

Exports to UK fall by half a billion euro after Brexit

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An Taoiseach Enda Kenny pictured after speaking on the topic of Ireland at the Heart of a Changing European Union at the Institute of International and European Affairs, Round Room, Mansion House, Dublin. Photo: Damien Eagers

Irish goods exports to Britain plummeted by almost half a billion euro last year as the Brexit vote took its toll.

Imports from Britain also fell back by €1.36bn. However, overall exports hit a record of almost €117bn.

The preliminary data from the Central Statistics Office are the first official figures showing the impact of the Brexit referendum on Ireland's crucial export sector.

Businesses in the agri-food sector and those in Border areas have been hit particularly hard by the slump in the value of the pound in the wake of last June's vote.

Meanwhile, the Government is preparing a 10-year national capital plan in response to Brexit.

In a major speech focusing on the UK's EU exit, Taoiseach Enda Kenny said the plan would include funded proposals to complete the national road network, including links between Dublin, Derry and Donegal, and to accelerate delivery of public transport.

Read more: [Government to prepare 10 year capital plan in response to Brexit](#)

He said the Government would also publish a new trade and investment strategy before St Patrick's Day to boost exports. He promised measures including funding for companies hit hard by the Brexit vote.

"Brexit is a serious, direct threat to Ireland's economic prosperity," Mr Kenny said in his speech, hosted by the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA).

"The potential impacts are profound, right across the economy. Key sectors such as agri-food and fishing face particular risks and challenges."

Mr Kenny said the National Competitiveness Council would carry out research to benchmark competitiveness with the UK, and there would be a new 10-year National Capital Plan. It will tap into Government resources, but also cheap loans from the European Investment Bank.

"That new plan will show how we will invest in roads, in public transport, in energy, in water, in schools, in higher education and in hospitals and health facilities," he said

There would be also a review of the State's industrial policy, Enterprise 2025, which would include a "medium-term stabilisation and adjustment plan" and measures for businesses hit hard by Brexit, backed up by Government funding. The Government would also make the case to Europe that Ireland needs support for Brexit-hit areas of the economy.

On Northern Ireland, Mr Kenny said that with the collapse of power sharing, there was a very real danger that the region's concerns would suffer "even greater marginalisation" as the absence of political leadership there will lead to a retreat to "partisan debate".

"The Brexit process will not wait for another round of lengthy talks in Stormont," he said.

"When Article 50 is triggered, the world will move on, and it will move on quickly."

Separately, in the Dáil, Foreign Affairs Minister Charlie Flanagan suggested calls for "special status" for Northern Ireland could give serious concerns to other European countries about precedents that might be set elsewhere.

Read more: [UK could breach Good Friday Agreement with U-turn over human rights, says Flanagan](#)

"This would risk undermining the Government's efforts to specifically address and mitigate the very real impacts facing our island - and the people of Northern Ireland in particular due to Brexit," he said.

Ibec director general Danny McCoy welcomed the Taoiseach's focus on infrastructure.

But he added: "That speech could have been made in December and been relevant, but now that Britain is actually moving away from the single market and possibly the customs union, I think the customs union aspect has become even more central even in advance of the common travel area and the Border issue, as important as they are."

Simon McKeever, chief executive of the Irish Exporters Association, warned there was too much focus on the North, and not enough on trade.

"We want Britain to have the status quo in terms of access to the European market, but what does that mean for Irish trade if they're outside the customs union?"