



Statement by Vice-President Šefčovič following his videoconference with the UK Foreign Secretary on the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland

Brussels, 3 February 2022

On 3 February, I met with UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss via videoconference to discuss the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

We took stock of the technical discussions this week, based on far-reaching solutions that the EU proposed to facilitate the implementation of the Protocol and strengthen stability and predictability for the people and businesses in Northern Ireland.

I believe we must stay laser-focused on practical challenges raised by Northern Irish stakeholders – particularly on the area of customs and the movement of sanitary and phytosanitary goods, in which an understanding could immediately and significantly help operators on the ground, while safeguarding the integrity of the EU's Single Market. I emphasised which processes should be in place and what data should be collected in this respect.

It is in this context that we see the recent instruction by the Northern Irish Minister for Agriculture to cease sanitary and phytosanitary checks between Great Britain and Northern Ireland as being very unhelpful. It creates uncertainty and unpredictability for the people and businesses in Northern Ireland. These checks are necessary for Northern Ireland to benefit from access to the EU's Single Market for goods.

According to our information, officials in Northern Ireland continue to carry out checks on goods coming to Northern Ireland. It is essential that this remains the case. The European Commission will closely monitor the developments on the ground.

The Protocol, the cornerstone of the Withdrawal Agreement, is an international agreement. It is therefore the UK government's responsibility to uphold its legal obligations stemming from the Protocol – the only solution we have found with the UK government to protect the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, taking into account the type of Brexit the UK government chose.

It is by respecting our international obligations and living up to our responsibilities, that trust is built and maintained, also in the future.

Both teams will continue intensive talks on facilitating the implementation of the Protocol next week. I will meet Foreign Secretary Truss again on Friday 11 February.

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