

BREXIT BRIEF

Brexit Brief Issue 125
16 February 2022



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The Brief seeks to provide up-to-date information on the progress and content of the UK-EU negotiations, and bring together relevant statements and policy positions from key players in Ireland, the UK and the EU.

The Brief is part of a wider communications programme covering the work of the IIEA's UK Project Group – including commentaries, speeches, texts and event reports – which are highlighted on the Institute's website. (www.iiea.com)

Introduction

"And just like that, Brexit is back at the top of the agenda" wrote the *Irish Times* as the DUP leader, Jeffrey Donaldson, finally acted on his long running threat to bring down the Stormont institutions in protest against the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland ('the Protocol'). As the 'intensive' Truss-Šefčovič talks on the Protocol continued, with a mixture of joint statements and tweets, Sir Jeffrey insisted that "we have been very patient" and withdrew First Minister Paul Givan from office.

Second Anniversary of Brexit

As the DUP prepared its withdrawal move the UK Government published, on 31 January 2022, a document celebrating the second anniversary of Brexit. The paper, entitled *The Benefits of Brexit* sets out how "the UK is

capitalising on the benefits of Brexit and how the government will use its new freedoms to transform the UK into the best regulated economy in the world."

The document also outlines what the UK Government sees as some of its achievements, including "the control we have gained and implemented, the laws we have changed or are in the process of changing, the further reviews of laws and policies influenced by our EU membership that we have started, the trade agreements and partnerships we have struck and are negotiating and the ways in which we have shifted our perspective from an EU-centric one to a global one."

The paper's final section describes the UK's vision statements for the post-Brexit future in the areas of: science, data and technology; business and industry; infrastructure and

levelling up; climate, the environment and agriculture; and also references its 'Global Britain' aspirations.

50th Anniversary of EEC Accession Treaty

The reappearance of Brexit occurred as Dublin marked the 50th anniversary of the decision of the Irish Government to accede to the European Communities.

On 22 January 2022, Ireland marked a milestone in its membership of the European Communities / Union. On 22 January 1972, following the conclusion of lengthy negotiations, the Treaty of Accession was formally signed at a ceremony in Brussels by the four applicant countries – Ireland, UK, Denmark, Norway – with Taoiseach Jack Lynch and Minister for Foreign Affairs Patrick Hillery signing for Ireland. Prime Minister Edward Heath and Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home signed for the United Kingdom. (Norway signed the Treaty but did not proceed to membership as the treaty was rejected in a referendum.)

The anniversary was marked in Dublin at a low-key event in the National Archives of Ireland where Taoiseach Micheál Martin and a number of Ministers inspected the original treaty text. The Taoiseach spoke briefly on the historic impact of a half century of membership which has seen the transformation of Ireland as a modern democracy and open society. The event was livestreamed as the first of a series planned to recall and reflect on the key moments in 1972 / 1973 as Ireland ratified the Accession Treaty and entered into full membership of the European Communities.

Section One: State of Play

Paul Givan Resignation

The DUP MLA, Paul Given, resigned as First Minister of Northern Ireland from Friday 4 February 2022. Under the Stormont power-sharing rules Paul Givan's resignation means that Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill ceased to hold office at the same time. The DUP move is part of the party's ongoing campaign against the Protocol.

The DUP move means that the Northern Ireland Executive cannot function. However, the Assembly Speaker, Alex Maskey, has pointed out that the functions of the Assembly remain the same until its dissolution in advance of the scheduled May election and individual Ministers will continue in office. Question marks exist about the capacity of the Assembly to proceed with business in areas such as organ donation legislation, issues surrounding historical institutional abuse and remaining COVID-19 rules. Debate and decision on a three-year budget are called into question. Party leaders have met to work out the options for Assembly business.

The Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce responded to the move saying it would "negatively impact people and businesses, leaving legislation and decision-making "in limbo" and creating an "unsustainable level of uncertainty."

The DUP leader, Jeffrey Donaldson, in press briefings following the First Minister decision, defended his decision, arguing that "We've been very patient. Everybody accepts that the Northern Ireland protocol is causing real damage to Northern Ireland." He further warned that the party would "have difficulty" reforming a Stormont Executive after the

May Assembly election. "If the Protocol issues are not resolved by the time of the election then, of course, it is difficult for us to form a government because of the instability that the Protocol creates."

Northern Ireland parties denounced the DUP move. Sinn Fein saw the decision as "an electoral stunt" and called for the scheduled Assembly election to be brought forward. The UUP leader, Doug Beattie, commented that removing the First Minister was not going to change the Protocol situation but was rather "a pointless action that is going to impact on people in Northern Ireland." The SDLP said that the DUP was "playing up" the difficulties in the Protocol and argued that "There are solutions out there. The DUP created this mess." The Alliance leader, Naomi Long, remarked that "The DUP playing cynical party politics with peoples' lives and livelihood is grim."

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Brandon Lewis, issued an immediate response: "The decision by the DUP to withdraw the First Minister from the Northern Ireland Executive is extremely disappointing. I urge them to reinstate their First Minister immediately to ensure the necessary delivery of public services for the citizens of Northern Ireland. The UK Government's priority is to see a strong, functioning Northern Ireland Executive delivering a better, more prosperous shared future for all the people of Northern Ireland."

I hope that Northern Ireland's political leaders will take the necessary steps to restore the stability in the devolved institutions that the people of Northern Ireland deserve."

The Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, criticised the decision as "very damaging to politics itself and to people's trust in politics. He also criticised Jeffrey Donaldson's comments casting doubt

on whether the DUP would go back into government after an election if protocol-related issues were not addressed. "No party should use language like 'unless we are fully satisfied we will not be participating. No one party should have a veto over whether an Executive exists or continues on, and likewise the Assembly.'"

Poots Post-Brexit Checks Initiative

The Northern Ireland Minister of Agriculture, Edwin Poots of the DUP, ordered the officials in his department to halt post-Brexit checks at ports. This move was part of the DUP campaign against the Northern Ireland protocol. Minister Poots argued that the decision was supported by legal advice that checks lacked necessary Executive approval.

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs did not carry out the Minister's instruction, pending legal clarity, and checks continued routinely at Belfast Port as the Belfast High Court was considering applications for judicial review of the decision.

The European Commission described the Poots instruction as "extremely unhelpful" with Commissioner Mairead McGuinness speaking of it as "absolutely a breach of international law." Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney told the Senate that the decision was "playing politics with legal obligations." Sinn Fein, SDLP and Alliance Party spokespersons criticised the move with Alliance leader speaking of people being "tired of this grandstanding and instability."

The UK Government indicated that it would not intervene in the situation. NI Secretary Brandon Lewis said this was a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive and "within their legal remit." He argued that the UK had been

warning the EU that this outcome would have been foreseeable. The Conservative chair of the Westminster Northern Ireland select committee, Simon Hoare, said that "I believe in the rule of law and adhering to obligations we voluntarily entered. There are no ifs and buts on this."

On 3 February 2022, the Belfast High Court ruled that checks on agri-food trade from Britain to Northern Ireland must continue pending the result of a judicial review. Listing the judicial review for a full hearing in March, Mr Justice Colton ruled that he proposed to make an order suspending the instruction given by the Minister for Agriculture until further order of this court."

Liz Truss in Northern Ireland. 27 January 2022

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis visited Northern Ireland on 27 January 2022 for meeting with the First and Deputy First Ministers and with business leaders.

The DUP told the visitors that 21 February must be final deadline for delivery of progress from the on-going UK-EU negotiations. The Joint Working Committee on the Withdrawal Agreement is scheduled to take place on that date.

Following their talks, business groups expressed hopes for a deal between the UK and EU, with the Retail NI chief executive saying that he was "hopeful that a deal to resolve the challenges around the Northern Ireland Protocol is achievable. We need a long-term sustainable deal which ensures stability, certainty and affordability for the broader business community in Northern Ireland." The Foreign Secretary tweeted: "Business leaders at Green's Food Fare in Lisburn tell

me rules are frustrating efforts to bring goods into Northern Ireland from Great Britain. That's why the UK Government is in intensive talks with the EU to find a solution. There is a deal to be done and a shared responsibility to make that happen."

Controversy arose when it was revealed that Truss and Lewis had visited the officers of the Orange Order and loyalist community representatives on the Shankill Road. Her itinerary did not include invitations to the SDLP, Alliance or UUP. The Irish News, in a leading article, commented that the Foreign Secretary "could not have been unaware that she was visiting a hugely sensitive area of a bitterly divided city without making any effort to reach out to nationalists based a few hundred yards away on the other side of what is infamously known as a peace wall."

Second Truss-Šefčovič Meeting 24 January 2022

The second meeting of the Chief Negotiators took place in Brussels on 24 January 2022. They issued a Joint Statement:

"Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss held their second meeting in Brussels on 24 January. The meeting took place in a constructive atmosphere with the aim to advance the talks. They agreed that officials would meet again this week, with the Principals taking stock at political level next week. They also agreed that the EU-UK Joint Committee would meet in the course of February. They reaffirmed their shared desire for a positive EU-UK relationship underpinned by our shared belief in freedom and democracy and cooperation on common global challenges."

Vice-President Šefčovič spoke to a Brussels press briefing: "I just held my second meeting

with Foreign Secretary Liz Truss on the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland.

Today's meeting followed a week of intensive talks between our teams. On EU side, we have remained steadfast in our efforts to facilitate the implementation of the Protocol on the ground, while safeguarding the integrity of the EU's Single Market, and ultimately, this is about ensuring stability, predictability and prosperity in Northern Ireland, bearing in mind that the Protocol represents the one and only solution found jointly, in light of Brexit, to protect the gains of the peace process and avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland.

After my first meeting with Foreign Secretary Truss, I said we needed to start taking things off the table. To get to that point, I believe we must stay laser-focused on practical challenges raised by Northern Irish stakeholders – mirrored in EU-proposed solutions. In this context, I find it particularly important that our teams dive into the questions related to the movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

As you know, in areas like customs and the movement of sanitary and phytosanitary goods, the EU has proposed an extensive reduction of formalities unmatched for any other third country. So if political goodwill is maintained, our discussions could lead to a timely agreement on durable solutions that would immediately and significantly help operators on the ground. At the same time, I have remained clear that we need safeguards to protect the EU's Single Market. The risks here – be it fiscal or in the area of public health and consumer protection – are not theoretical.

I am not in the business of setting artificial deadlines, but I will act with a sense of urgency. With Liz Truss, we will take stock at our level

by the end of next week. And we have also agreed that the EU-UK Joint Committee on the Withdrawal Agreement will take place in the course of next month. In a couple of days, two years will pass since Brexit. And I continue to believe that it is our shared interest to rebuild trust and work in close partnership, especially in a world where democracy increasingly finds itself under pressure from many sides. For my part, I will do my utmost."

Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney met in Brussels on 24 February 2022. The Minister tweeted: "Meeting Maroš Šefčovič today. Will emphasise that Protocol must not be used as a leverage in UK domestic party politics. Focus must remain on UK/EU partnership to protect stability in Northern Ireland and on practical solutions to real problems.

Truss-Šefčovič Meeting, 3 February 2022

The Chief Negotiators met by video link on 3 February. They issued separate statements:

Foreign Secretary Truss Tweeted:

Good discussion with Maroš Šefčovič on Northern Ireland Protocol. My priority remains maintaining peace and stability in Northern Ireland. We need urgent progress. Look forward to seeing him next week in London. Our teams will continue intensive talks.

Vice-President Šefčovič issued a Statement:

I believe we must stay laser-focused on practical challenges raised by Northern Irish stakeholders – particularly on the area of customs and the movement of sanitary and phytosanitary goods, in which an understanding could immediately

and significantly help operators on the ground, while safeguarding the integrity of the EU's Single Market. I emphasised which processes should be in place and what data should be collected in this respect.

It is in this context that we see the recent instruction by the Northern Irish Minister for Agriculture to cease sanitary and phytosanitary checks between Great Britain and Northern Ireland as being very unhelpful. It creates uncertainty and unpredictability for the people and businesses in Northern Ireland. These checks are necessary for Northern Ireland to benefit from access to the EU's Single Market for goods. According to our information, officials in Northern Ireland continue to carry out checks on goods coming to Northern Ireland. It is essential that this remains the case. The European Commission will closely monitor the developments on the ground.

The Protocol, the cornerstone of the Withdrawal Agreement, is an international agreement. It is therefore the UK government's responsibility to uphold its legal obligations stemming from the Protocol – the only solution we have found with the UK government to protect the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, taking into account the type of Brexit the UK government chose. It is by respecting our international obligations and living up to our responsibilities, that trust is built and maintained, also in the future..

Liz Truss Article in Belfast Telegraph, 20 January 2022

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss contributed an article to the Belfast Telegraph on 20 January 2022. The article, entitled *The NI Protocol*

must be changed to help protect the hard-won peace here, can be found [here](#). In it, Ms Truss writes that the Protocol is putting the progress of the Good Friday Agreement at risk “by upsetting the delicate balance which is fundamental to the agreement.” Some key sections of the article are produced below.

The core purpose of the protocol is to protect the peace process and the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement) in all its dimensions: East-West, North-South and within Northern Ireland. But it is failing on its own terms – having lost the consent of the unionist community over fears their identity – along with the integrity of our country – are under threat. They point to a fundamental truth: that Northern Ireland's prosperity is overwhelmingly tied to the place it has in the UK internal market.

This is crucial for the future of Northern Ireland. The UK and EU agreed under the Withdrawal Agreement to support the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its aspects. It is unsustainable to prioritise one strand over all the others by treating Northern Ireland as if it is in the Single Market and part of the EU, when we all know it is not.

The core principles on which the protocol was built remain as relevant as ever: protecting the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, respecting the integrity of the United Kingdom while providing adequate protections for the EU's Single Market. But our extensive efforts are not able to solve the countless problems emerging because it is clear that there are intrinsic faults with the current arrangements which need to be fixed. Needless paperwork has put hundreds of businesses off trading within the United

Kingdom. Rules are frustrating efforts to bring everything into Northern Ireland from beloved family pets to critical medicines.

Any UK Government of any party would have the same duty to fix these pressing problems. They will only get worse if we leave the situation to fester or insist the answer lies in implementing the Protocol's rules more tightly. The latest polling shows that the vast majority of people — 78% — in Northern Ireland agree the protocol needs to change.

Our proposal is pragmatic and common-sense: only goods actually going to the European Union should face checks and processes. We remain happy to keep checking those that do to ensure there is no need for a hard border North-South. This approach works because fundamentally it respects both unions: the UK and the EU.

After this week's round of renewed talks, I am looking forward to meeting Vice-President Šefčovič on Monday to review progress. We need to find a resolution one way or another.

Sinn Féin on course to be largest party in Assembly - Opinion Poll

Sinn Féin remains on course to emerge from Northern Ireland's next Assembly election as the largest party, according to a poll published on 22 January 2022..

Standing at 25%, the party is eight points ahead of its main unionist rival, the DUP, the LucidTalk poll commissioned by the Belfast Telegraph suggests. The gap has widened since the last LucidTalk poll in November, with Sinn Féin up one point and the DUP down one.

Of the other main Stormont parties, the poll puts Alliance and the Ulster Unionists in joint third place on 14% (Alliance down one point on November and no change for the UUP), the TUV on 12% (up one) and the SDLP on 11% (down one). The NI Green Party is up one point to 3%. People Before Profit is on 1% support.

Section Two: The Evolving Debate

Doug Beattie on Bloody Sunday

The UUP leader, Doug Beattie, issued a video statement in which, marking the 50th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday, he said "The events of 50 years ago today were unjustified. By showing compassion and empathy, with the aim of healing, we should not be afraid to admit what was wrong. We should be able to stand up and say what happened on that day was wrong."

There was an immediate response from Twitter followers ranging from unionists who felt he had gone too far to nationalists who rejected his comments as he did not describe the shootings as murder. Others commended his statement.

UK Foreign Office Video

In Dáil Eireann on 26 January 2022, the Fine Gael TD, Neale Richmond, raised the issue of the appearance of a video on the NI Protocol produced by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, accompanied by tweeted messages on the Protocol:

An hour ago, the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO, put out the most ridiculous tweet - it can only be described as Trumpian propaganda - and I have to question why. When the protocol talks are supposedly moving to a

better place, out of nowhere a ridiculous video was put out not by a politician, but by a British Government institution - the FCO - saying all manner of things about how the Northern Irish protocol worked.

We have to be clear in the upcoming discussions with Commissioner Šefčovič and European allies and colleagues, and directly with British Government ministers, that we want to see the deal implemented and we need to do this with a level of trust that quite simply has not been displayed so far.

The Video was posted beside a tweet – “The Northern Ireland Protocol was designed to protect the peace process and respect all communities in Northern Ireland. It is doing the opposite”. The Video stated: “The protocol prevents the free flow of goods between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, undermining the UK’s internal market and prosperity. The protocol is negatively impacting community groups, including the Jewish community, who have struggled to obtain Kosher food. The Northern Ireland Protocol needs to be fixed. That is why we are in intensive talks with the EU to achieve a solution.”

Orange Order in Dublin

Senior members of the Orange Order met the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, in Dublin on 31 January 2022. The Order’s Grand Master and Grand Secretary led a delegation which described the meeting in Government Buildings as “frank and wide-ranging” with the Taoiseach informed that “solutions to the current impasse are possible – but only if they fully respect Northern Ireland’s position.” The meeting came days after the meeting between Liz Truss and the Orange Order in Belfast.

Trade - End of Landbridge

The CEO of Dublin Port, Eamonn O’Reilly, has said that Brexit has spelled the end of the British ‘landbridge’ transit route. New figures show a dramatic fall in lorry traffic with British ports. Full-year figures for 2021 reveal the Brexit impact- Dublin Port recorded a 9% drop in the number of roll-on / roll-off units while the number of lift-on / lift-off units increased by more than 10%, representing a shift to direct shipping between Ireland and the continent. More and more traders are choosing to ship goods in and out of the country by container rather than trailers.

Section Three: Background Material and Further Reading

Background Material

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The IIEA acknowledges the support of the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union



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