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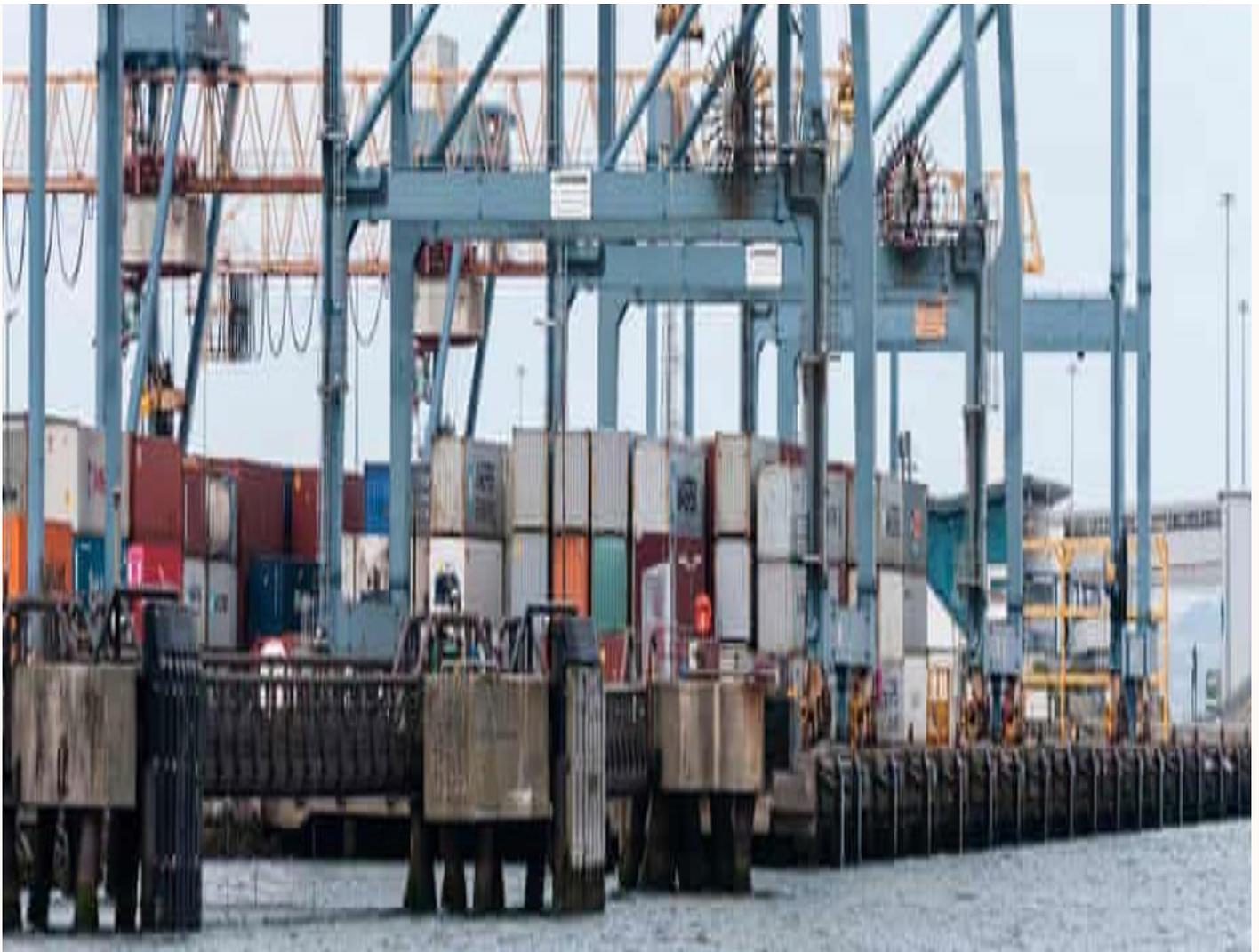
The Observer Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland wants stability. Tearing up the Brexit agreement will put peace and prosperity at risk

Annalena Baerbock & Simon Coveney

The British government has chosen unilaterally to break the protocol, which it signed two years ago – but Europe stands by it





The container terminal in Belfast harbour, Northern Ireland. Photograph: Stephen Barnes/Transport/Alamy

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Twenty-four years ago, people from across the island of [Ireland](#) came out in huge numbers to vote in support of the Good Friday (Belfast) agreement. Their vote was a clear vote against conflict and violence, to ensure that all children on the island of Ireland would be able to grow up in peace. This was a genuinely remarkable and defining moment.

Germany and Ireland denounce Boris Johnson's bid to ditch Northern Ireland protocol

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The agreement was explicitly built on the principles of partnership, equality and mutual respect. Its defining legacy has been to commit everyone to pursue dialogue in order to resolve differences.

The EU played a vital role in the peace process. The architects of the agreement were keenly aware of the EU itself as a peace project – one based on international cooperation and mutual understanding. To people across Ireland, EU membership and the single market opened a shared space where there was once division. Over the past three decades, the EU has invested more than €1.5bn in programmes for peace and cross-border cooperation.

When the UK took the decision to leave the EU, it was clear that both sides, the

EU and the UK, would need to find a common solution to protect the [Good Friday agreement](#) and preserve the precious peace for all people.

That solution, reached through long and hard negotiations, is the [Northern Ireland](#) protocol.

It is the solution that the British government agreed to two years ago.

It expressly recognises Northern Ireland's constitutional status and the principle of consent as set out in the Good Friday agreement.



Annalena Baerbock.
Photograph: Nacho Doce/Reuters

Crucially, we also wanted to give Northern Ireland continued access to the EU single market of more than 450 million consumers.

Concluding the withdrawal agreement and the protocol paved the way for finalising the EU-UK trade and cooperation agreement.

People and businesses in Northern Ireland are benefiting from this every day. Figures show that Northern Ireland's economy is [recovering more quickly](#) from the pandemic than most other regions in the UK. Interest in investing in

Northern Ireland is at an all-time high, with companies winning contracts because of their single-market access. We look forward to seeing Northern Ireland's businesses in key sectors, such as manufacturing, dairy and the food industry, grow further through these opportunities.

Throughout the negotiations, the EU has listened attentively to the views of citizens and businesses most impacted, including those in the unionist community.



Simon Coveney.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

And we not only listened. Having heard genuine concerns from people in Northern Ireland, the EU brought forward proposals to simplify the movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, changed its own laws to address concerns around the supply of medicines, and committed to giving stakeholders in Northern Ireland a greater say in how the protocol works.

This package struck a fair and reasonable balance between two key imperatives: to fully respect the letter and spirit of the Good Friday agreement, thereby protecting the gains of the peace process; and to maintain the high standards, including of public and

food safety, that EU citizens expect from the single market.

Unfortunately, the British government chose not to engage in good faith with these proposals. Instead of the path of partnership and dialogue, it has [chosen unilateralism](#).

There is no legal or political justification for unilaterally breaking an international agreement entered into only two years ago. The tabling of legislation will not fix the challenges around the protocol. Instead, it will create a new set of uncertainties and make it more challenging to find durable solutions.

We know and understand that the people of Northern Ireland want certainty, stability and predictability, for their future and the future of their children. We saw this in the recent assembly elections, where 52 of the 90 MLAs elected are supportive of the protocol.

That is why the EU stands by the protocol and why its proposals remain on the table. We are open to being flexible and creative because we believe the protocol can work to the benefit of all in Northern Ireland.

What is the Northern Ireland protocol and why is it back in the news?

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In these difficult times, as Russia is leading a ruthless war in Ukraine, breaking with our European peace order, the EU and UK must stand together as partners with shared values and a commitment to uphold and strengthen the rules-based international order.

We urge the British government to step back from their unilateral approach and show the same pragmatism and readiness to compromise the EU has shown.

By working together – in partnership and with mutual respect – common ground can be found and challenges, no matter how difficult, overcome.

Annalena Baerbock is Germany's minister for foreign affairs. Simon Coveney TD is Ireland's minister for foreign affairs and defence

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