

UK UPDATE

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Written by Tony Brown



The UK Update provides up-to-date information on UK-EU, and UK-Ireland relations, bringing together relevant statements and policy positions from key players in Ireland, the UK and the EU.

The Update 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

The many tributes to the former Taoiseach John Bruton, highlighted his highly significant contribution to the peace process. His role in the negotiation and publication of the [1995 Framework Documents](#)¹, representing a crucial coming together of the Dublin and London governments, led by Bruton himself and the British Prime Minister John Major, is seen as laying the foundations of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement of 1998. His deep commitment to reconciliation and mutual understanding on the island of Ireland was recognised by many who joined in tributes.

Notable among the tributes, John Major wrote: "I was shocked to learn of the loss of John Bruton. He was a brave and talented Taoiseach who contributed mightily to the early days of the peace process. In testing circumstances, he put peace above political self-interest to progress the path towards the end of violence. He was a formidable servant of the Irish nation and of peace, and I am deeply saddened at his passing." And, Jeffrey Donaldson, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), referred to John Bruton as a "gentleman" who, as prime minister, "reached out to unionists to try and gain a better understanding of our position and to encourage practical cooperation".

You can read further tributes and the *Sky News* article [here](#).

1. In February 1995, the UK and Irish governments published the Framework Documents which aimed to provide a basis for progressing the peace process. A Framework for Accountable Government in Northern Ireland, outlined agreed proposals for new political institutions, including a 90-strong assembly that would exercise powers similar to its 1974 power-sharing predecessor. A New Framework for Agreement, produced jointly by London and Dublin, was based around the principles of self-determination, consent, non-violence and parity of esteem.

Section One: State of Play

Opinion Findings on Restored Northern Ireland Assembly

In a recent report from Queen's University Belfast, based on findings from a study by Professor David Phinnemore and Professor Katy Hayward, poll findings showed that voters were split "into three camps" when asked if the restored Assembly would last until 2027. The poll was carried out by LucidTalk from 2 to 5 February 2024, just after the DUP agreed to the nearly £3.3 bn package deal from the British Government to guarantee a return to Stormont.

In more detail the poll resulted in the following statistics:

One third (33%) of voters think the Assembly will last; 31% think it will not last, and 36% say that they are unsure/don't know. Strong nationalists (39%) and strong unionists (37%) are those who have most confidence in its endurance, with moderates having the least (only 23% of 'neutral' voters think it will last).

The poll found almost three-quarters of respondents (73%) agreeing that the DUP was right to return to Stormont. This includes a clear majority of Alliance, SDLP, Sinn Féin and UUP supporters, and almost half (47%) of DUP voters. However, only 24% believe that the deal secured by the DUP was worth the two year closure of the Assembly and Executive, though 75% of DUP voters believe that it was.

Most interestingly, over 60% of respondents wanted "political debate in Northern Ireland to 'move on from' Brexit/Protocol matters". Those who voted to keep the focus on Brexit/Protocol matters (52%) identified in the study as "strongly unionist". Additionally, 75% of "strongly unionist" respondents also agreed that "a party's position on the Protocol/Windsor Framework will be 'key' to whether they vote for that party in the next UK General Election". Overall, 55% of voters agreed with this statement.

The LucidTalk's poll also showed that 60% see the Protocol/Windsor Framework as "an appropriate means for managing the effects of Brexit on Northern Ireland" and 56% see it having "a positive impact on the Northern Ireland economy", with 55% regarding the Protocol/Windsor Framework as overall "a good thing for Northern Ireland".

The poll also asked voters about trust in the UK government, the importance of civil society groups' voices, the use of the Stormont Brake, and application of the Protocol/Windsor Framework.

Professor Hayward commented the poll findings and what they show regarding sentiment towards the Protocol and the return to Stormont:

The DUP deal on the Protocol has clearly not removed opposition to it from among strong unionists. Now political contention over it has moved to being within the Assembly. We can expect to see the ramifications of that in practice. For example, three quarters of strong unionists (78%) want to see the Stormont Brake exercised by MLAs, compared to 4% of nationalists and others. The test for the stability of the Assembly will be on how such mechanisms are used and responded to.

All findings and further comments on the LucidTalk poll can be read [here](#).

Northern Ireland Executive on ‘proper funding’

The immediate priority for the re-established Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive was to address the serious financial problems which had built up over the two years of the political stalemate. The UK Government had indicated that it would provide a £3.3 billion financial package, and this was released to the Stormont Executive on 13 February. However, the package includes the stipulation that the Executive must publish and implement an agreed plan to deliver “sustainable finances”, including steps to balance the 2024-25 budget by raising a minimum of £113 million in Northern Ireland.

This minimum amount of own resources was seen to be equivalent to a 15% increase in regional rates, something seen as unacceptable by Stormont politicians including the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Negotiations have commenced between Belfast and London over the terms of the package, as well as a new funding model for Northern Ireland.

During a visit to a community project in Belfast with Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly, the First Minister, Michelle O’Neill spoke to the media about funding in Northern Ireland and its importance if good public services are going to be provided:

[Northern Ireland] isn’t funded properly. We need proper funding if we are going to be able to turn that around and deliver good public services and tackle things like childcare. We are in the middle of that discussion. There was an offer put on the table before Christmas, there was some conditionality presented in that paper. We haven’t signed up to that [...] All we are trying to do is achieve a proper funding model that allows us to do good public services.

Deputy First Minister Little-Pengelly said there would be “difficult decisions to be made in the future”. Ms Little-Pengelly discussed the improvements needed in the public service, while also protecting household incomes:

What is the narrative across the rest of the UK? It is all about trying to protect household incomes, they are even talking about tax reductions, and yet in Northern Ireland we are being asked to increase the tax burden on these hard-working families.

Further details of the First Minister and Deputy First Ministers statements can be read [here](#).

According to a [BBC News article](#), the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council (NIFC) has warned that Stormont is facing another financial ‘cliff edge’ in 2026. The Council has analysed the impact of the £3.3bn financial package and says future cuts may be needed to run a balanced budget.

As Stormont ministers were gathering for the first full meeting of the Executive since power sharing returned, public finances and in particular childcare provision in Northern Ireland were the main items on the agenda. The NIFC warned that once the short-term elements of the package are exhausted ministers may have to raise revenue or make cuts. It also suggests that the ambition to fund Northern Ireland public services at their level of need will not be achieved until the 2030s. The Irish Times reported on the allocation of £700 million of the financial package from the UK government to deal with the ongoing public sector pay dispute in Northern Ireland:

Negotiations will now take place between individual government departments and the relevant trade unions aimed at agreeing pay rises and ending strike action, which has brought widespread disruption to public services in the North. The funds allocated form part of the £3.3 billion financial package awarded by the UK government to support the restoration of the power sharing institutions. However, it is not clear if the funding will be enough to settle the public sector pay dispute, as it only covers the current 2023-24 financial year.

You can read the full article [here](#).

Taoiseach on Northern Ireland Assembly restoration

Juliette Gash reported for *RTÉ* on Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's statement ahead of the Shared Island Forum on 7 February 2024. Mr Varadkar spoke about the developments in Northern Ireland and how he has seen the institutions up and running and when they have been suspended. He also commented that when the institutions are up and running they are likely to stay that way.

When they happen, they tend to go on for years. I think it's always good to bear in mind that, if things don't succeed, you can't assume they'll be back up and running six months later, it's more likely to be two, three years later, but certainly meeting with the new first minister, deputy first minister and the new executive members, I think there's a lot of good faith there. We want to make it work to help do that, as best we can. Not by interfering but by assisting.

Mr Varadkar reflected on his optimism that the return to Stormont will be upheld and that disputes in the public sector will be addressed:

I just have the sense that there is a real genuine effort there. There is going to be genuine effort there on behalf of those sitting around the table in Stormont to try and make this work and focus on a lot of the very practical problems. Difficulties in the health service and public service pay disputes should be much easier to resolve with the institutions operating.

The Taoiseach remarked that important areas like north-south cooperation in particular, really work best with institutions operating. He said the Shared Island Initiative was a huge help when the institutions were down as there was not much else happening: "It is separate from the institutions of Stormont, but it allowed us to leverage some of that cooperation". When Mr Varadkar was asked about all-Ireland cooperation, particularly in relation to business, he said that there is opportunity in terms of investment and employment: "There's a huge opportunity [...] for Northern Ireland to secure a lot of investment, a lot of jobs. They're part of the market of the United Kingdom, have full access to the single market and there's the all-island economy as well."

The Taoiseach highlighted Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom, saying: "There's absolutely no reason why Northern Ireland can't be the most prosperous part of the United Kingdom". Mr Varadkar stated that there is an opportunity for Northern Ireland to grow economically, now that there can be certainty and stability amongst business owners:

I think potentially what we can look forward to is a period when, no matter what else happens, the trading, trade and investment rules are now settled. Northern Ireland will have full access to the single market and will have unfettered access as well to the UK internal market in which they're a part.

Mr Varadkar commented on the future role of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC), insisting that it was important that it should keep meeting: "There had only been one in-person meeting of the NSMC since 2016, and people need to get used to it again. The most important thing in many ways is that they just have it that people meet each other, and they meet their counterparts."

Read the full *RTÉ* article [here](#).

The Fractured Union

Much current political and academic discourse in the United Kingdom relates to a perception that the union has lost its way, that according to Cambridge Professor, Michael Kenny, it is "fractured". Three significant recent works address

this theme: *Gavin Esler's How Britain Ends* (2022); *Gavin Esler's Britain is Better than This* (2023); and Michael Kenny's, *Fractured Union* (2024).

An excerpt from Gavin Esler's *Britain is Better than This* sets the tone for his 2023 book:

Britain is better than this. We all know it. We also know that something has gone seriously wrong in the country almost 70 million of us call home. If we do not act soon the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to give it the full name on British passports, may be beyond repair. Many of us feel that our demonstrably clever and competent country has lost its way, that when change comes it may be change for the worse; that many of the people in top positions in the great institutions of our democracy are men and women we would not trust to look after our children or our bank accounts.

Survey after survey of public opinion shows that the great institutions of British democracy from parliament to the media and big business are no longer trusted as they once were, The unity, even the existence of the United Kingdom is now in doubt. Growing numbers of people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland no longer wish to be part of our union. Significant numbers in England don't seem to care if the others leave.

In Michael Kenny's book he states that:

Whether the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will survive in its current form has turned into one of the existential questions for British politics in the wake of the country's departure from the European Union. The Union's fragility haunted the occasion of the death and mourning of Queen Elizabeth in September 2022, and the ascension to the throne of her son, Charles III. But neither of these profound political and constitutional events are the main cause of the growing uncertainty associated with the UK's territorial constitution. This has its roots in a much longer history of political turbulence which stretches back to the rise and impact of nationalism in all parts of the UK, and declining public confidence in the performance and capacity of Britain's governing institutions.

The lack of a clear, shared sense of the ulterior value of the Union, and the dearth of leading public figures, intellectuals and politicians able or willing to speak about it in a way that might get a hearing across its geographical parts, are telling recent developments. Half a century ago hardly anybody would have taken seriously an argument that the territorial unity of the UK state might be in danger. Now it is hard to find anyone who thinks that it isn't.

Kenny paints, and discusses, three scenarios: the Union dissolved with Scotland and Northern Ireland leaving; The Union reconfigured, either through greater centralisation of a form of federalism; or, evolution with a long process of adaptation to changing circumstances.

Paul Gillespie has contributed a significant review of *Fractured Union* in the Irish Times culture supplement on 10 February 2024:

The puzzle animating this far-seeing and compelling study is why the future of the United Kingdom's political union remains a shadow question hovering on the shoulders of political parties and politicians, but rarely viewed as one that needs sustained attention or strategic discussion.

On Kenny's scenarios, Paul Gillespie quotes his view that "medium-term choices will extend over 20-30 years, a much longer period than the decade or so foreseen by most Irish and Scottish analysts."

Mr Gillespie's *Irish Times* article can be read [here](#).

Welsh Independence

In a recent *BBC* article by Gareth Lewis and Adrian Browne reported on the prospect of Welsh Independence. According to an expert group independence for Wales is a “viable” option. In contrast, the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales, which was set up “to consider and develop options for fundamental reform of the constitutional structures of the United Kingdom, in which Wales remains an integral part, and to consider and develop all progressive principal options to strengthen Welsh democracy and deliver improvements for the people of Wales”, has warned that Wales would face “significant” challenges in funding public services. The Commission’s report highlights that transferring further powers from Westminster and creating a federal UK were also viable options.

The article explains the conclusions of the report, which says that whatever path Wales takes will be a “balance between risk and opportunity”, and that all options will require UK government involvement:

The report calls it a choice between greater control over policy while “accepting that people may be worse off financially in the short to medium term” or a “lower risk, based on whatever reforms of the current settlement can be realistically achieved” but with the chance of not improving Wales’ economic prospects.

The commission was set up by the Welsh government in 2021 as a Labour Senedd election manifesto commitment. The commission includes personnel from the four main political parties in Wales, and is co-chaired by former Archbishop of Canterbury, Professor Laura McAllister. Commenting on the commission’s report, Professor McAllister said that it “acts as an impetus for change for the people of Wales in the future and we want the conversation to continue”. The report was welcomed by Labour’s First Minister Mark Drakeford, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats but criticised as “navel gazing” by the Welsh Conservatives.

Read the full *BBC News* article [here](#).

First Minister Yousaf on Scottish Independence

Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf and SNP leader spoke at the University of Glasgow at the start of January, where he described the UK as the “poor man of northwest Europe” in his address on the issue of future industrial policy in an independent Scotland. Mr Yousef pledged “large scale” investment in competitive industries after independence, but said any economic transition would not take place overnight and he was not promising “rivers of milk and honey”.

The SNP leader spoke a few hours after his counterpart of the Scottish Labour Party, Anas Sarwar gave a speech in Rutherglen encouraging independence supporters to vote Labour in the upcoming general election. Mr Yousef remarked on striving for independence, while also taking into consideration those who are unsure or against withdrawing from the UK, and that they should not be “dismissed”. He also spoke about the impacts on the Scottish economy, the overall state of the UK’s economy and expected results of the next general election.

I’m not selling independence as being an overnight change, that somehow the day after we become independent there will be rivers of milk and honey and the manna will fall from the sky. There will be challenges, of course, there will be difficulties. It will be a transitional process [...] the UK’s economic problems are] hardwired, it’s systemic. [...] Starmer is going to be the next prime minister of the United Kingdom barring a catastrophe.

[Click here](#) for the *Sky News* Article.

Prime Ministers Questions, 7 February 2024

On 7 February 2024, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Sir Jeffrey Donaldson spoke in the House of Commons, reflecting on the progress made in returning to devolution in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister and DUP Leader also discussed the recent report by Policy Exchange, entitled [Closing the Back Door](#), and how Northern Ireland can place a greater role in the defence of the United Kingdom.

Sir Jeffrey Donaldson:

I thank the Prime Minister for his dedication and leadership in helping us to restore our place in the United Kingdom and its internal market and to revive our political institutions at Stormont. The Union is more secure as a result of our combined endeavours and, together, we have greatly enhanced the potential to build a strong and prosperous economy that will help to cement our peace in Northern Ireland. Securing peace in an unstable world is vital for all of us, so will the Prime Minister examine the findings of a recent report by Policy Exchange that calls for Northern Ireland to play an even greater role in the defence of our nation?

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak:

May I start by thanking and paying tribute to my right hon. Friend for his own leadership over the past few months? He and I agree that the Union is stronger for the return of devolution and the work that we have done. I would be delighted to examine the findings of the report, and I have seen, with my own visits, the vital role that Northern Ireland is playing through the location of firms such as Thales and Harland & Wolff. However, as he will know, I was delighted that, in last week's Command Paper, we specifically committed to examining how we can further bolster Northern Ireland's share of the UK defence sector, because it is another essential pillar of our precious economic Union.

[You can read the full engagements from 7 February here.](#)

Policy Exchange on Northern Ireland and UK Security

The report mentioned by Jeffrey Donaldson published by the think tank *Policy Exchange* – backed by former Defence Secretaries Sir Michael Fallon and Lord Robertson and former Security Minister, Lord West – sets out how the deteriorating threat landscape, and persistent Irish security freeloading, require the UK to rediscover the strategic importance of Northern Ireland to its national security.

Policy Exchange summarises its findings and views from their report [Closing the Back Door](#):

With the restoration of Stormont, following the publication of the Government's command paper 'Safeguarding the Union', the time is right to focus on the wider issues surrounding British-Irish security relations. Russia once more poses a maritime threat to the Western Approaches to the British Isles, through and around which much transatlantic critical maritime infrastructure passes.

The UK also faces a back-door threat from the growing Iranian, Russian and Chinese presence in the Republic of Ireland, a mounting challenge for a chronically deficient Irish security and intelligence apparatus. The Republic's Defence Forces and security apparatus remain entirely inadequate, the result of a defence budget of less than 0.5% of GDP since 2000. With polling indicating that Sinn Fein is a serious contender in the 2025 election, there seems little prospect of the Republic's performance on security issues improving any time soon. The Party's longstanding hostility

to the UK, and opposition to firmer Irish commitment to Western security, mean that any Government it leads will be no friend to British interests. This report therefore calls for the UK Government to expand its naval and air presence in Northern Ireland for maritime patrol missions against Russian intrusion. It also urges the UK and its regional partners to unite and up the ante in pressing Dublin to do its fair share for collective security.

The *Policy Exchange* report and the timing of Jeffrey Donaldson and Rishi Sunak's remarks in the House of Commons give rise to consideration of the Irish position on these important issues. The significance of the developing debate is highlighted by the fact that the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, has attended the Munich Security Conference on 16-18 February 2024 - the first time an Irish head of Government has attended the prestigious international event in its 60-year history.

Mr Varadkar attended with the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence Micheál Martin. The conference brought together dozens of world leaders, including US Vice President Kamala Harris, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg. The agenda in Munich was dominated by discussion of the ongoing violence in Gaza, faltering western support for Ukraine in its defensive war against Russia and reaction to Donald Trump's threat to NATO if re-elected.

Mr Varadkar commented on the Irish perspective of the geopolitical state of the world at the moment, with the situations in both Ukraine and the Middle East, and further tensions arising, he said that "now is a crucial moment for international peace and security". Mr Varadkar also acknowledged Ireland's neutrality and the work that he is doing in this space in the near future.

It is very important Ireland takes part to set out our views on how best to manage the many – and growing – security challenges that we all face [...] I'm particularly looking forward to taking part in a panel discussion on neutrality. I will explain the work of the recent Consultative Forum on Neutrality and our Commission on Defence and show how Ireland and our policy of active neutrality can be part of the response to challenges in cybersecurity, hybrid warfare, disinformation, the protection of communications infrastructure and outright conflict.

The *Irish Times* article reporting on the Taoiseach's visit can be read [here](#).

In April 2023, the Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, Micheál Martin convened the Consultative Forum on International Security Policy to start a discussion on Ireland's foreign and security policy. The Forum was designed to build public understanding and generate discussions on our foreign, security, and defence policies.

[According to the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs:](#)

The Forum focused on a wide range of issues, including Ireland's efforts to protect the rules-based international order through peacekeeping and crisis management, disarmament and non-proliferation, international humanitarian law, and conflict prevention and peacebuilding as well as allowing for a discussion on Ireland's policy of military neutrality.

It looked at our current international partnerships in the area of peace and security, particularly as a member of the UN and the EU, as well as with our engagement with NATO through the Partnership for Peace framework. New and emerging threats were also discussed, including cyber and hybrid attacks, the use of disinformation and growing concerns over the protection of critical offshore infrastructure. The Forum also provided an opportunity to examine the experiences and choices of other partners in responding to the new security environment in Europe.

The Forum was an open, inclusive, and consultative discussion. It involved a wide range of stakeholders, with participation from civilian and military experts and practitioners representing a breadth of experience and views.

Section Two: The Evolving Debate

Tánaiste on Good Friday Agreement in the Dáil on 14 February 2024

Tánaiste Micheál Martin spoke in Dáil Éireann on the future of the Good Friday Agreement.

[The Tánaiste's full statement can be read here.](#)

The following short excerpt from his speech reflects on the importance of upholding the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and that the institutions are able to operate effectively as part of this:

A question being asked frequently and with increasing urgency is what work is required to ensure the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are on the most sustainable possible footing. Some parties have presented detailed visions for the reform needed. Others reason that a much more restrained approach is required. Few would argue that the institutions have operated as effectively as we might have hoped. Clearly, respect for the fundamental protections and balances achieved in the Good Friday Agreement must be at the heart of conversations going forward. Equally clearly, structural change is needed. The people of Northern Ireland should not be expected to tolerate further cycles of instability and suspension of the institutions. As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government has a duty to protect the delicate balance of the agreement, but it also has a duty to ensure that the institutions operate as effectively as possible.

Mr Martin also commented on the vitality of cooperation between the British and Irish governments and the progress that has been made so far:

I have said consistently that there must be room for the Northern Ireland parties and the British and Irish Governments to look together at the institutions to ensure they work for the Northern Ireland of today. The agreement itself provides for this. It is my view that the realities of today are not those of 1998 and that there is scope to consider some reform. I acknowledge this is a complex and sensitive matter, with different opinions around the table, but we simply need to find a way to end the cycle of instability, suspension and political torpor. Strong partnership between parties in Northern Ireland, and the Irish and British Governments, with respect for the fundamental principles of parity of esteem and rigorous impartiality, will be as crucial to any future arrangements as it has been to the crafting and operation of today's institutions across all the strands of the agreement.

Finally, the Tánaiste remarked that there will be challenges and opportunities in the processes that come with a return to devolution in Ireland but that it will be worth it to make a difference for the people of Northern Ireland:

The course of the seventh Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive will include challenges and opportunities as its leaders, supported in every way possible by this Government, work together to make a meaningful difference for the people they represent, and move us closer to the future the Good Friday Agreement imagined.

Today, on the feast of St. Valentine, we should remember that the Good Friday Agreement has many admirers around the world who look to Northern Ireland as an example of a society that has successfully moved past violent conflict. Much like true love, which we celebrate today, the path to a successful and prosperous post-conflict society is not one that always runs smoothly. Patience, tenacity, goodwill, compromise, empathy and hope for the future are necessary ingredients, and, I hope, are no longer in such short supply. I look forward to hearing Deputies' perspectives on recent events.

The leader of the UUP, Doug Beattie, commented on the Tánaiste's remarks, saying that he is supportive of moves to stop Sinn Féin and the DUP collapsing the institutions again, but warned those wanting reform to be "mindful of the disaster" of St Andrews.

Katy Hayward on Command Paper

The Queen's University Professor of Political Sociology, Katy Hayward, has contributed a paper to *The Constitution Society* in which she argues that the deal which has led to the reconstitution of the Stormont institutions breached the requirement of rigorous impartiality in engagements between London and Northern Ireland.

In the paper, Katy Hayward discussed the objectives of a return to devolution in Northern Ireland and how the role of the DUP in securing the package deal from the UK government:

... the objective of restoring the devolved democratic institutions [...] is an intergovernmental and all-party concern in Northern Ireland and should have been approached as such. Instead, the future of Northern Ireland became increasingly in the hands of the leader of a party for whom 79% of the electorate did not give a first preference vote.

She also argues that the deal was heavily influenced by the DUP:

It is little surprise, therefore that the deal secured from the UK Government by the DUP runs roughshod over principles that have formed the bedrock for the peace process for over thirty years. The Safeguarding the Union command paper outlining the package claims to 'copper-fasten Northern Ireland's political and constitutional place in the Union'. If it were to do so, it would usurp the British-Irish agreement of 1998, and the 1993 Downing Street Declaration before it, that: "It is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination."

Professor Hayward indicates that the command paper takes into consideration only one party in Northern Ireland and that it breaches the commitments from the Good Friday Agreement:

Assessed under light that extends further back than Brexit and further forward than the next election, Safeguarding the Union may be seen to imperil its own objectives. It makes legislative changes and govern mental commitments which have been designed, written and approved with just one party in mind. Worse, it breaches not one but many of the principles of the 1998 Agreement, in letter and spirit.

For example, it makes no effort to acknowledge the principle of 'parity of esteem' for nationalism and unionism. That principle was essential to securing Sinn Féin's endorsement of the 1998 Agreement. That Sinn Féin has not been minded to object too loudly to this omission should not be taken as any consolation for unionists – quite the opposite.

Professor Haywards concludes that this is a serious area of concern and emphasises the importance of upholding these principles to maintain political stability:

Those words in the 1998 Agreement were carefully crafted over countless hours of negotiation. They set forth principles that were agreed upon after decades of bloody conflict and centuries of imperious negligence. In times of deep political distrust and uncertainty, they should be held on to all the more tightly.

The full article by Professor Hayward can be read [here](#).

Section Three: Background Material and Further Reading

Background Material

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Further Reading

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The Institute of International and European Affairs,

8 North Great Georges Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

T: +353-1-8746756 F: +353-1-8786880

E: reception@iiea.com W: www.iiea.com