
FRENCH CUSTOMS STRUGGLES TO COPE WITH NO DEAL BREXIT PLANNING

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On 26 August, the French Council of Ministers sacked Rodolphe Gintz after two years as customs chief. Meanwhile, the French customs office is facing up to the difficulties of preparing for a no-deal Brexit, which would mean the return of a hard border, EURACTIV France reports.

As former public finance adviser to François Hollande, Gintz was appointed as director-general of customs in February 2017. He is now being seen as one of the first victims of Brexit.

During his two-year tenure, he managed to overcome the consequences of a corruption case against his office, which was led by the national intelligence and customs investigation department. He also had to deal with the consequences of an investigation conducted by the national prosecutors office in a case involving a speedboat, which was bought by customs.

However, what ultimately cost him his job was Brexit.

Brexit panic reaches across the Channel to France

The French have finally realised that there may well be a no-deal Brexit. The Medef employers federation has said that French businesses are not prepared, the agricultural sector is waiting, while transporters are panicking. EURACTIV France reports.

Last winter, a bitter social conflict had already made waves.

This was after Jacques Gounon, president of Eurotunnel (GetLink), stated that customs officers would have sufficient time to adapt at the border, as they knew where the plug or coffee machine was located.

This was all the more difficult to hear because it was also announced that many border agents would be required to work eight-hour shifts after Brexit. And they would receive almost identical pay for night shifts.

Mobilisation had quickly spread within an administration that also feels threatened by the reform of public financial management. Withholding tax has resulted in the elimination of thousands of posts, with some positions being withdrawn at customs.

For the Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT), which published a leaflet following Gintzs departure, the summer had been a murderous one.

Ultimately, the conflict resulting from Brexit is costing the state dearly.

That is because customs officers have obtained a hefty increase in the value of their night hours, and 17,000 agents have received a monthly bonus.

A strategic moment

The countrys economic ministry admits that Brexit represents a strategic moment for the customs administration. However, the department is also stating that the director generals departure is part of the regular rotation of posts across administrations. It is also assuring staff that continuity has been safeguarded given that the deputy director-general is keeping his job.

This period is all the more sensitive as more employees are now being called upon. Between 15 September and 15 October, specific experiments will be carried out to try to understand how, in concrete terms, a no-deal Brexit will pan out.

At this stage, 700 additional customs officers are planned to manage the border, with half of them to be deployed on the Channels coastline. The other half will be placed in airports, as well as in train stations, where the Eurostar arrives from London.

Kaynak/Source: