

My contribution in the Northern Ireland Protocol Committee (Day 2) debate

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): I welcome the notion of measures that restore our control over VAT and subsidies in Northern Ireland. It is entirely within the spirit and the text of the protocol, which says that both parties will respect the internal market of the United Kingdom. How can we have a proper functioning internal market if we have to have rates of VAT in Northern Ireland that are different from the rest of our internal market? And how can we claim that our country's sovereignty is respected by this part of the agreement, as the EU originally said it would be, if we are not sovereign to change VAT in an important part of the United Kingdom? It is right that we legislate on this issue, because we took back control and we wish to restore the sovereignty of this Parliament. How can we say that we have a sovereign Parliament properly restored if our Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot change VAT in part of the UK? It is right and it is legal that we legislate within the terms of the protocol and the agreement, and it is essential that we do so. Those who favour a negotiated solution with the EU should recognise that a huge amount of time and talent has been put into negotiating with the EU in recent years on these matters, and it has been unwilling to be reasonable or to respect the spirit and even the letter of the protocol itself. It is time to legislate.

I say to those who favour a negotiated solution and still have this idea that the EU will, in due course, negotiate properly over one that it is far more likely to negotiate in a more sympathetic and realistic spirit if it knows that we have the firm backstop of clear legislation, which means we will do the right thing by Northern Ireland and the whole UK if the EU cannot be bothered to meet us and understand what it means for the communities in Northern Ireland.

The EU should also take on board the good advice from the Democratic Unionist party and other members of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland. The whole fabric of the Good Friday agreement rests upon the consent of both communities. The EU says it fully signs up to that and sees it as of prior importance to the protocol, so the EU has to understand that there is no cross-community consent for the current position. The sooner we legislate to sort that out, the better.