



Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland: Commission proposes bespoke arrangements to benefit Northern Ireland

Brussels, 13 October 2021

The European Commission has today proposed bespoke arrangements to respond to the difficulties that people in Northern Ireland have been experiencing because of Brexit, by further facilitating the movement of goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

This follows extensive discussions over the past months with the UK government, as well as outreach by the European Commission to political leaders, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders in Northern Ireland. It also puts forward ideas based on elements raised in the UK's Command Paper published in July 2021.

The Commission now stands ready to engage in intensive discussions with the UK government, with a view to reaching a jointly agreed permanent solution as soon as possible. The Commission will do this in close collaboration and constant dialogue with the European Parliament and Council.

Vice-President Maros **Šefčovič** said: *"I have listened to and engaged with Northern Irish stakeholders. Today's proposals are our genuine response to their concerns. We have put a lot of hard work into them to make a tangible change on the ground, in response to the concerns raised by the people and businesses of Northern Ireland. We are looking forward to engaging earnestly and intensively with the UK government, in the interest of all communities in Northern Ireland."*

The Commission believes that this package of measures will make a real difference on the ground in Northern Ireland and addresses the Brexit-related problems regarding the movement of goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland that have been raised by Northern Irish people and businesses. These measures come in addition to [the package that was presented in June 2021](#), which facilitates the movement of live animals from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

Today's package proposes further flexibilities in the area of food, plant and animal health, customs, medicines and engagement with Northern Irish stakeholders. It proposes a different model for the implementation of the Protocol, in which the flow of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland - in respect of goods destined to stay in Northern Ireland - is facilitated to a significant extent. This facilitation is enabled by a series of safeguards and increased market surveillance to ensure the goods do not move into the EU's Single Market.

This package opens the way to a resolution of all outstanding implementation issues, thereby establishing predictability, stability and certainty for people and businesses in Northern Ireland.

Solutions in four key areas

The College of Commissioners today approved four non-papers (i.e. non-legislative texts) covering the following areas:

1. ***A bespoke solution for Northern Ireland on food, plant and animal health (i.e. "Sanitary and Phytosanitary issues") – leading to approximately an 80% reduction in checks***

This solution would result in a Northern Ireland-specific solution in the area of public, plant and animal health (i.e. "SPS"). In practice, this means vastly simplified certification and a significant reduction (approximately 80%) of official checks for a wide range of retail goods moving from Great Britain to be consumed in Northern Ireland. This is in addition to [the solutions](#) that the EU put forward on 30 June, which facilitates the movement of live animals from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

In order to protect the integrity of the Single Market, this would be subject to a number of conditions and safeguards, such as the UK delivering on its commitment to complete the construction of permanent Border Control Posts, specific packaging and labelling indicating that the goods are for sale only in the UK, and reinforced monitoring of supply chains. In addition, safeguards would include a rapid reaction mechanism to any identified problem in relation to individual products or traders, and unilateral measures by the EU in case of failure by UK competent authorities or the

trader concerned to react to or remedy an identified problem. These specific conditions and safeguards would provide a robust monitoring and enforcement mechanism that would make a significant reduction of checks possible without endangering the integrity of the Single Market.

2. *Flexible customs formalities to facilitate the movement of goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland – 50% reduction in paperwork*

This solution consists of measures that will simplify and make customs formalities and processes easier. It will cut in half the documentation currently needed for goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. This is also subject to safeguards, such as the UK committing to providing full and real-time access to IT systems, a review and termination clause, as well as the UK customs and market surveillance authorities implementing appropriate monitoring and enforcement measures.

When taken together, the bespoke solutions for both SPS and customs rules will create a type of “Express Lane” for the movement of goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, while at the same time providing for a robust monitoring and enforcement mechanism in order to protect the integrity of the Single Market.

3. *Enhanced engagement with Northern Ireland Stakeholders and Authorities*

These proposals aim to improve the exchange of information with stakeholders and authorities in Northern Ireland with regard to the implementation of the Protocol and relevant EU measures. This would make the application of the Protocol more transparent, while at the same time respecting the UK's constitutional order. This solution consists of establishing structured dialogues between Northern Ireland stakeholders (authorities, civic society and businesses) and the Commission. This would involve the creation of structured groups with the participation of experts to discuss relevant EU measures that are important for the implementation of the Protocol. Northern Irish stakeholders would also be invited to attend some meetings of the Specialised Committees. It will also create a stronger link between the Northern Ireland Assembly and the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly. A website will also be set up to show in a clear and comprehensive way the EU legislation applicable in Northern Ireland.

4. *Uninterrupted security of supply of medicines from Great Britain to Northern Ireland for the long-term*

The result of this proposal will be that pharmaceutical companies in Great Britain – when supplying the Northern Irish market – can keep all their regulatory functions where they are currently located. This means, for instance, that Great Britain can continue acting as a hub for the supply of generic medicines for Northern Ireland, even though it is now a third country. In this way, the long-term supply of medicines from Great Britain to Northern Ireland can be ensured. The Commission will hold further discussions with the UK and stakeholders before finalising its proposal for amending existing rules. This proposal involves the EU changing its own rules on medicines.

Next steps

The Commission and the UK government have been in constant contact over the past months. Following today's meeting of the College of Commissioners, Commission experts will travel to London to begin discussing these four non-papers in detail with the UK government. This will be the start of a period of intense discussions with the UK government over the coming weeks. Vice-President **Šefčovič** will meet Lord Frost on Friday in Brussels.

The Commission will also continue to engage with stakeholders in Northern Ireland.

Background

The Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, as an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement, was agreed jointly and ratified by both the EU and the UK. It has been in force since 1 February 2020 and has legal effects under international law. The aim of the Protocol is to protect the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement in all its dimensions, maintaining peace and stability in Northern Ireland, avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland, while preserving the integrity of the EU Single Market. In order for these objectives to be achieved – and to pave the way for further opportunities – the Protocol must be implemented in full.

The EU has continuously engaged in good faith within the Joint Committee to find pragmatic solutions to help minimise disruption caused by Brexit and to help facilitate the everyday life of communities in Northern Ireland. Ten months into the implementation of the Protocol, and on the basis of extensive discussions with the UK Government and stakeholders in Northern Ireland, the core issues in the implementation of the Protocol are clear. The package proposed by the Commission today aims to address these issues in a durable way in the interest of stability and predictability on

the island of Ireland.

For More Information

[Link to non-papers](#)

[Questions and Answers](#)

[Factsheet: concrete examples of today's package](#)

[Factsheet: the benefits of the Protocol](#)

[Factsheet: Examples of flexibilities already identified](#)

IP/21/5215

Press contacts:

[Daniel FERRIE](#) (+32 2 298 65 00)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)

Related media

 [Press conference by Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission, on the Commission's package of proposals related to the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland](#)