

## What the PM and President should have said in Ulster

During his brief morning stop in Northern Ireland on the way to his three day stay in the Republic of Ireland the President could have held out a hand of friendship to the Unionist community. He could have said on reflection he had been hasty to encourage an EU/UK deal, as he now saw that one on the wrong terms alienated the Unionist community and undermined the Good Friday Agreement. He could have pledged to ask the EU to change their stance to reduce the risk of damaging NI's place in the UK as well as burdening UK trade between GB and NI with too many barriers. The deal done has not resolved the problems. it has destabilised NI by re opening constitutional issues that the GFA had put to rest.

Instead he pretended there was no real issue, just unreasonable Unionists. He was not able to have a celebratory banquet for 25 years of the GFA. He could not make a speech to Stormont as it cannot sit. The original ideas behind the visit were cancelled so the NI visit was shortened.

The Prime Minister should have used the brief encounter to start work on restoring Stormont by engaging the President in the need to get the EU to change its stubborn and unhelpful stance. He could have made the Unionist case to balance the Republican case implicit in the President's words and deeds.

He did not do so. He seemed to go along with the idea that the Unionists should accept the EU/Republic of Ireland settlement and live with EU law making in their part of the UK. It was a bad missed opportunity, a tragedy for our country.