

Glue binding Celtic nations stronger than economic interests

THE shadow of Brexit now lies across Ireland which is a country that has risen to the challenges of the modern world by delivering changes that even he might not have foreseen in the Good Friday Agreement, marriage equality and women's reproductive rights, the Killarney Economic Conference has been told.

Scottish Parliament Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations, Michael Russell, told guests at the conference dinner that, although it is an indisputable fact the people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, this has not been acknowledged even in the most casual way by Theresa May and her government.

"Consequently, her offer in the throes of the biggest defeat ever inflicted on a sitting Prime Minister in the House of Commons, and the biggest rebellion ever seen in a UK political party to listen to what the opposition parties have to say about the way forward, is not only much too little, it is also much too late.

"I have been part of a supposed process of consultation for the last two and a half years. At no time has that discussion taken place – even at the highest level of the Joint Ministerial Process – and there has been no serious attempt to reconcile views and find common ground," he stated.

Mr Russell said if further crisis is to be averted there needs to be a unilateral ruling out of any "no deal" agreed by parliament and the UK government.

"Then there needs to be either an election or a people's vote and as an election is now not going to take place, then a second referendum in which 'remain in the EU' is on the ballot paper is essential," he stated.

"To give the space for that to happen the UK has to request, and the EU must agree to, an extension of the Article 50 timescale, to at least the end of June.

Whatever the outcome of Brexit, the UK's archaic constitutional arrangements are clearly no longer fit for purpose and can no longer be born.

The obsession with parliamentary sovereignty undermines the very foundations of devolution and multiple centers of decision making across these islands, Mr Russell told conference delegates.

"As Scotland looks to Ireland it cannot but draw a conclusion – small countries can exercise their sovereignty in ways that are creative and beneficial to them. That values are important and that modern democracies evolve and progress," he said.

"The glue that binds our two Celtic nations is not just our shared economic interests. It is also our shared cultural tradition, our belief in progressive values, our recognition of the importance of responsible global citizenship, our commitment to being open societies, our welcoming acceptance of diversity and the strength we draw from those we welcome into our countries," the Scottish Parliament Cabinet Secretary said.

"I look forward with great optimism to where this relationship can go, a future of even closer links, and links arising from your membership – and in time our membership – of a progressive EU. That is what I aim for," he insisted.