

## **'Our gatekeeping role has been tested'**

WHAT was really striking about the emphatic House of Commons vote to reject the withdrawal agreement was just how little discussion was heard on either side about the content before the vote was taken, the Killarney Economic Conference heard.

"Given that it was 600 pages long you would have thought there would have been one or two discussions about the substance," said Catherine Barnard, Professor of European Law at the University of Cambridge.

For those in favour of Britain leaving the European Union it was essentially about the backstop and for "remainers" it was about reality hitting home that Britain was actually leaving, she said.

"For the more sophisticated on the remain side it's a real realisation of the third rate status that the UK will find itself in," she said.

Prof Barnard said the word 'deal' caused complete confusion.

"What was being voted on was the withdrawal agreement which is essentially tying up the loose ends of the old relationship and it was nothing to do with the future arrangement which will be negotiated after the UK has left although there is a very loose template for what it might look like," she said.

"People simply do not understand the difference between the Article 50 deal and any future negotiations".

Prof Barnard said the negotiation of a future deal would probably take a minimum of four or five years and it has got to be ratified by the member states.

Dr Holger Hestermeyer of Kings College in London said no deal means no trade relationship and, accordingly, the EU will have to treat the UK the same way it treats Russia and China.

The conference heard from Central Bank Deputy Governor, Ed Sibley, who said in most scenarios, Brexit will be negative for Ireland as the countries have very strong trade, financial and social connections and real difficulties would arise in the case of a hard Brexit.

13 per cent of goods and 16 per cent of services are exported from Ireland to the UK and a little over 50 per cent of exports by weight going beyond the UK go through the UK landbridge.

He said the repercussions would hit Ireland in a very uneven way with agri-food and tourism and Kerry is an area that is potentially at risk when it comes to places likely to suffer most

Mr Sibley said the Central Bank's role is focused on thinking about those impacts with a lot of analysis to make sure the risks are understood to protect firms and consumers.

"We have been very active in making sure firms are preparing to protect their interests and discharging their responsibilities to protect their businesses and their customers.

"Our gatekeeping role has been tested over the course of the last year or so. A hard Brexit would be very, very difficult for Ireland," Mr Sibley stated.