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Liz Truss: These moves are not about scrapping the Protocol, but making it work

The Foreign Secretary wants to ‘cement’ the parts of the Northern Ireland treaty that are working and ‘fix’ those that are not

LIZ TRUSS

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Pace and stability in Northern Ireland have been hard-won. The Belfast Good Friday Agreement is the bedrock on which the modern, thriving, Northern Ireland is built.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/05/17/liz-truss-moves-not-scrapping-protocol-making-work/>

marking the triumph of compromise and tolerance after decades of instability.

I remember growing up in Leeds during the Eighties and Nineties, a time when our school was one of many to face bomb scares. I remember the heart-breaking attacks on civilians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which happened all too often. The transformation since then triggered by the [Belfast Good Friday Agreement](#) has been a marvel.

Today, Northern Ireland plays a critical role in our response to [Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine](#). The Ukrainian people are using our [NLAW missiles](#), assembled in Belfast, to halt the advance of Russian tanks. They are defending their skies with Belfast-built [Starstreak missiles](#). People in Northern Ireland have shown their immense generosity by opening up their homes to those fleeing the barbarity.

Northern Ireland is now a modern, thriving economy. No one wants to return to the past. The basis for successful power-sharing remains strong. But the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement is under strain.

Regrettably, the power-sharing institutions integral to the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement have not been fully functioning since February. This is the direct consequence of the Northern Ireland Protocol's profound impact.

Companies continue to face significant costs and paperwork when moving goods within the UK, due to full [EU customs procedures](#) which are completely unsuited to goods moving within a country, leading some to give up altogether.

Citizens in Northern Ireland are not able to benefit from the same economic decisions as the rest of the UK. Rules on plant and animal products mean producers face particularly burdensome restrictions in order to sell foodstuffs in shops in Northern Ireland.

These problems have fed concerns in Northern Ireland that the East-West relationship has been disproportionately affected by the Protocol. All Parties in Northern Ireland agree on the need for change given the mounting problems we have seen with the current arrangements.

Without resolving these fundamental issues, we will not be able to re-establish the Executive and end the current impasse, leaving Northern Ireland without institutions to deliver for the local people.

That is why we need to make changes so the Protocol achieves its core stated objective of protecting the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement instead of undermining it, while avoiding a hard border, protecting the integrity of the UK and safeguarding the EU Single Market.

Our preference is to reach a negotiated outcome with EU. I have had six months of negotiations with my EU counterpart Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič. We are now nearing 18 months of talks, including the year of discussions led by my predecessor.

The UK has proposed a comprehensive solution to address the barriers created between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Our solution would maintain Northern Ireland's place in the UK's internal market, ensure there is no hard border, and protect the EU Single Market.

This requires a change to the Protocol itself, as its current drafting prevents this solution being implemented. But the EU's mandate does not allow the Protocol to be changed, and they have so far been unwilling to consider such a change.

From our discussions with Parties in Northern Ireland, it is clear that only the solutions we propose, which require a change in the Protocol, will enable the Executive to be restored.

We need a solution that can command the broadest possible cross-community support for years to come. For the sake of the preservation of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, we must find a fix to the current situation. To this end, I have announced our intention to introduce legislation to make changes to the operation of the Protocol in the coming weeks.

In parallel with legislation being introduced, we will remain open to further talks with the EU if we can achieve the same outcome through a negotiated settlement.

This is not about scrapping the Protocol but making it work. We will cement those parts which are working while fixing those that are not: the movement of goods, goods regulation, VAT, subsidy control, and governance.

As the Government of the whole United Kingdom, we have the responsibility to resolve this situation. We are clear that the EU will not be negatively impacted – just as we have ensured the protection of the EU Single Market since the existence of the Protocol.

We must restore the primacy of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its dimensions

we must restore the primacy of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its dimensions as the basis for the restoration of the Executive. We will do so through technical measures designed to achieve the stated objectives of the Protocol, tailored to the reality of Northern Ireland.

Our approach fundamentally respects both unions: the UK and the EU. By taking the necessary steps to preserve peace and stability, we will live up to our commitments to all communities of Northern Ireland.

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