

Chaotic scenes in London should be a stark warning

FOR Ireland and Europe, and the democratic world as a whole, Brexit is a defining issue of our age with economic, political, social and cultural implications which go far beyond the narrow issue of a trading relationship, Fianna Fáil leader, Micheál Martin told the Killarney Economic Conference.

The situation is now very serious two and a half years after the “dark and destructive” Brexit referendum and 70 days until it is due to take effect under current law. “Under the current best-case realistic scenario all we will achieve in the coming months is more time to define a permanent relationship. We have really not even begun to grasp the medium and long term issues which come from Brexit,” he said. Mr Martin said there is no roadmap for how relations between different administrations and jurisdictions on these islands will work with no plan for the diversification of the economy which is essential to prospering in the longer-term.

“The chaotic scenes we have seen in London in recent months should be a stark warning to us of what happens when a political elite looks only at winning tactical battles and refuses to question itself.

“We have to get through the weeks and months ahead – and we have to do so with a continued national unity of purpose – but we also need to step back and realise how much more we need to do to meet the challenge of this moment,” he added. But the FF leader stressed that he believes that there will eventually be a deal reached which can be ratified in some way in London.

“In order to make sure that Ireland is in the strongest possible position in discussing and implementing this deal, my party has ensured political stability. We went much further last month and gave a commitment unmatched in Europe to allow a minority government a secure period to focus on emergency issues,” Mr Martin said.

Hinting that a general election is never far from his thoughts, he said what he termed “the chronic failures of public policy in the critical areas of health and housing” should lead to a change of government but business as usual is simply not an option. “The stability which is there for the rest of this year needs to be used to move at much greater speed to both address the urgent practical tasks of preparing for Brexit and to start addressing more permanent issues,” Mr Martin said.