

## **PROTECTING OUR PEACE, STOPPING BORDERS, BANKING THE BACKSTOP.**

After centuries of division and conflict, people across Europe made a lasting choice, we decided that bridges work so much better than borders. That many flags and many identities can come together in common cause. That difference doesn't have to mean division. Founded over half a century ago - that simple idea remains the greatest peace and prosperity process the world has ever seen. In our darkest days in Northern Ireland - the European Union served as a hope on our horizon. When our history was suffocated by narrow ideals it encouraged us to believe that there is always a path to something bigger-something better.

That's why the European Union has always been in the SDLP's DNA. Our party was born at its beginnings and we have grown alongside it - it is a major part of who we are. That's why we have always been its strongest supporters. Being European is part of who we are here, it's part of our way of life across all parts of this island.

Europe brought peace to the continent but also to our communities here. With political and financial support, Europe has been a sponsor and an aid to our peace process. Enabling creative solutions for cooperation and collaboration Europe has given us the peace that we now all enjoy.

Part of that is the enablement of frictionless freedoms and frictionless borders across these islands. The freedom to live, work and love is a freedom that the SDLP wants to preserve for the new generation and the next. Brexit threatens to restrict freedoms, impose tariffs, delays and even more so question marks over our identity and our sense of belonging. That is why it must be resisted.

The Irish border, which has been the subject of the debate throughout the Brexit process, yet while conversation has dominated about our futures, there really has been little real understanding about the consequences any border would have on the island. The border is 500km long, has over 300 crossings. Over 4.6million goods vehicles cross the border every year. There is no technology anywhere in the world capable of securing an economic frontier of this nature without customs checks and controls. There is no check and control operation that could secure the entire border without a military style operation. People living in Northern Ireland know we cannot go back to those days. That is why it is imperative that we remain.

Aside from remaining in the European Union, the backstop is the best way to protect interests on this island, avoid a hard border and provide local businesses with ambidextrous trading opportunities. The SDLP has called for MPs to bank the backstop and support the withdrawal agreement before future relationship talks. This would effectively keep Northern Ireland in the Single Market and the Customs Union, protecting our economy and freedoms. While it's not perfect, we need to ensure that we have a safety net, an insurance policy to protect citizens here.

If elected Colum Eastwood will ensure that all options are on the table and will work to ensure that stopping Brexit, in whatever way possible, becomes a reality to protect our socio-economic and political interests in the North and across these islands.