

THE SUNDAY TIMES



FESTIVE FOOD & DRINK

52 PAGES THE DISH MAGAZINE

PAUL McCARTNEY

INTERVIEW CULTURE

FREE HEINEKEN CUP WALL CHART

Irish border poses barrier to final Brexit deal

Justine McCarthy

The border is once again a potential deal-breaker in Brexit negotiations, with the EU insisting that the UK government must abandon planned legislation that breaches the Irish protocol if it wants a deal on €825bn worth of annual trade.

Boris Johnson, the British prime minister, has said he intends to reinsert clauses in the UK Internal Market Bill when the House of Commons sits tomorrow.

A finance bill due to come before the UK parliament later this week is also regarded as not compliant with last year's withdrawal agreement.

"If the offending clauses go back in, it would certainly be seen as a sign of bad faith and, if the finance bill were to go ahead, it would be taken as an indication that it's over and we proceed with no deal," a Brussels source said yesterday.

"There has always been a view that, if we reach agreement, these provisions would be quietly dropped by London."

The House of Lords removed contentious clauses from the Internal Market Bill last month but MPs have the power to reinstate them.

Johnson's government says the measures are a vital "safety net" that will protect the UK if trade negotiations with the EU collapse.

An hour-long phone call yesterday between Johnson and Ursula von der Leyen, the commission president, failed to break the deadlock in negotiations for a relationship deal.

In a statement, von der Leyen



ONE MINUTE TO MIDNIGHT

TIM SHIPMAN WHITEHALL JUSTINE MCCARTHY DUBLIN PAGES 12-13

said "significant differences remain on three critical issues – level playing field, governance and fisheries".

The pair agreed to speak on the phone again tomorrow after talks in Brussels today between Michel Barnier, the EU chief negotiator, and Lord Frost, his British opposite number.

Von der Leyen will stay in contact with key EU heads of government, including Emmanuel Macron of France, Angela Merkel of Germany and taoiseach Micheál Martin, who welcomed the resumption of talks.

A spokesman for Martin said he and von der Leyen "have been in regular contact and will continue to be over the next while". Another

EU source said: "Ursula von der Leyen won't be negotiating without reference to Paris, Berlin and probably Dublin over the weekend about how far she can go."

"This is not necessarily the crisis it is being made out to be. It's possibly a positive development. All along it was felt the core issues would have to be referred to the commission president and the British prime minister, as well as the other prime ministers to finalise the agreement."

Simon Coveney, the foreign affairs minister, said: "What we need now are calm heads. The negotiations were always going to reach a finale and both the UK and the EU have negotiated firmly but honestly. A deal can still be done to minimise the damage of Brexit and allow us all to move on."

With just 25 days left before the deadline for an agreement expires, an Irish source said that distrust caused by the UK's planned legislation breaching the Irish protocol was an aggravating factor in the stalemate over governance.

"Because of the bill, the EU is determined that assurances about subsidies have to be cast iron to ensure they cannot be broken," he said.

Another issue on which the sides have failed to agree is an EU demand for the UK to appoint an independent, domestic regulatory body to ensure compliance with the rules in Britain. Sources in Brussels say the UK has not given satisfactory assurances on this.

The EU also wants greater

Continued on page 2 →

BUMP ALONG THE WAY TO CABINET

BRYAN MEADE



Justice minister Helen McEntee has announced that she and husband Paul Hickey are expecting their first child, making the Fine Gael TD the first Irish government minister to be pregnant while in office

Gardai 'cancelled' thousands of 999 calls

John Mooney

An internal garda inquiry is under way into the discovery that officers "cancelled" thousands of incidents reported to the 999 emergency service by members of the public.

Staff at the force's regional command and control centres, who assign gardai to respond to people making emergency calls, seem to have "cancelled" several thousand incidents over the past two years, including calls from people reporting serious crimes, suspicious behaviour and public order offences.

An analysis of call data shows one garda in Dublin cancelled hundreds of incidents generated on the force's IT system from 999 calls for unclear reasons and without permission.

Garda Headquarters has confirmed it is carrying out a "scoping exercise" to establish the scale of the problem and what action to take. It declined to disclose the number of "cancelled" 999 calls under review, but security sources say it is substantial.

The 999 emergency calls are answered by either a garda or a civilian staff member, who inputs the details of the incident into the force's computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system. The call-taker then forwards the information to a garda dispatcher, who sends officers to the scene of the reported crime or emergency.

Sources say the internal inquiry has examined data for 2019 and the year to date, looking at incidents where gardai took no action other than to receive the 999 call. Investigators are checking whether the gardai who decided against dispatching a patrol car or foot patrol to investigate an incident made the correct decision.

The problem was first discovered at the command and control centre at Harcourt Square in Dublin and reported to Anne Marie Cagney, the new assistant commissioner for Dublin.

A similar problem has since

Continued on page 2 →

PUP 'fraudsters' denied €94m

The Department of Social Protection has stopped 24,000 pandemic unemployment payments (PUPs) to recipients not entitled to receive the subsidy, saving the state an estimated €94m, writes John Mooney.

The claims were discovered in an examination of 70,000 Covid payments, which sought to identify fraud. The scheme was established by the government in March to support people who temporarily lost their jobs in lockdown.

The department said the payments were identified after desk-based assessments of claims,

interviews with claimants by investigators, audits of employers' PRSI records, and special investigations. Others came after self-declarations by claimants.

Gardai consider the PUP scheme to be "vulnerable" to abuse, and suspect that it has been exploited by professional fraudsters and organised crime gangs who harvest payments by submitting multiple applications using stolen, cloned or old PPS numbers.

Gardai and social welfare investigators fear that eastern European gangs are earning hundreds of

thousands from the scheme. The gangs fly claimants into the state to attend interviews at the Department of Social Protection when required to do so.

The gangs are also thought to be using PPS numbers bought on the dark net to submit multiple applications.

Last week gardai in Limerick and Clare conducted searches of properties in connection with an investigation into the activities of a Romanian gang that is suspected of harvesting an estimated €100,000 by using stolen PPS

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Family sorry for Roald Dahl racism

Gabriel Pogrand

Roald Dahl's family have discreetly apologised for his antisemitism after meeting for the first time in several years. The discussion about the much-loved children's author took place amid fears that his racism could tarnish his legacy and global brand. Dahl, a father of five, died aged 74 in 1990.

The author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the Giant Peach* was a self-professed antisemite and even appeared to sympathise with Adolf Hitler when in 1983 he declared:

"There is a trait in the Jewish character that does provoke animosity ... even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason."

His estate has signed several lucrative deals to adapt his works, including a Netflix spin-off about Oompa-Loompas, the workers at Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory, and a Hollywood version of *The Witches*, which came out this year. It posted revenues of £23m in its latest accounts, 82% of which came from outside the UK.

The estate published an apology on an obscure section of Dahl's official website, saying that his

comments were "incomprehensible to us". They did not publicise the step or tell Jewish groups.

Dahl's family said last night: "Apologising for the words of a much-loved grandparent is a challenging thing to do, but made more difficult when the words are so hurtful to an entire community. We loved Roald, but we passionately disagree with his antisemitic comments ..."

"These comments do not reflect what we see in his work – a desire for the acceptance of everyone equally – and were entirely unacceptable. We are truly sorry."

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