



## UK and the Northern Ireland Protocol

### What is the issue?

- The UK has demanded “significant” changes to Northern Ireland’s post-Brexit trading arrangements [the Northern Ireland Protocol].
- The rift over post-Brexit trade rules for Northern Ireland is threatening to become a full-scale confrontation between Britain and the European Union.

### What is the Northern Ireland Protocol?

- The Brexit treaty on Northern Ireland was negotiated by British PM Boris Johnson and called the Northern Ireland Protocol.
- The Northern Ireland frontier is long-contested.
- Parts of it were fortified during the decades of violence known as The Troubles.
- But after a peace deal in the late 1990s, those visible signs of division have melted away along the open border.
- No one wants checkpoints back.
- The single market allowed goods to flow freely across European borders without checks.
- But as part of the Brexit plan, Boris Johnson insisted on leaving Europe’s customs union and its single market.
- This would require bringing back checkpoints at the border.
- The protocol thus sets out a plan to deal with this unique situation.
- It had sought to avoid a hard border coming up between Northern Ireland (part of the UK) and the Republic of Ireland (EU member).
- Accordingly, the region is expected to follow some EU rules in trade with the Irish Republic.
- This effectively leaves Northern Ireland half inside the European system, and half inside the British one.
- The hard Brexiteers in Mr. Johnson’s Conservative Party were critical of this clause, claiming that it endangers the U.K.’s sovereignty.

### What are the key contentions?

- The current trade arrangement means more checks on goods entering Northern Ireland from mainland Britain.
- This effectively creates a border down the Irish Sea and divides the UK.
- Faced with all the new bureaucracy, some British companies have stopped supplying stores in Northern Ireland.
- They simply said that they could not handle the added paperwork now needed.
- For some in Northern Ireland who want the region to remain part of the UK, it feels as if their British identity is under threat.
- Johnson's allies accuse the EU of inflexibility in applying rules.
- They are also concerned about the lack of sensitivity to feelings in parts of Northern Ireland and vengeful hostility toward Britain for exiting the bloc.
- Beyond the trade concerns, there are also fears about the fragility of the Northern Ireland peace.
- EU leaders believe that the bloc's existential interests are being put at risk.
- [The single market is one of its cornerstones.
- If that is undermined, it could threaten the building blocks of European integration.]
- U.S. President Joe Biden, who talks often about his Irish heritage, has also warned Johnson not to do anything to undermine the trade arrangement that helped to end the violence.

### **What is the recent development?**

- Britain said that the treaty could create so many problems.
- It expects that the treaty might have to be abandoned if it cannot be rewritten.
- The European Commission, the EU's executive body, said it would seek creative solutions but would not renegotiate the deal.
- With UK's present demand for changes to the trade arrangement, the post-Brexit relations between Britain and the EU is further strained.

### **What options does Britain have?**

- Britain says it has grounds already to deploy an emergency clause known as Article 16.
- The Article permits it to act unilaterally, effectively allowing it to suspend parts of the protocol.
- It does not plan to do so for the moment, but the option remains.
- If Britain does this, the European side will most likely accuse Johnson of breaking a treaty.
- This could lead to retaliation and even a trade war between Britain and the EU.

- Meanwhile, Britain's current stance is also seen as a negotiation tactic, to bring EU to terms.

**Source: The Indian Express**

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