

## Special status for a special trading relationship

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### Focus On: Importance of British-Irish trade 39 A SPECIAL 3-PAGE REPORT

# Special status for a special trading relationship

More than €1.2bn in goods and services is traded between Britain and Ireland every week and that relationship will continue post-Brexit, albeit with complications, according to the Irish Exporters Association

BY MARGARET O'BRIEN

There's no doubt that Ireland and Britain have a special trading relationship. We are the only country to share a border with the soon to be ex-EU state and currently we export more to the British market than to any other.

More than €1.2 billion of goods and services are traded

between us every week and many Irish companies have built their business around that trading relationship, and view its continuation as vital to their survival.

Given the history, proximity and current status of trading relations between the two islands, Irish companies trading with Britain, particularly those in food and agri which are especially vulnerable sectors,

are rightly concerned. But, the loud and clear message from business advisers and government agencies alike is to plan ahead.

The speed at which negotiations will evolve is almost as difficult to predict as the outcome.

Simon McKeever, chief executive, Irish Exporters Association, is hoping for swift negotiations, to put the uncertainties around Brexit behind us. "We have been trading with Britain for 1,000 years and we will continue to have a strong bilateral trade relationship with it, albeit with more costs and complications post-Brexit," he said.

The IEA welcomed the prominence that relations with Ireland, the North and in particular the Common Travel Area featured in Theresa May's speech setting out her plan for Brexit negotiations, in January, and again in her Article 50 letter to the EU.

"The announcement that the British government will make it a priority to deliver a practical solution to maintain the Common Travel Area with Ireland is an incredibly important priority for this



Simon McKeever, chief executive, Irish Exporters Association

island. While this will be challenging, we urge all Irish, British and EU stakeholders to work towards this aim," said McKeever.

"The objective of phased implementation periods of the negotiated deal with the EU is also an important goal. This should, if agreed, minimise disruption for Irish exporters while we move from one trade agreement into another, depending on the terms. This is incredibly practical and will be good for businesses across Europe."

The government has stated that priorities for Ireland in the negotiation process are our economic and trading arrangements, the Northern Ireland Peace Process including border issues, the Common Travel Area, and the future of the European Union.

"The ball now lies in the EU's court.

According to McKeever: "It

is crucial that the government acts to, and is seen to act to, secure a special status with regard to our relationship with Britain given the close bilateral relationship between the two countries. We need to see continued visible action by this government that demonstrates that they are fighting hard on behalf of Irish exporters in these negotiations. The Irish Exporters Association will continue to lobby government on a regional, national and international level on the issues that affect Irish exporters."

The prospect of a 'hard border' has highly negative implications for trade and employment across the island and it would add complexities and cost to businesses moving

goods between both jurisdictions. While every effort should be made to prevent potential disruption to trade as a result of Brexit, Carol Lynch, customs and international trade services partner at BDO, said that one thing Irish businesses are sure of is that change is on its way.

She advised forward-thinking businesses to stay grounded in reality and to calmly prepare for all scenarios ahead. For those who haven't yet a plan in place, her advice is to start now.

"This level of preparation will give companies competitive advantage by allowing them to continue to access the British market after the trade negotiations are complete."