

Border situation can be taken advantage of

A SECURITY and anti-terrorism expert has warned that there is a need for more bilateral political dialogue on how to manage the everyday security situation to protect the common travel area between Ireland and the UK during the Brexit fallout.

Dr Edward Burke, Director of the Centre for Conflict, Security and Terrorism at the University of Nottingham, said there has been a ratcheting up of the common travel area mechanisms already in the last six months.

“There has been an increased exchange of officials, increased dialogue, increased measures and a lot of good things already done in terms of joint serious crime task forces that have taken on an increased importance,” he said

Dr Burke pointed out that greater co-operations will be required when it comes to the exchange of data on March 30 and, in a ‘no deal’ situation it could necessitate the exchange of thousands of pieces of data between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána on a daily basis and that could lead to problems.

A border situation can be taken advantage of by very capable smugglers and that could lead to a breakdown in law and order.

“I think the Commission might be sympathetic to that. Irish and British diplomats are very aware of that but there will have to be some flexibility and exceptional measures for the unique situation we will have,” he said.

Dr Burke noted that Ireland and England had moved to such normal inter-state relations that some politicians in Ireland were very recently talking about the UK as their closest ally in terms of how both countries related to Brussels and in terms of vital national security functions. Brexit, however, has disrupted that positive dialogue.

It was interesting that in many areas of the UK with large Irish emigrant populations, like Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Lancashire, people voted very strongly in the referendum to leave the EU, he noted.

“We are two states but, to some extent, it is a shared space where we move and accommodate each other very easily,” he remarked.

Both embassies and the British-Irish Association should work very hard to try to maintain that type of exceptional relationship in choppy waters, Dr Burke said.

A good relationship is about banal everyday transactions and that has been disrupted and there is an increased mistrust in some quarters and the return of the kind of rhetoric he wouldn’t have predicted a few years ago, he said.