

Relations with the European Union

The SDLP continues to argue for special status for the North of Ireland to protect our unique interests. We are firm that there must not be any border on the Island of Ireland.

In our view, the talks process has not focused enough attention on the very serious social and economic problems that Brexit will have on our way of life. The SDLP continues to press for all political parties to rise to challenge of protecting Northern Ireland from the British Government's hard Brexit.

The SDLP's view that the Good Friday Agreement should be utilised to protect our interests from the Brexit storm are well documented.

We have also raised during the talks process that agreement should be made in a number of key areas.

We would like to see:

- A Junior Minister for Brexit to be appointed to support the Executive Office and the Executive in cross-departmental co-ordination and to reflect the Executive's efforts and interests in engagement with relevant sectors.
- The sub-committee on Brexit to be supported by a dedicated civil servant, at permanent secretary level, appointed by open competition.
- Need to include British Irish Intergovernmental Conference as another platform for trilateral discussion of issues of mutual interest of non-devolved NI matters.
- Explore a re-orientation of North South bodies to areas where EU would continue to provide funding and would do so via Dublin on a cross-border, all-island basis.
- The Executive should also identify potential funding sources for the future in areas where gaps will ensue as a result of Brexit. They should explore tri-laterally how British and Irish governments could come to an agreement where-by the interest payments from British loans to the Irish government (Loans to Ireland Act 2010) could be ear-marked or streamed to EU match funding or to replicate funding that has supported North-South/East-West programmes and provide a substantial investment package to the North in the form of a Border Bank structural fund.
- The SDLP also raised the need for an Inclusion of a Devolution, Rights and Environmental Standards Affirmation Bill to be introduced by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The SDLP continues to argue for agreement that all future legislation passed by the Assembly must be fully compliant with EU law and practices. It is also our view that an active and continued presence for European Commission should be encouraged.