



4th June 2021

To: Seanad Special Select Committee on the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union

A Chathaoirligh,

The EU's continued support for Ireland has been clear. Throughout this whole process, the EU, from Michel Barnier to MEPs from across Europe, has, for the most part, understood what is at stake, particularly when it comes to the protection of the Good Friday Agreement. I welcome the news that Ireland will receive funding through the Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR) Fund to help alleviate the financial impact of Brexit. While negotiations are ongoing, Ireland stands to gain a little over €1 billion from the total €5 billion fund. From a Greens perspective, we have been pushing for a minimum amount of BAR funding to contribute to climate objectives. My colleague Grace O'Sullivan MEP's work in the Fisheries Committee includes calls for prioritised support for small-scale sustainable fishers.

Brexit has meant a new relationship for Ireland, Northern Ireland, the EU and the UK. The road to securing the EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (EU -UK TCA) was long and arduous. Undoubtedly, Ireland has felt the impact of Brexit more than any other EU member state. Speaking as a member of the European Parliament's energy and transport committees, Brexit has meant a new way of doing business with changes on the ground for imports and exports at ports and airports, for example. Brexit has also reduced surplus energy trading to the UK from Ireland, resulting in increased energy costs for Irish consumers.

While Brexit was not the outcome I ever wanted to see for the island of Ireland, the EU-UK TCA prevented a no-deal Brexit, so I voted for the EU-UK TCA in April. Regardless of how I may personally feel about Brexit, it is clear we need to move forward in this new relationship. However, one prevailing point of concern has been around the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The Northern Ireland Protocol ensures the Good Friday Agreement remains intact. It removes the threat of a no-deal Brexit and prevents a hard border on the island of Ireland. It is an agreement the UK signed up to. And a deal the UK actively negotiated. It is deeply worrying to hear constant statements from London that the Northern Ireland Protocol is not sustainable and fit for purpose. It is also concerning that, the previously agreed-upon grace periods are extended without any prior notice to the Commission. As seen in March, with the grace period extension of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) controls that focus on export health certificates, the movement of goods such as chilled meats, meat products and medicines, parcels, and pet travel from the UK to Northern Ireland. And more recently, this past week's surprise delay of checks on pets travelling between Northern Ireland and the UK extended until October 2021.

There may well be grounds for such extensions. However, the lack of notice combined with the unwillingness from the UK to meaningfully engage in a road map to implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol does not show good faith from our closest neighbour to an agreement they negotiated and signed up to. Such grandstanding only exacerbates existing sensitivities in Northern Ireland that have arisen from balancing the Good Friday Agreement with Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol. Perhaps, a little less ideology from the UK government and little more cooperation is needed.

That extends to the DUP too. I note with interest the election of Edwin Poots as the new DUP Leader. Mr Poots has been vocal in his stance on Brexit. He is in favour of Brexit, but against the Withdrawal Agreement, the NI Protocol, the Good Friday Agreement and against the EU-UK TCA. While I was encouraged to see Mr Poots visit Dublin this week, I would remind the DUP leader regardless of Brexit; we live on a shared island. The future lies in regional cooperation, not the continuation of extreme grandstanding.

One final point, all sides must ensure that the people of Northern Ireland, from civil society stakeholders, young people to business owners, are involved as partners in the ongoing implementation talks. Brexit and the future relationship between the EU and the UK disproportionately affects the people of Northern Ireland. Their voices must be heard.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'CIARÁN CUFFE' in a cursive style.

Ciarán Cuffe  
Green Party MEP for Dublin