



Department
for Exiting the
European Union

Correspondence Unit
9 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AG

correspondence@dexeu.gov.uk
www.gov.uk

You can follow DExEU on Twitter:
@DExEUgov

Mrs S. Steele
Democratic Services Officer
Belfast City Council
Chief Executive's Department
City Hall, Belfast
BT1 5GS

Your ref: SS/NOM
Our ref: PM/0077

25 October 2018

Dear Mrs Steele,

Thank you for the letter of 10 October regarding Belfast City Council's concerns over the final deal in relation to our exit from the European Union. We are responding on behalf of the Prime Minister.

We have been very clear that this government will never accept a second referendum. The referendum on 23 June 2016 saw the highest number of votes cast in UK electoral history. Almost three quarters of the electorate took part in the referendum, resulting in 17.4 million votes to leave the European Union. This was a clear instruction from the British people, which the Government is committed to deliver upon.

Parliament also overwhelmingly confirmed the result of the referendum by voting with clear and convincing majorities in both of its Houses for the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill. Further still, at the last general election, over 80% of British people voted for parties committed to respecting the result.

Throughout the Exit negotiations, the UK Government has been clear about its unwavering commitment to upholding the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its parts. Guarantees of equality and rights, which recognise the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, are a fundamental part of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, and we acknowledge that EU law, particularly on protection from discrimination, has formed part of the framework for delivering those guarantees.

In this context, the UK committed, in paragraph 53 of the December 2017 Joint Report, to ensuring that no diminution of rights is caused by its departure from the EU, including in the area of protection against forms of discrimination enshrined in EU law. The 'no diminution' commitment, which will be reflected in legal text in the Northern Ireland/Ireland Protocol to the draft Withdrawal Agreement, means that the rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity provisions set out in the Belfast Agreement, insofar as they are enforceable in domestic law in Northern Ireland on Exit day, cannot be diminished as a result of UK Exit.

On the backstop, the proposals we have put forward for our future economic relationship would allow both sides to meet our commitments to the people of Northern Ireland in full, and we are working hard to get a deal on that basis. The proposals maintain frictionless trade and remove the need for checks between the UK and the EU.

Whilst we remain committed to resolving the Northern Ireland border through our overall economic relationship, the backstop is a critical issue. There must be a legally operative backstop in the Withdrawal Agreement - and one that is fully consistent with all the commitments made in the Joint Report. Both the UK and the EU share a profound responsibility to ensure the preservation of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, protecting the hard-won peace and stability in Northern Ireland and ensuring that life continues essentially as it does now.

We have always been clear that we cannot break up the UK customs territory. No UK Prime Minister could accept a solution for Northern Ireland that involves an internal customs border separating one part of the UK from the rest. Doing so would undermine the constitutional and economic integrity of the UK, and it would go against the clear commitment made in December's Joint Report to protect Northern Ireland's place in the UK internal market.

The Government is continuing to work with our European partners to secure a deal that is in the best interests of the country. Negotiations are progressing well and the shape of a deal across the vast majority of the Withdrawal Agreement is now clear.

We also have broad agreement on the structure and scope of the framework for our future relationship, with progress on issues like security, transport and services. We have made real progress in recent weeks on both the Withdrawal Agreement and the political declaration on our future relationship. Perhaps most significantly, we have made progress on Northern Ireland, on which the EU has been working with us to respond to the very real concerns we had about its original proposals.

There is no doubt that a good deal is the best outcome for both sides and we are working to ensure we get that good deal within the timetable that enables us to leave the EU on 29 March 2019.

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,
DExEU Correspondence Team