

My Interventions in the Northern Ireland address – 2

Mr Baker:

If my right hon. Friend will agree, I would like to have a meeting with him, because I am very clear that the scope of law that can apply in Northern Ireland is that which is necessary to ensure the smooth flow of goods.

I have said before at this Dispatch Box that we were always going to have special arrangements for Northern Ireland. When I resigned from the then Government in 2018, the issue that I forced among our colleagues in the European Research Group was that of Northern Ireland. We wrote a paper that said that there would need to be alternative administrative and technical arrangements so that there could be an open border with the Republic of Ireland. We understood that there would be special arrangements. There was never going to be an open border with no arrangements to deal with it, and there was never going to be a hard border; it was always going to be necessary to do something unique and special in Northern Ireland.

As I have also said at this Dispatch Box, had this country gone forward with one united voice in accepting the referendum result, and had this country enjoyed the good quality of relations with Ireland and the EU that we enjoy today, we might have done better than leaving in place some EU law in Northern Ireland. I wish we had, but after all we have been through and the eight years it has taken to do it, I think that this settlement taken overall—the Windsor framework plus the Command Paper, including the Humble Address we are debating today—represents the moment to bank what I regard as a win and move forward constructively in the best interests of all the people of the UK, but also the people of the Republic of Ireland.

John Redwood:

Let me reassure the Minister that the Secretary of State gave me a very clear assurance in this House that we can legislate for VAT for Northern Ireland—so I am not quite sure why he was querying that.