# Northern Ireland businesses struggle as UK-EU summit fails to deliver clear Brexit border solutions



The looming summit between the UK and EU, aimed at reshaping post-Brexit relations, raises significant concerns as the complexities of the Irish Sea border continue to disrupt local businesses. Amidst the fanfare surrounding government pledges to provide solutions, the reality for many—like Laura Graham-Brown of Arcadia Deli in Belfast—paints a troubling picture. With supply chains crumbling under the weight of the new sea border regulations, the cold truth is that local businesses are being left stranded, forced to navigate an opaque system that prioritizes bureaucratic red tape over practical solutions.

The anticipated "agreement to agree" on trade matters remains vague, with few details to ease the burdens of Northern Ireland's agri-food sector—an economic cornerstone now teetering on the brink. Though there is talk of reducing physical checks and eliminating the cumbersome 'Not for EU' labels, skepticism abounds. It seems increasingly clear that the current framework fails to deliver any substantive relief; the people of Northern Ireland deserve far better than mere promises while their livelihoods are jeopardized.

A recent poll has unveiled a sobering decline in support among unionists for the status quo, plummeting from 51% to 26% in a year. This sharp drop is a clarion call for action, not more half-hearted commitments. It’s imperative that the new government prioritizes the urgent needs of its constituents over appeasing the European bureaucrats, particularly when they are in desperate need of trade facilitation to bolster local sentiment and stabilize the economy.

Contradictions ripple through the UK government's stance. While expressing intentions to create a beneficial agri-food agreement, the broader implications on the UK economy are all too often glossed over. The Center for European Reform acknowledges potential benefits for Northern Ireland but cautions against overstating its significance for the UK at large. It’s telling that while local businesses cry out for help, the government seems more concerned about optics than actual support.

Political dynamics complicate the situation further. The DUP remains wary of any agreements that could compromise Northern Ireland's position within the UK, echoing sentiments of many who feel the existing arrangements have already undermined sovereignty. The party's cautious approach to the proposed agri-food deal highlights the urgent need for the government to engage seriously with local representatives rather than presenting surface-level agreements that fail to address the core issues.

With speculation around 'Swiss-style' agreements emerging, the government must tread carefully. While some factions might see merit in closer alignment with EU regulations, the potential erosion of hard-fought sovereignty through Brexit is a price too steep for many. This lack of clarity and decisive action only stokes fears and fractures the delicate fabric of Northern Irish political stability.

As businesses like Arcadia Deli continue to appeal for immediate solutions, it’s clear that leaders on both sides are under tremendous pressure to navigate an increasingly convoluted landscape. The stakes are high—Northern Ireland’s trade viability and political harmony hinge on the outcomes of negotiations that thus far have yielded little more than uncertainty and frustration. The time for clear, unwavering action is now, lest the region’s challenges grow insurmountable.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgnpyj2py9o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgnpyj2py9o> - The article discusses the anticipated UK-EU summit aimed at reducing the impact of the Irish Sea border. The UK seeks to reset its post-Brexit relationship with the EU, focusing on trade issues, particularly in food and agricultural products. A potential agri-food deal could minimize checks and controls on goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, potentially ending 'Not for EU' labelling and most physical checks. Local businesses, like Arcadia Deli in Belfast, express the need for immediate measures to alleviate current challenges.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/31168fb3-3317-4901-ac98-f2eeb2ec6903> - Gavin Robinson, leader of Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), acknowledged that the Brexit-related agreement to restore the power-sharing executive in the region was oversold. He emphasized the need for more cautious realism regarding the deal, which his party insisted would eliminate the post-Brexit Irish Sea border. However, the agreement has led to internal divisions within Northern Ireland, limiting its ability to trade with Great Britain. The DUP had previously suspended Northern Ireland's power-sharing government between 2022 and 2024 in protest.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/bf10f21608bce50b8beab13b8ad9ec1d> - UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak visited Belfast to promote the 'Windsor Framework,' a new Brexit deal aimed at easing trade tensions between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The deal seeks to simplify customs checks and maintain an open border with the Republic of Ireland, aligning with Northern Ireland's peace process. The support of Northern Ireland's British unionist politicians, particularly the DUP, is crucial for reinstating the region's semi-autonomous government. The DUP is carefully reviewing the deal details, which include mechanisms like the 'Stormont Brake' allowing Northern Ireland politicians to challenge new EU trade rules.
5. <https://time.com/6258503/northern-ireland-brexit-deal/> - The article examines the 'Windsor Framework,' a new UK-EU deal announced to revise the contentious Northern Ireland Protocol. The original protocol imposed checks on goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, creating tensions and political instability. The revised framework proposes green and red lanes to streamline goods checks and includes a 'Stormont brake' allowing Northern Ireland's assembly to veto certain EU laws' application. While British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak praised the deal, its acceptance by political groups in Northern Ireland, especially the DUP, remains uncertain. The final approval and political consensus on the Windsor Framework are pending, with Sunak facing challenges in unifying support.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-rejects-nirish-unionist-request-use-emergency-brake-eu-label-law-2025-01-20/> - The British government denied a request by Northern Irish unionists to use the 'Stormont Brake' to block an EU law on chemical packaging and labelling. Unionist lawmakers from the Belfast assembly invoked this post-Brexit mechanism, designed to address significant impacts on Northern Ireland due to changes in EU regulations. Despite arguments that the law would cause significant divergence from the rest of the UK, Britain's regional minister Hilary Benn did not deem the changes substantial enough to activate the brake. Instead, he promised a public consultation on harmonized chemical labelling across the UK as a response to unionist concerns. This decision angered unionist parties, with the DUP calling it a 'grave mistake' and the TUV urging further political protests. The rejection highlights ongoing tensions in Northern Ireland regarding post-Brexit trade regulations and their effect on the region's status within the UK.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/56362f30-b238-4007-a737-60a83b0d3d77> - Rachel Reeves, the British Chancellor, attended a meeting of European finance ministers in Brussels, marking the first such engagement for a UK chancellor since Brexit. Reeves pledged to honour existing post-Brexit agreements, particularly the Windsor Framework concerning Northern Ireland trade, and aims to build on these agreements to enhance the UK's economic relationship with the EU. Reeves, alongside Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, seeks to lower trade barriers and align UK regulations with EU standards in pharmaceuticals, automotive, and agriculture sectors. The EU, however, remains cautious about 'cherry-picking' sectoral deals. Senior EU officials stress the importance of full implementation of current agreements before discussing future ties. Additionally, the meeting will involve discussions on the broader European economy and will include bilateral talks with individual finance ministers. Reeves aims to reaffirm the UK's dedication to free trade amidst potential protectionist trends from the US.