

No deal is better than a bad deal

It was a great pity the government did not stick with its mantra, No deal is better than a bad deal, when Mrs May was negotiating our exit from the EU. It is as true today over the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Two week-ends ago I read that a deal had been agreed and that we would hear it on the Monday and vote on it on the Tuesday. Nothing happened. Ministers assured us there was no deal. They told us they were still negotiating, yet various forces were briefing the press otherwise.

The same thing happened this week-end. I read we are on a 3 line whip today for an NI deal. There was no such thing on the whip sent out to Conservative MPs.

Clearly Ministers would like a deal, and are working on one. They now say they will not sign a deal which fails to tackle the issues over who governs Northern Ireland as well as the trade issues. Let me briefly remind you what the big ones are:

- 1 Does the deal remove all EU barriers to GB to Northern Ireland trade?
2. Does it remove all EU laws from economic activity taking part entirely within NI if that entails sales to NI, to the rest of the UK or to non EU countries?
3. Does it restore the UK's right to settle all tax and state aids policy in NI?
4. Does it restore the supremacy of the Good Friday Agreement, as set out in Article 1 of the Protocol, allowing the restoration of Stormont by gaining the consent of the Unionist community to these arrangements?

It would be a bad idea to settle for partial success, as the EU's aim will be to get the EU to accept a binding Agreement, leaving us open yet again to EU laws and legal challenge as we always were when in the EU.