

President Macron's revealing view of Northern Ireland

When President Macron said that sending supermarket supplies from Toulouse to Paris was different from sending them from Liverpool to Belfast because in the first case they were in the same country he revealed a common international misunderstanding about the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. Fed on a diet of EU and Republic of Ireland spin they all see the issues in Northern Ireland from the Irish Republican viewpoint. They ignore or simply do not understand the majority community in Northern Ireland who are strongly of the view that Northern Ireland must remain an integral part of the UK, as much a part of the UK as Toulouse is part of France. There are quite a lot of Americans who also need to be told this. They sometimes seem to think the UK is holding onto some colony in Northern Ireland against the will of the people. As the Good Friday Agreement makes clear Northern Ireland is fully part of the UK by virtue of popular majority support. It could be changed by a referendum or border poll. Recent polling shows an insufficient level of support for any such change showing there is no need to hold a poll.

When challenged by the UK view that the current arrangements over trade between GB and NI are not working, the EU argues two contradictory soundbites. They say the UK entered into an international Agreement called the Northern Ireland Protocol, and that must be fully enforced and can never be changed. They also argue that the Good Friday Agreement is central to the wider issues of good peaceful government on both sides of the border on the island of Ireland.

The truth is the EU's aggressive and excessive approach to implementing their view of the Protocol is undermining the Good Friday Agreement. Their actions have alienated the majority community in Northern Ireland, who see the EU trying to force them into dependence on the Republic, severing important links with their own country, the wider UK.

Nor is it true to say that the EU's view of the legal requirements of the Protocol are correct. The Protocol, like the Good Friday Agreement, seeks to balance the interests of the UK and of the Republic/EU. It is meant to uphold Northern Ireland's full membership of the UK's internal or single market, yet the EU is doing everything it can to stop goods, animals and plants passing from GB to NI. The UK government needs to set out its legal view of the EU's need to respect the UK single market to comply with the Protocol, and its various suggested fixes for the restrictions and frictions deliberately placed in the way of GB/NI trade by the EU.

I did not myself vote for the final UK/EU Agreement, fearing bad faith by the EU especially on fish and Northern Ireland. The Withdrawal Act I did vote for contained the crucial sovereignty clause which gives us the legal basis to act unilaterally if the EU refuses to negotiate a sensible compromise. We also have such rights under the Vienna Convention on Treaties should we need to renounce the Protocol. The EU/UK Agreement also gives us the right to

suspend the Protocol if it is not being fairly and sensibly enforced. It is time to take control of our own internal trade and demonstrate that is legal as well as right.