

## **DUP Leader Arlene Foster addressed members of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, 17 September 2019**

"I know that many in the Republic were both shocked and disappointed at the outcome of the United Kingdom's referendum on its membership of the European Union. Having reached a new and settled partnership with the United Kingdom, Ireland, understandably feared for the future and the impact the outcome of the result would have.

I respect the fact that Ireland has sought to bring about solutions which would keep the UK in the closest possible future relationship with the European Union but equally Ireland has to recognise that the referendum result has to be upheld and that ultimately it is for the Government of the United Kingdom to determine whether future arrangements are compatible with the referendum result.

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We are living, and working, through momentous times. The upheaval and the changing circumstances have placed strains on relationships both North and South as well as between London and Dublin.

As the leader of Unionism in Northern Ireland I want to reassure you, that as your neighbours and regardless of the final outcomes on Brexit we must work together in the future as friends and neighbours.

We must do so in a spirit of co-operation recognising that through mutual respect and co-operative working we can successfully deliver for all those who, whether they live in Northern Ireland or the Republic, call this island home.

For my part I know we can do that for the benefit of all our citizens without compromising the constitutional arrangements.

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So turning to Brexit. First, we want to secure a deal between the United Kingdom and the European Union as the UK leaves. That has always been the position of the party.

I, along with the late Martin McGuinness, wrote to the then Prime Minister in August 2016 outlining our desire to see a deal that would work for Northern Ireland. For our part we have not moved from that position.

In our Westminster manifesto in 2017 we indicated "we will work to get the best deal for Northern Ireland recognising that we share a land frontier with the Republic and the particular circumstances of our unique history and geography."

So we want to see an agreement reached that we can support and which works for the United Kingdom, Ireland and the other EU member states.

A no deal outcome is no-one's preferred outcome and is not of itself a final destination.

Second, a deal will not be achieved that involves a backstop whether it is UK wide or NI specific.

Those who know anything about Northern Ireland will appreciate that long-term arrangements cannot be secured in Northern Ireland unless supported by a majority of Unionists and Nationalists.

The majority of Unionists do not and will not support the arrangements as envisaged in the backstop as set out in the draft Withdrawal Agreement.

At its heart, the Belfast Agreement recognises that parallel consent is required. So if we are to secure a Brexit agreement then it requires the European Union in particular to recognise that Unionist consent must be forthcoming.

Some commentators say DUP influence in Westminster is on the wane and that a deal can be achieved without DUP input. The reality however is that regardless of particular numbers no agreement will pass Parliament without the buy-in of the Unionist community. The Prime Minister in his letter to Donald Tusk highlighted the anti democratic nature of the backstop and that it "weakens the delicate balance embodied in the Belfast Agreement."

Third, we are clear that the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, must leave the EU Customs Union and the Single Market. Both the UK-wide and NI specific backstop were designed so that Northern Ireland would remain as part of the EU Customs Code. The concept that there could ever be customs duties falling due within the internal market of the United Kingdom following departure from the European Union is one we could never support.

Northern Ireland trades more within the United Kingdom single market than all other markets combined. 73% of all goods leaving Belfast port are bound for Great Britain. While recognising the importance of North South trade, economically Northern Ireland is integrated with the Great Britain market in a way that cannot be damaged if our economy is to flourish.

Fourth, as we indicated in 2017 we are prepared to be flexible and look at Northern Ireland specific solutions achieved with the support and consent of the representatives of the people of Northern Ireland. We want to have prosperous trading relationships across the island and allow businesses to get back to investing in the future with confidence.

There are some sectors of the economy in particular where the nature of the supply chains are significantly integrated and we believe, with flexibility on all sides, that solutions can be found that will not on the one hand erect new barriers to trade within the United Kingdom while not damaging the integrity of the EU Single Market.

Fifth and finally we want to see a refit of some of the structures of the Belfast Agreement to reflect the new emerging relationships both between Northern Ireland and the Republic as well as between the United Kingdom and the Republic.

Updated arrangements to take account of any new Brexit deal secured would allow the new environment to be managed in a pro-active and democratic manner.

The Democratic Unionist Party will want to play a full and positive role as we move into the next chapter of our evolving relationships.

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It is a point of massive frustration for everyone in Northern Ireland as there are no local Ministers to make decisions about our schools, roads or hospitals.

Sinn Féin is refusing to restore the Assembly until all other parties agree to their preconditions.

The DUP has offered to restore the Assembly in a time-limited manner with a parallel process to deal with Sinn Féin's demands. This offer has been rejected.

I want to see the devolved institutions restored so our citizens can shape their public services but I also see a functioning Stormont as a critical part of improving the east-west and north-south relationships.

Northern Ireland has incredible influence in Parliament given the DUP confidence and supply agreement. We have used this influence to deliver one billion pounds extra for Northern Ireland's schools, roads and hospitals. Such a position is not a barrier to devolution but rather should help oil the wheels of devolution.

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With influence in London, a sensible deal from Brussels and a functioning Assembly in Belfast, I know we will always have good neighbours in this city.

We must place our shoulders to wheel and in the coming weeks ensure everyone is committed to restoring devolution. For our part, the DUP will not be found wanting. We have overcome many more complex and deep-rooted problems in our past."