

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The land border between Northern Ireland and Ireland](#), HC 329

Wednesday 1 November 2017

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Members present: Dr Andrew Murrison (Chair); Maria Caulfield; Mr Stephen Hepburn; Lady Hermon; Kate Hoey; Conor McGinn; Nigel Mills; Ian Paisley; Jim Shannon; Bob Stewart.

Questions 38 – 119

Witnesses

I: Dr Christian Bock, Director General, Federal Customs Administration (Switzerland), and Lieutenant Colonel Rebekka Straessle, Chief of Staff, Swiss Border Guard.

II: Kristin Breiland, Directorate of Norwegian Customs, and Liv Kristin Rundberget, Assistant Director, Directorate of Norwegian Customs.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Christian Bock and Lieutenant Colonel Rebekka Straessle.

Q38 Chair: Good morning, everybody. Good morning, Dr Bock and Colonel Straessle. Can I say how grateful we are to you for coming a considerable distance to better inform our deliberations this morning? As you know, we are very much exercised by the land border that will exist between the European Union and the United Kingdom after we leave the EU in March 2019, and getting it right for the benefit of both sides and ensuring, crucially, that things go well in the island of Ireland. You will be aware of all the complexities around that particular border. Before we go on to questions, Dr Bock, I wonder if you might like to give us a very quick rundown on the border that you have been dealing with for some considerable time and perhaps suggest to us any pitfalls that we might wish to avoid.

Dr Bock: Thanks a lot. Yes, indeed, I am also very grateful that I have the opportunity to present to you the Swiss experience. The way from Switzerland to the UK is not as long as you might think. It is a surprising and interesting fact that we have 150 flights per day between the UK and Switzerland, and especially when British tourists are taking their ski holidays in France, you of course enter Switzerland by Geneva airport.

I want to give you some idea of what a day at the Swiss border is like in figures. We will distribute a small brochure of facts and figures. I find these figures quite impressive. We have 2.1 million people crossing the Swiss border every day—we have 8 million inhabitants—1.1 million cars and 24,000 heavy goods vehicles. We have 2.1 million people—you have a little more than 1 million people entering the US every day—and 24,000 heavy goods vehicles, which gives you 8.7 million trucks per year. I remember that I once saw a figure of 4 million trucks entering the UK per year, so you will see that Switzerland is quite an important country for transit. Of course, as we are a small country we have many centres where people live over the border, especially in the Chiasso-Como area in the south, the Basel area or the Geneva area, but work in Switzerland.

The Swiss Customs is, in its organisation, a little bit special, as we have the typical customs work and the border force—and I am happy that I have Lieutenant Colonel Straessle, the Chief of Staff of the Border Guard, with me—under one roof. The basic distinction between Customs and Border Guard is that the Border Guard is responsible for people, Customs is responsible for goods. We have a border with five countries, but a customs border with four countries as the Principality of Liechtenstein and Switzerland, since the 1920s, have a customs union.

Let me remain for a few seconds on this issue, as it is a very interesting model. Of course, this is a model that you cannot take one for one on the special Irish situation, but the model is very interesting in saying, yes, it is possible, inside Europe, to have a situation where one country is a member of the European Economic Area and, at the same time, has a



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customs union with a country that is not a member of the EU and the EEA at all and has some bilateral treaties with the EU. This basic idea is saying if there is good will and if you respect the special geographical and historical situation of two countries, it is possible to find a good working solution.

Many of the arrangements we have with our neighbouring countries were not built up from day one. We have a very good collaboration with our German colleagues. We are collaborating especially with the German Federal Police. We do common operations, and so I have done customs checks in Germany—we are allowed to, of course always together with German colleagues. There are German police helicopters flying in Switzerland with my people on board. We are working together. There are common teams. We even have common police posts where we are working together. This collaboration with colleagues, with different security forces, is, in our view, extremely efficient.

On the customs matter, as I have said, we have many importations of course. Switzerland is well known for its beauty, but it is not well known for its natural resources. We have no coal, no steel industry, so there is heavy importation into Switzerland. If you are a transit country, you need an efficient system. You will know that we have built the longest train tunnel in the world, so we have an interest in the rail line between Genoa and Rotterdam functioning well. I have heard that you have the intention to visit Basel and you are absolutely welcome, because you have to see this in reality and what it looks like in the morning, and so I would suggest that you start at five o'clock. Then you will see what is going on at the border.

To be precise, we are doing 100% checks. We are doing risk-based data checks 100%. Effective checks, controls, I would say are between 1% and 2%. Yesterday, I was in Chiasso and they told me that this year they have a quota of 1.7% that is really checked. We should remember that in many cases importers, exporters and truck companies are absolutely fine; they are doing a good job, and there is no necessity to check them. There we need random checks. We will make a risk analysis and, based on this, we decide what we want to control.

Q39 Chair: Thank you very much. That is very comprehensive and gives us a good feel for the situation. As I understand it, Switzerland has a collection of bilateral agreements with its neighbours that ensures relative seamlessness when it comes to the several borders you have described. Further, they are overseen by joint committees that meet periodically and there are protocols for conflict resolution in the event that there is disagreement between the parties involved. Can you describe a little how that works and whether it is effective? The difficulty, of course, with agreements that are not fully comprehensive and overarching is that things disappear between the joins and things get missed out. To what extent is that the case?

The other border we are quite interested in is Norway-Sweden, which of



course is easier in that respect. Switzerland is in a very different position because of the multitude of agreements that have grown up over the years, in particular the Bilateral I, Bilateral II sets of agreements and the governance structures around that. Could you say whether that has been effective and, if not, where perhaps the problems have arisen?

Dr Bock: Yes. There are different levels of agreements. At the very basic level, we have agreements with our neighbouring countries. This is to rule out how we operate on the ground floor. For example, there is an agreement for a Basel motorway with Germany and our buildings are there on German ground. This is often the case; in Chiasso, Ticino, my customs station is in Italy. We have an agreement to say where we can operate, where we are responsible and what we are doing, and these responsible persons meet regularly, so they are there. They have a common interest and their interest is that there is a constant flow. In case of any problem, such as, from time to time, a truck tries to enter twice—so not exiting the country, or that kind of thing—they have procedures in place to rule out all the problems.

Then, on a regional level, they are meeting with their national counterparts, so my directorate responsible for the north-west part of Switzerland is meeting with his counterpart for south-west Germany. I have regular meetings with my counterparts in France, Germany and Italy, where we rule out problems. I would say that 99.9% of all problems are ruled out at these levels, because customs officers are talking to each other. We have a common interest, which is, at the end of the day, fighting smuggling, taking criminals out and taking dangerous goods out. Frankly speaking, on politics and law, of course we follow the rule of law, but these are specialists. It is a little like when two police officers are talking to each other: they have absolutely the same interest. They understand each other. Even when they come from different countries, they speak the same language. For customs officers, it is the same; they speak the same language and we rule out all the problems.

I have to say that on a more political level, in the customs field I cannot remember any big issues we have had. You address the problem. You try to solve it. From time to time you have to negotiate—there is a bit of give and take, and a bit of dealing. But we have roughly four to eight treaties in the customs field, and I have to say there are no practical problems. We talk to each other.

Q40 **Chair:** That sounds remarkably pragmatic, because the alternative of course is relying upon the European Court, the legal system that relates to relationships between member states. What you seem to be describing is a remarkably pragmatic way of resolving issues, but there must be disputes between Switzerland and its neighbours over particular areas of your relationship, and I am wondering how those are dealt with. Perhaps it is an unfair question, because I suspect it is dealt with at a higher official level or political level.



Dr Bock: Frankly, I have to say I do not remember those kinds of problems. In our field, yes, there were problems, but these are normal problems you are able to solve. In the field of customs and border securities, I can only answer no—we did not have any major problems and it was not necessary to escalate. On the few problems we had, we were talking to each other.

Q41 **Jim Shannon:** Thank you very much for coming today. It is always good to hear of your experiences and how you do it. I just had occasion this morning, Chair, to sit alongside a gentleman who is involved in some of the Brexit negotiations, and I happened to mention to him that we had some people coming from Switzerland this morning to tell us how they work and their relationship with the rest of the EU. He suggested some things to me that might be pertinent to this inquiry and what we are trying to do. He said very clearly that Switzerland is not a seamless border, and it is not, so how does the trading between countries take place? I know it is not something that you are involved in directly, but you mentioned how many lorries come across the border each day and that, as an indication of the vehicle movement, is quite something. He tells me—and you will tell me if this is right or wrong—that every vehicle, every car and every lorry, pays a tax to drive on Swiss roads whenever they cross the border. Therefore, we cannot really say it is the same as we have on our border of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Perhaps you could confirm how that works.

How do the companies that are selling into Switzerland cross the border and come back again when it comes to the trade agreements? I know Switzerland can set its own trade agreements. The problem really is that they are so tied in with Europe that those trade agreements have to almost be overseen by other countries within the EU. When a lorry comes across with its products, how long does it take to process? Is there administrative paperwork that helps it get across?

Those are the two questions, Chair, and I am very conscious of and thank you for letting me go first.

Dr Bock: If I understood you correctly, your first question related to our road tax.

Jim Shannon: Yes. Every vehicle that crosses into Switzerland is taxed and, by the way, if you cross the border and you do not pay, they have your number and they chase you, whatever European country you are in, and get the money from you. You do not get away with it.

Dr Bock: The way we are dealing with this, you have to distinguish between private cars and trucks. A private car is rather easy: if you use the Swiss motorway, you need a motorway sticker, which costs you 40 Swiss francs per year—very cheap. When you are entering via a motorway—I think we have seven crossings—we make a visual check of whether you have such a sticker, if someone is there and not occupied.



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If you are not driving with such a sticker, you risk a random check by police.

The second thing is our trucks or lorries. Yes, there we have a system for the road pricing. Most of the trucks entering Switzerland regularly have an electronic system. There is an on-board unit they need to have. From time to time, you see a truck crossing the whole of Europe and they have up to eight or 10 of such road-pricing devices inside. When they have the device, they do not have to stop.

Otherwise it is rather easy: you have something like an ATM card, you go to a machine like a ticket machine, you enter how many kilometres you have on entering Switzerland and then, when you are exiting Switzerland, a deduction is made automatically. This is not as automated as we would wish, but it does not take you such a long time.

Q42 Jim Shannon: What is the cost for the lorries going across the border? You said it was 40 Swiss francs for a car.

Dr Bock: We have different systems. For cars, we say you pay for using Swiss motorways. For the motorways, if I remember correctly, it is also based on EU legislation and bilateral treaties we have with the EU. It is based on pollution, so if you have a dirty truck, then you pay more than if you have something like a Euro 6 truck, which is highly efficient and rather clean, and there you pay for every kilometre you make in Switzerland. It is the same idea as you have with the German Maut, for example. I think you have it in all European countries, just with different technical systems. For the time being, we lack the interoperability of these different systems.

The second question was related to how much time it takes. If you are in transit entering Basel and you want to exit by Italy, it will take you, entering Switzerland, between one and two minutes.

Q43 Jim Shannon: If I was bringing my goods from across the border in my lorry, is there an administrative system that you have in place that enables it to move along quicker? I am very conscious that the trade agreements are such that we must meet the requirements of whatever country we are going into, so I am curious to know how that works.

Dr Bock: Unfortunately, we are a little jealous of the agreement my Norwegian colleagues have with Sweden. They have a very efficient system, which we do not have. When you are exiting the EU, you have to deal, in my example, with German Customs; then you enter Switzerland. The normal importation procedure will not take you a long time because we have all the data in advance. In many cases, we even tell them, "Look, you can simply enter. We have all the information we need." Of course, the whole system is optimised. We know how to use it. We distinguish between the two flows; for everything that is transit, where we want it to flow, it is highly efficient. What we are dealing with is the importation process, where we need a little more time.



It is also important not only to focus on the big entry points we have, and I think this is the same situation at the Irish border. You are not dealing with big enterprises; you are dealing with local SMEs, local farmers—small companies that are doing business on both sides of the border, a little like mum and dad companies. There we have, for the time being, some efficient, simple procedures that, with the new European Union customs goals, may need to change, because the UCC is introducing some administrative burdens.

Jim Shannon: Chair, where would we be without mum and dad companies?

Chair: Absolutely.

Q44 **Bob Stewart:** Thank you very much, Dr Bock, and nice to see you here, Colonel Straessle. I am going to direct my questions at Colonel Straessle, because my wife is an ICRC delegate. She is Swiss and she is French—she is a half-breed. We have a house in Ferney-Voltaire, which is right on the border. The number of times I have crossed the border between France and Switzerland at the airport is numerous and I have never been stopped. Actually, I was; I was in the wrong lane last time—forgive me. I was in the wrong lane and I was stopped then, and they were very kind. My point is this: I can get across the border any time I like by going down the Rue de Versoix crossing point right near the border, which is always unmanned. What percentage of fraudulent crossings do you think there are because of either unmanned checkpoints, like at the main checkpoint, which is normally unmanned, or the unapproved or always unmanned checkpoints? What percentage of the people crossing the border do you think are crossing illegally? For Dr Bock, what percentage of illegal cargos cross as well? Do you have any idea of this? It might be in your booklet; forgive me—I have not looked at it. For me, the border works very well and it is very easy, but from an authority point of view, what fraudulent crossings take place percentage-wise?

Lt Colonel Straessle: Thank you very much, sir, for your question. I have to say that you are obviously a low-risk person and it is very correct that you were never stopped.

Bob Stewart: They are wrong there.

Lt Colonel Straessle: On the more serious side, what you do not see when you cross the border is the whole risk analysis process that is going on in the background. Even at border points where there are no personnel, there will be cameras that can read licence plates. There will be evaluations going on of cars that have been found to be involved in smuggling and cars that belong to networks. In addition, on the airport, we consider passengers incoming from Britain as very low risk. You would be flagged if it were different.



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With regard to the fraudulent entries, it is a very difficult question to say what percentage evades us, but we can say that we have impressive numbers of people we do catch at the border. For example, last year we caught 48,000 people, mostly illegal migrants, who crossed the border, so our controls are not useless, as you can see from the numbers.

Q45 **Bob Stewart:** I did not imply they were useless. I thought they were jolly good, but I was just wondering what percentage. You are not quite sure, but you caught 48,000 people who were illegally coming through, through your Border Guard, of which you are the Chief of Staff. On cargo, we do not have much idea.

Dr Bock: From time to time, we are doing control days where we check more or less everything. Of course, this only works for one or two hours and then every truck driver in Europe knows that we are doing controls. However, when we are doing big operations like in the Geneva area—I was in Ferney-Voltaire, indeed, where we did a big operation together with the French Gendarmerie two weeks ago—

Bob Stewart: Picking up illegal people?

Dr Bock: No, you do not find so many cases, so we think that the number is rather low. Also, it depends what kinds of errors we find. You have some formalities that are wrong. You have some cases where it is not really smuggling; they are administrative errors. Of course, yes, you have some cases of smuggling, but these are special cases. These are not the big trucks. Then, of course, you have drugs. Yes, they are coming in. I do not have the exact figures in mind. There are figures about drug smuggling, which are more or less the same. The police know how big the Swiss drug market is. We know how much we find and you can make some estimations on how effective we are.

I want to stress one point that Rebekka made. When you do not see us at the border, it does not mean that we are not there, and I am not speaking about cameras. I want to give you an example. I was with a Member of Parliament on a train and I explained to her a little of our work. I told her, "Nearly on every train you will find my people," and it was a coincidence that then two people arrived. If you have a bit of an eye for them, you see how they look around, and they knew me. They are not in uniform, and they make spot checks on the train. We have people on nearly every international train. We are in unmarked vehicles around. We have observation systems in place. When you are crossing the Swiss border with too many cigarettes—which I am not saying you are doing—even then you are not an interesting case.

Bob Stewart: Chocolate.

Dr Bock: As long as you do not import chocolate. We do not like that.

Q46 **Bob Stewart:** I must not be too flippant, but can I just finish up? We, as a Committee, are trying to help get a really effective but non-invasive



border for Northern Ireland. It is a bit of an unfair question, but if the authorities in Northern Ireland came to you and said, "Dr Bock, Colonel Straessle, design a system that minimises the hassle to the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland but is effective," could you design a system that does not have visible checkpoints? Can you find a system that would work like that? I ask because that is what we really want.

Dr Bock: Yes, that is possible. What would you need to do? You need common patrols between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, staffed with the same people and with the common goal of finding irregularities. Secondly, you need an intelligence strategy for what you are looking for. You need control points not at the border but somewhere in the country. You need controls not at the border but with the enterprises. You need a system of some sort of pre-qualification like, for example, the authorised economic operator, and then you need a system for low-risk trade or when you have a trade of always the same kind of stuff.

For example, if you have milk every day—I know this is of particular interest in Ireland—you do not need a system where you stop every time at the border. We have those systems. Do you know what we are doing? We give them a list and tell them, "Send us the list at the end of the month," and that is enough. From time to time, yes, we control them. Of course, if you are in the agricultural sector, you have so many regulations and we can control. We can look at their accounts and check what they have declared for export, what they have sold, and the invoices. You get a very good overview in that way; you do not need an expensive system. From time to time, you tell them, "Look, we will control you." People accept this. We have Swiss farmers who have part of their land in Germany and France. They know they have to announce, "Now we are crossing the border," and they accept this. From time to time, we check them. I do not know how UK farmers are behaving, but we get most of the information from colleagues. One farmer realises "Oh, my competitor is not following the rules," and we get some information, and that is very efficient.

Bob Stewart: I am quite sure that would happen in our case too. I have to go, Dr Bock and Colonel. Thank you so much. The answer to that question was very illuminating and very helpful, because that is exactly what we want. I hope someone is listening to the words you have just said and possibly coming to you and saying, "Bock, Straessle, over here, design our system." Thank you very much.

Q47 **Ian Paisley:** I want to reiterate what Bob has just said. I have sat on this Committee for many years and, Dr Bock, Lieutenant Colonel Straessle, your evidence so far has been precise, clear, candid and extremely helpful. It has taught me two things: first, that good will is incredibly important between you and the other five nations that you share the border with and for those common goals that



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come from good will. The other message is keep the politics out of this. It does not need a political mess. There is obviously small "p" politics around it, but by and large keep the politics out of it and the border situation will work. They are very encouraging messages and I reiterate what Bob has said. I hope that other people listen to your evidence today. I wish the whole of Parliament would listen to it, because it has been very encouraging.

I have two questions. One of them relates to terror threat. Obviously, we have a very specific and quite a high terror threat. What is the terror threat like in Switzerland and how do you use that in your analysis and intelligence with regard to border operations?

Lt Colonel Straessle: Thank you. Yes, the terror threat is higher than it used to be. I have just seen the numbers of people suspected to be terrorist fighters or people who are close in their beliefs and thinking to radicals. I have noticed that in the area of Geneva, bordering France and being close to Lyon, we have had 134 people suspected of having close connections to radicalised networks, so that is a question where we do not have the answer yet.

We have 2,100 border guards and we are trying to give them key indicators of what to look for when they are confronted with a person. These may relate to behaviour, like not shaking the hand of a woman; they may relate to clothing or mostly to propaganda materials they have with them. However, I have to say it is a very difficult fight to fight. We are also, right now, establishing a new law for the prevention of terrorism, where we are trying to find the right indicators and the right amount of controls for that. I cannot give you a recipe for that, but we are very aware of it. Again, it is a risk-based approach that is most helpful; it does not help to control everyone.

Q48 Ian Paisley: Thank you. You say that you have 2,500 border guards. You also mentioned, Dr Bock, that you have undercover agents on some of the vehicles and trains operating. Could you give us an indication of how many officials in total you employ to deal with the border and border issues? What are the costs to the Swiss Government in making this arrangement work so well?

Dr Bock: The Swiss Federal Customs Administration is, excluding the army, the biggest unit of the Federal Government. I have roughly 5,000 collaborators. We have about 2,200 in the Border Guard and 2,200 in Customs. The rest is administrative things, some taxes, training and so on.

On the cost, my biggest budget is, of course, HR costs. If I do a headcount, I have 15% of the Swiss Government, about 10% of all the HR costs and I have HR costs of about 600 million Swiss francs per year for salaries, wages and so on. For the police and security, it is not the Federal Government; the cantons are competent. This leads to the situation where the Border Guard is the biggest security organisation in



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Switzerland. We are bigger than each canton in this field. I have a budget of about 1.5 billion Swiss francs.

Q49 Ian Paisley: What you said earlier in answer to Bob Stewart about the agri-foods industry and the transfer of milk across borders, and the cross-jurisdictional issues of farms owned on both sides of the border, was incredibly interesting and very informative, because we have a similar issue to address. Do you get many complaints about the border system from either Swiss citizens or from citizens from other nations trying to enter Switzerland? What are the levels of complaints that you get annually, for example, if any?

Dr Bock: There are not many. I get the feeling that Swiss people are happy to see people at the Swiss border. There are two organisations in Switzerland where you get a big political mess when you close a unit, and that is the Swiss Post and the Swiss Customs. People like that there is something at the border.

Complaints from externals, yes, they come from time to time. I have to say that once per month I get a reclamation. For the rest, it will be dealt with. It depends on the level. Sometimes it is a minor issue, and then of course you get some formal complaint where you really have to look into what has happened. However, the acceptance of Swiss Customs and the Border Guard is rather high, I think. Rebekka, do you see the same? You see those cases where we have some problems.

Lt Colonel Straessle: Most complaints that we see relate to Schengen—to people believing that since Switzerland is a member of Schengen, they should be able to cross the border without any checks at all. Sometimes they are being checked and then there are some reactions.

Q50 Ian Paisley: However, it does not appear, from what you are saying, to have a detrimental impact on trade, imports and exports. You are not losing business as a result.

Dr Bock: Some years ago, there was a study on the costs of the border system. The economic cost of customs checks was estimated to be 450 million Swiss francs per year. I think this is a correct figure, but you have to consider that, if you talk about customs procedures, there are always two procedures: it is the procedure of the import and the export. In many cases, even if I had no custom procedure at all, there would be an export procedure of another country or even, for example when you are exporting to China, many rules you have to follow.

Our aim is to reduce the economic burden as much as possible. Maybe you have seen that we are not only competent for customs; we are competent for roughly 100 to 150 other laws. We are responsible for looking into protected species, drugs, arms, dairy products, sanitary requirements, intellectual property and so on. We have the whole range. Normally there is not another specialist from another department, so you do not have to wait. You do not get the answer, "Okay, this was



Customs checked,” but then the police officer will come, the vet will come, or some other organisation will come. If it is possible from our knowledge, we try to reduce it really to one point of entry and to one group our customers are talking to. With that, we are able to reduce all the administrative burdens.

Ian Paisley: Thank you very much.

Q51 **Conor McGinn:** I was very interested to hear your evidence. I suppose the context in which I am viewing it is that you have not been in the European Union and your border has been designed accordingly, whereas we have been in the EU and we are leaving, so therefore that will require a slightly different context in which we come to our arrangements.

To follow up Ian’s point on production and process, I was wondering if you could say a little bit more about that. As you rightly identified, a lot of SMEs along the border make multiple entries and exits every day. Food and milk are an example, as is Guinness, one of the island of Ireland’s most famous exports, where companies make multiple journeys across the border to process the produce before moving it on to the UK or Europe. How much of that occurs in terms of the work that you do and how do you manage that? You mentioned pre-clearance; I would be interested to hear a little more about that.

The issue that complicates things further around individual checks—and I do not think anyone is proposing that citizens would be checked moving freely between the north and south of Ireland—is that there are Irish citizens in Northern Ireland who are Irish not because of their residence in Northern Ireland but because they were born there. Under law, you can choose to be Irish or British or both. It would be very difficult to have those citizens stopped while travelling back and forth across the border. Are there any similar examples you have around some of that with your cantons and their relations with some of the five that surround you?

Finally, if you want to go to County Fermanagh or south Armagh and tell a farmer that he has to declare every time he crosses the border into one bit of land or the other, then you are a better man than me and the best of luck to you with that one.

Dr Bock: Thank you, Mr McGinn. You are right. The situation is different if you were always outside and were able to manage a border or if you are leaving, but of course the UK has always had a border—the sea border. There was importation from over the sea into the UK and into the European Union, so the knowledge is there.

I can give you a very practical example. A lawyer told me that he had a client who was coming from another European country into Switzerland and he had a big art collection, everything legal. He said to his client, “Look, we will go to Swiss Customs and discuss this with them,” and the client said, “Discuss this with Customs? It is not possible.” The lawyer



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said, "Yes, it is possible," and, in the end, they were sitting together finding a solution.

This is a very big point. Do we understand us? We have a double understanding. Yes, we are a police force, so we are guaranteeing security for our citizens, our economy and our Government. At the same time, we are a service-oriented company, so when an SME wants to do business and they come to us and say, "Look, I am doing trade regularly in Switzerland, so what should I do?" we help them. We are not closing doors. We do not tell them, "Okay, go to a transportation company." We sit together and find a solution. We explain to them, "Look, this is the easiest way you should proceed." Then you have a procedure in place and it works fine and people always accept this. This is the most important point. Yes, we have an advantage in having run a land border for years. You need some sort of experience. This is not something you can build up from one day to the other.

There are also things where the UK is highly experienced where we have no idea—our experience in managing a port, for instance. I am from Basel and, okay, we have a port, but it is not comparable with the ports the UK has. That is a different kind of experience.

Q52 **Conor McGinn:** You mentioned joint patrolling; is that co-patrolling, in that you do it together, or is it parallel?

Dr Bock: No, it is co-patrolling.

Conor McGinn: You do it together.

Dr Bock: Specifically in Basel, we have a common patrol between the Swiss Border Guard and the German Federal Police. It is 10 from each side. There is no commander. There are two staff sergeants of course and their only job is to organise themselves. Do your job: find criminals. That is their job, and they plan together and define their mission. They say, "Okay, we are working in Switzerland, and then we are working in Germany," and it is working perfectly. We always have to be together in case something arises, and from a legal perspective, to help people with what they can do.

I have made such patrols myself. The funny thing is, I am there, clearly visible as a Swiss official, not a German official, and we have checked German people and you do not even get asked, "What are you doing here?" People accept it and people like it. I was at a checkpoint where we had many people from the German Federal Police in Switzerland. Mainly Swiss people were controlled and it was accepted. It gives security and people like this. They like that common police forces are operating.

Q53 **Lady Hermon:** Thank you both very much indeed for coming here this morning. Dr Bock, you mentioned four to eight treaties that had been negotiated with Switzerland's neighbours. How long did those treaties



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take to negotiate? If you do not know, do not worry—we can come back to it or you can send the information. Please do not worry. I have a list of questions.

Have any of the borders with your EU neighbours been disputed in the past? Are they disputed borders? Have you experienced any terrorism over a disputed border in the recent past? Ours is a history in Northern Ireland where, of course, we have had a terrorist campaign for over 30 years with the Republic of Ireland. Are any of your borders disputed?

Dr Bock: No. From time to time, you have to redefine the border because in the Alps the glaciers move a little, but you have common commissions between, for example, Italy or France and Switzerland and they define it. It is mainly on a purely administrative level.

Q54 **Lady Hermon:** Yes, but there has been no experience of recent terrorism over a disputed border?

Dr Bock: No.

Q55 **Lady Hermon:** Therefore, we are not really comparing like with like when we are looking at the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Have either of you visited Northern Ireland or seen the border or seen the problems that we are trying to deal with when the UK leaves? Have either of you visited the border?

Dr Bock: Yes, but many years ago. I am feeling old at the moment. I was still in school.

Lady Hermon: You were still in school, right, but you have not been in the recent past?

Dr Bock: No.

Q56 **Lady Hermon:** I was very struck by the emphasis on the common operations—that there were common teams of police officers, and common operations with Germany and, indeed, German police helicopters. Do you really think that would be applicable over a disputed border and we would have helicopters from the Irish Republic flying over the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland or, indeed, British helicopters flying over the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland?

Dr Bock: It is not up to me to respond to such a political question. I can only express my opinion on the Swiss situation. Of course, you need to inform people. You need to tell people what you are doing. You cannot simply, from one day to another, arrive with a German police helicopter in Switzerland. We have to take the local police forces on board. We have to inform them. We have to inform the cantons. You have to inform the general public to make clear what you are doing. You need absolutely a clear rule of law. This is not something I can decide at my level. This is an international treaty, a police co-operation treaty between two countries, where you have made it absolutely clear.



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Parliament has discussed this, which is important and something you need to have. Then, when both police forces or security forces have a clear legal framework, we know what we can do. In our case, and I simply want to stick to the Swiss situation; we did not have any problems.

Q57 Lady Hermon: We are not comparing like with like is the point. Colonel Straessle, I was very struck by your reply to Mr Stewart in terms of the risk analysis process and there being cameras at the border. Are there cameras at every crossing point on the border?

Lt Colonel Straessle: Yes, most of them—wherever it is technically feasible and we are not on the territory of a neighbouring nation.

Q58 Lady Hermon: The cameras are facing into Switzerland, but you have cameras at every crossing?

Lt Colonel Straessle: Yes.

Q59 Lady Hermon: How would we reconcile that with the fact that the Prime Minister has recently ruled out—and I am quoting—"any physical infrastructure on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland"? Indeed, two weeks ago, in this Committee, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland specifically ruled out cameras along the border. How would you propose to monitor the movement of people without cameras or physical infrastructure? How could that be done?

Chair: Is there an alternative way of doing what you are doing without physical infrastructure? I think that is the gist of it.

Lt Colonel Straessle: I have to say that, with regard to data protection, we are not filming people. We are filming licence plates, so that is a difference. I cannot comment on how to do that. You have either people on the ground, boots on the ground, or you have the technical means. I do not see a third way. For us, it is preferable to have technical means and to have an intelligence process in the background.

Q60 Lady Hermon: You are saying that there is not really an alternative in Switzerland without cameras? You need cameras?

Dr Bock: The Swiss Parliament is extremely reluctant in increasing my headcount, so if I have a constant or even declining headcount, the only solution I have is using technical means. These cameras are rather efficient. I do not think it is always efficient to be there, as Colonel Straessle said, with boots on the ground, so for us it is working.

Q61 Lady Hermon: Yes. You are confirming that along your border you need either cameras or boots on the ground?

Dr Bock: Yes.

Q62 Lady Hermon: Can we just come back to the farms, please? I am really very interested in this. We have over 300 miles of border and we have somewhere in the region of 300 farms that straddle the border between



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Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In your evidence earlier, you mentioned that when Swiss farmers are moving their cattle into Germany, when the farms straddle the border, they have to notify the authorities. Is that correct?

Dr Bock: I have to say that I do not know everything in detail, but there is a simplified procedure in place. It depends a little on the situation. There is no such thing as “the” or “a” Swiss border. You realise very quickly, and I had to realise this in my position, that you have a situation where you are more in an environment that is absolutely crowded, but if I go to the north-west, you have large fields and not so many people. The mentality is extremely different. Do not forget we have four languages.

I would say we have simplified procedures that are adapted to the local situation, and this is important. In some places, as you have mentioned, you have cattle. You bring the cattle on the other side. In other cases they have their fields outside. It depends a little on the local situation, but, yes, we have everything, more or less, as much as you can, under control.

Q63 **Lady Hermon:** Yes. In other words, cattle are goods and, whenever the UK leaves the EU, cattle will be moving from Northern Ireland, which will then be a third country, outside the EU, into the Republic of Ireland, an EU country. Cattle will be moving across a farm; will those have to be notified? Are they notified in Switzerland? It is a simplified form, but they are notified.

Dr Bock: Yes.

Lady Hermon: Every time cattle are moved on a farm from one jurisdiction into another, they have to be notified, in a simplified form?

Dr Bock: There is a notification, yes, but frankly this is a very special case and we would be happy to give you more information in order to be absolutely correct.

Lady Hermon: That would be very helpful, because it will affect a lot of farmers, and a lot of farming communities are extremely concerned, as Mr McGinn indicated, that there will be difficulty moving cattle around farms.

Q64 **Maria Caulfield:** Just looking at the numerous border crossing points that you have, there are clearly some areas that are not covered by a border crossing. What happens in those situations, in terms of people and goods not going through official crossing points?

Dr Bock: There are some crossing points where we have a basic infrastructure. What you have there is a possibility, as a normal tourist, for example, or a private person, to announce the goods you have bought. Please remember that we have a rather high threshold below which we do not demand any customs duties or VAT. For an import below 300 Swiss francs, which is about £240 to £250, you do not pay any



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VAT. You can make a paper declaration at the border point. We will have a smartphone solution next year.

Q65 **Maria Caulfield:** It is possible to cross the border without going through the official points?

Dr Bock: Absolutely. At some points, when you have nothing to declare, absolutely you are free. I am very often in the north-west part of Switzerland, and I have GPS in my car that announces when I am crossing a border. It always says, "Welcome to Switzerland" or "Welcome to France". We even have some routes where you change from point A to point B and you cross the border 10 times.

Q66 **Maria Caulfield:** What checks do you have on those people? They are not being checked at the actual border. What checks do you have inland to make sure they are who they are supposed to be?

Dr Bock: As Lieutenant Colonel Straessle said, we have cameras in place, and then it depends on our risk analysis. From time to time, we make special control operations, where we control everything. We have these common patrols, which may be not in uniform. We have our controls on the Swiss side in uniform or not in uniform.

Of course we do not want to give bad people a good feeling, so they always have to know we can be everywhere.

Q67 **Maria Caulfield:** Because the Northern Ireland situation is so sensitive, because of the conflict that has been there in the past, can you envisage a time when you will not need those borders because of technology? Whether it is cameras or people, the technology will move inland rather than being at the physical border so you can do checks without necessarily being at the border itself. Is that possible in the future?

Dr Bock: Of course, when you say that for historical political reasons you do not want anything at the border, you have to compensate. In my view, you have to compensate with mobile controls. I am a big fan of technology: I am now leading the biggest digitisation project in Switzerland, with 400 million Swiss francs. But, finally, you should remember that Customs and Border Guard work is fieldwork done by people.

At the end of the day, you need people who are performing checks. You need people who have local knowledge and local feeling. I want to stress this; it is extremely important. We have seen this when the German Federal Police was sending more people to the Swiss border. These were nice colleagues from Germany. They did not have a feeling of what a border is. You need local knowledge, people who know each other and who know the local specificities—including knowing the dialect.

Q68 **Maria Caulfield:** Do those people need to be physically at the border?



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Dr Bock: No, not necessarily at the border, absolutely not. But there needs to be some room around the border to make some controls based on good risk analysis.

Q69 **Nigel Mills:** I just have a couple of quick questions. How many authorised operators are there across the EU-Switzerland border? I am guessing it is quite a large number, is it?

Dr Bock: We will come back to you.

Q70 **Nigel Mills:** We have 600 at the moment.

Dr Bock: I have to admit that being an AO is not of much interest for a Swiss company, because our customs procedures are rather efficient and not that rigid. The added value of being AEO towards Swiss Customs is not that big. We cannot give you so many advantages. There is a lot of interest to deal with other countries, but we will come back to you on the exact number.

Q71 **Nigel Mills:** Thank you for that. Earlier on, you mentioned that you had some bilateral agreements with Germany and Italy for controlling the borders in some way. We are always told that the EU do not allow bilateral agreements on customs issues, and that it is an EU-wide thing. Are you saying there is scope for the UK and Ireland to have some bilateral agreement at least on enforcement?

Dr Bock: I am sorry. I want to be precise. These are agreements on a technical level. Let me take the example of the Basel motorway. Basel motorway is a Swiss customs post on German territory. We have to define with Germany—this is not with the EU—where we can exercise our official duties. You must exactly define where the Swiss perimeter is in Germany. You have to exactly define what we can do, where and how the procedure is done. These are rather technical procedures. It is not about the UCC as such; it is really about the technical things.

The other part where we have agreements is in police co-operation. On one side, these are done by the cantons and the Swiss Federal Police and then also by the Swiss Border Guard. In this field, the co-operation is not really the customs procedure; it is more going into crime prevention and investigation procedures. But you are absolutely right: on the typical customs arrangements, now you are out, you do not have the possibility to do it anymore.

Q72 **Nigel Mills:** Finally, if someone suggested to you that you could make everything really easy and just exempt small and medium-sized businesses from complying with customs rules on the EU-Swiss border, is that something you could negotiate with the EU or is it a little optimistic?

Dr Bock: Let me phrase it like this. For Switzerland, negotiating this would be extremely difficult, but maybe Switzerland and the UK have a common interest to discuss this with the EU.



One of the problems we have with the Union Customs Code is that it is a one-size-fits-all code. They apply the same rule for every country neighbouring the European Union. There is no differentiation based on how developed an economy is. This is one of the problems we have.

However, the UCC is a new thing. The EU is still adapting the UCC. The EU is not absolutely against adapting the UCC. When you are operating the UCC, you will realise something you have not thought of. As I said before, the situation at the border might be extremely special. I even cannot apply the same procedures for all of Switzerland, because the regional situation is simply different and you need special rules. But I can also confirm that we have always had and will have special arrangements with our colleagues. This is an important part. If you have people on both sides who trust each other, where you can talk to each other, there is some room for adapted administrative procedures.

Nigel Mills: That is a good phrase.

Q73 **Kate Hoey:** You have both been incredibly helpful. It has been a really useful session. Apart from meeting us, have you had any formal or informal meetings with any of the Ministers who are dealing with the United Kingdom leaving the European Union—or any officials?

Dr Bock: Yes, of course. I would say we did our homework. We had a plan. When it was announced that there was a Brexit vote in the UK, of course we first analysed it as to what will happen. Very quickly after that decision, I contacted my counterpart at Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to get in touch—and, of course, we are talking regularly to each other. Every occasion we both have, we meet and discuss where we are standing.

I might say that, from what I have heard, Switzerland is rather advanced in the negotiation with the UK. I am very happy that I have heard that the customs field is the most advanced part. It is not that we are that good. Of course, we are very good—on both sides. No. One reason is that you are talking with people who are doing groundwork. We have two specialists talking to each other.

As a member of this Committee said before, you can rule out politics. It is about specialist customs officers. Customs officers tend to belong to the same family. This is the reason. Yes, we have rather good contacts and we are well advanced already in our negotiations.

Q74 **Kate Hoey:** I am very glad to hear that, and I hope that when we leave the European Union we will have even closer relationships with your country.

Dr Bock: I hope so.

Kate Hoey: Thank you.

Chair: Indeed, yes. On that very optimistic note, can I thank you very



much indeed, both of you, for coming so far and for being so frank with us? What you have said is extremely insightful and will certainly help to improve our report when we publish it. We are all looking forward very much to visiting Basel in the near future to see the situation on the ground. Thank you very much indeed.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Kristin Breiland and Liv Kristin Rundberget.

Q75 Chair: Welcome to both of you. Thank you very much indeed for coming today. I am sorry to keep you waiting this morning. As you probably gathered, we are very much exercised—as part of what is going on at the moment in relation to the UK’s relationship with the European Union—with the land border that will be created between the European Union and the United Kingdom in March 2019.

As you probably gathered from this morning’s session, we have focused on the situation that exists between Switzerland and its neighbours and the situation that exists between Norway and Sweden. Please very briefly say how your situation operates and how it might apply to the UK.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes. First, thank you for the opportunity to be here today and share information with you.

My name is Liv Kristin Rundberget. I am an Assistant Director in the Directorate of Norwegian Customs. The Directorate is organised under the central Ministry of Finance. We have six local regions doing the practical customs work. We have approximately 1,600 employees in Customs in Norway: some on the border, some inland and some by the coast.

I work in the Customs and Trade Facilitation department. My main area is the procedure of import and export. My colleague here is working in one of the regions. Maybe you can give an introduction.

Kristin Breiland: My name is Kristin Breiland. I work in Customs in east Norway, by the border. My main area is customs clearance and audit controls. We put the agreement with Sweden into practice in our daily work.

Chair: Thank you.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: I also want to give you some useful basic information, and then we can provide answers afterwards, if that is okay.

Chair: Yes, please.



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Liv Kristin Rundberget: Norway has different agreements with other countries and organisations. I will just mention the agreement that affects the border between Norway and Sweden. That is our focus today.

We are a part of the Common Transit Convention, which is a transit procedure for the movement of undeclared goods. The goods can be going from Norway through the EU and maybe to Spain. They are undeclared but under customs control. That is a very useful convention for us. There are seven contracting parties in this convention: the EU, Norway, Iceland, Macedonia, Switzerland, Serbia and Turkey. We can send undeclared goods to these countries.

We also have this agreement on security with the EU and also with Norway and Switzerland. As there were a lot of terror incidents around the world, the EU adopted the agreement in 2005. We gave agreement in 2009. It is a part of the EEA agreement in Protocol 10. It exempts pre-notification between Norway and the EU, so we do not need to send pre-notification between these countries—but we have to require pre-notification from third countries outside the EU and Norway.

We also have to do risk analysis on the common risk criteria of the EU, and we also have to have authorised economic operators. We have 38 in Norway today. It is the same as Switzerland: we only have it on security, not on the customs procedure. It is not very attractive at this stage for companies in Norway.

That is what is going to be the focus today: this Norway-Sweden agreement, which is a part of the EEA agreement. In 1995, Norway became a part of the in-market. We continued the agreement between Norway and Sweden. The agreement is a cost-effective, co-ordinated border management and one-stop shop for trade business and travellers. It has been in place more than 50 years. The purpose of this agreement is that one country handles procedures and enforcement at the border on behalf of both countries. If you are transporting goods, you only need to stop once at one customs office.

At one of the largest border-crossing points, Svinesund, in southern Norway, Norwegian Customs do the Swedish exports and the Norwegian imports; and the Swedish do the Norwegian exports and the Swedish imports. It is one stop for commercial operators, and that is very effective. This also means customs officers need to know the law and regulations of the other country. The Norwegians are familiar with the EU regulations. We have joint education between the countries. The Swedish learn our regulations and the other way around.

We are also able to do control 50 kilometres into Sweden, if we are following some criminal or suspicious person, and the Swedish force can do the same: they can go 50 kilometres into Norway if they are following some control object. We also have co-operative controls with Sweden.



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We also have co-operation with governmental agencies, such as food safety and so on, and with Swedish Customs, because in Norway, as with other Customs, we also do the control on behalf of those governmental agencies. In Norway, we have more than 30 different governmental agencies that we do the border controls on behalf of.

Because of this agreement with Sweden, we exchange ongoing reports and controls information. We exchange lots of data for analysis and intelligence data. We have a meeting once a year at a high level, and we have regular meetings at a lower level between the regions in Norway and the Swedish parts.

That was my statement, and we look forward to answering your questions.

Q76 Chair: Thank you. That is really comprehensive and very useful. It is interesting to see—you will have gathered this from the previous session—some commonality with the situation in Switzerland and its neighbours in respect of the fact there is a great deal of co-operation at working level. That came across loud and clear from the Swiss evidence, and you have reaffirmed that in the evidence you have given this morning. It seems to work at a working level.

Can I ask you what happened in 1995? Obviously, in that year Sweden joined the European Union. Something probably will have changed in terms of the relationship between the two countries. What was materially different in 1995 in relation to the things that you do?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: It was not very different, because in 1995 a memorandum of understanding was made between Sweden and Norway. The customs administration was represented by the GD, the general directorate. In 1997, the EU and Norway sanctioned a new agreement on customs co-operation based on the agreement between Sweden and Norway. The agreement, therefore, was continued in the same format as before. It was not much different, but then it was an agreement between the EEA and Norway.

Q77 Chair: 1995 was a long time ago, so the situation was probably very different in terms of technology, for example. We are obviously very exercised by the possibility that we may have to have more infrastructure around the border in Ireland after March 2019. I am sure colleagues will come in on this, but what happened in 1995 in relation to infrastructure—that is, buildings, cameras and the paraphernalia of borders—that was different before? Did anything change at all particularly?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: No, there was no difference.

Chair: That is interesting.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: We got cameras afterwards. I do not think we had cameras.

Kristin Breiland: No.



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Q78 **Conor McGinn:** When you say there was no difference, did you have physical infrastructure beforehand?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes.

Q79 **Ian Paisley:** Yes, the ANPR cameras are incredibly discreet. Most people do not even know they are there. People say there are no cameras, but they are actually there the whole way from Ballycastle to Cork on our island. A lot of people do not even see them.

You have mentioned and you have stressed the Sweden-Norway border. You also have a tiny Russian border. Could you tell us a little bit about that? Are there additional problems with that or are the relationships similar in terms of addressing that border?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: At the Russian border, we do not have such an agreement. If a commercial operator wants to export goods from Norway and import them into Russia, he first has to stop at the Norwegian border and do the export clearance, and then he goes to the Russian border and does the import clearance.

Q80 **Ian Paisley:** Would the border be slightly more noticeable there or are there more problems on that border?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Maybe, because we are not so familiar with the Russian regulations. Yes.

Q81 **Ian Paisley:** Whether on the Swedish-Norwegian border or the Russian-Norwegian border, are there any more instances of criminality? How do you deal with criminality on the border, if at all?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: We have the same controls on the Russian border as the Swedish border, because the agreement between Sweden and Norway is mainly that we are doing the clearance process on behalf of the other countries. They have the same focus to look for criminal persons.

Q82 **Ian Paisley:** If, for example, someone were to suggest, bizarrely, that there are people on the other side of the border who will not respect or obey your laws but who must be given special passes and allowed to break your laws, I assume that would be laughed out of court in your country. You would expect people to obey the law on the border?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: I am not sure what you mean.

Q83 **Ian Paisley:** For example, we have this assumption that there are people on the southern or the northern sides of the border who will not obey the laws of the border. Some people seem to think they should be given a pass and allowed to not obey. In your country, if people decided they were not going to acknowledge the border and obey the laws that pertain to the border, I assume you would come down quite hard on them.



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Liv Kristin Rundberget: At the border, the customs officer has control over the customs matters and the police control the people. Customs are controlling people only if they have undeclared goods with them. I am not sure what you mean by the question, but we have a focus on the goods normally.

Q84 **Ian Paisley:** If someone was trying to smuggle goods, obviously you would expect them to obey the law?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes.

Ian Paisley: You would certainly not expect top political representatives to give them a pass for that?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: No, not if they have smuggled. Yes, they are able to cross the border, but they cannot bring goods with them. If it is a crime, we have to contact the police and maybe they will get arrested or something.

Q85 **Ian Paisley:** I was very interested to hear that you allow joint patrols up to 15 kilometres inside Finnish territory. I assume they are joint patrols—that is, an operator from Sweden could not come in on their own?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: We have to discuss it. You have to inform them if you want to go inside.

Ian Paisley: Again, trust and co-operation seem to be the watchwords.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes.

Q86 **Lady Hermon:** Thank you both for coming to see us. You have travelled so far to give us your insight into how you deal with this issue. Most of your evidence has concentrated on the border between Norway and Sweden. Just to make sure we are comparing like with like, has this been a disputed border in the past between the two countries?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: What do you mean by that?

Q87 **Lady Hermon:** In the Committee we are particularly looking at how we are going to manage the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. That has been a disputed border. It has been disputed, and there has been terrorism related to that. Could we just make sure that that is not the case between Norway and Sweden? Has that been the case in the past? It is not a disputed border.

Chair: That is a rhetorical question. My understanding is that the border between Sweden and Norway has not been disputed for at least 200 years.

Lady Hermon: No—exactly.



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Liv Kristin Rundberget: We share information; we have co-operation in controls; we are very open with intelligence. We cannot share all the information, but we try to help each other in the controls.

Q88 **Lady Hermon:** How do you control the movement of people into Norway?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: It is different for the different border crossings.

Q89 **Lady Hermon:** To help us, the best place to start is to describe a border crossing: the border crossing with Russia, but also the border crossing with Sweden—what does it look like?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Between Norway and Sweden, we have 57 roads, and only 11 have customs offices; 46 are unstaffed. If I can talk about the staffed ones, where they have the customs office, if people who go into Norway have uncleared goods, they have to stop at the border. If they do not have uncleared goods—perhaps they are under the limit for free importation—they can just pass through the border. But we do have cameras.

Lady Hermon: You do have cameras?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: We can check the cameras, and the cameras are linked to our intelligence system. If we see a person crossing the border, staffed or unstaffed, and we see we have some information about him on the intelligence register, we will try to stop him. But mostly they go to the customs offices to declare goods. Of course, we have spot checks. We do not stop everyone, but we do have spot checks.

Q90 **Lady Hermon:** There is a physical infrastructure, and you do have cameras? You rely on the cameras?

Kristin Breiland: We have mobile cars, too.

Q91 **Lady Hermon:** You have mobile cars?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: We also have customs officers on the road all the time.

Q92 **Lady Hermon:** Yes. That is on the road in Sweden, so you would have Norwegian customs officials inside Sweden?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Most of them are in Norway, but if we were going to follow some specific criminals, we can go into Sweden.

Q93 **Lady Hermon:** You have the right of hot pursuit, I think you can call it, into Sweden?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes.

Q94 **Lady Hermon:** That is very interesting indeed. By comparison with the evidence we took a few minutes ago about Switzerland, where they have common teams of customs officers, I think I am right in saying that you have one customs office and the agreement it is only searched once. Is



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that correct? You have a customs office manned—"peopled" is maybe what I should say—only with Norwegian officials, but you can also have those across the border in Sweden. Is that correct? You have Norwegian officials sitting in Sweden and vice versa. Is that correct?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: No, it is different. At some of the border crossing points we have Norwegians on the Norwegian side of the border doing the Swedish export and Norwegian import, but in some places the office is in Sweden with Norwegian customs officers, and they are doing both import and export to and from Norway and Sweden.

Q95 **Lady Hermon:** Yes, but I think I am right in saying you have Norwegian customs officials in Sweden, next door.

Kristin Breiland: They are sitting in Sweden with two hats: now I am the Swedish Customs and now I am the Norwegian Customs.

Lady Hermon: They do both?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes.

Kristin Breiland: Yes.

Lady Hermon: Why did we not think of that?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Because the Norwegian customs officer first does the export from Sweden and then he does it in the Swedish system called TDS. He is sitting in the same place and then he uses another system, the Norwegian system, and makes the clearance into Norway. It is the same person doing that.

Kristin Breiland: They have two hats.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Therefore, they have to be educated on the regulation of the EU. They know both regulations.

Q96 **Lady Hermon:** It is the same person checking both Norwegian customs regulations and also Swedish regulations? They are doing both?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes.

Lady Hermon: They are wearing both hats. I am not quite sure that would translate easily into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. That would not work very well.

Q97 **Kate Hoey:** I was interested in what I heard about the fact you were going to pilot some kind of automated system for trusted companies that cross the border a lot, which would then not have any kind of stop. Do you want to tell us a bit about that? That may be new technology that would be useful. I am sure we have trusted companies crossing the border regularly, too.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes, we have an ongoing project, and we are going to start a pilot in June. In short, this project is called



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express-clearance procedure. Customs get the manifest or the information from the transporter of the goods. They get the declaration before arrival, and then they can do the risk analysis.

When the truck crosses the border, it depends on whether Customs want to control or not. If they want to control, they get a red light and they have to stop at the border. But if they get a green light, then Norwegian Customs do not want to do a control because they have got all the information beforehand. They are doing the control on the documentation, and then there is no need for the truck to stop.

They have to do the export-clearance process from Sweden already. That is an easy way to do it in the beginning. Later we want to become more streamlined with Sweden. That will be the next step. But in the beginning it is only the transporters who have been export-cleared in the EU already. That is the beginning. They only do the Norwegian clearance when they come to the border.

Q98 Kate Hoey: If this is successful as a pilot, you will extend it?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes, because we do lots of clearance at the border. It is more than 400,000. That is too much. Then we do not have time to have control when they are going to clear all the goods at the border. Therefore, we want to use this express-clearance process.

Q99 Nigel Mills: Just so I understand, if I am bringing some goods into Norway from Sweden and I need to declare them, am I allowed to cross anywhere or do I have to cross a specific border point? Can I cross in the middle of the countryside if that works for me or not?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: You have to cross a border where there is a customs office.

Nigel Mills: I cannot just nip across on a back trail?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: No.

Nigel Mills: I cannot even declare in advance and then get permission to cross?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: No.

Q100 Nigel Mills: I have to go through there? The EU say they want imaginative solutions to the Irish border. We have to imagine some creative options. Has anyone ever suggested that Norway and the EU could just exempt all small and medium-sized businesses from having to comply? Is that something you could negotiate with the EU if you tried?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Most of the importers are small and medium-sized enterprises.

Q101 Nigel Mills: You would be exempting everybody, would you? You would be exempting every business if you did that? Is that what you are saying?



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Liv Kristin Rundberget: We do not do exemptions.

Q102 **Nigel Mills:** One suggestion for the Irish border is that we would not enforce the customs processes on small and medium-sized enterprises.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: I understand, yes.

Q103 **Nigel Mills:** I was asking whether you thought that was something you could negotiate with the EU if you wanted to or whether that is an unrealistic idea.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Everyone has to stop at the border if they have to declare goods. If they are a small or a big company, they have to stop at the border.

Q104 **Nigel Mills:** You do not think the EU would be willing to be that flexible?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: If you do not want to do clearance at the border, you can use the transit procedure, and then you have to do clearance inland. I mentioned the Common Transit Convention. You can go with undeclared goods through the members of the convention, and then you can go, for instance, into Europe and then you have this transit declaration sent to Customs. When you enter the border—you have to stop at the border—Customs will just check that you have this transit declaration, and then you can continue into Norway some place, for example Oslo, and then you would do the clearance in Oslo.

Q105 **Nigel Mills:** Okay. On a different subject—maybe I am wrong—is it the case that there are tariffs on fish exports from Norway into the EU, so you retaliate with quite high tariffs on cheese and other things? Is my understanding correct on that?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes, because fish is one of the main export products from Norway. If you want to export fish, you have to ensure that it is of Norwegian origin. I will not go into detail on that. If you want more information, we can send you some. But if you want to export fish from Norway, you have to be registered at the Norwegian Seafood Council. You have to pay a fee to this council, and then you are allowed to export fish out of Norway. You have to do the same clearance process as anyone else, but you have to refer to this number from the council and you have to pay some export fees before you export the fish.

Q106 **Nigel Mills:** In terms of retaliatory tariffs, it is cheese you have a very high tariff on coming in, isn't it?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes.

Q107 **Nigel Mills:** Has this been a stable situation for a long time or do you occasionally add new tariffs on things just to battle with the EU? Is the deal just cheese for fish? Do you occasionally change tariffs on EU imports or is that not happening?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: It is more a political decision, because of the duty on cheese. I am not sure.



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Kristin Breiland: We have high taxes on cheese.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: It is more a political discussion with the EU.

Q108 **Conor McGinn:** I just have a few questions. There are 17 manned crossing points and commercial vehicles must use them. Is that right?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: There are 11 in Norway and Sweden.

Q109 **Conor McGinn:** There are 11, and commercial vehicles must use those 11. Is every vehicle checked at those points?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: If they have uncleared goods, they have to stop at the border. Sometimes they just drive through the border and do not stop. Then we can stop them inside the country, because we have a camera. But normally they have to stop at the border.

Conor McGinn: As a matter of course, they do have to stop at the border?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes.

Q110 **Conor McGinn:** The Swedish National Board of Trade did a survey of its members, which said the thing most hampering trade between Sweden and Norway was the customs. What is the average wait time? What is the bureaucratic process of filling out forms? What was the justification for the National Board of Trade saying that customs was an impediment to trade with Norway?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes, they have to stop at the border. We can use the example of Svinesund, the busiest border crossing—8,000 vehicles a week stop at the border at Svinesund. Do you want to know how long it takes to handle the export and import?

Conor McGinn: Yes—what is the average waiting time?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: It depends on the traffic, the quality of the document, the type of goods. But we have been measuring, and the customs officer has approximately 3.5 minutes to handle one transport. The customs officer can handle approximately 100 clients a day.

Q111 **Conor McGinn:** In terms of those journeys, have you measured how many of those are multiple entry and exit? Of course, one of the issues we have on the island of Ireland is about produce and processed goods, where vehicles make lots of journeys back and forth. Is it a similar case with you or is it more import/export?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: There is more import than export for Norway.

Q112 **Conor McGinn:** We talk a lot about trade when we talk about border crossings—obviously, that is what you do—but people are important in this as well. You said that very rarely are people checked coming across the border.

I want to get a picture of what the border is like. On the Irish border,



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lots of communities exist across the border: schools, churches, community organisations. People live across it; people do not recognise it on a practical or political level in some respects. Is that the case along your border? Are there communities where you have people who will have family quite close but on opposite sides of the border, or people who go to school or work on the opposite side of the border? How is that managed?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes. That is not a problem, because if they do not have uncleared goods they can cross the border as they like, so no. Both countries are part of Schengen, so there is no passport control.

Conor McGinn: It is because you are part of Schengen?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes, so they can cross the border. But if they have uncleared goods, they have to stop at the border. Especially tobacco, alcohol and meat are more expensive in Norway, so Norwegian people go to Sweden. In Sweden, they have been building lots of malls or shopping centres, and several times a day they cross the border for shopping in Sweden, but they must not bring goods into Norway with a value of more than €600. If they are bringing in more goods than that, they have to declare the goods.

Q113 **Lady Hermon:** In the earlier part of this session, we heard about the use of helicopters on the border. Do you have any helicopters at all?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: No, not yet.

Lady Hermon: You say "not yet". Does that mean you plan to have some?

Kristin Breiland: No.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: We have not discussed that, no. That is not an issue in Norway.

Q114 **Lady Hermon:** How do you deal with human trafficking or the smuggling of people? Is that a problem for you?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: I guess so, but that is more a police responsibility. We co-operate with the police, though. If we detect something suspicious, we call the police. We stop the people and wait until the police come, and then they take over.

Q115 **Lady Hermon:** Does that happen often?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes, mostly because of the refugees, because there are lots of people. But I do not know.

Kristin Breiland: No, it is not a big problem.

Q116 **Ian Paisley:** Obviously, Norway has a very large coastline. Does that lend itself to any problems in terms of managing that particular sea border or land-sea border?



Kristin Breiland: Yes.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes, it is a problem because we do not have so many customs officers on the coast. Yes, it is a challenge.

Q117 **Ian Paisley:** Is there much crime detected as a result of that land-sea border?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: No, not much. We try to monitor the coast, but do not have cameras at the coast.

Q118 **Ian Paisley:** No. I would imagine it would be GPRS on ships.

Liv Kristin Rundberget: Yes. We use the AES system to follow the ship and where they are going.

Q119 **Nigel Mills:** Norway has a large number of trade deals around the world. How easy is it for people to comply with the rules of origin if you are moving goods from Norway into the EU? Is that a complicated and expensive process or is it quite streamlined now?

Liv Kristin Rundberget: No, it is not complicated, because we have this agreement that you can use different kinds of documents if you want to export goods from Norway to another country. It is important that we control that we have the right origin. We are using two kinds of documents: a movement certificate or origin declaration.

The customs officers assign the origin documents in some way at the border. If Customs in other countries want us to check whether it is the right origin, we can check with the manufacturing company whether it is the right origin.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed for giving evidence to us this morning. What you have said is extremely insightful and terribly helpful in preparing our report on this quite challenging aspect of the Brexit process. Thank you so much for coming such a long way and spending a significant amount of time with us this morning. Thank you.