

# **“Leo Varadkar is primarily responsible for the NI Protocol problems...”**

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***An opinion and statement by Anthony Coughlan***

**From The National Platform EU Research and Information Centre, Dublin**

Ireland's Fine Gael leader Leo Varadkar is the person primarily responsible for the problems associated with the Northern Ireland Protocol.

This is because when Mr Varadkar became Taoiseach in 2017 he ordered the promising contacts between the Irish and British Revenue authorities, initiated by his predecessor Enda Kenny, to cease.

He did this in order to facilitate the EU's desire to use the Irish border issue as a means to keep the whole of the UK in the EU single market and customs union. This was at a time when Mrs Theresa May and her advisers were willing to play along with that objective once she had lost her House of Commons majority in the 2017 UK general election.

People will recall how at an EU Council meeting on becoming Taoiseach Mr Varadkar waved an “Irish Times” front-page photo of a customs post burned down by the IRA to show what he implied would happen again if there were any North-South controls on trade after Brexit happened. This piece of demagoguery was grossly irresponsible for somebody who should have been solicitous of the Good Friday Agreement.

The current websites of the Campaign for an Independent Britain\* ([www.cibuk.org](http://www.cibuk.org)) and [Facts4EU.org](http://Facts4EU.org) give details which show that the relevant Irish and British Revenue officials in 2017 did not believe that Brexit called for a hard border between North and South of Ireland. The comments carried there show that the North-South Border trade problem in the context of Brexit is largely a ball of smoke.

These discussions were referred to by the *Irish Times* at the time, but they have been forgotten since as mainstream Irish opinion sought to exaggerate the issues posed by the Northern Ireland Protocol in order to demonize the UK’s Brexiteers.

## **The solution**

The sensible way to deal with the East-West sea border problem which has so upset Northern Unionists is to have Red and Green lanes that distinguish between goods imported from Britain that are for consumption in Northern Ireland and the tiny proportion of goods that are imported by sea to the North in order then to go across the land border to the Republic. The threat of these goods to the EU Single Market is derisory.

The sensible way to deal with North-South trade in goods originating in Northern Ireland is to impose severe legal penalties on anyone in the North who seeks to export goods to the Republic that do not abide by EU Single Market rules. Ireland should impose similar sanctions on exporters to the UK that do not abide by UK rules. Such sanctions should be supplemented by licensed exporter and trusted trader schemes for regular North-South exchanges of such goods as milk, plus devices for unobtrusive electronic surveillance in border areas.

Such measures are well able to deal with any valid EU concerns regarding the “Single Market” as long as Ireland remains a member of that – as the relevant Revenue authorities accepted was possible way back in 2017.

This whole Northern Ireland Protocol issue is a mountain made out of a mole hill by “Remainer” interests in the Republic, led by officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and the euro-federalist editorial group in the “Irish Times”, who foolishly think that they can use it to undo Brexit.

## **The damage to North-South relations by Varadkar and Coveney**

These interests, whose chief political mouth-pieces have been Messrs Leo Varadkar and Simon Coveney, have led to a significant degeneration in community relations in Northern Ireland, as the latest studies show. This is shocking irresponsibility by interests in the Republic that have

allowed their uncritical europhilia to imperil the hopes for peace and gradual cross-community coming-together in Northern Ireland stemming from the Good Friday Agreement.

It is important that the new British Prime Minister understands that the North-South trading issues in the context of the UK leaving the EU while the Republic of Ireland stays in it, can be resolved relatively easily by the British and Irish Revenue Authorities sitting down together – as they were doing when Enda Kenny was Taoiseach and before Leo Varadkar replaced him.

## **Getting the message through to the Irish people**

They need to know – and it is desirable that Irish public opinion should know – that the blame for the Northern Ireland Protocol problems rests primarily with Dublin, and the EU encouraged by Dublin, rather than with London. Mr Varadkar is due to become Irish Taoiseach again next December under the rotating-Taoiseach arrangement that currently exists in the Republic.

It is to be hoped that when this happens Mr Varadkar will get together with the new UK Prime Minister to undo the damage that his putting EU interests before Irish ones have done since 2017 to Anglo-Irish relations and the Good Friday Agreement.

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\* The Campaign for an Independent Britain is the oldest EU-critical network in the UK, going back to 1969. It has both Conservative and Labour affiliates. Its Chairman for nearly two decades was the Labour peer Lord Stoddart of Swindon, who died last year. Its current Chairman is Mr Leigh Evans.

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