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# Neale Richmond Platform: If and when a border poll is called, we must be ready

*Neale Richmond*

4-5 minutes

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BREXIT has completely changed the narrative when it comes to the prospect of achieving a united Ireland, bringing the discussion back to the fore of our political narrative north and south at the highest levels.

This week we saw Tánaiste Leo Varadkar reaffirm his desire to see a united Ireland, but he also outlined some of the steps we must accomplish before a border poll can be called and some understandable concerns.

As we all know, it is the British secretary of state who decides when to call a border poll. Under the Good Friday Agreement there does not have to be a roadmap for what would constitute a border poll, nor does the secretary have to give reasoning behind their decision. We are powerless as to when the poll will be called, and so we must ensure that we are prepared for any eventuality. Therefore, we must reaffirm our commitment to the Shared Island Unit, establish an Oireachtas Committee on Unity, and formally request that the British government outline what would constitute a poll.

It is not unreasonable to expect any secretary of state to lay out,

clearly, what the criteria would be for them to determine a border poll is necessary. It is in everybody's interest, unionist, nationalist or other to have that clarity spelled out and publicly accessible.

Whether we get this clarity or not, the work on what a united Ireland would look like must be underway. I would not rule out the British government calling for a poll at an inopportune time in the hopes it will be defeated and so we must be prepared for this.

This is why I have repeatedly called for the establishment of an all-party Oireachtas Committee to be established to take testimony from a range of experts and to map out the possibilities and challenges that unity would present. A united Ireland should be a New Ireland, not merely an extension of the southern state as we know it but a much better place, combining the best of all our island. The case must be that while unionists would not vote for a united Ireland, they would at least be at ease that they will be equal and that many of their deep held concerns will be taken into account. Whether one aspires to unity or not, the ongoing work of the Shared Island Unit is increasingly important to bring people together and to break down many invisible barriers.

We also must deal with the political issues at hand, namely the lack of a functioning executive and the ongoing issues with the Northern Ireland Protocol. We now have a situation where 52 out of 90 MLAs are united in their opposition to the British government's legislation overriding the protocol, but this has fallen on deaf ears in London. Public support for the protocol has risen by almost 20 per cent within Northern Ireland, now at 55 per cent. That the British government refuse to accept this and instead plan to break international law and put Northern

Ireland at risk is frankly staggering.

We must resolve the lingering issues with the protocol, continue to encourage the UK to return to the negotiating table with the EU and, as a result, ensure that a functioning executive can be formed. This should be the immediate priority for all on this island.

If and when a border poll is called, we must be ready and those of us who seek a United Ireland must use this time to prepare the ground but also work on the many, immediate and pressing, issues of today.

- Neale Richmond is a Fine Gael TD for the Dublin Rathdown constituency