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## The impact of Brexit on the transformation and development of Rosslare Europort

### Wpływ brexitu na transformację i rozwój portu Rosslare Europort

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#### Abstract

This article analyses the impact of Brexit on the transformation and development of Rosslare Europort in Ireland, highlighting its new role as a strategic gateway to continental Europe. The study focuses on changes in transportation dynamics, pointing to a decline in traffic through the United Kingdom and a significant increase in direct ferry services between Ireland and Europe. The authors outline how the port has adapted its operational structure to new customs procedures and invested in infrastructure, which has increased its capacity and importance. The article concludes that despite initial logistical challenges, Brexit has created growth opportunities for Rosslare Europort, transforming it into a key maritime hub financially supported by the European Union. In addition, the text discusses in detail the protocol arrangements for Northern Ireland, including the Windsor Framework agreement, and the practical implications of the new customs regulations for shipping companies.

**Keywords:** trans-European logistics corridors, supply chain resilience, trade policy adaptation, customs regulatory frameworks, post-Brexit economic integration

## Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje wpływ brexitu na transformację i rozwój portu Rosslare Europort w Irlandii, podkreślając jego nową rolę strategicznej bramy do Europy kontynentalnej. Autorzy koncentrują się na zmianach w dynamice transportu, wskazując na spadek przewozów przez Wielką Brytanię i znaczny wzrost bezpośrednich połączeń promowych między Irlandią a Europą. Przedstawiają także, w jaki sposób port przystosował swoją strukturę operacyjną do nowych procedur celnych i zainwestował w infrastrukturę, co zwiększyło jego pojemność i znaczenie. Na koniec stwierdzono, że pomimo początkowych wyzwań logistycznych brexit stworzył szanse wzrostu dla Rosslare Europort, przekształcając go w kluczowy hub morski wspierany finansowo przez Unię Europejską. Dodatkowo, tekst szczegółowo omawia rozwiązania protokolarne dotyczące Irlandii Północnej, w tym porozumienie Windsor Framework, oraz praktyczne implikacje nowych przepisów celnych dla firm transportowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** transeuropejskie korytarze logistyczne, odporność łańcucha dostaw, polityka handlowa, integracja gospodarcza

## Introduction

When analysing the structure of international freight transport in the Republic of Ireland, it is important to note that, aside from a small volume of air freight, nearly all transport operations rely on maritime shipping. The majority of intercontinental container transport is carried out via feeder vessels that transport cargo across the Irish Sea to deep-sea ports located in the United Kingdom (UK) or mainland Europe.

For decades, Ireland's maritime transport sector depended on the so-called UK land bridge as a key route for importing and exporting goods between Ireland and continental Europe. The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit) significantly disrupted this system, leading to major changes in maritime transport and the operations of Irish ports. The introduction of stricter border controls resulted in a decline in freight volumes on routes connecting Ireland with the UK. Consequently, transport companies began to favour direct ferry connections between Ireland and continental Europe to minimize costs and reduce administrative burdens associated with transiting through the UK.

The objective of this study is to analyse the functioning of maritime transport, focusing on the opportunities created by Rosslare Europort and the impact of Brexit on the development of this port.

The authors of this paper have formulated the following research questions to support the study's objective:

- Q1: Has the UK's withdrawal from the European Union caused disruptions in transport at Rosslare Europort?

- Q2: Has Brexit created new development opportunities for Rosslare Europort?
- Q3: How has Brexit affected the operations of Irish transport companies regarding freight movement between the Republic of Ireland and mainland Europe?

The central thesis of this paper is that the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union has strengthened the role of Rosslare Europort, transforming it into a gateway to mainland Europe for Ireland within the international transport chain.

The research methodology applied in this study includes in-depth interviews with experts (structured interview questionnaires containing eight questions) and secondary research based on available reports.

A review of the relevant literature and an analysis of the data collected during the research process have allowed the authors to present the consequences of Brexit for the functioning of maritime transport, using Rosslare Europort as a case study.

## **The effects of Brexit on Northern Ireland's transport system**

The United Kingdom formally triggered Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union on March 29, 2017 (*EU–UK withdrawal agreement timeline*, n.d.). The first round of Brexit negotiations began on June 19, 2017, in Brussels. The draft withdrawal agreement of the United Kingdom was published by the European Commission on February 28, 2018. The UK repeatedly requested Brexit extensions, which led to the withdrawal agreement coming into force along with the UK's exit from the European Union on January 31, 2020. From that moment, the UK was considered a third country. This also marked the end of the period referred to in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union and the beginning of the transition period.

In the negotiations between the European Union and the United Kingdom, the situation of Northern Ireland was a crucial aspect. It became necessary to find practical solutions to the difficulties faced by residents and businesses in a country sharing a border with the United Kingdom (Vega, Espino, Valero, 2018).

Northern Ireland is a small country located on the same island as the Republic of Ireland; however, it is part of the United Kingdom. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, a conflict arose regarding the resettlement policy from Scotland and Wales to the Irish island. The worldview of the island's inhabitants differed significantly. In 1913, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was established in Dublin, with the primary goal of reclaiming Ireland's independence. In 1921, Ireland became an autonomous state, except for six counties that formed Northern Ireland, which remained under the rule of the United Kingdom.

In the 1960s, tensions between Catholics and Protestants escalated. The Bloody Sunday massacre in Londonderry was the culmination of the conflict, in which the IRA was involved. The events of that day went down in history as Bloody Sunday. A civil war continued for years. In the 1990s, peace negotiations between Ireland and the United Kingdom began. On Good Friday, April 10, 1998, the Good

Friday Agreement was signed by the governments of Ireland, the United Kingdom, and eight political parties from Northern Ireland (*The Good Friday Agreement*, n.d.).

During Brexit negotiations, special attention had to be paid to the circumstances on the island. Protecting the Good Friday Agreement became a priority, along with avoiding a hard border and maintaining North-South cooperation. On January 1, 2021, negotiations concluded, resulting in the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, which aimed to (*Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland – consent mechanism*, n.d.):

1. Avoid a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, ensuring the smooth operation of the island's economy and protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its aspects.
2. Ensure the integrity of the EU single market for goods, with all its guarantees regarding consumer protection, public health, animal health, and the prevention of fraud and human trafficking.
3. Keep Northern Ireland within the UK's customs territory, allowing it to apply future free trade agreements that the UK may sign with third countries (*Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland – consent mechanism*, n.d.).

The protocol's implementation was based on checks on goods and documents carried out between Great Britain (England, Wales, Scotland) and Northern Ireland at Northern Irish ports. It was also agreed that Northern Ireland would comply with EU standards for imported and exported products. However, the protocol faced criticism from unionists in Northern Ireland as well as from the UK government. As a result, it was subject to renegotiation.

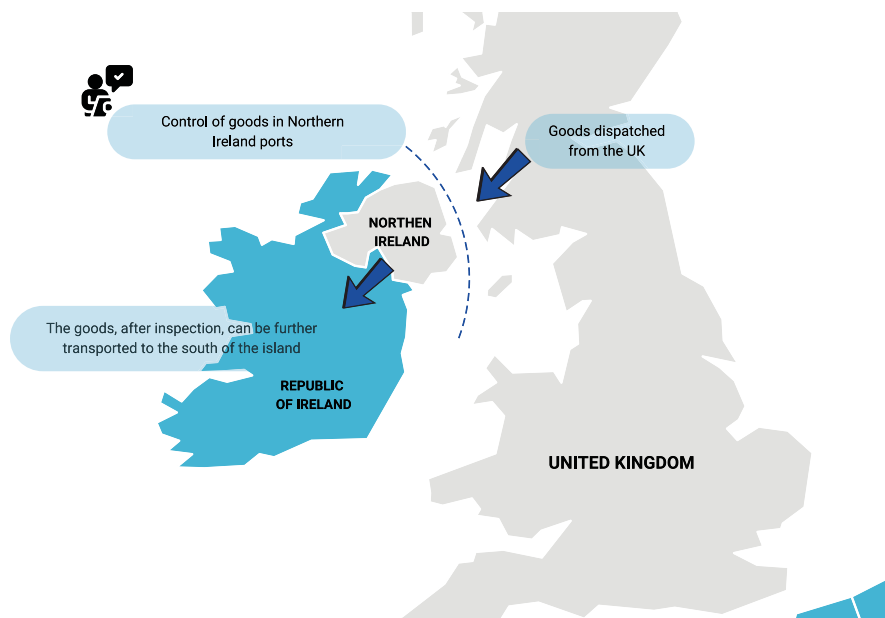


Fig. 1. Flow of goods from the United Kingdom to Ireland

Source: own elaboration.

To facilitate the flow of goods between the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, the European Commission and the UK government reached the so-called Windsor Framework in February 2023. As a result of this agreement, customs and administrative procedures were simplified while maintaining the principles of the EU Single Market.

The movement of Irish imports and exports between Ireland and the European continent via the UK's road and port network is referred to as the "land bridge".

According to statistics provided by The Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO), transport time via the land bridge is half as short as direct ferry transport:

- Land bridge transport – less than 20 hours,
- RoRo ferry transport via a direct route – up to 40 hours,
- LoLo ferry transport via a direct route – up to 60 hours.

The land bridge is primarily used due to shorter transit times, which is crucial for the delivery of goods such as perishable products, where shelf-life pressures demand the shortest possible transport time. High-value goods should be transported efficiently and quickly, as shorter transit times can significantly minimize storage costs and accelerate the release of frozen capital.

The land bridge is also used as a competitive advantage in the transport industry, specifically in terms of transit time. In 2018, the Irish Maritime Development Office estimated that around 150,000 truck crossings occur annually via the UK land bridge between the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the EU, carrying trade valued at approximately 18.2 euro billion.

During an expert consultation conducted at the Irish Department of Transport as part of this study, it was noted that a significant portion of traffic via the land bridge was destined for European markets. This shift – characterized by reduced use of this route – represents a fundamental reorganization of Irish supply chains rather than a withdrawal from trade with the UK.

The implementation of new trade agreements has increased the attractiveness of direct ferry services between Irish ports and EU ports. This has contributed to the expansion of direct routes that do not require additional customs procedures. At the same time, it has led to a decline in RoRo traffic between ports in Ireland and the UK.

Since Brexit, the UK has left the customs union and the European Single Market, meaning that customs and regulatory controls now apply at the UK–EU border. This has increased the risk of delays and disruptions, making the UK land bridge a less reliable route to the EU for Irish hauliers (Vega, Espino, Valero, 2021).

According to an industry expert interviewed for this study: "Brexit has had a significant impact on traffic via the UK land bridge. Brexit has also had a significant impact on the purchasing locations of Irish businesses. To avoid customs clearance procedures, they have turned to markets in other parts of Europe, abandoning purchases from the UK. The additional documentation requirements pose a challenge not only for businesses but also for maritime operators" (Expert interview conducted by the author, 2023).

As noted by a transport sector practitioner during an interview, maritime transport operators are also facing this issue: “[...] The problem arises when, for example, we send certain containers with BG Freightline. Some vessels first go to England before reaching Ireland. In such cases, we need special documentation because these containers enter England first, even if they are not unloaded there” (Expert interview conducted by the author, 2023). However, the vast majority of Irish trucks traveling to the EU still rely on the land bridge (Carswell, 2021). One undeniable advantage of avoiding the land bridge for Irish trucks is the environmental impact on the UK. By reducing emissions from Irish trucks using the British road network, the overall pollution levels are lowered. This is particularly relevant given that Irish trucks are generally older and more polluting than their British counterparts (Bryson, Ghaffarpsand, Bloss, 2020).

Under the terms of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the UK and the EU, Irish hauliers now have more restricted cabotage rights in the UK compared to pre-Brexit conditions. This has made the use of the UK land bridge less economically viable for them.

However, the UK has signed the Common Transit Convention (CTC), which has helped maintain the use of the UK land bridge despite Brexit. While hauliers using the land bridge are eligible to benefit from the CTC, they still face additional bureaucracy compared to when the UK was an EU member state. Nevertheless, they can avoid full customs checks at the UK–EU border.

The Irish Maritime Development Office, in collaboration with the Department of Transport, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Enterprise and Innovation, and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, encouraged the logistics and maritime transport sectors to take action and prepare for a switch to direct routes to the continent by launching an informational campaign (Irish Maritime).

The information campaign was called ACT (Assess, Communicate, Trial). This acronym stands for:

- **A – Assess:** Evaluating access to routes that serve as alternatives to the land bridge.
- **C – Communicate:** Engaging with shipping companies regarding new routes and services.
- **T – Trial:** Conducting a trial period to test routes and services with logistics providers and freight forwarding companies.

IMDO urged freight forwarders to try out new direct shipping options well in advance of December 31, before border controls were fully implemented for traffic passing through the UK. The reasons for adopting the government’s proposed solutions included:

- A company’s supply chain requires lead time to arrange alternative transport solutions.

- The shipped product is time-sensitive.
- Customs procedures may cause uncontrollable delays and costs for businesses.
- Route changes involve risks for businesses, and it is beneficial to test new solutions and address potential issues well in advance.

Brexit created a situation in which businesses had to face new trade barriers, leading to increased costs and requiring adjustments to integrated supply chains (Pallis, 2021).

During an expert consultation conducted as part of this study with the Irish Department of Transport, the following summary of the situation was provided:

The greatest challenge for the transport industry was faced by seaports, transport companies, and freight forwarders. Encouraging importers and exporters to complete and submit the required documents, customs declarations for goods transported through these entities – was a frequently observed issue. The rapid introduction of new routes in RoRo and LoLo services posed a significant challenge for ports. Daily schedules changed, and work had to be reorganized. It was also a major investment for shipping operators, not without risk (Expert interview conducted by the author, 2023).

The Irish shipping industry quickly and comprehensively adapted to the changes, providing a range of additional services and increasing the frequency of RoRo and LoLo sailings.

The imposition of customs controls on goods between the United Kingdom and European Union member states represents the greatest barrier, hindering Ireland's trade with its largest trading partner. These barriers have contributed to a decline in both imports and exports in Irish-British trade. According to an industry expert interviewed for this study, "Brexit causes numerous delays on a daily basis, and additional controls in the UK and Ireland – essentially bureaucracy – are also a huge problem for customers. Sometimes they do not have their documents in order, which significantly affects the timeliness of deliveries. As a transport company, we are required to undergo additional inspections conducted by officials for goods arriving in Ireland at seaports in Dublin or Rosslare Europort. As a result, a driver can be delayed for many hours, and if there is any issue with our clients' documentation during these inspections, it may cause further delays and create significantly more work for everyone involved in transport operations" (Expert interview conducted by the author, 2023). There are various reasons why a container with cargo may be held at customs clearance. These include incorrectly completed documents, veterinary inspections, health and safety checks, as well as outstanding financial dues. For many businesses, the challenges associated with customs clearance following Brexit have led to the establishment of dedicated customs departments within their structures to minimize supply chain disruptions and adapt to the prevailing transport regulations.

From the perspective of international trade, Brexit is, in effect, a negative event for the Irish economy. However, the claim that Ireland's maritime transport sector

has developed much more dynamically compared to previous years confirms the positive changes brought about by the UK's departure from the European Union. Businesses have overcome numerous obstacles in their efforts to adjust to the new reality, demonstrating their high level of flexibility and adaptability to changing market conditions.

In 2020–2021, the shipping industry experienced a boom, affecting many key aspects of the organization and operation of maritime transport. Excess transport capacity was utilized, schedules were adjusted to meet market demand, and new routes were launched to satisfy growing needs.

Major maritime operators quickly responded to rapid market changes. Stena Line, Irish Ferries, CLdN, and Brittany Ferries announced additional transport capacity on direct routes to seaports in the European Union. Moreover, a new maritime operator, DFDS, launched a RoRo service between Rosslare Europort and Dunkirk in January 2021. Currently, one-third of all RoRo traffic takes place via direct connections to EU ports. The introduction of new customs restrictions led to a sharp increase in demand for services on direct routes between Irish ports and mainland Europe. RoRo traffic on these direct routes rose by 94% compared to 2020, largely due to a decline in the use of the UK land bridge by road hauliers. As a result, RoRo traffic to UK ports decreased by 22%, while direct crossings to the EU now account for one-third of the total RoRo volume, compared to 17% in previous years.

Until the end of the transition period, ferry services between Ireland and the UK remained unchanged. According to data obtained by the study's authors from the Irish Department of Transport in January 2023, Irish Ferries and Stena Line continued to operate four daily sailings to Holyhead, Pembroke, and Fishguard, just as before Brexit. Seatruck and P&O maintained their routes to Liverpool with slightly increased frequency while essentially preserving their existing schedules. These figures indicate the high resilience of the maritime sector, despite a 20% decline in shipping traffic on this route since Brexit.

With the frequency of ferry services between ROI and the UK remaining unchanged, alongside the launch of new direct ROI–EU services, Irish importers and exporters gained greater flexibility in choosing transport routes for their goods.

## **Cargo transport organization under new customs regulations – practical implications**

The Northern Ireland Protocol was a solution that helped avoid a hard border on the island, including all border infrastructure between Ireland and Northern Ireland. This had several consequences for trade regulations on the island between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (*Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland*, n.d.):

1. No customs declarations, tariffs, or quantitative restrictions.
2. No customs controls on the island.

3. No sanitary requirements.
4. Continued access to tax systems for Northern Irish businesses to settle VAT.

The Windsor Framework, announced by UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, introduced several measures aimed at simplifying procedures and ensuring smooth trade between the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. The key changes included (*Brexit: Withdrawal agreement – protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland*, 2023):

1. “Green lanes” – for goods exported from the UK intended exclusively for the Northern Ireland market. These goods are labelled “Not for EU”.
2. “Red lanes” – for goods exported from the UK through a Northern Irish port with the final destination in the Republic of Ireland.

Expert Consultation on New Transport Rules: Three Cargo Transport Scenarios Between Ireland and the UK.

During an expert consultation conducted as part of this study, based on new transport regulations, three transport scenarios exist for goods moving between Ireland and the United Kingdom:

#### **Scenario 1**

Loading in the Republic of Ireland → Transport → Unloading in Northern Ireland

There are no customs requirements for any goods collected in the Republic of Ireland and transported to Northern Ireland, due to the free movement of goods.

#### **Scenario 2**

Loading in Northern Ireland → Ferry crossing → Unloading in Great Britain (Scotland, England, or Wales)

If goods are shipped via the Port of Belfast or Warrenpoint, no customs clearance is required. However, if goods loaded in Northern Ireland are shipped via an Irish port (e.g., Rosslare Europort), import and export declarations are required to settle VAT obligations.

#### **Scenario 3**

Loading in the Republic of Ireland → Ferry crossing → Unloading in Great Britain (Scotland, England, or Wales)

Goods in this case are shipped from Dublin Port or Rosslare Europort. Standard Irish export declarations and UK import declarations are required.

Declared goods are assigned an MRN (Movement Reference Number), which allows transport companies to generate a PBN (Pre-Boarding Number) – a mandatory requirement for port access.

Since January 1, 2021, all goods transported to or from Great Britain (excluding Northern Ireland) are subject to customs formalities.

#### **Ro-Ro System Services**

The Ro-Ro (Roll-on/Roll-off) system consists of three stages (Revenue):

- Pre-Boarding Notification (PBN),
- Customs Channel Search,
- Customs Clearance Upon Receiving a Call to the Customs Office.

The Ro-Ro service provides real-time information to all parties in the supply chain about the status of goods, including:

- PBN validation and transmission of the PBN identifier,
- Confirmation that goods are “ready to proceed for clearance” onto the ferry,
- Customs channel assigned to goods before arrival at an Irish port,
- If selected for inspection, a “customs office call” notification will be issued, directing goods to the customs clearance point.

## **Changes in the functioning of transport in Rosslare Europort after the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union**

Rosslare Port, known in Irish as *Cuan Ros Láir*, translates to “the port of the central peninsula”. It is located on the southeastern coast of Ireland, strategically positioned for maritime connections with both the United Kingdom and mainland Europe. The history of Rosslare Europort is closely linked to the development of rail transport on the island. The expansion of the new transportation system led to the establishment of the port. In the 1890s, the Fishguard & Rosslare Railway & Harbours Company created new railway and ferry networks. The railway line from Wexford to Rosslare (Ballygeary) was initially opened on June 24, 1882, but was closed after ten years. It was later reopened by the Fishguard Company on August 4, 1894 (Ros-siter, 2014). This development facilitated new trade, tourism, and migration routes. Today, the port is managed by the Irish state-owned company *Iarnród Éireann*.

The increasing popularity of ferry crossings for both passenger and freight vehicles between Southern Ireland, the United Kingdom, and mainland Europe has strengthened Rosslare Europort’s role as a key hub for international transport.

The port handles RoRo (Roll-on/Roll-off) vessels, Ro-Pax (Roll-on/Roll-off Passenger) ships, and bulk cargo. The primary exported goods include fresh produce, food products, pharmaceuticals, steel, timber, and construction materials. Imports mainly consist of clothing, furniture, food, and electronics. Rosslare Europort offers a comprehensive range of integrated port services. Its core operations include vessel docking, cargo loading and unloading, cargo distribution in ship holds, and passenger vehicle processing for RoRo shipping lines. Additionally, the port facilitates the handling of dry bulk, general cargo, and offshore shipments. It is equipped with RoRo handling equipment, forklifts, and terminal tractors (*About Rosslare Europort*, n.d.). The port has also expanded its operations to include the import and export of motor vehicles, providing a secure monitored area of 17,500 m<sup>2</sup> for this service.

To fully unlock the potential of Rosslare Europort, an investment of over 30 euro million has been planned. The port will be reconfigured to maximize profitability while supporting regional and national economic growth. New facilities and infrastructure upgrades are in the pipeline. The Masterplan consists of four phases, which, once completed, will transform Rosslare into a modern seaport.

The impact of Brexit on Europe has influenced changes in this development plan. As the second-largest port in Ireland, Rosslare Europort has the capacity to carry out customs clearances. Therefore, dedicated zones have been incorporated to enhance customs processing for travellers heading to the UK and to facilitate customs procedures for freight trucks and other cargo destined for the British market. Expanding the port's operational area will increase its capacity for future freight operations and bulk cargo storage.

The completion of the Masterplan will provide Irish importers, exporters, manufacturers, and logistics sectors with access to Ireland's leading port, offering direct services connected to markets across Europe and beyond.

Rosslare Europort presents an attractive offering, ensuring connections to all key European markets. Like any major port, it hosts a wide range of businesses that provide various services to customers in both cargo and passenger transportation. A port functions as a multi-entity economic system, operating as a complex organization in terms of ownership and capital structure, production and spatial planning, as well as management and operational efficiency (Klimek, 2016).

## **The impact of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union on Rosslare Europort**

The United Kingdom's departure from the European Union has led to significant changes in the European transport sector. The trade restrictions imposed by the UK government have had a substantial impact on Rosslare Europort, particularly in terms of goods movement and functional-organizational practices. Efficient and reliable border controls are essential for the smooth operation of port activities.

As one of Ireland's main Ro-Ro ports, Rosslare Europort serves as a key international hub for trade between Europe and the UK. The demand for port services is driven by two main factors: international trade volume and the choice of transport mode. Given this, the Irish port must continuously adapt to the terms of trade agreements with the UK, ensuring the seamless delivery of goods to the British market and vice versa. Factors such as varying tariffs and currency fluctuations also play a crucial role in shaping trade dynamics.

Since the UK's departure from the EU Single Market, goods moving between Irish and British ports are now subject to border and customs controls, leading to delays that disrupt supply chain structures. Ensuring on-time delivery without unnecessary delays is a key concern for shippers. The Irish Revenue Commissioners (*Trade and cars at Rosslare Europort*, n.d.) are responsible for overseeing import procedures in Ireland.

Importing goods into Ireland has become a complex challenge for transport companies. If the imported goods originate from outside the European Union, including the UK (excluding Northern Ireland), a customs declaration is required. This

declaration must be submitted electronically via Revenue's Automated Import System (AIS). Certain goods are prohibited, while others are subject to restrictions or require special licenses. Importers are responsible for paying all applicable charges, including customs duties, VAT, and excise tax. At the time of customs clearance, Revenue may request specific documents, such as an invoice, a certificate of origin, and an import permit.

Similarly, when exporting goods from Ireland to destinations outside the EU, including the UK, the procedures follow a comparable process. A customs declaration must be submitted electronically through Revenue's Automated Entry Processing (AEP) system.

## **Rosslare Port's response to Brexit-driven changes**

Rosslare Port has taken proactive steps to meet customer expectations. In the main terminal building of Rosslare Europort, both passengers and freight industry representatives have access to a dedicated contact point for Revenue. This facility handles all inquiries related to imports, exports, and non-EU customs declarations.

All participants in the supply chain, including exporters, declarants, logistics companies, freight forwarders, and carriers – must be fully aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding the correct submission of goods. Accurate data entry is essential for preventing transport delays. Clear and precise communication between supply chain stakeholders helps avoid issues related to order fulfilment.

Brexit has significantly influenced not only ferry operators, who have increased the number of sailings or introduced vessels with higher capacity, but also the decision-making process of transport companies in selecting routes for their goods. Currently, 70% of Rosslare Europort's total RoRo capacity is dedicated to transporting goods from the European Union, whereas between 2010 and 2020, the average share was only 21% (*Be prepared: Brexit act and prepare switch*, 2020).

Since early 2021, DFDS has launched new routes to Dunkirk, while Stena Line and Brittany Ferries have expanded their services to Cherbourg. In 2022, Finnlines introduced a new freight route between Rosslare Europort and Zeebrugge. Responding to market demand, Brittany Ferries announced that its new vessel, *Salamanca*, would operate the Rosslare–Bilbao route.

During an expert consultation conducted at the Irish Department of Transport as part of this study, it was highlighted that Rosslare Europort now plays a crucial role in freight and passenger transport. Since early 2021, the port has undergone a major transformation in terms of both frequency and capacity of shipping services to and from Rosslare.

The following table 1 presents detailed data on the volume of RoRo transport units on the Ireland–EU route from 2021 to 2023.

Tab. 1. RoRo traffic statistics in Irish seaport

| Route         | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | Growth vs 2022 | Diff vs 2022 |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Cork – EU     | 6,917   | 9,240   | 6,792   | –26%           | –2,448       |
| Dublin – EU   | 257,781 | 261,715 | 238,442 | –9%            | –23,273      |
| Rosslare – EU | 119,006 | 126,165 | 144,025 | 14%            | 17,860       |
| ROI – EU      | 383,704 | 397,120 | 389,259 | –2%            | –7,861       |

Source: Fallen Bailey, 2024.

In 2023, Rosslare Europort once again recorded an increase in traffic between Ireland and the European Union, rising by 14%. The total volume reached 144,025 units, marking the third consecutive record.

To fully analyse RoRo traffic at Rosslare Europort, it is essential to consider volumes both before and after Brexit. Brexit has had a significant and positive impact on RoRo traffic through Rosslare.

Looking at table 2 below, RoRo traffic in the third quarters of each year since 2020 has shown a consistent decline. In the third quarter of 2022, RoRo traffic at Rosslare Europort decreased by 39% compared to the third quarter of 2020.

Tab. 2. RoRo traffic Ireland–United Kingdom 2020–2022

|          |                    | Dublin – GB | Rosslare – GB | ROI – GB | NI – GB |
|----------|--------------------|-------------|---------------|----------|---------|
| Total Q3 | Q3 2020            | 234,160     | 25,328        | 259,488  | 217,968 |
|          | Q3 2021            | 183,731     | 17,045        | 200,776  | 236,961 |
|          | Q3 2022            | 185,149     | 15,532        | 200,681  | 218,592 |
|          | Growth vs 2021 (%) | 1%          | –9%           | 0%       | –8%     |
|          | Growth vs 2020 (%) | –21%        | –39%          | –23%     | 0%      |

Source: Fallen Bailey, 2024.

Table 3 below presents data on RoRo traffic between Ireland and the United Kingdom from 2021 to 2023. In 2023, a decline in RoRo traffic volume on routes between Irish and British ports was recorded for the second consecutive year.

This decrease was largely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of stockpiling ahead of Brexit. The reduced use of the UK land bridge led to a shift away from traffic between Ireland and the UK. However, since the first quarter of 2021 – the beginning of the post-Brexit era – traffic has remained at a stable level.

Tab. 3. RoRo traffic Ireland-United Kingdom 2021–2023

| Route         | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | Growth vs 2022 | Diff vs 2022 |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Dublin – GB   | 703,603 | 741,117 | 724,925 | –2%            | –16,192      |
| Rosslare – GB | 64,069  | 61,858  | 60,668  | –2%            | –1,190       |
| ROI – GB      | 767,672 | 802,975 | 785,593 | –2%            | –17,382      |

Source: Fallen Bailey, 2024.

According to data from the IMDO report, RoRo traffic at Rosslare Europort surged dramatically in 2021, increasing by 49% and adding over 60,000 freight units year-on-year. The year 2021 marked the highest annual total of RoRo freight units ever recorded by IMDO, reaching 183,338 units.

Rosslare Europort captured half of the direct demand for EU trade routes, significantly exceeding its pre-Brexit share of RoRo traffic within the European Union, which had been around 13% in previous years. Currently, Rosslare accounts for one-third of all Republic of Ireland–EU RoRo traffic. Therefore, the decline in traffic observed in Q3 2022 should be viewed within the context of the post-Brexit period.

Over the past seven quarters since the transition period ended, the latest quarter has recorded a decline in RoRo traffic. A broader analysis suggests that growth in Irish ports is beginning to slow, influenced by the deterioration of key economic indicators in the wider Irish economy.

Comparing traffic between Rosslare Europort and British ports, there has been a 34% decrease since 2020. This decline reflects a reduced willingness to use the UK land bridge. Meanwhile, the number of freight units on routes from Rosslare to European ports has reached record levels.

Volume of RoRo freight units transported on the Rosslare Europort–EU route:

- 2019 – 20,623 units,
- 2020 – 25,450 units,
- 2021 – 119,006 units.

This represents an impressive 368% increase in freight volume, marking a major success for Rosslare Europort.

Further IMDO data indicates that between 2015 and 2020, Rosslare Europort had a 14% share of the RoRo transport market. However, since 2021, this share has risen significantly to 31%.

Passenger transport data also shows a 62% increase in 2021 compared to the previous year.

## Conclusion

In summary, Brexit has proven to be a positive catalyst for the development of Rosslare Europort. The port now offers 92 weekly RoRo sailings, seizing new and unex-

pected opportunities to position itself as a central hub for international freight movement between Ireland and European ports. This transformation has been driven by the evolving geopolitical landscape.

Discussions with experts and the analysis of available reports have allowed for the achievement of this article's objective – presenting the changes occurring at Rosslare Europort and outlining the new opportunities in transport following the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

The consequences of Brexit have caused disruptions in transport at Rosslare Europort due to new customs transit regulations. However, these issues apply only to trade between Southern Ireland and ports in the United Kingdom. Rosslare successfully addressed these challenges through a reorganization of port operations, creating designated zones for goods destined for the UK market. While Brexit initially posed logistical difficulties, it has also opened new growth opportunities for the port. The Masterplan transformation in the coming years is clear evidence of how Rosslare is capitalizing on its potential. The increased number of sailings and rising port capacity necessitate infrastructure expansion. Thanks to financial support from the EU Brexit Adjustment Reserve, Rosslare Europort has the potential to become the most modern port in Southern Ireland and rank among the leading ports in Europe.

Following the UK's departure from the EU and the introduction of new regulatory requirements, Irish transport companies have also had to adapt, resulting in higher freight rates. The need for customs clearance procedures has discouraged many businesses from using the UK land bridge, but at the same time, some transport operators have seized the opportunity to expand their services to include customs operations.

Reflecting on the broader impact of Brexit on transport, it is clear that Rosslare Europort has gained strategic importance and has become a gateway to mainland Europe for Ireland. The research and analyses conducted confirm the study's hypotheses and objectives. However, it is important to note that the discussion on Brexit's impact on transport is far from exhausted.

One must also consider the role of the Windsor Framework, which plays a crucial role in shaping trade and regulatory relations between the UK and the EU. Additionally, the Stormont Brake mechanism allows Northern Ireland's authorities to object to new EU regulations if they are deemed detrimental to the region.

Ultimately, Rosslare Europort is a prime example of dynamic development, driven by a shifting political and economic landscape that initially seemed to threaten the free movement of goods and port growth. By skilfully adapting to these new challenges and establishing new transport connections, Rosslare has transformed a potential crisis into an opportunity, ensuring both the port's and the region's long-term growth.

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### O autorach

**Grzegorz Mazurkiewicz** – adiunkt na Politechnice Łódzkiej, od 25 lat związany z branżą TSL (transport, spedycja, logistyka) jako praktyk, uzyskane doświadczenie zawodowe wykorzystuje w procesie dydaktycznym. Pełni funkcję przewodniczącego

Rady Klastra Lodzistics (Logistyczna Sieć Biznesowa Polski Centralnej). Do głównych obszarów badawczych należy problematyka transportu i spedycji w handlu międzynarodowym, regulacji prawnych dotyczących transportu i logistyki, zarządzanie łańcuchami dostaw, innowacje w logistyce, *green logistics* oraz zrównoważony rozwój.

**Anna Frydrych** – studentka kierunku zarządzanie na Społecznej Akademii Nauk w Łodzi, absolwentka logistyki. Przez ponad dekadę mieszkała w Irlandii, gdzie zdobywała doświadczenie zawodowe w branży transportowej. Obecnie związana z sektorem energetyki kolejowej, uczestniczy w procesach mających realny wpływ na funkcjonowanie transportu w Polsce. Jej zainteresowania naukowe i zawodowe koncentrują się wokół logistyki i transportu, zarządzania procesami oraz rozwoju infrastruktury. Pasjonuje się również optymalizacją procesów oraz nowoczesnymi rozwiązaniami w organizacji usług.

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