



House of Commons
Northern Ireland Affairs
Committee

Northern Ireland and the EU Referendum: Government Response to the Committee's First Report

First Special Report of Session
2016–17

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Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Northern Ireland Office (but excluding individual cases and advice given by the Crown Solicitor); and other matters within the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (but excluding the expenditure, administration and policy of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Northern Ireland and the drafting of legislation by the Office of the Legislative Counsel).

Current membership

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Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/niacom and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

Robert Cope (Clerk), Philip Larkin (Committee Specialist), Elektra Garvie-Adams (Committee Specialist), Nick Taylor (Senior Committee Assistant), Eldon Gallagher (Committee Support Assistant) and George Perry (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 2173; the Committee's email address is northircom@parliament.uk.

First Special Report

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee published its First Report of Session 2016-17, [Northern Ireland and the EU referendum](#) on 26 May 2016 as the House of Commons Paper HC 48. The response from the Government was received on 22 December 2016 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Overview

The Government welcomes the Northern Ireland and the EU Referendum report published by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 26 May 2016, and is grateful for the opportunity to respond.

This paper sets out the Government response. The Northern Ireland Office provided written evidence on behalf of the Government to the Committee on 22 March 2016 and Ben Wallace, the previous Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, gave oral evidence on 23 March 2016. As the Minister said during this session, the Government gave the British people an opportunity to decide on the UK's relationship with the EU, delivering on a key manifesto pledge.

The people of the United Kingdom as a whole have voted to leave the European Union and the Prime Minister has been clear that their will must be respected and delivered. We will invoke Article 50 no later than March 2017 and we will soon put before Parliament a Great Repeal Bill, which will remove from the statute book the European Communities Act.

This was a decision for the whole of the United Kingdom but, at the same time, the Government understands that the result of the referendum will have considerable implications for the people of Northern Ireland.

The coming months and years will inevitably contain challenges. But whatever side of the referendum debate people were on, now is the time to build bridges and come together. The United Kingdom is a great and strong country with a bright future and Northern Ireland will play a huge part in that.

The Government's focus now is to grasp the opportunities that this result provides and do everything possible to deliver a forward-looking vision of Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole engaging with the wider world, as well as with Europe, and to deliver the very best possible deal for our country.

The report concluded that the three major questions that arose out of the referendum debate are on the issues of trade and commerce, agriculture and the border and cross border issues. Therefore, the Government response will first focus on the immediate next steps for Northern Ireland, and then respond to the Committee's conclusions, incorporating the first two issues under the wider theme of the economy.

Next steps for Northern Ireland

There will now be careful and detailed negotiations to determine precisely how we implement the decision taken in the referendum. The Prime Minister has committed to full engagement with the Devolved Administrations to get the best possible deal for all parts of our United Kingdom as we leave the EU, including Northern Ireland.

It is important to understand that whilst these negotiations are happening there will be no immediate changes, including in the circumstances of British citizens living in the EU, nor for European citizens here.

Nor will there be any immediate changes in the way our people can travel, in the way our goods can move or the way our services can be sold, including across the border with Ireland.

In the meantime, the Government as a whole will continue working to deliver our agenda. For Northern Ireland in particular, that means:

- Working to implement the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements;
- Developing and implementing our strategy to combat terrorism;
- Working with the NI Executive to deliver a growing economy for Northern Ireland; and
- Supporting reconciliation and the Executive's objective of building a shared future for all, while acknowledging the past.

The Economy

The UK has always been an open and outward looking country, a great global trading nation, and this will continue to be the case. The Government is committed to securing a long-term economic relationship with the rest of Europe that provides for the best possible terms of trade in goods and services.

The Government will look to put in place the strongest possible economic links with friends across the globe, like the United States, the Commonwealth and other important partners like China, so we can open up important new potential opportunities for Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland economy has seen real progress since 2010. The result of the referendum does not change the Government's priorities. Along with all political parties in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government, we share a vision of peace and prosperity for Northern Ireland.

We will continue our work to strengthen the UK economy and to support the economic security of working people across the UK, and we will continue to work alongside the Executive and with the business sector to help rebalance and grow the economy in Northern Ireland.

The UK will continue to have all of the rights, obligations and benefits that membership brings, including receiving European funding, up until the point we leave the EU.

We recognise that many organisations across the UK which are in receipt of EU funding, or expect to start receiving funding, want reassurance about the flow of funding they will receive.

The UK is currently a net contributor to the EU. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has confirmed that the Treasury will guarantee funding for structural and investment fund projects which are signed before we leave the EU, even for those projects that continue after the date of exit. This includes funding agreed under the Peace IV and Interreg programmes. It will be for the Northern Ireland Executive to decide what criteria to use in assessing whether to pursue projects that they administer.

The Treasury has also provided a guarantee to the agricultural sector that it will receive the same level of funding that it would have received under Pillar 1 of CAP until the end of the Multiannual Financial Framework in 2020, regardless of the date of exit, which will be used to help the agricultural sector transition effectively to a new domestic policy framework.

We are determined to ensure that people have stability and certainty in the period leading up to our departure from the EU and that we use the opportunities that departure presents to determine our own priorities.

The border and cross-border issues

The Government remains fully committed to the Belfast Agreement and its successors and to the institutions they establish.

Nothing in this vote will undermine the workings of the Assembly, the North-South Ministerial Council or the British-Irish Council, which will all continue to reflect the unique political relationships throughout these islands.

Although there were strong views on both sides of the debate, all the main NI parties are agreed on one thing. The people of NI want to see peace and political stability continue, they want their elected representatives to work together, and in co-operation with the UK and Irish Governments.

The Common Travel Area predates the UK's and the Republic of Ireland's membership of the EU. We remain firmly committed to maintaining it and to preserving the rights of Irish and British nationals when in the other State. There is a strong appetite on both sides of the border and in all parts of the UK to maintain the current status quo. The Government has been clear that there will be no immediate changes to our practices surrounding the CTA. The UK and Ireland are working closely to consider the implications of the UK's exit from the EU and to maintain the open borders that UK and Irish citizens enjoy. The focus going forward is on securing a deal that is in the interests of both of the UK and Ireland.

The Committee's report notes the importance of police cooperation on both sides of the border. This cooperation is important and will continue to remain so after EU Exit. Relationships between the PSNI and Garda Síochána are strong. Their combined effort on security is continuing to keep people safe on both sides of the border. We are leaving the EU but co-operation on security with our European and global allies will continue. We will do what is necessary to keep people safe.

A Joint Agency Task force has been established, under the Fresh Start Agreement, to enhance effort to tackle cross border organised crime and criminality, including that linked to paramilitarism. The Task Force includes representatives of law enforcement agencies from both jurisdictions. A strategic assessment has been carried out and priorities have been identified.

The First Minister and Deputy First Minister have made it clear that they will act on the best interests of all in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has spoken with both of them and we will continue to hold meetings and discussions over the coming weeks and months. We had an open border between the UK and the Republic of Ireland many years before either country was a member of the European Union. There is a strong commitment between the UK Government, the Irish Government and the NI Executive to see we do not return to border controls of the past. Our focus remains on making a success of EU exit and getting the right deal both for the UK as a whole and for Northern Ireland.