

No Assembly an insult to the people

BREXIT might create an opportunity to reconsider reconstituting the British-Irish Council which was considered critical in 1998 to balance the north-south institutions, a leading Democratic Unionist politician told the Killarney Economic Conference.

Gary Middleton, MLA, said it was obscene that the Northern Ireland Assembly and its executive was not allowed to govern over the past two years and it amounted to an insult to the public in Northern Ireland.

“We have a series of issues that need immediate attention from across various sectors, including health, education, the economy and, of course, leaving the European Union. The DUP is always open to discussions with other parties and we trust that a new impetus can be brought and progress can be made in a timely fashion,” he said.

“The history book will wonder how Northern Ireland contrived not to have an executive during this of all periods of political activity and significance.”

The DUP official said difficult decisions will be required if his party stands ready to govern but they have proved in the past that when a fair deal can be reached, they will support it and implement it.

“A return to devolved government cannot come a moment too soon and it need not be held hostage to negotiations. A number of substantive agreements were reached when devolution operated before and that can be done again,” he added.

He said it was “simply not true” to suggest that the DUP is happy to “crash out” of the European Union in March regardless of the consequences, including those for the Irish Republic.

“We wish it can be avoided and a sensible agreement achieved. We are acutely aware of the importance of trade across the border and a hard border would not be in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland,” Mr Middleton said.

“We recognise the reality that thousands of people cross the border daily to work, to go to college or to go to school. We are not indifferent to the concerns”.