



John Carr; Flex International, Paschal McCarthy; President, IEA and Howard Knott, IEA & Fleet Publications.

As the days and weeks go by towards the day when British Prime Minister Teresa May formally launches the EU exit 'roller coaster', the new realities of the supply chains linking Irish manufacturers and importers with the outside world are really beginning to strike home. The overall picture is not a happy scene and the likelihood of a Trump inspired USXIT only seems to deepen the gloom.

The Irish Exporters Association (IEA) Supply Chain Group organised its second annual workshop event for the Western Region in Claremorris, County Mayo on 12 October. The large attendance drawn from all industry sectors located in the area were treated to a range of presentations and discussions that, taken overall, were a good balance of Good News and Bad News. The professionalism and dynamism of world leading exporter Allergan, described in the presentation by Paul Whoriskey, its Westport based Senior Warehouse & Customer Service Manager, was a real revelation, while John Carr of Flex International and a long-time IEA Council Member spoke about the establishment of the Association's Western Regional Council under his Chairmanship.

Ballina native and IEA President, Paschal McCarthy introduced the topic of BREXIT. He spoke about the challenges that it is already imposing on Irish traders and about the work

that the IEA is doing to help members meet these challenges. Howard Knott then spoke about some of the already identified Supply Chain challenges, pointing out that the most difficult area is that in which cargo is shipped through Northern Ireland or Britain. John O'Leary, the Revenue Commissioners' Head of e-Customs advised the attendance about the key aspects of the recently adopted Union Customs Code, expressing the hope that the UK would remain a part of the arrangements. He also talked about measures that traders and their Supply Chain partners could take to minimise a number of the BREXIT issues.

It became clear from the general discussions that there appears to be no realistic possibility of the establishment of a 'soft' Border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and that freight traffic passing over the Border will be subject to considerable delays. These would arise from immigration and other controls, more than the traditional problem area of Customs.

These, and other issues, were picked up in round-table discussions which took place a couple of weeks later and hosted by the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport (DTTAS). The purpose here was to tease out the 'red line' Irish Supply Chain issues that Government negotiators should take with them into discussions with their

Brexit really focusses the mind

EU partners aimed at developing a Common Community stand in BREXIT. Also, important for Ireland is to define, in the first place, what will be needed in coming years in the way of transport infrastructure with respect to roads, rail, ports and airports, as well as services connecting those facilities with Europe and further afield. Having done this, the Irish negotiating team can seek to ensure that the EU "Connecting Europe Facility" and Regional funding arrangements can be enabled to support those developments in the EU Member State that will be most isolated by BREXIT.

At a pair of 'Around Table' events on the BREXIT theme organised by the IEA and hosted by Investec, many of the same issues were aired, but there was also significant input from exporters present which put a much more positive spin onto the developments. Here were companies, large and small, basically saying that BREXIT has been a wake-up call for them and that they would now focus their export activity on markets in Continental Europe and further afield. Many spoke in particular of attacking the German and Northern European markets, while niche markets in the USA were also being explored. This development will put forwarders and carriers under some pressure to come up with Supply Chain solutions that work well in these particular markets.

Exporting to new markets and the Supply Chain to service those markets was a theme picked up in the IEA submissions to a consultation underway with Dublin Airport Authority on its proposed new North Runway. The planning conditions imposed by An Bord Pleanála in this decision could severely limit night-time flying into and out of Dublin Airport. This could greatly inhibit the development of new services and the cargo carrying potential that these services could offer.

And President-elect Donald Trump is waiting in the (West) wings!

Text: Howard Knott