

The EU, Mr Biden and Northern Ireland

The EU continues its negative approach to international relations. It has picked a fight with the USA over their agreement to link with Australia and the UK in a submarine and Asia defence deal, indulging in French tantrum diplomacy. Apparently daily it seeks to undermine the UK in Washington using its large embassy staff to brief the Administration and politicians with a very misleading and biased account of the Northern Ireland Protocol. They probably urge the President not to offer a Free Trade Deal to the UK as they seem worried by the prospect of one. As I have often argued we can get to a FTA with the USA by both the UK and the USA joining the TPP, or by the UK joining the US/Mexico/Canada Free Trade Agreement which might even be possible under this President. Meanwhile we have a great trade with the USA without any FTA as there was no EU/USA Trade Agreement to roll over when we left. The WTO works fine.

The EU misrepresentation of the Northern Ireland Protocol and Good Friday Agreement is more concerning and does need correcting. The UK Embassy in Washington and our new Foreign Secretary need to redouble UK efforts to get across the UK and Northern Ireland majority view of the issue to the USA. The Northern Ireland Protocol is not essential to the Good Friday Agreement which is not about trade matters. The Good Friday Agreement is fully supported by the UK and Republic of Ireland governments. It sets out constitutional provisions of importance and is based around a mutual respect for and by the Catholic and Protestant communities.

The Protocol as interpreted by the EU is harming relations within Northern Ireland and between NI and the Republic because it does not respect the wishes of the majority community. As interpreted by the EU it is denying NI the advantages of membership of the UK single market which was meant to be guaranteed. There is clear evidence of diversion of trade from NI/GB to NI/EU though this is ruled out by the Protocol. The document states "Having regard to Northern Ireland's integral place in the UK's internal market, the Union and the UK shall use their best endeavours to facilitate the trade between Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK". The Union has been doing the opposite.

The UK will need to take action to restore the integrity of the UK internal market in NI. NI should not be impeded in getting GB products and supplies whilst of course UK companies selling into NI can ensure there is no seepage of goods destined for NI into the Republic. Trusted trader schemes, electronic manifests and spot inspections by UK officials away from borders can police the trade. A trusted UK supermarket company or large retailer should be able to stock their NI branches as they do their GB branches without EU interference. NI/UK and the Republic of Ireland have a good history of co-operating to stop smuggling over the NI/Republic border during our time in the EU, as the EU/NI border was a VAT, excise and currency border throughout. We did not need border posts as these matters were sorted out electronically away from the border.

The UK diplomats should explain to their US contacts that the EU is wrongly interfering in our internal trade. It would be like Canada saying it needed to police and inspect US goods moving from other US states to Alaska in case they ended up in Canada instead. I don't think US politicians would countenance that.

They should also read out the crucial Article 16 of the Protocol which states "If the application of this Protocol leads to serious economic, societal or environmental difficulties that are liable to persist, or to diversion of trade, the Union or the UK may unilaterally take appropriate safeguard measures". There is clear diversion of trade going on so we need to act.