UK MEP Charles Tannock has proposed holding a referendum in Northern Ireland as a way of resolving the impasse in the current Brexit talks between the EU and UK.

Speaking in the European parliament, Tannock said voters could be asked what sort of arrangement they prefer after the UK exits the EU in 2019.

A referendum could give the Northern Irish electorate the chance, if they so wish, of remaining in the
EU’s single market and/or a customs union, post Brexit.

Tannock, a Conservative deputy, was speaking at a Brexit workshop organised by the parliament's constitutional affairs committee on the implications of the UK’s EU withdrawal.

The ECR group member reminded attendees that, back in 2015, he had warned of the possible problems for the Irish border in the event of the UK pulling out of the EU.

“At the time I was rubbished,” he said.

On the possibility of a referendum in the North, Tannock, said, “If we truly believe in democracy then this is, I believe, the way of resolving this problem of the Irish border, post Brexit.

“Given the dangers of a no deal being struck between the EU and UK, and the current absence of a working government in Northern Ireland, this, I believe, is the way forward.”

Irish EPP member Mairead McGuinness also warned of the dangers for both the republic and Northern Ireland of failure to reach agreement in the talks, saying, “I stood on the border of both sides on Saturday with ordinary local people who all said they are absolutely terrified about the possible consequences of Brexit.”

She added, “What we are now witnessing, of course, are all the implications of Britain’s decision to withdraw from the EU.”

“Given the dangers of a no deal being struck between the EU and UK, and the current absence of a working government in Northern Ireland, this, I believe, is the way forward”

Charles Tannock MEP

She also appealed to Diane Dodds, an MEP for the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) politician in Northern Ireland, to help resolve the current impasse.

Following the recent inconclusive general election in the UK, the DUP effectively holds the balance of power in Westminster, said McGuinness who added, “I hope Diane Dodds, as a DUP MEP, can use her party’s incredible influence to urge the UK government to come up with a solution to the Irish border issue.”

“This is vital to address the real fears and uncertainties that are prevailing at the moment.”
McGuiness’ Fine Gael Party colleague, Brian Hayes spoke of the risks at stake in the event of a so-called “hard border”.

Hayes said, “We know from experience that where a hard border exists Paramilitarism and criminality takes over. We have to create an environment which ensures this does not happen.”

Another committee member, Diane James, an Independent British Eurosceptic MEP, told the meeting, “The Irish border issue is for Dublin and London to resolve, not the EU.”

James, a former Ukip member, said that “smart border technology” could be deployed to help address some of the problems under debate.

“What we are now witnessing, of course, are all the implications of Britain’s decision to withdraw from the EU” Mairead McGuinness MEP

“I would like to know why the EU is able to think this technology is suitable in other parts of Europe but not on the Irish border where it could be very usefully deployed,” she said.

UK Socialist member Richard Corbett asked, “I would like to know what is going to happen if there is no agreement between the EU and UK.”

The constitutional affairs committee hearing was presented with the findings of a major study on the issue by David Phinnemore and Katy Hayward, two academics at Queen’s University, Belfast.

The 60-page study, “UK withdrawal and the Good Friday Agreement”, commissioned by the European parliament, says the problem can only be tackled if both sides, the EU and UK, show sufficient “imagination and flexibility.”

It goes on, “Brexit puts the Good Friday Agreement at risk of deep fissures. Both sides need to be flexible and approach issues from the perspective of what can best ensure the agreement’s unimpeded implementation.”

It says, “This means maintaining as much of the status quo as possible in terms of the free movement of goods, services, capital and people.”

Meanwhile, a separate meeting in parliament was told of the “uncertainty” caused by Brexit to the science community.

“I would like to know what is going to happen if there is no agreement between the EU and UK” Richard Corbett MEP

Dr James Briscoe from the Francis Crick Institute, highlighted the “pivotal” role played by non-British scientists and technicians in the UK’s science and research sector. He pointed out that the Brexit referendum result had introduced a “climate of uncertainty.”

UK Tory MEP Julie Girling spoke of the role of the European Parliament in the Article 50 procedure, adding that while the UK government’s plans for the science sector are “full of good intentions” they “lack details.”

Girling also discussed how fellow MEPs from the continent view the UK and the Brexit debate, adding
that the UK seemed to have abandoned its pragmatic and ‘evidence-based’ approach to politics.

Speakers all agreed that the main concern for the science-sector, post-Brexit, is not financial but rather maintaining the networks and joint projects which the EU has encouraged through its programmes over the years.

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

Tags
Brexit [7]
Agriculture [8]
Economic Affairs [9]
Internal Market [10]

Categories
Agriculture and rural affairs [11]
Business and industry [12]
International Relations [13]
Media & publishing titles

Politics Home
The House
Parliament Magazine
Holyrood
Total Politics
Public Affairs News
Civil Service
World Technology
Training Journal
Dods Parliamentary Companion
Vacher's Quarterly The European Union and Public Affairs Directory

Dods events

Westminster Briefing
Digital Health & Care Scotland
MEP Awards The Skills Summit
Scottish Public Service Awards Public Sector Procurement
Summit Public Sector ICT Summit Cyber Security Summit Cyber Security 2017 Training Journal Awards

Partnership events

The Health and Care Innovation Expo
Civil Service Live Awards
Chief Nursing Officer for England's Summit
Women into