

Statement by Taoiseach Enda Kenny on the UK Vote to Leave the European Union

Good morning,

In recent months the Irish Government has advocated for our belief that the EU is better with Britain as a leading member and that Britain and Ireland have always worked together very well, as equal partners, within the EU.

I am very sorry that the result of the referendum is for the UK to leave the European Union. However, the British people have spoken and we fully respect their decision.

I want to assure the Irish public that we have prepared to the greatest extent possible for this eventuality.

There will be no immediate change to the free flow of people, goods and services between our islands.

We have previously set out our main concerns in the event of Brexit. These relate to the potential impacts for trade and the economy, for Northern Ireland, for the common travel area and for the European Union itself.

We have engaged in detailed contingency planning for the possibility of this result. Today at Government, we agreed to publish a summary of the key actions we will now take to address the contingencies arising from the UK's decision. Our primary objective remains to protect and advance this country's interests.

I propose to further brief leaders of the Opposition on those actions later today.

The Summer Economic Statement, published earlier this week, includes an assessment of the potential economic impact of a UK vote to leave the EU.

Ireland is a strong, open and competitive economy - our ongoing economic recovery is testament to our resilience.

We will continue to implement policies that prioritise economic stability, growth and job creation.

In the immediate term, the Minister for Finance and his officials are in close contact with the Central Bank, the NTMA and our international partners to ensure that any short-term market volatility is carefully managed. They will continue to monitor and assess developments.

The implications of this vote for Northern Ireland and for relations between North and South on this island will require careful consideration. These will be a particular priority for the Irish Government.

We will approach these issues in the same spirit of partnership that has underpinned the peace process and has transformed relationships on this island since the Good Friday Agreement.

I welcome the Prime Minister's clear statement that Northern Ireland's interests will be fully reflected in the British Government's negotiating position.

I will meet with colleagues from the Northern Ireland Executive on Monday week at the North/South Ministerial Council where we will have detailed discussions on how to best approach these new circumstances - acting in the best interests of all of the people of Ireland, North and South.

In the medium term a related concern is that of the Common Travel Area between Britain and Ireland.

For our part, the Irish Government will do our utmost in upcoming discussions to maintain the Common Travel Area and minimise any possible disruptions to the flow of people, goods and services between these islands.

We are also acutely aware of the concerns which will be felt across the Irish community in Britain. I want to assure them that the Irish Government will also have their interests in our thinking as we approach the forthcoming negotiations. It is important to remember that the position of Irish citizens within the EU will be unaffected.

The other key concern that the Government has expressed about a British departure from the EU relates to the impact on the Union itself.

Ireland will, of course, remain a member of the European Union.

That is profoundly in our national interest.

After more than 40 years of membership, we have built up strong bonds of partnership with all the other member states, and with the European institutions, that will continue to serve us well. We must now begin a period of reflection and debate on how we can renew the Union of 27 and equip it for the challenges ahead.

There will be a discussion of the next steps at the meeting of the European Council next week.

I will clearly set out our national position at that meeting, and I will ensure that our particular national interests are fully respected as we prepare to enter the next phase of negotiations.

These negotiations may not commence for some months yet, and will take a considerable amount of time to complete. In that regard, it is important to stress that Britain remains a member of the European Union until negotiations have been concluded.

We must take this breathing space...and use it wisely.

Finally, I would like to express my personal best wishes to Prime Minister Cameron.

We have worked closely together at a time of unprecedented warmth in relations between our two countries.

He has taken a decision this morning, which he believes is in the interests of his country.

I wish him all the very best for the future.

Finally I'd like to reiterate that while Ireland's future lies within the European Union, Ireland's strong and close relationship with the UK will remain.