

THE GREAT IRELAND SOUTH WAIT



The full recount of the Ireland South European Election count, due to begin today (Tuesday) is set to cost at least €1 million and take at least 28 working days to complete. The Green Party's Grace O'Sullivan and Sinn Féin's Liadh Ní Riada are fighting to stay in the race with the initial recheck reducing Ms Ní Riada's arrears by just one vote to 326. The costly recount means that the 12-county constituency will be without a sitting MEP until the count is completed.

"The one difficulty it brings now is uncertainty about whether or not Ireland South will be represented in Brussels during the crucial weeks when the president and vice presidents are elected and key committee positions are distributed," said poll topper Sean Kelly (FG)

"There could also be uncertainty about whether or not parliament can finalise these positions before all seats have been filled." Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, while saying electronic voting would not be countenanced under his watch, suggested: "Maybe we should think about electronic counting".

On Friday last, Returning Officer Martin Harvey outlined the security that will be required to ensure the integrity of the ballot papers. "We will have the Gardaí looking after the hall until next Tuesday morning at 9am when we reconvene here and we start counting afresh. Unfortunately, it will take time, what we are proposing is to count from Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm or 6pm, we won't count at weekends, if we did we wouldn't be able to get the staff to do that, so that's where we are."

This scenario ought to have been accounted for prior to the election because a month-long wait such as this is entirely unacceptable. Other count centre staff should be brought in and should be provided for by the cabinet this week to ensure the vote is completed as soon as possible. We need all of our MEPs in place so that they can all be considered for the membership of the parliament's various committees.

With Kelly and Billy Kelleher (FF) polling largely as expected, the popularity of Mick Wallace (Ind) and the extent of Grace O'Sullivan's support had not been widely trumpeted prior to election day. But what happens in terms of the fourth and fifth seat (the latter being held in reserve until the UK leaves the EU) remains to be seen. Ms Ní Riada still appears to be on the back foot unless the re-count does go her way and overtakes Grace O'Sullivan. However, should the Sinn Féin MEP lose her seat, in all likelihood, Deirdre Clune (FG) will place fourth, with Ms O'Sullivan in the 'cold storage' seat.

Of course, it's also worth pointing out that the UK's departure from the EU could take even longer than expected given the pending Conservative Party leadership campaign and all that might follow thereafter. If Ireland lacks a voice on any of the soon to be appointed parliamentary committees on Brussels due to poor counting resources, who will carry the can for this? A budget and back-up plan is needed now to ensure that we have our four (and post-Brexit, five) voices in the European Parliament as soon as possible.