**Enda Kenny says Ireland will work to minimise some of the effects of a potential 'hard Brexit'.**

The Government earlier welcomed today's speech by Theresa May, saying it provided 'greater clarity' on Britain's plans to leave the European Union.

In the Dáil, Enda Kenny said Ireland would play a major role in talks to protect itself from the effects of a harsh withdrawal.

He told deputies: "Ireland will contribute strongly to these negotiations on the basis of being a member of the European Union

"We will give the matter serious consideration because of the difficulties that will apply and the many economic reports that have indicated that Ireland will be one of the countries most adversely affected by a hard Brexit."

**"Specific and historic relationship"**

In a statement issued shortly after Mrs May's speech, the Irish Government said it shares Mrs May's goal to achieve the "closest possible future economic relationship for Britain with the EU".

The statement says: "Prime Minister May highlighted the specific and historic relationship between Britain and Ireland. In this context, she made clear that her priorities include maintaining the common travel area and avoiding a return to a hard border with Northern Ireland, both of which are welcome.

"The alignment between our concerns regarding the economy and trade and the UK objective of the UK to have a close, and friction-free, economic and trading relationship with the EU, including with Ireland is also very important."

It also notes that the Government is carrying out "extensive" work to prepare for Brexit - highlighting the ongoing 'all-island Civic Dialogue process' and engagement with other EU leaders.

The statement also re-stresses that the Northern Ireland peace process will be a key priority in negotiations.

The Government says it is "very aware of the potential economic opportunities that may arise for Ireland, including in terms of mobile investment".

It explains: "Bids for the EU agencies currently located in London – the European Medicines Board and the European Banking Authority have already been announced and the State enterprise agencies are actively pursuing opportunities for increased investment, business and job creation in Ireland.

"The Government is under no illusion about the nature and scale of the Brexit challenge," the statement adds. "But it is ready."