

Brexit: The Case for the Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland

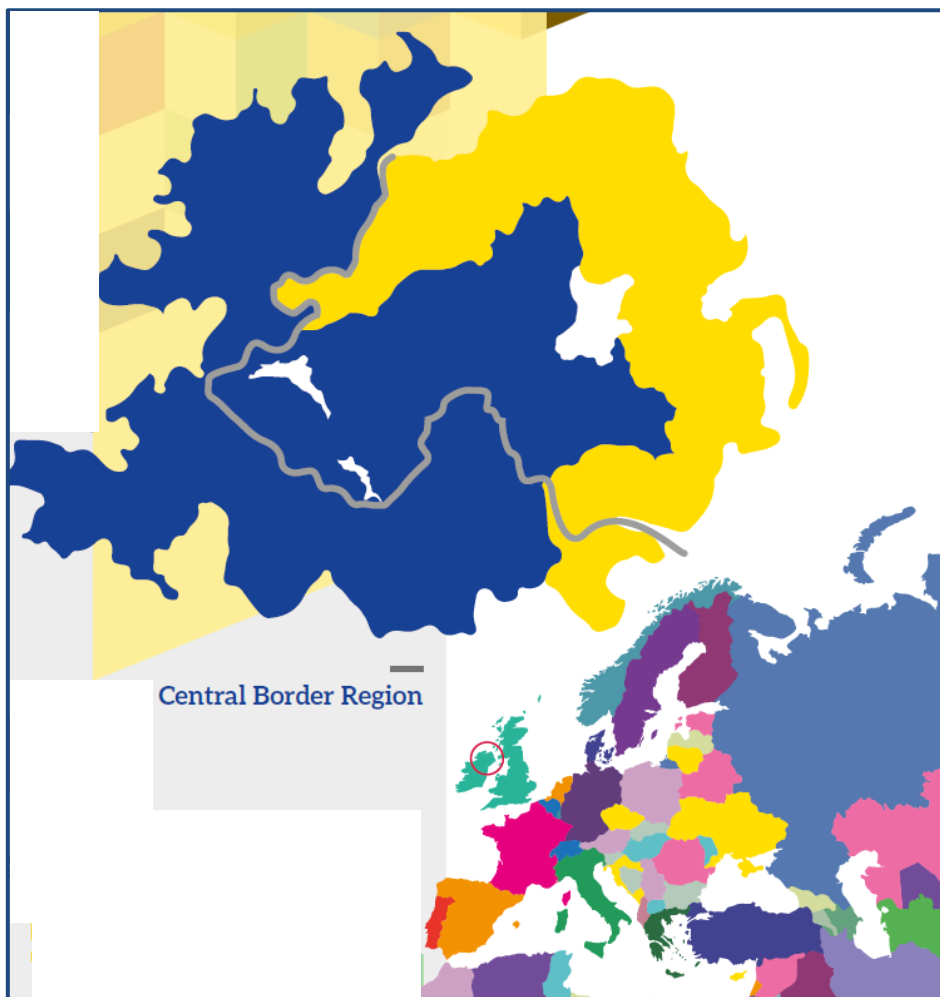
By Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) Ltd.

Introduction

Brexit represents a significant challenge to cross-border life on the island of Ireland. As a cross-border group representative of areas in both jurisdictions, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, we want to ensure that our Region, the Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland, can confidently address the challenges involved, and to help ensure that there is a viable and sustainable legacy for future generations.

The Council areas of the Region include, from Northern Ireland: Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon, Fermanagh and Omagh, and Mid Ulster; and from Ireland the County Council areas of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo.

Map: The Central Border Region in relation to Ireland and Europe



At this stage, and just as Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty has been enacted by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, there is still a lack of detailed information on how Brexit may affect the communities of our Region. There are however concerns that such a process may have profound implications for citizens and businesses. Irrespective of how individuals perceive Brexit, there is widespread agreement that all efforts must be taken to help withstand any negative consequences.

- Approximately 30,000 people cross the border to their place of work (Centre for Cross Border Studies & Co-Operation Ireland, 2016).
- 15% of the island of Ireland's population live in the border area (Hayward et al, QUB, 2016).
- In the programming periods 1994-2020 Northern Ireland will have accessed EU funds of €17 billion (Hayward et al, QUB, 2016).
- ICBAN has directly levered over £50 million in funding to the border area.
- Since 2008, the number of visitors per year travelling to the Republic of Ireland from Northern Ireland has almost trebled to 1.7 million, while the numbers travelling to Northern Ireland have remained at approximately 400,000 per year (Ireland 2040 Issues & Choices, 2017)
- In 2014, North-South cross-border trade in good & services has been estimated by InterTrade Ireland at approximately €6 billion.

Who is ICBAN ?

ICBAN stands for the Irish Central Border Area Network Ltd. We are a local authority-led cross-border development organisation. Overseen by a Management Board of elected representatives, our members represent cross-border, cross-party and cross-community interests.

We acknowledge and respect the differing viewpoints that our members have with regard to whether Northern Ireland and the UK should be leaving or remaining within the EU. We seek to advocate that the needs of this Region be considered and recognised during discussions and negotiations between governments and their institutions.

For over 21 years ICBAN has been promoting and working to improve cross-border co-operation in the area. Our work has transitioned from a period when the border area first embraced the peace process and efforts towards reconciling divisions, to current times where daily lives are able to function fluidly without any negative consequences of a border. As it is, people and businesses have become accustomed to not having a formal physical barrier of demarcation. However, Brexit creates a distinction between one area of the island remaining within the EU (Republic of Ireland) and another part of the island (Northern Ireland) preparing to leave the EU as part of the UK. This scenario runs contrary to the efforts of our cross-border

group, where we have sought to work across borders and to break down such barriers, even the borders of the mind.

Economic stimuli in the form of funding supports have helped arrest the challenges of being a peripheral border area removed geographically from the centres of decision-making in Belfast and Dublin. We should not take for granted what has been achieved in the communities of the border region. Stakeholders, such as our own group, bring together those with very different political and institutional viewpoints to develop common solutions to similar problems. We all collectively might take these arrangements for granted now, yet over 21 years ago this would not have been considered possible. It is proven that issues can be broken down and different points of view can be accommodated.

A negative outworking of a process such as Brexit could serve to undo all this good work in reconciling, relationship building, and working together.

The Key Asks and Needs for the Central Border Region

We therefore want the case of our border region to be considered in the related discussions and negotiations, acknowledging that the area includes communities that are within the UK and some that are in Ireland. We believe the following key issues need to be argued in the interests of this area and the communities served:

No disruption to daily life - There must be no change to the border arrangements between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. The border must be kept open to facilitate daily life and the ease of movement for goods, services and people.

Funding supports - EU funding has been vital for social and economic projects in the border region and the level of support must be maintained into the future. A long-term funding and investment plan is necessary (7-10 years duration), from whatever funding sources, to enable strategic planning and confidence in the Border Region, for example, an enterprise / development zone¹, with requisite business supports and tax incentives etc.

The pre-existing challenges to the border region must be addressed and not become side-lined by discussions and a focus on Brexit. These include many long-sought critical infrastructure and development programmes, which are needed now and must not be delayed, for example, key road corridor improvements such as A5/N2 and A4/N16, and in digital and broadband infrastructures.

Leadership - The border region presents a unique set of challenges and thus unique solutions must be found to help address these. Many of those involved in making the key decisions impacting on the border region will be far removed geographically and cannot appreciate the impact these decisions will have on local

¹ Initiative by Centre for Cross Border Studies, 'Towards a Border Development Zone' 2013
<http://crossborder.ie/towards-a-border-development-zone/>

circumstances. A high-level consultative group, representative of governments and key stakeholders in the region, should be convened and empowered to help highlight and support the challenges involved.

Protection of existing arrangements - The good relationships between both areas of the island, which are underpinned institutionally and constitutionally, must be maintained and built upon. Life will go on long after Brexit has been impacted and thus continuing good co-operation arrangements are needed.

About this document

This document is for the consideration and use of stakeholders and citizens engaged in the Brexit debate. This will be updated and adapted in light of future developments on the subject. We welcome further comments and discussions.

info@icban.com

0044 28 66340710

March 2017