

Dublin denies pushing London too hard on post-Brexit border

Dublin stuck to its tough position on Brexit on Thursday, even as Westminster was plunged into chaos over the so-called Irish “backstop” to Britain’s deal to leave the EU.

“Any attempt to ship responsibility [to] Ireland for all [Britain’s] trouble is nonsense,” said a party ally of Leo Varadkar, prime minister.

“There’s a recognition in Dublin that they’ve got what they wanted, but they’re not crowing about it.” Negotiations have been dominated for months by the insistence of Leo Varadkar’s government on provisions to guarantee against a hard border on the island of Ireland. This has led to measures — such as an all-UK customs union with the EU under Brussels rules — that Brexiters say would infringe UK sovereignty. But even as Theresa May, UK prime minister, fought for her deal’s survival against a wave of opposition from almost all sides, Dublin rejected the idea that it had pushed London too hard.

Another Irish official said it was difficult to see how any other deal could have been reached given Dublin’s requirement of avoiding a hard border and Mrs May’s priorities to take the UK out of Europe’s customs union and internal market. “They’ve always been the two binding constraints on the process,” the official said. Because of its close economic links with Britain, in a no-deal Brexit Ireland could suffer more collateral damage than any other third country.

Why hard Brexiters want to ditch the deal “[Companies] need to focus on a crash-out scenario rather than just this soft Brexit plan,” said Simon McKeever, chief of the Irish Exporters’ Association, a trade group. “My sense is the plan won’t survive. The maths in Westminster simply aren’t there.” He added: “So what’s plan B? [Irish companies] will continue stockpiling [in Britain] . . . They’re going to have to continue their contingency plans and they need to step up a gear. They’re at the point really where they’re saying they’re getting very very worried about this.”

Such concerns have weighed on the Irish stock market, where shares were down almost 3.5 per cent in afternoon trade on Thursday. But the consensus in Dublin remains that Mr Varadkar was right to push Ireland’s agenda hard. Fianna Fáil, the opposition party that provides the Irish prime minister with the parliamentary support needed to remain in office, said the draft treaty agreed by London and Brussels could not be allowed to lapse. Recommended explainer Brexit treaty: what the EU and UK have agreed “You have to allow Britain to deal with the deal that’s on the table,” said Micheál Martin, party leader. “The consensus in the [Irish parliament] has been steadfast throughout. From our perspective, there is no upside to Brexit. All the analysis shows it will have a negative impact on the Irish economy.

Therefore the overriding objective of all parties is to minimise the damage.” When asked whether Dublin and Brussels had pushed Britain too far, Paschal Donohoe, finance minister, insisted it was the Irish government’s job to avoid a hard border with Northern Ireland. “We’re in the realm now of where there are no easy choices,” he told national radio, adding that Mrs May had recognised the weight of Ireland’s claim by agreeing to a border backstop. Simon Coveney, deputy premier, said that government contingency planning for a no-deal Brexit was continuing.