

LmunA 2022

Research report

Forum: European Parliament

Issue: Discussing the North Ireland-UK conflict

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Introduction

Many of the delegates reading this will be familiar with the conflict known as The Troubles. This was a 30 year long **ethno-nationalist** conflict in Northern Ireland, from about 1965 to 1998. It is often described as a **LIC (Low intensity conflict)**. The violence took part mostly in Northern Ireland, but at times spilled into parts of Ireland and the UK. The reason for the conflict was the tension between the protestants in NI, wishing to remain under British rule (and more importantly refusing to become part of a catholic-dominated country), and the Catholics, wishing for NI to be governed by Ireland, and in doing so unifying the island. Mostly, it is deemed to have ended with the Good Friday Agreement, or Belfast Agreement of 1998, but in reality, as with most wars or conflicts, even after the supposed resolution or agreement, the tension still remains. Especially after Brexit in 2020, the political and economic situation between the UK and NI has become a particularly entangled mess of a cobweb. This research report will attempt to give the delegates a useful guideline of what exactly is going on.

Definitions of key terms

Ethno-nationalist: Ethnic nationalism is a form of nationalism wherein the nation and nationality are defined in terms of ethnicity.

LIC: A Low Intensity Conflict is a usually localized military conflict, between two or more state/non state groups, which is below the intensity of conventional war.

GFA: The Good Friday Agreement, signed in 1998, putting a relative end to the conflict known as the Troubles.

Brexit: The term used to refer to the withdrawal process of the UK from the European Union.

North Ireland Protocol (NIP): The agreement signed in 2021, specifying new rules needed for the particular case of the borders between Ireland, the UK and NI.

MEP: Member of the European Parliament.

Dominion Status: A term that was used to refer to one of the several self-governing nations of the British Empire.

Abstentionism: The practice of standing for election to an assembly while refusing to take up any seats won or otherwise participate in the assembly's business.

Regionalism: A political ideology that seeks to increase the power, influence or self-determination of the people of one or more subnational regions.

General overview

The **GFA** of 1998 brought the Troubles to a relative standstill, by creating a governing assembly in Northern Ireland that ensured power sharing between the protestants and the Catholics, and by creating bodies to facilitate cooperation between Northern Ireland and Ireland. Furthermore, it allowed citizens of NI to obtain a dual British-Irish citizenship. After this, North Ireland experienced a good number of years of relative peace. It became a popular tourist attraction, especially due to the hit show Game of Thrones, which was filmed for the most part in NI. Now, before this report moves on to the recent developments involving the **North Ireland Protocol** and **Brexit**, the main parties in NI and their viewpoints will be summarized.

The Unionists

Unionism is the political tradition on the island of Ireland that favors political union with Great Britain. Since partition (the separation of Ireland from the UK), it has taken the form of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV), all of which aim to keep North Ireland part of the UK. The differences between the three are most easily expressed in comparisons of radicalism. The UUP supported and helped negotiate the GFA, while the DUP campaigned against it. The DUP is slightly more radical, often being described as right-wing and socially conservative. For example, it is against same sex marriage and abortion. When, finally, in 2006, the DUP co-signed the St Andrews agreement, which agreed to a power-sharing government with Sinn Fein, Jim Allister, the DUP's **MEP**, left the party in protest and founded the TUV, which is even more radical than the DUP. The TUV is in complete disagreement with the GFA, and also strongly opposes a power sharing government with Sinn Fein. (Groups with very similar aims to the unionists are the loyalists, another political party, and the Ulster protestants, an ethnoreligious group also wishing for NI to be ruled by the UK).

The Republicans

Republicanism is the political movement that campaigns for the unity and independence of the island of Ireland under a republic. This movement views British rule in any part of Ireland as completely illegitimate. The Republican party Sinn Fein largely contributed to the treaty in 1921 wherein the British conceded a 26 county Irish Free State with **Dominion Status**. They also formed the First Dail, the parliament of Ireland, and kept up their practice of **Abstentionism** until 1986. About two years into The Troubles, (circa 1970) the republican movement split into the Official Irish Republican Army(leftists) and the Provisional Irish Republican Army(fundamentalists), which can be considered as Sinn Fein. While they both held an armed campaign against the British State in the beginning, in 1972 the Officials gradually moved into mainstream politics after the Official IRA ceasefire, also renaming themselves the worker's party. The Provisionals kept up their violence for thirty years, excluding brief ceasefires in '72 and '75. When in '86, Sinn Fein dropped their abstentionist policy for the Dail, the RSF (Republican Sinn Fein) was formed in protest, and they carried on the practice of Abstentionism.

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In the 1990's, Sinn Fein was involved with the North Ireland Peace Process, which eventually led to the GFA in '98. Sinn Fein continues their practice of Abstentionism in the UK house of commons to this day.

And then, something happened. All of Europe was shocked, as The United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union. This greatly threatened the political balance in Northern Ireland. Why? Because Ireland remained an EU member state, and **Brexit** threatened to lead to checks on the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, which was previously completely unrestricted, as is the case with most EU member states. This would impede the free flow of goods and people, and moreover, anger the people who wished to see the island unified. Efforts to keep the border open, in turn, angered those in NI who wished to be part of the UK, leading to outbreaks of violence. This in turn, of course, raises fears of a Catholic retaliation. Insert the **North Ireland protocol**. It came into existence because of the special rules needed, due to it sharing a land border with an EU country: Ireland. Pre-Brexit, this border had been open, but after Brexit, new rules became necessary, because the EU has strict rules requiring border checks when certain nutritional products arrive from non- EU countries. This together with the fact that the NI borders are already a sensitive issue (due to all the past conflicts), called for a specific set of rules for this case. Thus, all parties signed the North Ireland protocol as part of the Brexit withdrawal agreement.

How does the NIP work? Fairly simple. Instead of checking goods at the border between Ireland (EU) and NI (not EU), it agrees that any inspections or checks take place at the border between NI and the UK, with all inspections being conducted at NI's ports. Furthermore, it agrees that NI would keep following EU rules concerning product standards and so on. This agreement essentially renders NI an EU country in practice, although it officially is part of the UK. See the picture below.

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The current process

- The goods are checked at ports in Northern Ireland on arrival
- They can then be moved into the Republic of Ireland once checked

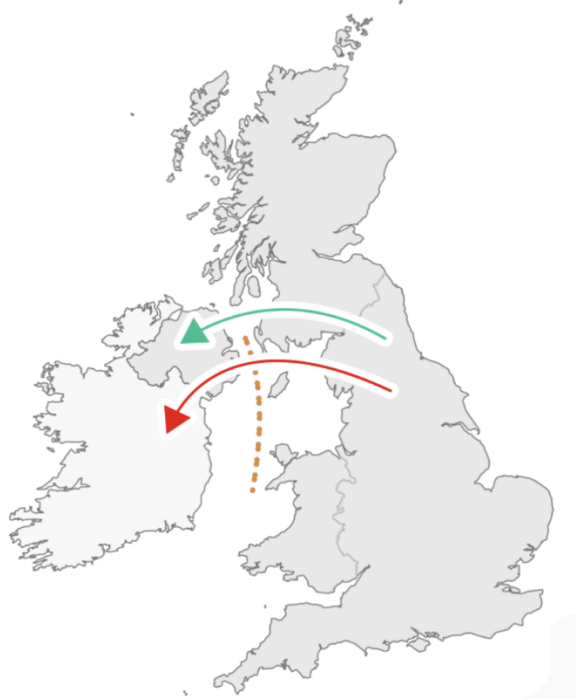


Now however, the UK wishes to change the protocol, by creating a partial trade border, by doing the following: They want to create a red lane and a green lane. The green lane would be for trusted traders importing goods into NI only. This lane would be exempt from checks and inspections. The red lane would be from products going into the EU, thus including Ireland. This lane would undergo all the routine checks and inspections. This would no longer render NI a EU state in practice, but would further tie it to the UK, pleasing the unionists, but angering those who wish to be part of Ireland. See the picture below.

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The UK's new plan

- The goods are split into two different lanes
- Goods destined only for Northern Ireland go into the **Green Lane** and are not checked
- Goods destined for Ireland and the EU go into the **Red Lane** and checks are carried out



Major parties involved

The European Parliament

The European Parliament is one of the two legislative bodies of the EU, and one of its seven institutions. Together with the Council of the European Union, it adopts European legislation, following proposals by the European Commission. The Parliament is composed of 705 MEP's, which are divided among the Parliaments groups and parties. How does this work?

The European Parliament is unique in that its members, the MEP's, organize themselves into ideological groups, instead of national cleavages. Usually, the groups of the EP are the formal representation of a European political party. In some cases, however, the groups are coalitions composed of a number of European political parties, national parties and independent politicians.

European People's Party (EPP)

The EPP is one of the groups that represents one party only and has been the largest group in the EP since 1999. It describes itself as a center-right group committed to creating a stronger and self-assured Europe, built at the service of the people, its goal being to create a more competitive and democratic Europe, where people can build the life they want. As of now, 176 of the 705 MEP's are part of the EPP.

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Their stance on the NI situation is opposed to the UK. They have criticized the UK's unnegotiated changes to the NIP as reckless and disappointing. They are now urging the UK to return to the negotiating table, while keeping in mind that the EU must protect the open single market. One of the MEP's warned: "We are disappointed that the UK would consider taking this unilateral step after all the efforts by the EU over the last months to find a mutual solution. During this exceptional time, with Putin's war in Ukraine and the vast implications of these unprecedented events, the UK Government chooses to create more problems rather than work to resolve them." "Such action could increase the risk of a hard border on the island of Ireland and endanger the existence of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement as well as the whole Trade and Cooperation Agreement. If the UK proceeds with these plans, we must explore all political and legal tools in order to respond in the right way."

Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)

The S&D is another group representing one party (plus, a couple of unaffiliated national parties). It is a social democratic party, comprising national-level political parties from all member states of the European Union. It describes itself as a center-left group standing for an inclusive European Society based on principles like freedom, equality, solidarity, diversity, and fairness. Their MEP's fight for social justice, jobs and growth, consumer rights, sustainable development, financial market reform and human rights to create a stronger and more democratic Europe and a better future for everyone. Regarding the situation with the NI protocol, here's what MEP Thijs Reuten, and coincidentally also keynote speaker for this conference, had to say: "Contrary to what PM Boris Johnson believes, there is nothing trivial about the unilateral action the UK government has published today. Instead, after London's countless earlier failures to act in good faith, today's announcement represents the UK government's clear intent to commit yet another serious breach of international law."

"We reject Prime Minister Boris Johnson's attempt to once again spur animosity with the EU to distract from his poor political performance at home. His domestic reputation is clearly already on the rocks, but the UK's reputation as a credible, global player is still intact. We call on the United Kingdom to refrain from willfully undermining our post-Brexit cooperation at a time when unity among European allies is of the utmost importance. Hopefully, cooler heads will prevail as these proposals make their way through the UK Parliament."

Renew Europe (Renew)

Renew Europe, like the ECR, represents two European parties: The Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and the European Democratic Party (EDP). This may be the only thing it has in common with the ECR. It is a liberal, pro-European political group, founded for the ninth European Parliament term. They believe in the reunification of and in the importance of a renewed European union. According to their website: "The European Union has the chance to renew itself and be able to deliver on the bigger issues, deliver on the expectations of our citizens and deliver tangible added value enabling them to understand how it positively affects their lives. Our commitment is clear: it is because we believe in the future of Europe that we want to change it!" Furthermore, their goal is to promote European values, invest in a sustainable future, create a thriving economy with opportunities for all, and create a stronger Europe in a changing world.

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Concerning the NI-situation, renew Europe has expressed their concern at the UK's decision to table unilateral domestic legislation that undermines the NIP. They called for the UK and the EU to restart negotiations on the topic. One of their MEP's, Nathalie Loiseau, said: Unilateral action will not provide solutions for the people of Northern Ireland. We need joint solutions. The EU will remain calm, we will remain united. There will be no renegotiation of the Protocol. Respected governments don't break international law. As responsible politicians we must find solutions when there are problems, not invent problems when there are solutions."

Greens-European Free Alliance (Greens- EFA)

The Greens-EFA group represents a multitude of parties: The European Green Party (EGP), the European Free Alliance (EFA), the European Pirate Party (EPP) and Volt Europa (Volt). It is composed of primarily green and **regionalist** political parties. It has generally limited its membership to progressive parties. They fight to make Europe global leaders in terms of climate and environmental protection, peace and social justice, fair globalization, human rights, and self-determination. "As Greens/EFA we stand for a society where everyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, age, race, or religion, can live a dignified and fulfilling life. As a political force, we put the human rights of all human beings, present and future, at the front and center of all policies we advocate and implement."

Identity and Democracy (ID)

Back to a group that represents but one political party: the Identity and Democracy party. ID is a right-wing to far-right group. It is mainly composed of nationalist, right-wing populist and Eurosceptic national parties. According to themselves, their focus is creating jobs and growth, increasing security, tackling illegal immigration, as well as making the EU less bureaucratic.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)

The ECR is a group that represents two parties: The Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE), and the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM). It is a lightly **Eurosceptic**, anti-federalist group, which describes itself as a center-right political group that brought together MEPs from all over Europe who supported a vision of common-sense reform for the whole EU. The group was established in 2009, and since then has worked "towards an EU that gets back to basics to deliver common sense solutions. They oppose unchecked immigration, and the enlargement and potential evolution of the EU into a federal European superstate. Further, they wish to ensure that the EU does not heavily encroach on matters of state and domestic and regional decision making within EU member countries.

The Left in the European Parliament – GUE/NGL (GUE-NGL)

Perhaps the group of the EP representing the most European political parties, the GUE-NGL represents: the Party of the European Left (PEL), the Nordic Green Left Alliance (NGLA), European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL), Now the People! (NTP!) and Animal Politics EU (APEU). As the name suggests, it is a left-wing political group composed of parties of the

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socialist, communist, and Eurosceptic orientation. Continuing the Eurosceptic trend, they describe themselves as those who want another Europe. They say they stand up for workers, feminism, peace, and human rights, with a vision of a socially equitable and sustainable Europe based on international solidarity. They criticize the EU for having policies that are too frequently based on a radically market-oriented logic of competition both within the EU and towards the rest of the world, saying the EU cannot remain a project of the elite.

The United Kingdom: As a result of Brexit, the UK exited the open single market for goods that exists for any EU member states. Logically, this had negative effects on the British economy. After the NI protocol, a border was drawn between NI and the UK, including NI in this open single market, while England, Scotland and Wales remained excluded. It is thus in the UK's interest that the changes they wish to make to the NI protocol be made, as this create an open border between the UK and NI, which is now acting as an EU country in practice. The UK justifies the changes they are making to the NI protocol by stating that it is allowed to change the terms of an international agreement in order to safeguard an essential interest.

Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland is a country full of examples of conflicts of interest. There are Unionists and Protestants, who wish to remain part of the UK, and thus oppose the NI protocol, which draws a border between the UK and NI. Then, there are the Nationalists and the Catholics, who either wish to be part of Ireland, or simply agree to the NI protocol. In the May elections, Sinn Fein (a nationalist party that agrees to the original NI protocol) won, and the Democratic Unionist Party (the DUP) came second. Now, the DUP is refusing to take part in NI's power sharing government, unless the changes are made. A new NI government cannot be formed without the DUP's support.

The European Union: The European Union's interests are simple, but complicated to realize. They wish to protect the open single market that resides across the EU. The changes made to the NI protocol threaten this market greatly, by creating a hole in it. Furthermore, there is a mounting tension and urge among some EU member states to implement sanctions against the UK, because of their unnegotiated changes to the NI protocol. Other voices call for further negotiations on the matter.

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Timeline of Key Events

1921	Partition. The UK agrees to a 26 county Irish free state with dominion status.
1986	The RSF is formed in protest of Sinn Fein dropping their abstentionist policy in the Dail.
1998	The Good Friday Agreement is signed, ending the Troubles.
2006	The DUP splits and the TUV is formed in NI.
2020	The North Ireland Protocol is ratified and comes into force at the start of 2021.
2020	Brexit.
2021	The UK makes unnegotiated changes to the NIP, creating a hole in the EU's open single market, and kick starting this issue.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Seeing as the complications that have arisen with the NIP are relatively recent, there has thus far not yet been a widespread official attempt to completely solve the issue. As summarized in the Major Parties Involved section, the different groups of the EP have different stances on the issue, albeit so that they are all in some way or another opposed to the actions taken by the UK. (The unnegotiated changing of the workings of the NIP). Some parties call for sanctions, others call for a negotiation where the EU will not budge in changing the NIP, while others may be open to a slight amendment of the NIP in order to appease the UK.

Possible solutions

As stated in the previous section, there are two general ways that the EU can head in order to solve this issue. The first is the harsher method: the implementation of sanctions on the UK, in order to force them to accept the NIP as it is. The second is to call all parties to the negotiating table. It is within this method that the various nuances lie. Is there any way to renegotiate the NIP to appease the UK, the EU, NI, and Ireland? When deciding what changes, the delegates wish to make to the NIP, or just deciding on solutions in general, there are some things they must keep in mind:

- One of the priorities of the EU is to protect the open single market that currently resides. The UK's change of the NIP creates a hole in this market, so something must change. But what?
- The Good Friday Agreement also complicates things within NI, as the power sharing government makes it so that multiple political parties must be satisfied within NI. But maybe the delegate thinks the GFA also requires a change in order to solve this issue.

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