

The government needs to ask for substantial improvements to the Northern Ireland deal

Now more of the detail is coming out about the Northern Ireland talks, it shows us more matters need to be clarified in writing and sorted out in the Joint Committee before accepting any changes to the legal position.

The EU spokesman has told MEPs according to briefings that the ECJ will have an important role and substantial amounts of EU law will apply to Northern Ireland. He also pointed out the Stormont brake would rarely be able to work. It seems the green lane would still be subject to EU checks and to possible EU interruption to the flow of goods. That is why I have asked the government to show us a list of the EU laws that will apply to Northern Ireland from day one of any new agreements. I have asked how many VAT and Excise rules will still constrain our tax policies, and want to know more about what information and form filling people will need to supply to allow green lane trade. It appears that EU plant and animal husbandry rules will apply. We also need to know in what circumstances the EU could suspend or modify green lane trade.

It is most important to get this right. The rest of the UK does not want to find it needs to align with the EU over tax and regulations, any more than Unionists in Northern Ireland wish to find their laws and taxes in part come from the EU where they have no vote or voice. The UK fully accepts the need to avoid a border between NI and the Republic, but also needs to avoid a border between GB and NI. Any new arrangement at the very least needs a unilateral exit route for the UK should the terms prove onerous. It remains to be seen if the Unionist parties find it acceptable so that they can rejoin the Stormont Assembly, one of the original aims of the talks.