

The Northern Ireland Protocol

The Protocol was cobbled together at speed to get Brexit done, on the understanding that it would need clarifying and improving and was temporary. The EU is now seeking to take the agreed proposition that the UK would work to ensure no goods that failed to conform to EU rules would find their way to the Republic from NI and turn it into the EU's wish to make NI a full and permanent member of the EU single market to the exclusion of parts of its GB/NI trade. This was not agreed, and the loose language of the Protocol allows different interpretations. Some at the time said NI would "get the best of both worlds" being both a member of the UK's internal market and of the EU's single market.

Let us take this to a practical level. It is for example about the sausage. Let us suppose the UK comes to have different rules about sausages from EU rules, though for the time being the UK is still using the EU rules it has rolled over into UK law anyway. A British standard banger should be able to move freely from GB to NI to be sold in an NI shop to an NI customer without hindrance. Similarly the UK would be happy for an EU standard sausage to be imported from the Republic and sold in an NI shop.

If a reseller of sausages started to buy sausages from the NI shop with a view to reselling them in a Republic of Ireland shop, the UK authorities would take action to stop such a movement, as that would be a violation of the EU's single market rules. Were any to get through the UK authorities would notify the EU authorities to take action at the second retailer in the Republic. One way or another the EU's single market would be safeguarded against the wandering sausage. The way the EU is wanting to act, it is seeking to stop a UK supermarket chain simply routing high quality UK food from GB to NI for sale in an NI shop. The EU always said it accepted that the UK had every right to its own internal market and understood that included NI.

The UK government has been all too tolerant of the extreme interpretations the EU is trying to impose on the situation. The UK has put various ways of proceeding by agreement to the EU, always offering complete support for their stated aim of keeping certain non EU produce out of the EU. The EU has also said it is concerned about relations between the communities of NI, yet its actions are designed to antagonise the Unionists by seeking to break some of their legitimate links to GB. It is time for the UK to make a further move to resolve the impasse by enforcing our internal market movements.