

My Interventions in the Northern Ireland Stormont Brake debate

John Redwood

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that because the EU will have powers over things such as VAT and state aid in Northern Ireland, it will also have powers on a drag-through basis over the whole United Kingdom? Does the whole United Kingdom not need a veto?

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. That is why we need a solution that enables the United Kingdom Government and this Parliament to regulate the entirety of the United Kingdom internal market. That is the solution. I am not saying that where Northern Ireland businesses trade with the European Union, EU standards and rules should not apply; I am saying that we can allow for that. What I do not accept is a situation where every business in my constituency must comply with EU rules even if they do not sell a single widget to the European Union. That is wrong, because it harms our place in the internal market of the United Kingdom.

The Stormont brake seeks to address the democratic deficit that I have mentioned, and to an extent, it provides a role for Stormont to pull that brake where changes to EU law occur, but I note that it does not give us any ability to deal with existing EU laws that impact on all manufacturing in Northern Ireland—laws that have been applied without our consent. To that extent, the brake cannot apply. It applies to amendments to EU law or changes new EU laws that are introduced.

I also note that in the proposed arrangements, it is available to the EU to take retaliatory action in the event that the UK Government apply a veto to a new EU law. That is a matter of concern to us in Northern Ireland, because retaliatory action could come in a number of forms. It could include the suspension of arrangements in the green lane, which would impact our ability to bring goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. We need to be clear that it is wrong for the EU to be able to intervene at that level in the free flow of goods from one part of the United Kingdom to the other. I highlight that issue as a real matter of concern to us.