# Stormont’s First Minister warns of hidden risks in EU-UK post-Brexit agreement



Stormont's First Minister has emphasized the critical need for vigilance regarding the complicated agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom, insisting that the "devil will be in the detail." This deal purports to tackle the ongoing post-Brexit challenges, but such promises often fall short of reality. Michelle O’Neill's remarks reveal a troubling tendency to embrace optimism without addressing the underlying risks, as stakeholders brace for the fallout from this major arrangement.

Recent months have seen the narrative of post-Brexit negotiations shaped by developments such as the purported resolution offered by the Windsor Framework in February 2023. While Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen heralded this framework as a means to facilitate free trade between Northern Ireland and the remainder of the UK, grave concerns remain. Sunak is grappling with mounting skepticism from his own Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), who view the deal's nuances as a potential threat to Northern Ireland's standing within the UK.

The already convoluted negotiations are compounded by previous attempts to address post-Brexit trade disputes. In January 2023, UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly’s visit to Belfast aimed to kick-start discussions for data sharing—yet this effort merely scratched the surface of the distrust fostered by the Northern Ireland Protocol. Despite claims of minor progress, a solid resolution continues to elude negotiators. The urgency of the situation, accentuated by the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement this April, poses significant implications for all involved.

Sinn Féin’s O’Neill has expressed a hopeful outlook regarding the new deal's potential, specifically for Northern Ireland's beleaguered agri-food sector. This industry has been beleaguered since the Brexit vote, stifled by limited access to EU markets and fears of renewed customs checks at the Irish border, which O’Neill has previously described as ‘catastrophic.’ Such dire assessments highlight the inadequacy of current leadership in addressing real economic concerns.

The dialogue between the UK and EU has proven to be fraught with challenges. Rachel Reeves, recently installed as Chancellor, touted her commitment to maintain existing post-Brexit agreements and to seek ways to lessen trade barriers. However, her approach lacks the assertiveness needed to restore the UK's competitive edge against the EU, revealing a potential softness in current leadership that heavily contrasts with the demands of the times.

With the DUP resolutely withdrawing from power-sharing arrangements at Stormont in opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocol, the political landscape remains unstable. O’Neill's calls for strong leadership from both the UK and Irish governments to revive the Assembly demonstrate an unsettling reluctance to accept accountability for the ongoing turmoil—an accountability that the new administration seems ill-equipped to confront.

As discussions continue and the implications of recent agreements come to light, it is evident that navigating a stable post-Brexit environment in Northern Ireland will require a far more robust examination of the complexities at play. Rather than pursuing piecemeal solutions, we need to hold those in power accountable to ensure that the intricacies of any agreement do not undermine our nation's integrity or security.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/devil-in-detail-of-eu-uk-deal-says-first-minister-as-tuv-blasts-agreement-as-brexit-sabotage/a516916124.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/a04d2b3673440f90baaf17d415a4e9ba> - In January 2023, UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly visited Belfast to discuss resolving post-Brexit trade disputes affecting Northern Ireland. The UK and EU had reached a data-sharing agreement, aiming to build trust and address issues caused by the Northern Ireland Protocol. While progress was acknowledged, officials emphasized that a final deal was not imminent. Unionist politicians expressed concerns that the protocol undermines Northern Ireland's status within the UK, leading to a lack of a functioning administration for most of the previous year. The goal was to resolve these disputes before the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in April.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/56362f30-b238-4007-a737-60a83b0d3d77> - In December 2024, UK Chancellor Rachel Reeves attended a meeting of European finance ministers in Brussels, marking the first such engagement for a UK chancellor since Brexit. Reeves pledged to honor existing post-Brexit agreements, particularly the Windsor Framework concerning Northern Ireland trade, and aimed to build on these agreements to enhance the UK's economic relationship with the EU. She sought to lower trade barriers and align UK regulations with EU standards in sectors like pharmaceuticals, automotive, and agriculture. However, the EU remained cautious about 'cherry-picking' sectoral deals and emphasized the importance of full implementation of current agreements before discussing future ties.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/0552e9210a850c56a13c0fbb63cd6640> - In February 2023, the UK and EU finalized the 'Windsor Framework' agreement to address post-Brexit trade issues involving Northern Ireland. Announced by British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the deal aimed to enhance their relationship by allowing goods to move freely between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, while maintaining Northern Ireland’s peace process without customs checks at the Irish border. Despite marking a significant step towards mending UK-EU relations, Sunak still faced the challenge of gaining support from his Conservative Party and Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party, which remained cautious about the deal’s details. The agreement also promised the UK’s readmission to the EU's Horizon science program. After announcing the deal, Von der Leyen met King Charles III, a move criticized for potentially involving the monarch in political matters.
5. <https://news.sky.com/video/sinn-fein-vice-president-michelle-oneill-welcomes-new-brexit-deal-after-solutions-found-12821597> - In February 2023, Sinn Féin Vice President Michelle O'Neill welcomed the new Brexit deal, stating that solutions had been found. She emphasized the necessity of protections secured within the protocol and expressed optimism about the potential benefits of the agreement. O'Neill highlighted the importance of addressing the concerns of Northern Ireland's agri-food industry and ensuring that the deal would not undermine the region's position within the UK. She also noted the need for further analysis of the deal's details to fully understand its implications.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-35442040> - In 2016, Northern Ireland's Agriculture Minister Michelle O'Neill stated that a British exit from the European Union would have a 'catastrophic' impact on the agri-food industry. She expressed concerns about the potential reintroduction of customs posts along the Irish border and the challenges in accessing EU markets on existing terms. O'Neill emphasized the importance of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the need for its simplification. She also questioned the UK's ability to maintain current levels of subsidies for farmers post-Brexit.
7. <https://www.thejournal.ie/sinn-fein-vp-michelle-oneill-calls-for-joint-uk-irish-plan-to-restore-stormont-6181889-Sep2023/> - In September 2023, Sinn Féin Vice President Michelle O'Neill called for a joint plan from the UK and Irish governments to restore the Stormont Assembly. She criticized the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) for blocking power-sharing for over a year in protest against the Northern Ireland Protocol. O'Neill emphasized the need for leadership and a collaborative approach to address the concerns of all parties involved and to ensure the effective functioning of Northern Ireland's political institutions.