

DUP leader Arlene Foster scuppers hopes of post-Brexit border in Irish sea

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News

Integrity of UK's single market a red line issue for Northern Ireland, says Unionist chief.



Photo Credit: Lorna Hutchinson

Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Arlene Foster has warned EU and UK leaders that any Brexit deal involving “divergence” from the normal functioning of the UK’s internal market, such as a border between the mainland UK and Northern Ireland, - one of the UK’s four constituent countries - would be unacceptable and non-negotiable.

“I’m the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party – the clue’s in the title. I’m a unionist, I believe in the union of the United Kingdom...we do not want Northern Ireland going off in a different direction from the rest of the UK,” Foster said at a press conference following a meeting with chief EU Brexit

negotiator Michel Barnier in Brussels on Tuesday.

“We’ve always said that there’s only one red line in these matters, and that’s when we are being treated differently from the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of customs, in terms of regulatory alignment,” she added.

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As Britain and the EU gear up for a crunch Brexit summit next Thursday (18 October), Foster, said it was vital that the EU understood the sensitivities surrounding Northern Ireland adding that she feared there were some in the EU looking to “annex” Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of customs and regulatory alignment.

“There cannot be barriers to trade in the UK internal market that could damage the economic wellbeing of Northern Ireland, therefore we do not support any arrangement which would give rise to either customs or regulatory barriers within the UK internal market.”

“The whole point about checks is that there’s a difference: why would we need checks between GB and Northern Ireland, or between Northern Ireland and GB, if we were an integral part of the single market of the United Kingdom. So, we need to go back to the fundamentals of the single market of the UK. Economically it’s very important for Northern Ireland that our goods can travel within the UK market in the way that they do at the moment,” Foster said”

Accompanying Foster was DUP MEP, Diane Dodds who said at the press conference: “it’s also incredibly important that we realise that while Northern Ireland sells more to Great Britain than it does to the Republic of Ireland, the rest of Europe and the rest of the world put together, actually Northern Ireland buys 75 percent of everything it buys – either for consumers or into the manufacturing process – within the British market.”

“There cannot be barriers to trade in the UK internal market that could damage the economic wellbeing of Northern Ireland, therefore we do not support any arrangement which would give rise to either customs or regulatory barriers within the UK internal market.” Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party leader Arlene Foster

“Therefore, the ties between our two economies are so intricately linked, that to put up barriers – either tariff or non-tariff barriers – between those two economies would be economically disastrous for Northern Ireland, meaning it impacts on jobs and families in Northern Ireland,” she added.

As for the text outlining the UK government’s plan in the event of a no-deal Brexit, Foster said she

was still in the dark.

“We haven’t seen any text as yet, in relation to our own government. Our own government is very clear and we reiterated the position last week with the Prime Minister [Theresa May], that there cannot be any customs or regulatory barriers between ourselves [in Northern Ireland] and the rest of the United Kingdom...The Prime Minister understands that position and I expect her to respect that.”

“When the government comes forward with a text, then we will assess that, and I assume that it will come very quickly.”

Asked to what extent she would be willing to accept compromise or whether she would be willing to veto a deal and bring in a no-deal Brexit, Foster said: “what we need to see is the legal text, because we can’t talk in a vacuum. We need to see what is being proposed and then we will check that against what we are calling our ‘red lines’.

“We need to be satisfied that we’re not going to do damage to the United Kingdom, and we heard yesterday from the First Minister of Scotland – she is watching very closely what is going on in relation to Northern Ireland – therefore it is very important for the whole of the UK that this is handled in a very sensitive way. We need to see the text and once we’ve seen the text we’ll then be able to judge that against what is being proposed.”

About the author

Lorna Hutchinson is a reporter and sub-editor at the Parliament Magazine

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