



Statement by Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič following today's announcement by the UK government regarding the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland

Brussels, 3 March 2021

Following the UK government's statement today, Vice-President Šefčovič has expressed the EU's strong concerns over the UK's unilateral action, as this amounts to a violation of the relevant substantive provisions of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and the good faith obligation under the Withdrawal Agreement. This is the second time that the UK government is set to breach international law.

This also constitutes a clear departure from the constructive approach that has prevailed up until now, thereby undermining both the work of the Joint Committee and the mutual trust necessary for solution-oriented cooperation.

It is equally disappointing that the UK government has resorted to such unilateral action without informing the EU's co-chair of the Joint Committee. Issues relating to the Protocol should be dealt with through the structures provided for by the Withdrawal Agreement.

Vice-President Šefčovič has reiterated that the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is the only way to protect the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement in all its dimensions, and to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. Throughout last year, we worked tirelessly to find practical workable solutions, based on the Protocol, to minimise disruption caused by Brexit and to help facilitate the everyday life of communities in Northern Ireland. The Joint Committee formally endorsed these solutions on 17 December 2020 in order to help businesses adapt to the new reality.

The Vice-President has also recalled that at the last EU-UK Joint Committee on 24 February, the UK reiterated its commitment to the proper implementation of the Protocol, as well as the implementation without delay of all decisions taken in the Joint Committee in December 2020. He also recalled that the mutually agreed joint engagement with Northern Irish business groups and other stakeholders was meant to jointly look into solutions.

In his phone call later today with David Frost, in his capacity as co-chair of the EU-UK Joint Committee on the Withdrawal Agreement and of the EU-UK Partnership Council, Vice-President Šefčovič will inform him that the European Commission will respond to these developments in accordance with the legal means established by the Withdrawal Agreement and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

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