

Partnership Council and Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee: 9 June

This morning Lord Frost will co-chair a meeting of the Partnership Council and Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee at Admiralty House, London.

This is the first meeting of the Partnership Council, established under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which supervises the operation of the Agreement at a political level. The meeting will cover issues including fish, SPS measures, customs and trade facilitation and law enforcement.

The Joint Committee will include a discussion on Withdrawal Agreement implementation issues, covering the Northern Ireland Protocol and citizens' rights.

Speaking ahead of the meeting Lord Frost said:

Today's historic first meeting of the UK-EU Partnership Council marks an important milestone in our new relationship as friendly trading partners and sovereign equals.

Along with the Joint Committee, I hope this will be a productive forum where we can address shared challenges by working together in the spirit of mutual trust and cooperation.

First among these challenges is the damaging impact the Protocol is having on the ground in Northern Ireland. Businesses in Great Britain are choosing not to sell their goods into Northern Ireland because of burdensome paperwork, medicine manufacturers are threatening to cut vital supplies, and chilled meats from British farmers destined for the Northern Ireland market are at risk of being banned entirely.

When I meet Maroš Šefčovič later today my message will be clear: time is short and practical solutions are needed now to make the Protocol work.

Our overriding shared priority must be to protect the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and the peace process. I look to the EU to show flexibility and engage with our proposals so that we can find solutions that enjoy the confidence of all communities.

Further threats of legal action and trade retaliation from the EU won't make life any easier for the shopper in Strabane who can't buy their favourite product. Nor will it benefit the small business in Ballymena struggling to source produce from their supplier in Birmingham.

What is needed is pragmatism and common sense solutions to resolve the issues as they are before us. This work is important. And it is ever more urgent.

It is only by making substantial progress across the whole range of difficulties that we can show people in Northern Ireland that the Protocol can work in a pragmatic, proportionate and sustainable way – as was always intended.

The UK has taken forward our work to operate the Protocol since the beginning of the year, alongside huge efforts from the Northern Ireland Executive, unprecedented cooperation across a range of departments and agencies, and intensive work with businesses.

- We have delivered significant systems and legislative change – developing or significantly amending 4 major IT systems, including the declaration, transit, safety and security and goods movement systems.
- We have put in place unprecedented means of support for businesses – with more than £200m of funding provided for our Trader Support Service; a Movement Assistance Scheme to fund certificates and vet capacity; and a further £150m invested, with £25m already delivered, for a new Digital Assistance Scheme to digitise the processes for agri-food movements from GB-NI. The TSS has already processed 640,000 customs consignments from GB to NI since the start of the year.
- We have delivered wholly new facilitations, such as the UK Trader Scheme, despite the very late stage at which they were agreed in December.
- We have already begun to share data on GB-NI goods movements, with information already shared on “goods at risk” declarations, in line with what we agreed in December. Detailed, intensive work continues to fulfil other obligations such as a long-term solution on database access.

The UK has now sent more than 10 papers to the European Commission, proposing potential solutions on a wide range of issues. As yet, we have had no written response from the EU.