

## Fine Gael TDs backing calls for Brexit minister

Monday, January 30, 2017

By Juno McEnroe

A number of government TDs are backing the idea of a Brexit minister amid concerns Taoiseach Enda Kenny is unable to focus on securing the best deal for Ireland.



Several Fine Gael TDs have told the Irish Examiner it is time a full-time minister, potentially at senior Cabinet level, is considered in order to best protect Ireland's interests in Britain's EU exit.

A number of TDs also want Mr Kenny to press British prime minister Theresa May when she visits Dublin today about a special side deal over Brexit.

Speaking in favour of having a specific Brexit minister, Wexford TD Michael D'Arcy said: "I'd fully support this, so the person could exclusively focus on Brexit. One person for all departments. The concern at the moment is that they fall between too many sectors."

Mr D'Arcy said he was unconvinced by the Department of Finance, which recently told a committee it only has a handful of staff working full time on Brexit.

"You need a full Cabinet position with a full secretary general, to coordinate with departments and the Taoiseach. Negotiations will take anything from five to 10 years. And it [a minister] would help businesses," said the Oireachtas finance committee member.

Carlow-Kilkenny TD Pat Deering said: “There’s a lot of work to be done, which will continue for years, indifferent of who is Taoiseach. It is a concern with so much going on [at home] with the Taoiseach, where will he have the time and ability to concentrate on it?”

“Maybe we could look at a minister who would act as a liaison [with others]. It would free up the Taoiseach, lead to better coordination of departments. A junior minister position, to alleviate the pressure on the Taoiseach who has so much to resolve for a minority government.”

Cork South West TD Jim Daly supports the appointment of a Brexit minister: “There should be one, either from existing ones or a new appointment. It would reassure the public, someone would be responsible. The Taoiseach has massive work leading the party, managing the Independents [in Government].”

Mr Daly said businesses wanted to see such a minister appointed.

The Dublin Airport Authority, Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association, Retail Excellence Ireland and the Irish Exporters’ Association among others have indicated support for the idea of a Brexit minister.

The call has also been echoed by the Centre for Cross Border Studies, which notes both the Westminster and Holyrood parliaments, in London and Edinburgh, have a dedicated Brexit minister.

Louth TD Fergus O’Dowd said: “The more ministers or delegations there are, the better. Brexit is coming down the tracks like an express train coming at us.”

Others who have backed the prospect of a Brexit minister include former taoiseach Bertie Ahern, Fianna Fáil TDs as well as Transport Minister Shane Ross, who said: “There is a case for putting a minister there.”

Some Fine Gael TDs though said Mr Kenny should remain as the de facto Brexit minister.

Louth’s Peter Fitzpatrick said that “when you manage a football team, you either do or you don’t”.

Kildare North’s Bernard Durkan said the “chief executive” of the government should front the talks.

Longford-Westmeath TD Peter Burke questioned if restructuring government for such a role would help Brexit negotiations.

A weekend Red C poll said 74% of voters want a Brexit minister. The findings and calls will fuel opposition demands for the dedicated role, especially as Mr Kenny meets Theresa May today.

Mr Kenny will also face questions this week about why he left the door open to Fine Gael working with Sinn Féin in government, comments he was forced to roll back on after a backlash from ministers and TDs.