



European Chamber of Ireland



Represented by Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey

Report on the Visit of the European Chamber delegation to Brussels. 8th - 9th March 2017.

1. On Wednesday 8th March a delegation from the European Chamber of Ireland visited Brussels as part of an important Brexit engagement mission. The specific purpose of this two-day trip was to ensure that key EU decision-makers understood the challenges Brexit will present for businesses operating in Ireland. The Chamber delegation comprised of sixteen members from a variety of leading companies in Ireland and was led by Dr Jack Golden, the President of the European Chamber and formerly a director at CRH, and Mr. Ralf Lissek, the CEO of the German-Irish Chamber of Commerce.
2. The delegation's first port of call was a meeting in the Irish Embassy with Ambassador Declan Kelleher, the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the EU, and Mr David Brück, Senior Policy Advisor on Brexit at the Office of the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the EU. Ambassador Kelleher and Mr Brück gave the delegation a detailed briefing of the steps being taken by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Ireland's diplomatic service to ensure that the other EU member states were fully aware of the dangers that Brexit posed to Ireland. A useful discussion took place on the points that the delegation could most productively raise in the various meetings that would occur over the course of the two-day visit to Brussels.
3. The delegation travelled to the Berlaymont Building, the official headquarters of the European Commission, to meet with the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Phil Hogan. The purpose of this meeting was to present the Commissioner with a report authored by the German-Irish Chamber of Commerce on Brexit. This report warns that Brexit is likely to create significant job losses in Ireland, damage growth and harm the country's trade. The Commissioner undertook to read the report and he informally spoke individually to members of the delegation about issues of concern.
4. The delegation next met with Irish MEPs Brian Hayes, Mairead McGuinness, and Sean Kelly in the European Parliament. The delegation made the Irish MEPs aware of their concerns regarding the impact of Brexit on business in Ireland. The MEPs explained how Brexit was impacting on their work in the Parliament and gave an overview of the work they were doing to highlight Ireland's concerns with their MEP colleagues from other countries. The Irish MEPs suggested that it would be very useful if the Chamber delegation returned to Brussels after Article 50 had been triggered to let MEPs from other countries directly hear from Irish businesses. The Irish MEPs pledged to organise such a meeting.

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5. The delegation then returned to the Berlaymont Building to meet with the European Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources, Günther Oettinger. Commissioner Oettinger had previously received the report produced by the German-Irish Chamber of Commerce. The Commissioner complimented the report and he said that he was conscious of the deep concerns in Ireland. He pointed out that Brexit would also impinge severely on Germany's trade and that Britain's exit will mean changes to the EU budget. Commissioner Oettinger said that the Brexit negotiations will be complex, but there had to be a common EU wide position on the single-market. The Chamber delegation raised a number of concerns, including the fact that Ireland had a special case, as the remaining EU member that would be most affected by Brexit. Special emphasis was placed on the fact that Ireland would need the support of the EU or this could lead to anti-EU sentiment in Ireland. Commissioner Oettinger took these points on board and offered to meet with the Chamber on a future visit to Brussels to keep this dialogue open. He also said that he planned to visit Ireland in the spring next year and said he looked forward to seeing Chamber members at that time.

6. The delegation's final meeting of the day was with German MEP Reiner Wieland in the Baden-Württemberg State Representation Office. Mr Wieland is a member of the Christian Democratic Union, which is part of the European People's Party in the European Parliament. Since 2009 he has been one of the 14 Vice Presidents of the Parliament. Mr Wieland spoke about the damage that Brexit could do the EU. He expressed understanding of the issues of concern to Ireland, given the close economic relationship between the two countries, however, he also emphasised that it could be counter-productive to the interests of the EU if Britain was allowed to exit while maintaining the full benefits of membership. Mr Wieland said that in his view the plan going forward should be that rather than compromising on solutions for Ireland that instead there should be some compromise in negotiations with the UK. Chamber delegates stressed Ireland's special case and concerns about the need to better communicate the positives of the EU, especially given the influence of the largely Eurosceptic British media. Strong emphasis was also placed on the need to ensure that Brexit was not allowed to damage the peace process in Northern Ireland.

7. On Thursday 9th March, the Chamber delegation met with Mr Werner Langhals at the Office of the Permanent Representative of Germany to the EU in the German Embassy. Mr Langhals gave a presentation on the German Government's response to Brexit and explained how engagement would take place with the Task Force for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom under Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union. Chamber delegates briefed Mr Langhals on Brexit issues of concern to Ireland.



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8. The Chamber delegation travelled to the offices of the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. This Commission department is responsible for EU policy on agriculture and rural development and deals with all aspects of the common agricultural policy (CAP). The delegation was given a presentation by senior officials, Dr. Willi Schulz-Greve and Mr Jürgen Koehler. This informative presentation touched on the workings of the CAP, the complexity of trade deals that the EU are engaged in and matters arising from Brexit. Following the presentation, discussion predominately focused on the potential damage Brexit could do to the Agri-Food industry, which is a key sector in Ireland's economy.
9. The European Chamber delegation's final meeting was with Dr. Günther Lambertz, Head of the DIHK (the German Chamber Organisation) in Brussels and Mr Mathias Dubbert. The DIHK officials explained the work of their organisation as an intermediary between German business and the EU. They also set out the negative impact that Brexit would have in the short and long-term on German exports and imports to the UK. The European Chamber briefed the DIHK officials on Irish concerns.
10. In summary, the European Chamber's overall visit to Brussels allowed Irish business leaders to underline to key decision-makers in the EU real concerns about the difficulties faced by the island of Ireland arising from Brexit. The Chamber made clear in all of its meetings that Ireland, as the EU member state most connected with Britain, will suffer most from the market volatility and unpredictability that Brexit brings in its wake. The Chamber also stressed that Ireland needs the full support of its EU partners to mitigate the impact of the UK leaving the EU. The Chamber emphasised that Brexit will unduly cause Ireland significant collateral damage unless our special circumstances are recognised. Over the course of a number of informative meetings, the Chamber has now built good links for further dialogue on Brexit issues, which will continue to evolve in the period ahead. The Chamber received good feedback and encouragement in Brussels from interested parties to make a return visit in six-eight months time.

Anyone interested in being part of the next delegation to Brussels or becoming a patron of the European Chamber should contact Ralf Lissek at ralf.lissek@german-irish.ie or Nicole Jung at nicole.jung@german-irish.ie.