

Ahern: May must negotiate properly

FORMER Taoiseach Bertie Ahern has said embattled Theresa May must initiate proper and meaningful negotiations with Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and others if the Brexit crisis is to be sorted out before the deadline.

He noted that the Prime Minister left parliament after a vote at 7.30pm on Wednesday night and at 10 o'clock she was back in front of No 10 Downing Street complaining that people hadn't turned up to the negotiating table.

"The capacity and the ability of people to properly negotiate is fading fast. I spent weeks of my life trying to get people to turn up at the negotiating table. You do it by soft diplomacy, try to convince people and talk quietly," he told the second annual Killarney Economic Conference.

Mr Ahern made nonsense of the idea that people could negotiate in two and a half hours when the reality is it takes days and weeks at least to try to get people to look at what's possible and what's not.

The former Fianna Fail leader said the secret is to narrow down the various solutions being put forward by voting on the issues and narrowing it down to just a few possible outcomes and negotiate at that stage.

"Very quickly, in my view, it will become clear what you have to bring to the European Union for discussions," he said, adding that he doubts it is possible to achieve that by the end of March deadline.

"At the very least they must be willing to sit down – otherwise this will continue and that's not in anybody's interest," he said.

Mr Ahern said Ireland wants a good relationship with the United Kingdom but far preferably if it remains in the European Union.

"If that's not possible we want to see negotiations in a fair and balanced way that will deal with the issues that are well documented. Let us hope that more progress is made in the next couple of weeks than has been made in the last two years," he said.

The former Taoiseach said he was at a football club on Wednesday night when the Southampton v Derby County match was being screened and those present were given a vote on whether to watch extra time or Prime Minister Theresa May's speech.

"Only two of us voted to listen to Teresa May's speech so the match stayed on. I was able to use modern phones to watch it but I'm afraid the rest of the audience wanted to watch extra time," he remarked.