020.

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In this regard, the Government has produced general guidance for citizens, which may be of use for your discussions, on the potential impact of Brexit on business and daily life. This is regularly updated and can be found on our 'Getting Ireland Brexit Ready' site:

<http://www.gov.ie/brexit>

The Government has also produced a guide for business 'Getting Your Business Brexit Ready- Practical Steps' which you may also wish to consult:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a7ba02-brexit-info/?referrer=/brexit/>

This guide highlights the practical steps all businesses- large or small- should take now to prepare for the UK's departure from the EU and minimise the impact of Brexit on their business. This information is aimed primarily at businesses in the South, however will be of use also to Northern Irish business.

Further, InterTrade Ireland (ITI) operates a helpful Brexit Advisory Service for businesses North and South, helping companies prepare for Brexit through a range of supports and services, including funding and an online learning tool.

ITI's 'Bitesize Brexit' Service can be accessed here:

<https://intertradeireland.com/BitesizeBrexit/>

We would also emphasise that both the Irish and UK Governments have committed that the Common Travel Area (CTA) will be maintained in all circumstances. The CTA allows Irish and British citizens to move and reside freely in either jurisdiction, enabling access to a range of associated rights and privileges in each other's countries. This will continue after Brexit.

Should you have any further or more specific queries, we would be happy to discuss at official level.

The Tánaiste has asked me to convey his best wishes for a successful meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Brosnan  
Private Secretary