



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

2 October 2019

Dear Colleague

A FAIR AND REASONABLE COMPROMISE: UK PROPOSALS FOR A NEW PROTOCOL ON IRELAND / NORTHERN IRELAND

The UK is leaving the EU on 31 October and the Government I lead wants to leave with a deal. There is very little time to negotiate a new agreement between the UK and the EU. We need to get this done before the October European Council and I have today written to the President of the European Commission setting out an explanatory note on our proposals, which I enclose.

Both sides now need to consider whether there is sufficient willingness to compromise and move beyond existing positions to get to an agreement. We are ready to do that and we have outlined the basis on which a deal can be done.

Parliament rejected the previous Withdrawal Agreement three times due largely to the anti-democratic backstop. The new proposals we are bringing forward resolve this problem. Fundamentally the backstop acted as a bridge to a future relationship in which the UK would be bound into EU customs arrangements and aligned with EU law in many areas. This Government is taking a different approach. We want our future relationship with the EU to be based upon a Free Trade Agreement in which the UK takes control of its regulatory affairs and trade policy. In that context the backstop is a bridge to nowhere, and a new approach is needed that abolishes it.

Our new proposal for a Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is based around five elements:

First and foremost, our proposal is centred on our commitment to find solutions which are compatible with the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. This framework is the fundamental basis for governance in Northern Ireland and protecting it is the highest priority for all.

Second, it confirms our commitment to long-standing areas of UK / Ireland collaboration, including those provided for in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, but also others, in some cases predating the European Union: the Common Travel Area, the rights of all those living in Northern Ireland, and North/South cooperation.

Third, it provides for the potential creation of an all-island regulatory zone on the island of Ireland, covering all goods including agrifood. For as long as it exists, this zone would eliminate all regulatory checks for trade in goods between Northern Ireland and Ireland by ensuring that goods regulations in Northern Ireland are the same as those in the rest of the EU.

Fourth, this regulatory zone must depend on the consent of those affected by it. This is essential to the acceptability of arrangements under which part of the UK accepts the rules of a different political entity. It is fundamental to democracy. We are proposing that the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly should have the opportunity to endorse those arrangements before they enter into force, that is, during the transition period, and every four years afterwards. If consent is not secured, the arrangements will lapse.

Fifth, and finally, under these arrangements Northern Ireland will be fully part of the UK customs territory, not the EU Customs Union, after the end of the transition period. It has always been a fundamental point for this Government that the UK will leave the EU Customs Union at the end of the transition period. We must do so whole and entire. Control of trade policy is fundamental to our future vision.

This is entirely compatible with maintaining an open border in Northern Ireland. Goods trade between Northern Ireland and Ireland makes up a little over 1 per cent of UK-EU total trade in goods. Any risks arising will be manageable in both the EU single market and the UK market, particularly as all third country imports will continue to be controlled by the EU and UK customs authorities.

We are proposing that all customs processes needed to ensure compliance with the UK and EU customs regimes should take place on a decentralised basis, with paperwork conducted electronically as goods move between the two countries, and with the very small number of physical checks needed conducted at traders' premises or other points on the supply chain. All this must be coupled with a firm commitment (by both parties) never to conduct checks at the border in future.

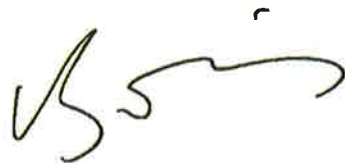
In addition, in order to support Northern Ireland through this transition, and in collaboration with others with an interest, this Government proposes a New Deal for Northern Ireland, with appropriate commitments to help boost economic growth and Northern Ireland's competitiveness, and to support infrastructure projects, particularly with a cross-border focus.

Taken together, these proposals respect the decision taken by the people of the UK to leave the EU, while dealing pragmatically with that decision's consequences in Northern Ireland and in Ireland. In particular:

- They provide for continued regulatory alignment across the whole island of Ireland after the end of the transition period, for as long as the people of Northern Ireland agree to that.
- They mean that EU rules cannot be maintained indefinitely if they are not wanted - correcting a key defect of the backstop arrangements.
- They provide for a meaningful Brexit in which UK trade policy is fully under UK control from the start.
- They ensure that the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland will remain open, enabling the huge gains of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement to be protected.

More than three years after the referendum, it is time to get Brexit done. I hope our friends and partners in Europe will agree that these proposals provide the basis for rapid negotiations towards a new Withdrawal Agreement. This will in due course be accompanied by proposed changes to the Political Declaration to reflect our goal of a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement as the basis for our future relationship with the EU. That way the UK can leave the EU with a deal on 31 October and then focus on the positive future relationship with the EU that I believe is in all of our interests.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'V. S. M.', written in a cursive style.