



Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland: Statement by Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič following today's announcement by the UK Foreign Secretary

Brussels, 17 May 2022

The European Union wishes to have a positive and stable relationship with the United Kingdom. This relationship must be based on the full respect of the legally binding commitments that the two sides have made to one another, based on the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Both parties negotiated, agreed and ratified these agreements.

After long and intensive discussions between the EU and the UK, the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is the solution found to reconcile the challenges created by Brexit, and by the type of Brexit chosen by the UK government. The Protocol is an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement. It avoids a hard border on the island of Ireland, protects the 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement in all its dimensions, and ensures the integrity of the EU Single Market.

The EU has shown understanding for the practical difficulties of implementing the Protocol, demonstrating that solutions can be found within its framework. For instance, the same medicines continue to be available in Northern Ireland at the same time as in the rest of the UK.

The European Commission put forward additional far-reaching and impactful bespoke arrangements to facilitate the flow of goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. These proposals – stemming from our extensive engagement with stakeholders in Northern Ireland – provide for, among other things, an express lane with drastically reduced and simplified customs procedures on an unprecedented scale. They can deliver a real difference on the ground.

The European Commission stands ready to continue discussions with the UK government to identify joint solutions within the framework of the Protocol that would benefit people and businesses in Northern Ireland. The potential of the flexibilities put forward by the European Commission is yet to be fully explored, and the Commission remains keen to do that with the UK government.

The announcement by the UK government, however, to table legislation that would disapply constitutive elements of the Protocol, raises significant concerns. First, because the Protocol is the solution agreed between the EU and the UK to address the challenges posed by the UK's withdrawal from the EU for the island of Ireland, and to protect the hard-earned gains of the peace process. Second, because the Protocol is an international agreement signed by the EU and the UK. Unilateral actions contradicting an international agreement are not acceptable. Third, because the Withdrawal Agreement and its Protocol are the necessary foundation for the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which the EU and the UK have agreed upon to organise their overall relationship after the UK's withdrawal.

Should the UK decide to move ahead with a bill disapplying constitutive elements of the Protocol as announced today by the UK government, the EU will need to respond with all measures at its disposal. Our overarching objective is to find joint solutions within the framework of the Protocol. That is the way to ensure legal certainty and predictability for people and businesses in Northern Ireland.

With political will and commitment, practical issues arising from the implementation of the Protocol in Northern Ireland can be resolved. The European Commission stands ready to continue playing its part, as it has from the outset.

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