

# IRELAND-CANADA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

*As the war of words ramps up between the European Union and the British Government regarding the ongoing roll-out of Brexit, Irish Member of Parliament Neale Richmond TD, writing for the Ireland-Canada Chamber of Commerce newsletter, says the Northern Ireland Protocol must be fully implemented and the will of the majority of the people respected. Failure to do so, he says, threatens Britain's international reputation and its ramifications will be felt as far away as Washington DC and Ottawa.*

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## ***NEALE RICHMOND: UK MUST NOT USE NORTHERN IRELAND AS A POLITICAL PAWN***



*Once again, we in Europe have found ourselves in a position where the UK Government is threatening to violate international law regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol. The British Government has made clear its plans to remove checks on goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, overriding the Protocol and clearly breaching their obligations.*

*The rhetoric coming from the UK Government on the Protocol, and indeed from Foreign Secretary Liz Truss directly, is frankly out of step with reality. Claims that the recent Stormont Assembly elections in Northern Ireland have proved that the Protocol is not sustainable are categorically false. The people of Northern Ireland elected 54 pro-Protocol MLAs to Stormont out of a total of 90. If this is sending a message to anyone it is to the British Government to implement the Protocol and allow Northern Ireland to escape from these political games.*

Ms Truss claims that the EU proposals do not address the real issues facing Northern Ireland. Given that the EU have engaged with businesses and residents in Northern Ireland, listened to their concerns and designed their Protocol proposals in light of this, this is hard to believe. The EU's proposals on the Protocol are sensible and fair, they acknowledge that the Protocol is not perfect and have proposed changes in light of this. Most recently we saw the issues of the movement of medicines from Great Britain to Northern Ireland addressed by the EU. This is the way to make progress, by sitting down together and hammering out the issues at hand – not by acting unilaterally, throwing around threats of breaking international law while claiming to be representing the people of Northern Ireland.

The question is: who is really addressing the issues facing Northern Ireland? Is it the EU, proactively engaging, offering Northern Ireland the best of both worlds through a pathway into the EU Single Market as well as maintaining their role within the UK Single Market? Or is it the UK Government who consistently fail to acknowledge the will of the people in Northern Ireland who did not want Brexit, did not vote for Brexit and want to maintain their links with the EU. The answer appears obvious to most.

With the people of Northern Ireland now in the midst of yet another Stormont stalemate with the DUP insisting they will not nominate a Deputy First Minister and thus preventing an Executive from being formed, the last thing they need is the British Government using them as a political pawn in its games with the EU. The writing on the wall is clear, even more so after the Stormont elections: the people of Northern Ireland support the Protocol. They want to maintain their link with the EU and the UK Government must recognise this.

What is clear is that the UK Government are playing to a national audience with moves like this. They are not helping their international reputation, both in the EU and further afield in the US. In recent weeks, we have seen American Congressmen Bill Keating and Brendan Boyle warn the UK Government of what forces they could be unleashing in Northern Ireland if communities are destabilised, and urged them to act with the EU in good faith and uphold the Northern Ireland Protocol. The only people benefitting from the UK Government's moves are their pro-Brexit base. Not the people of Northern Ireland, not the EU, not the US, not Canada.

Much attention has been paid over recent weeks to the importance of international law, how it maintains peace and promotes prosperity across the EU and the world. Why the UK Government has chosen to once again threaten to breach international law is puzzling to say the least and will not be forgotten on either side of the Atlantic Ocean.



**Neale Richmond** is a Member of Parliament (TD) for Dublin-Rathdown, representing Fine Gael, and is his party's spokesman on European affairs