

Meeting EVP with Leo Varadkar

Monday 25/1/2021 at 16:30 – 17:00

Ms Vestager joined the conference call at 16:31

Mr Varadkar joined at 16:33 (+3 colleagues)

In the context of Brexit the EVP assured IE that she is fully aware of the needs of the Irish fishery sector and stressed the need to start preparing measures well in advance of the use of the Brexit fund. Mr Varadkar would seek input from his fellow ministers on this issue. Mr Varadkar asked whether the companies being in difficulty due to the Brexit could also benefit from the Temporary Framework, which has been extended until the end of 2021. According to the EVP it is better to keep a separate track as the companies in difficulty due to Brexit may need a longer timeframe. This will need preparation and a more focused approach. She suggested to re-establish the COMP working group with IE that helped put in place a number of Brexit preparedness schemes that also proved useful at the start of the Covid crisis.

As far as the review of the RAG is concerned, Mr Varadkar reiterated the Irish request to maintain their current coverage and keep their map in place until the end of 2024. A loss of 50% of the current coverage is dramatic and not acceptable under the current circumstances of Covid and Brexit.

The EVP stressed that the review is based on a fitness check and that the current coverage of all MS are based on outdated data of 2008. Almost all MS support this approach and many MS await the updated rules and maps. GNI would not be a valid parameter as it would only be used for Ireland and is not available at regional level. Mr Varadkar offered to have the regional data for Ireland recalculated, while admitting that the GDP distortion is mainly driven by the presence of some large tech enterprises and the leasing of airplanes. This was declined, as we should use harmonized and transparent figures from Eurostat for all MS for this exercise, which is done every seven years.

As far as the border region with Northern Ireland is concerned, the EVP pointed to the fact that this border would be an inner border as Northern Ireland should be treated in the same way as a MS.

Mr Varadkar asked whether there could be transitory provisions so that the drop in population could be spread, as a drop of 50% is far too dramatic. The EVP acknowledged that we should look whether something can be done at the level of the safety net.

As far as the process on the revision of the RAG is concerned, the EVP explained that it is now in Inter Service Consultation and that we are gathering all the inputs (also those from Ireland) and that we would take these into account to come to a balanced solution. The objective is to adopt the RAG by the end of the first Quarter of 2021.

Both the EVP and Mr Varadkar agreed that their teams would work together to come to this balanced solution.