

What Parliament agreed concerning the EU and Northern Ireland

This week the Commons passed unanimously an important motion to sort out the issues with the EU concerning Northern Ireland. Noting that this got very little attention in the media, I need to set out here what was agreed. I assume the BBC ignored it because it did not offer them the usual opportunity to interview a lot of Remain MPs willing to slag off the UK and put the EU case. To the BBC many pro Brexit MPs speaking for the majority view are non persons unless they can be damaged by a story.

The motion stated:

“That this House supports the primary aims of the Northern Ireland Protocol of the EU Withdrawal Agreement, which are to uphold the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its dimensions and to respect the integrity of the EU and UK internal markets; recognises that new infrastructure and controls at the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic must be avoided to maintain the peace in Northern Ireland and to encourage stability and trade; notes that the volume of trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland far exceeds the trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; further notes that significant provisions of the Protocol remain subject to grace periods and have not yet been applied to trade from Great Britain to Northern Ireland and that there is no evidence that this has presented any significant risk to the EU internal market; regards flexibility in the application of the Protocol as being in the mutual interests of the EU and UK, given the unique constitutional and political circumstances of Northern Ireland; regrets EU threats of legal action; notes the EU and UK have made a mutual commitment to adopt measures with a view to avoiding controls at the ports and airports of Northern Ireland to the extent possible; is conscious of the need to avoid separating the Unionist community from the rest of the UK, consistent with the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement; and also recognises that Article 13(8) of the Protocol provides for potentially superior arrangements to those currently in place.”

So Parliament agrees with the majority in the country at last over this issue, agrees that there is no need to bring in over the top measures the EU wants which have not yet been brought in, and recommends alternative arrangements to the current EU style Protocol. The government Ministers who replied to the debate welcomed the views of those of us who drafted and backed the motion, and the Opposition parties allowed it go through without too many pro EU complaints.

To some of you the wording will be too soft, but the significance is the wording was accepted by all. More importantly the actions that follow are

also clear. The grace periods on further excessive EU intervention in NI trade should be permanent as there is no need for the powers and inspections they threaten. The EU and UK should look for an alternative to the Protocol. Parliament sees that the current EU version is alienating the Loyalist community in NI and is therefore contrary to the Belfast peace Agreement. The UK proposal of mutual enforcement and continuing checks as needed away from the border makes sense. Imposing a disproportionate number of checks at NI ports on GB/NI trade makes no sense and is illegal under the Agreement,

The government was committed to protecting the integrity of the UK internal market, and has reaffirmed its commitment in accepting this motion. If there is no early success in EU/UK talks along these lines then it is clear the UK has to take unilateral action, as it is legally entitled to do as set out in the debate. The EU should stop belying and obfuscating and see that it has at last united the UK Parliament against its view and actions.