

Tea and purple Snacks better than Brit bashing

A SENIOR executive with Ryanair has complained that there is too much gloating in Ireland over the Brexit debacle and he said people here should show more gratitude for what the UK has done for this country.

Peter Bellew, the airline's Director of Operations, said the gloating has been ongoing for the past two years and it was time that it stopped.

"It's actually quite sad that this is happening, considering what a pillar they have been of European democracy and freedom and peace. It's quite upsetting to see what's happening at the moment," he said.

Mr Bellew told the Killarney Economic Conference that Ryanair has taken a view that it will not be "bashing the English".

The Irish government, businesses and the people in Ireland would do well to do the same with the British people they are doing business with, he added.

Mr Bellew said people in Ireland should pick up the phone and ask their contacts in Britain if there is anything that can be done to help them.

"A lot of things could be solved by jumping on a plane to London or Manchester or Birmingham or Brussels and talk over a cup of tea and a few purple Snacks which was traditionally how we sorted out some situations," he said.

"We need to show a bit more common sense".

Mr Bellew, a former marketing manager with Kerry Airport who was CEO of Malaysian Airlines before he joined Ryanair, said progress could be made over the next three to 12 months if influencers here met with decision makers in the UK and Europe.

The senior Ryanair official said Brexit is going to be "quite brutal" in many ways and he is particularly concerned about the devastation it will cause in the border counties. It is having a huge impact on the property market in counties like Sligo, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Cavan and, to a lesser extent in Louth, where there is big investment by pharmaceutical firms in Dundalk.

"Property prices have stagnated and dropped in many of those border counties – you can't sell a house there at the moment," he added, suggesting that a plan needs to be put in place to help those areas.

"There is a reason Marks & Spencer has closed their branch in Newry and there is a reason that a lot of things are closing in the north of Ireland at the moment. I would be very concerned about that," he added.

Ryanair has over 6,000 people working in the UK. It is also the base for the largest pilot training facility in Europe and the second largest aircraft maintenance facility in the UK.

He said up to four to six hours of his week, at least, are spent purely on Brexit issues and the company had to go to the trouble of applying to the civil aviation authorities to set up a completely new airline, Ryanair UK, with a new tier of management and that had created its own costs as well as touching base with all the airline's suppliers.

"Many of the American suppliers have actually been quite reluctant to bother with the UK because they see it as a whole other thing to have to do. Quite a number of them are going to have to set up new subsidiary offices in other EU locations but some of them will not bother so it's going to be quite difficult," he added.

On a human level, Brexit has been very distressing for Ryanair staff in the UK and the company shows staff videos every Friday to highlight what it has done on Brexit.

"I didn't want to lose our UK staff – many companies at the moment are suffering from a rapid loss of staff because people are worried about the future. We've had to spend a lot of time wrapping our arms around our staff," he said.

Mr Bellew said the growth engine is in India, China, Indonesia and Australia which see themselves as one economic entity and the planes are staying within that region or going to the US. Ireland needs to be very careful and it will need to forge links with that part of the world, he warned.

“We won’t be able to rely on these people coming as the investment traditionally bounced off the UK into Ireland so we really have to push our own thing,” he said.