



Brexit: European Commission publishes guiding principles on Ireland and Northern Ireland

Brussels, 7 September 2017

The European Commission has today set out its principles for the political dialogue on Ireland and Northern Ireland in the Brexit negotiations.

Today's paper states that the **Good Friday Agreement** should continue to be protected and strengthened in all its parts after the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. The continuation of the **Common Travel Area**, which facilitates the interaction of people in Ireland and the UK, should also be recognised.

Key issues include ensuring that: the interlocking political institutions on the islands of Great Britain and Ireland, established by the Good Friday Agreement, continue to operate; cooperation (in particular, North-South cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland) is protected across all the relevant sectors; and that full account be taken of the birth right of the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves as British or Irish, or both. Given Ireland's unique situation in the Brexit negotiations, a unique solution is required.

In the first phase of the Brexit negotiations, the EU wishes to reach a common understanding with the UK on the implications of its withdrawal for the Good Friday Agreement and the Common Travel Area. Once there is sufficient progress on the principles set out in today's paper, discussions may move to the second phase of negotiations, which aim to find flexible and imaginative solutions to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. These solutions must respect the proper functioning of the internal market and the Customs Union, as well the integrity and effectiveness of the EU's legal order. As it was the UK's decision to leave the EU, it is the UK's responsibility to propose solutions in this regard.

Michel Barnier, the European Commission's Chief Negotiator said, *"Today's paper on Ireland and Northern Ireland is a concise and comprehensive text, which has been drafted in close cooperation with the Irish government. Our aim is to minimise the impact of the UK's decision to leave the EU for the island of Ireland. But as it was the UK's decision to leave the EU, it is the UK's responsibility to come forward with solutions to overcome the challenges for the island of Ireland."*

Today's paper builds on the [European Council guidelines](#), agreed by the 27 Heads of State or Government on 29 April 2017, and the Council's [negotiating directives](#) of 22 May 2017 – both texts acknowledging the "unique circumstances on the island of Ireland" and the need to find "flexible and imaginative solutions", which respect the integrity of the European Union's legal order. The [European Parliament Resolution of April 2017](#) also recognises the unique position and special circumstances of the island of Ireland.

Background

On 29 April 2017, the European Council adopted a set of political guidelines, part of which state that:

"The Union has consistently supported the goal of peace and reconciliation enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, and continuing to support and protect the achievements, benefits and commitments of the Peace Process will remain of paramount importance. In view of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, flexible and imaginative solutions will be required, including with the aim of avoiding a hard border, while respecting the integrity of the Union legal order. In this context, the Union should also recognise existing bilateral agreements and arrangements between the United Kingdom and Ireland which are compatible with EU law."

On 19 June 2017, the EU and UK negotiators agreed to establish a political dialogue on Ireland and Northern Ireland. The aim of this dialogue is to reach a political agreement with the UK in order to protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts – of which the UK is a co-guarantor under international law – as well as preserving the Common Travel Area, which predates Ireland and the UK's membership of the EU.

The negotiations will, at all times, be conducted in light of the European Council guidelines and in line with the Council's negotiating directives and with due regard to the European Parliament's resolution of 5 April 2017.

For More Information

[Text](#) of the Guiding Principles for the Dialogue on Ireland and Northern Ireland

[Information on the Good Friday Agreement and the Common Travel Area](#)

See all the EU's position papers [here](#)

[TF50 website](#)

[TF50 transparency policy](#)

[Terms of Reference for the Article 50 negotiations](#)

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