

Who Will Speak for Northern Ireland? The Looming Danger of an Ulster Brexit

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Northern Ireland is rarely mentioned in the debate on the UK's membership of the EU. However, a potential Brexit will have a significant impact on the social and economic situation in the country. In this article, Edward Burke argues that politicians in Westminster and Stormont have failed to address the risks associated with the UK's departure from the union. These may adversely affect the region's prosperity and the delicate peace process.

Threats to Northern Ireland have historically come from within. Former leader of the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Féin Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness helped to wage a campaign of violence for almost thirty years that aimed to detach Northern Ireland from the UK and unite it with the rest of Ireland. Now Northern Ireland's leaders find that the future integrity and sovereignty of the UK is being decided in Edinburgh, London and Brussels, conversations over which they have little influence. Alarming, on matters of fundamental importance to the UK, such as Scottish independence or UK membership of the EU, Northern Ireland's interests have scarcely been considered. To some, particularly English voters, this might seem entirely proportional – after all Northern Ireland makes up only 3 per cent of the UK's population. For decades Northern Ireland demanded, and received, attention as a consequence of its dysfunctional political structures and sectarian violence – and, so the logic goes, it has received more than enough from the rest of the UK – including almost £9.6 billion in British subsidies in 2014, amounting to almost £5,200 a year for each inhabitant.¹

Despite the continuing transfer of large annual subsidies from the Treasury, MPs on 'the mainland' are now prone to ignoring Northern Ireland. The Scottish National Party has long found Ulster politics to be an uncomfortable topic; Scotland has its

own sectarian issues to grapple with and few constitutional nationalists in Edinburgh care to sup with former terrorists, even those who now hold respectable offices.² In the rest of the UK, Ulster Unionists are, at best, seen as illiberal Tories. The Conservative Party, with only twelve non-English MPs (one from Scotland and eleven from Wales), is increasingly preoccupied with 'English issues'. Many Conservative MPs are focused on strengthening 'English Votes for English Laws' that will further restrict the right of non-English MPs to vote on matters that predominantly affect England.³ Less time discussing Scottish or Welsh issues in Westminster is understandable, given the strength of both these nations' executives and elected parliaments. But inattention in the case of Northern Ireland, particularly on Brexit, is complacent and dangerous; Northern Ireland's departure from conflict remains brittle. There has been persistent deadlock and discord in Northern Ireland's power-sharing executive over issues such as dealing with the past, paramilitary groups and integrated education. Meanwhile, much of Northern Ireland's 'peace dividend' has come from the EU, both through structural funds aimed at boosting Northern Ireland's economy and specialised programmes designed to reinforce the peace process.

This article argues that Northern Ireland will be severely exposed to any potential fallout from a vote to quit the EU. However, the threat to Northern Ireland's future has not been well articulated by its political leaders. So far Northern Ireland has merited little or no consideration in the rest of the UK when considering the forthcoming referendum. This is a grave mistake, not only for the future prosperity of the UK, but also for Anglo-Irish relations.

British Duties versus English Inclinations

William Hague, the former Conservative Party leader and former foreign secretary, has drawn a distinction between his Euroscepticism as an English politician and his British obligation to preserve the UK. According to Hague, a vote to leave the EU, in the face of Scottish (and possibly Welsh and Northern Irish) opposition, would, 'end up destroying the United Kingdom'.⁴ Hague's stance echoes the example set by George Villiers, viceroy of Ireland in the late 1840s, who wrote of his obligation to

choose 'in favour of my duty versus my inclinations' when it came to considering Irish concerns in the Union rather than following his own English prejudices. Villiers saw that a larger principle was at stake, namely confidence that the government in London would act in the interests of the weaker parts of the Union.⁵

The current secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers, has faced the same dilemma confronted by her ancestor but has come to a very different conclusion. Critics of the secretary of state accuse Villiers of taking a narrowly English view of the EU, refusing to acknowledge that Northern Ireland's interests are better served by the UK remaining a member of the EU.⁶ Villiers's comments have largely been confined to stating that the UK would prosper outside the EU if it opted for Brexit.⁷ She has also led efforts to gain the right for her and other members of cabinet to campaign against government policy in favour of leaving the EU.⁸ Meanwhile, the Conservative MP who chairs the House of Commons Select Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, Laurence Robertson, has been even more explicit, claiming that he has never supported the UK's membership of the EU and will actively campaign to leave. A Labour MP on the committee, Kate Hoey, is also a leading voice in the Vote Leave campaign (of the thirteen members of the committee, only three could be labelled as longstanding and vocal supporters of EU membership).⁹ Similarly, only three of Northern Ireland's fourteen sitting MPs (Sinn Féin boycotts Westminster) strongly favour the UK's continued membership of the EU. Both in Cabinet and in the House of Commons, Northern Ireland's broadly pro-EU electorate find its views poorly represented.¹⁰

Talking To Themselves: Old Issues, New Threats

It is unfortunate, if not bizarre, for the secretary of state for Northern Ireland to refuse to offer a more nuanced position on the possible consequences of Brexit to Northern Ireland. However, the largest party in Northern Ireland, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), has also struggled to develop a coherent position on Brexit, despite being part of the campaign for a 'Leave' vote. DUP leader and Northern Ireland's First Minister Arlene Foster's own statements on the EU are somewhat contradictory; although now campaigning for Brexit, she has also warmly praised EU

funding for Northern Ireland and has made it clear that access to new EU programmes such as Horizon 2020 is a critical priority for the Northern Ireland Executive. Foster has acknowledged that her party is divided over the question of the UK's EU membership, although most of its leading figures, particularly its MPs in Westminster, are vocal advocates of the Leave campaign.¹¹ However, the DUP leadership has failed to convince representatives of Northern Ireland's business and farming sectors of the case for Brexit.¹²

Unionist Euroscepticism is coloured by three factors. First, few political movements wave the Union Jack and appeal to the virtues of 'Britishness' as much as Ulster Unionists.¹³ Margaret Thatcher once claimed that Northern Ireland was 'as British as Finchley' (Thatcher's own constituency, now partly subsumed within Theresa Villiers's constituency of Chipping Barnet).¹⁴ It is an adage which Unionists very much wish to live up to; recommending the dilution of British sovereignty in favour of some form of European integration sits awkwardly with Ulster Unionism's loudly pronounced patriotism.

Second, Unionists regard Sinn Féin's conversion from a position of long-held Euroscepticism to one of support for the UK's membership of the EU with profound suspicion. Sinn Féin has argued that Brexit 'would represent a huge setback in the political sense in that it would harden partition'.¹⁵ Party president Gerry Adams has called for a Northern Ireland-only referendum if the UK votes to leave the EU and for the Irish government to ensure that the North is exempt from Brexit.¹⁶ Unionists are alarmed by such statements, which reinforce their long-held concerns that Irish Nationalists may use the EU as a 'back door' in order to advance Irish unification.¹⁷ Many Unionists also believe that Republicans, including those who were involved in violence, have abused European human-rights legislation to attack the British state; Nationalists and Republicans have frequently used the European courts to make allegations against the British security services in Northern Ireland. (According to one European Commission official there is often little separation made in Unionist discourse between the European Court of Human Rights – not an EU body, but established by the forty-seven-member Council of Europe – and the EU.)¹⁸

Third, many Unionist representatives adopt a simplistic arithmetic formula to calculate the benefits of EU membership for Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Such an argument is persistently made by the deputy leader of the DUP, Nigel Dodds: 'Each year we pay in £19 billion and get back £10 billion, a deficit ... It's our own money coming back at a reduced rate ... As things stand I would certainly be voting to come out'.¹⁹ Another DUP MP, Jim Shannon, has spoken about the negative effect Europe has had on Northern Irish business: 'The worst of Europe damages the best of Britain. That is how I feel about the issue, and that is how I believe many others feel about it. The worst of Europe means red tape for businesses, mass immigration and less money for hard-working taxpayers'.²⁰ A combination of all three factors has prompted the DUP to opt to side with the Leave campaign.

Sinn Féin, Northern Ireland's second-largest party, has a long record of equivocal support for British and Irish membership of the EU. South of the border, Sinn Féin campaigned in February's Irish general election as the anti-austerity party, heavily criticising the EU's recent record during Dublin's debt crisis.²¹ The party has also campaigned against successive EU referendums in the South.²² Consequently, the party leadership knows it has to be careful not to be too fulsome in its support for the EU in Northern Ireland during the referendum campaign to avoid drawing attention to inconsistencies that could damage the party's credibility.²³ The SDLP is vocally pro-EU but is a much-diminished force compared to its status in the 1990s.²⁴ In such a vacuum the Irish government emerged as the most coherent advocate of Northern Ireland (and implicitly the wider UK) staying in the EU – to the extent that Arlene Foster has publicly criticised such 'meddling' or 'scaremongering from outside interests'.²⁵ However, the recent political deadlock in Ireland following February's inconclusive general election has arguably diverted attention away from the Brexit issue.²⁶

The debate in Northern Ireland on the merits of Brexit has become increasingly polarised. With few Unionist representatives willing to make the case for the EU,

Unionist voters (predominantly Protestant, making up over 50 per cent of the electorate), are mostly in the Eurosceptic camp (64 per cent are in favour of leaving the EU, 20 per cent favour staying in and 16 per cent are undecided). 74 per cent of Sinn Féin and Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) voters (mostly Catholics and making up approximately 40 per cent of the electorate) say they will vote to stay in the EU.²⁷ However, it is the legacy of the Troubles, the persistent breakdown of trust and institutional co-operation in the Stormont executive and Assembly that most seriously hinders a serious cross-party policy discussion of the UK's membership of the EU in Northern Ireland.²⁸

The Dublin Dimension

The Irish government views the prospect of the UK leaving the EU as a major threat to the Irish economy, Anglo-Irish political ties and cross-border cooperation in counter-terrorism/serious crime investigation.²⁹ An Irish diplomat pointed out that 'The issue [Brexit] is just too important for us. Northern Ireland is just one small part of the UK; it is a large part of the island of Ireland'.³⁰ In the area of trade, North-South commerce is already negatively affected by 'an international land border between a small state and a region of a larger state that have tax systems that are not very harmonised and currencies that can fluctuate rapidly and through large margins'.³¹ According to the government in Dublin, the EU, particularly the single market and the role of the European Commission, is a critical means of eliminating, or at least reducing, such structural disadvantages. The harmonisation of customs procedures and the development of cross-border programmes to stimulate economic activity, effectively removed much of the red tape that restricted trade in the past.³²

The UK is Ireland's largest trading partner accounting for 17 per cent of Irish exports. More than €1 billion of goods and services are exchanged between the two countries every week; bilateral trade amounted to more than €62 billion in 2014.³³ The Irish government has also estimated that over 200,000 UK jobs depend on exports to Ireland. Ireland receives more UK exports than China, India and Brazil combined – €18 billion of British goods and services were imported by Ireland in

2014.³⁴ Ireland is the UK's fifth-largest trading partner, ahead of China – a statistic often criticised in London as evidence of the UK's failure to expand its trade relationships.³⁵ However, such criticism, at least to Irish ears, can smack of complacency or a lack of appreciation of Anglo-Irish ties.³⁶ There has been a significant increase in trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement (partly facilitated by North-South bodies and programmes funded by the EU aimed at stimulating economic co-operation and investment).³⁷ Irish officials do not argue that this trade relationship would disappear overnight. However, they see a period of uncertainty – including the lengthy negotiations of new bilateral agreements – as likely to incur serious economic losses to both countries: “‘Brexit’”, like it or not, is a leap into the unknown’.³⁸ Irish officials are dismayed by the lengthy UK introspection on its membership of the EU, particularly because the two countries share very similar views on deepening the European Single Market, including the creation of a digital single market.³⁹

The Irish government has been at pains to point out that the vote on the EU is a choice for UK voters alone claiming its stark warnings to London of the negative consequences is merely advice from ‘a friend’.⁴⁰ In private, however, Irish diplomats admit that they are in effect, if discreetly, in campaign mode – a special unit has been set up in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to deal with Brexit issues and to advise on the referendum. Dublin is also mindful that 330,000 Irish citizens are eligible to vote in UK referendums, with a similar number of UK citizens living in the Republic of Ireland who are also entitled to cast a ballot.⁴¹

Common membership of the EU has served to greatly improve relations between the UK and Ireland. According to the Irish minister for foreign affairs and trade, Charles Flanagan, working together in Brussels ‘helped us appreciate that we have more in common with one another than with any other member state’.⁴² Bilateral meetings in Brussels, away from the emotional pressures of domestic politics, solidified a relationship that overcame mutual differences over Northern Ireland in order to counter the threat of terrorism and advance the peace process.⁴³ Moreover, joint EU membership also helps to underpin the Good Friday Agreement. The Irish

government – having ceded Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution (claiming jurisdiction over the whole island) – leaned on a collective European identity as a means of reassuring Nationalists in Northern Ireland that the island, despite this constitutional change, would come closer together.⁴⁴ The UK's part in a wider European identity, articulated through its membership of the EU, is also attractive to those who, although they have come to accept UK sovereignty over Northern Ireland, are uncomfortable with being identified as British.⁴⁵ Removing a European dimension that 'softens the border' between the North and South of Ireland may upset the delicate equilibrium painstakingly constructed since the Good Friday Agreement.⁴⁶

Irish officials have sought some clarity on what might replace the European Arrest Warrant (EAW) – used extensively by the British and Irish security services to combat terrorism and other serious crimes – if the UK votes for Brexit but have received no concrete response from London. A similar agreement, Irish officials warn, would have to be negotiated – a protracted consultative and legislative process would likely ensue.⁴⁷ Justice and security ministers in Dublin, Belfast and London have repeatedly underlined the vital importance of the EAW. In 2014 the threat of the UK exempting itself from the EAW prompted an urgent letter from Northern Irish justice minister, David Ford, to London and a subsequent assurance by the home secretary, Theresa May, that the EAW would remain in place. From 2004 to the beginning of 2013, 192 suspected criminals or terrorists were handed over to the UK authorities by Ireland under the EAW.⁴⁸ Other European police and judicial bodies such as Europol and Eurojust are also frequently used by the British and Irish police, and security agencies during counter-terrorism and criminal investigations on both sides of the border (Europol establishes procedures for the exchange of crime intelligence for police operations; Eurojust facilitates the collection and exchange of information and evidence for the prosecution of transnational criminal or terrorist networks).⁴⁹ The largely neglected British-Irish Council (created under the Good Friday Agreement) could serve as an overarching body to replace EU agreements on a bilateral basis. However, David Cameron has largely ignored the council since he became prime minister.⁵⁰

Counting the Costs of an Ulster Brexit

The key questions in the current debate centre on whether the EU makes a positive contribution to Northern Ireland and on the specific threats of a Brexit to the country's security and economy. First, as Northern Irish officials acknowledge, agencies such as Europol, Eurojust and tools like the EAW, developed over many years, are exceptionally important to the security of the country and not easily replaced.⁵¹ The economic effect of Brexit is less certain, debated by politicians and economists alike. However, Northern Ireland is a major beneficiary of EU programme funds. From 2007–13, the EU provided €2.4 billion to support Northern Ireland's development as a peripheral region emerging from conflict (managed by the Northern Ireland-dedicated Special EU Programmes Body).⁵² In 2007, following the St Andrews Agreement that restored Northern Ireland's power-sharing executive, the president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, set up a Northern Ireland Task Force with input from eighteen different units in the Commission. The executive in turn established a Barroso Taskforce Working Group in Belfast chaired by two junior ministers; it also seconded a number of civil servants to the Commission in Brussels, and to the British and Irish Permanent Representations to the EU. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister also set up a dedicated policy unit to set targets with respect to accessing EU funding.⁵³

This strategy of engagement has been only partially successful. In recent years participation by Northern Ireland's small- and medium-sized enterprises in European-funded programmes ranked lowest in a recent comparison with five similarly sized (by population and economic profile) European regions, a statistic that can be partially – but not fully – explained by the large role of the public sector in Northern Ireland's economy.⁵⁴ Between 2007 and 2013, Northern Ireland also had the worst record of successful applications to receive EU Seventh Framework Programme funds of any region in the UK.⁵⁵ The Northern Irish economy has a number of structural disadvantages – a person of working age in Northern Ireland is more likely than anywhere else in the UK to have no qualifications.⁵⁶ The EU has tried to address this skills shortage by putting in place (in 2007–13) programmes

worth €472 million to allow young people to gain new qualifications and to address social problems in Northern Ireland. (Of the 33,540 participants who took part in such programmes, 17,347 gained qualifications rated at level two – a good level of expertise in an area of work/study - or above.)⁵⁷

Northern Ireland's robust civil-society sector is heavily dependent on funding from the EU. From 1995–2014 EU programmes directly aimed at mitigating violence in Northern Ireland and dealing with the trauma of decades of conflict amounted to approximately €1.3 billion; during that time more than 5,000 people in Northern Ireland have received trauma counselling paid for by the EU. An additional €229 million has been allocated for the PEACE IV Programme; this funding is in addition to regional-development funding which will be spent in Northern Ireland and along the border region in the Republic of Ireland between 2014 and 2020.⁵⁸ The effect of such programmes is difficult to quantify; anecdotal evidence suggests positive outcomes, as does the decline in inter-community violence.⁵⁹ Northern Ireland's civil-society sector has also helped to mitigate tensions during long periods of political deadlock. Some funding is also forthcoming from the Northern Ireland Executive, including for the independent Community Relations Council, but official Northern Irish bodies are unable to fund some politically sensitive activities, such as those that involve former paramilitaries (so-called ex-prisoners' groups). This is a uniquely important EU contribution (with some assistance from the Irish government's Reconciliation Fund, for which the 2015 budget amounted to €2.7 million).⁶⁰ The potential withdrawal of such funds risks undermining the cross-community dialogue, community and mental-health projects that have been put in place since the Good Friday Agreement.

Compared with the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland is disproportionately dependent on EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments. The agri-food industry is a critical employer, responsible for approximately 6 per cent of all jobs in Northern Ireland in 2014; agriculture alone accounts for three times the UK average as an employer. Northern Ireland's biggest private sector enterprise is Moy Park, a poultry processing firm.⁶¹ Northern Irish farmers expect to receive close to €2.5 billion in

CAP payments from 2014 to 2020 (the total income generated from farming – excluding subsidies – in Northern Ireland amounted to £283 million in 2014).⁶² Indeed the Ulster Farmers Union has warned the Stormont Executive of the importance of the CAP to farming, without which Northern Irish farmers would not be able to ‘produce affordable food, look after the countryside, create jobs, and maintain rural communities’.⁶³ So far the government in London has not said if it will replace the UK’s €25.1 billion CAP payments with a similar UK-only scheme.⁶⁴

The potential post-Brexit decline of more than 20 per cent in Anglo-Irish trade – forecast by the Dublin-based Economic and Social Research Institute – seems extreme; this estimate has been dismissed by, among others, Leslie Budd, a British economist commissioned in early 2015 by the Northern Irish Assembly’s Enterprise Committee to examine the specific impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland.⁶⁵ Budd highlighted some key characteristics of the Northern Irish economy which differentiated it from other areas of the UK: the country reported more sluggish growth than the rest of the UK; and was disproportionately (and increasingly) reliant upon the Republic of Ireland for its trade. As a result, the median figure forecast by a range of economists – a 2 per cent decline in UK-wide GDP as a result of Brexit – should be increased to 3 per cent in the case of Northern Ireland. Moreover, because 8.4 per cent of Northern Ireland’s GDP was dependent on support from EU programmes, such as those financed under the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, CAP, Interreg and PEACE, these would have to be quickly replaced by funding from London to avoid a more severe contraction of GDP than the 3 per cent figure forecast.⁶⁶ Funding from the European Investment Bank, which has consistently backed large infrastructure projects in Northern Ireland, including a recent €150 million loan to the University of Ulster, would also likely be severely reduced.⁶⁷ Northern Ireland has already been among the most recession-prone UK regions: its private sector shrank by 1.5 per cent between 2008 and 2013.⁶⁸

Unionists, such as Nigel Dodds and Sammy Wilson, counter that the devolution of corporate tax rates – part of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement between the parties in the Northern Ireland Executive aimed at resolving identity issues and

forging agreement on welfare reform and fiscal responsibility – and the ending of fiscal transfers to the EU budget would outweigh any negative economic effects of Brexit.⁶⁹ However, London has attached difficult conditions to a deal that would allow the Northern Ireland Executive to set lower corporation tax rates similar to (or lower than) the 12.5 per cent flat rate in the Republic of Ireland. First, the Conservative government has insisted that the Northern Ireland block grant will be cut to mirror reduced fiscal revenues received from Northern Ireland. Second, such powers will only be transferred to Belfast in 2017 if the executive can demonstrate that it has a programme in place to balance its budget – a thorny issue for Sinn Féin, which has vowed to fight further cuts to the Northern Ireland budget, including plans to cut 7,000 public-sector jobs which Unionists claim were agreed under the Stormont House Agreement.⁷⁰ Northern Ireland’s public sector currently accounts for 28 per cent of employment, four percentage points higher than Wales and ten points higher than England.⁷¹ The Stormont executive’s current budget deficit is running at an alarming 33 per cent of gross value added.⁷² Sinn Féin and other parties may conclude that the long-term benefits of lower corporation taxes are not worth the short-term political fallout. A sharp reduction in public money for Northern Ireland would likely see an immediate slump in growth.

The prospect of a vastly increased transfer of funds – drawing on those which are currently part of the UK’s contribution to Brussels – from London to Belfast also does not appear to hold much water. The UK contributed approximately £8.5 billion in post-rebate net contributions to the EU in 2015.⁷³ However, in the likely scenario that the UK wished to remain an integrated part of the European Single Market – akin to Norway – then it would have to make a substantial contribution to the EU budget but would not take part in EU decision-making, would be subject to EU regulations but would not be eligible for many EU funding programmes).⁷⁴ Based on its budgetary contribution, the ‘Norway option’ is not attractive to the UK; from 2009-2014, Norway was the tenth highest contributor to the EU budget, despite not being an EU member.⁷⁵ Theresa Villiers has declined to say whether London would meet funding gaps directly caused by the withdrawal of EU funds from Northern Ireland.⁷⁶ The mood in Westminster does not leave much room for optimism – 83

per cent of Conservative MPs want to see the scrapping of the Barnett formula (the present system used to calculate the level of subsidies to UK devolved institutions), including significant cuts in payments to Scotland and Northern Ireland in order to spend more public money in England.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Any fallout from Brexit to the UK's security or economy will be keenly felt in Northern Ireland. Even if London eventually agrees to opt into the European Economic Area on the same terms as Norway, avoiding a sharp increase in regulations and other related costs to its European trade, a period of uncertainty will negatively affect investment. Northern Ireland is heavily dependent on trade with the Eurozone; any re-imposition of border controls on the UK's only land border to restrict 'back-door' immigration from the EU or the introduction of enhanced customs inspections, hindering cross-border trade, would likely see a further deterioration in Northern Ireland's already parlous economic fortunes. Regardless of the prospect of Stormont introducing lower corporation tax rates, the Republic of Ireland – with a more qualified workforce, a history of political stability and, crucially, an economy fully integrated into the EU as its only native English-speaking member state – would become an even more attractive place to invest in comparison to Northern Ireland.⁷⁸ The majority of English MPs are vocally against any increase in the block grant to Belfast.⁷⁹ They are unlikely to wish to fill the multi-billion pound gap in the Stormont executive's finances after Brexit.

Northern Ireland's politicians – so certain on questions of flags, dealing with the past and the UK constitutional question – are not sending a clear message of what is best for the future of Northern Ireland. The election for the Northern Ireland Assembly later this year is likely to be focused on local issues, such as disputes over the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement, rather than on the broader question of the UK's EU membership. The Northern Ireland Executive is once again too consumed by old politics and divisions to think strategically or pragmatically about its future and make those views known to the rest of the UK. The confusion, hand-wringing and even outright rejection of Europe that characterises policy

discussions in Northern Ireland stands in stark contrast to the clear-eyed position taken by political parties in Edinburgh, where the Scottish Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the ruling Scottish National Party have all made coherent arguments in favour of the UK staying in the EU.⁸⁰ Northern Ireland's Unionist leaders – despite their close cultural connections to Scotland and despite raising vocal concerns to preserve the UK – appear to have not given significant consideration to the prospect of a renewed push for Scottish independence in the event of the UK leaving the EU.

Meanwhile, Northern Ireland finds itself with the most Eurosceptic of secretaries of state, unwilling to recognise or to warn of the dangers of Brexit to the country. Scotland has dominated British political debate about the future of the UK. Yet it is Northern Ireland, with its 300-mile land border, its fractured political structures, weak economy and enduring terrorist threat, that requires urgent attention in the debate on a potential Brexit. A departure from the EU could see Northern Ireland re-emerging as a major political, security and economic crisis for future governments in London.

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Notes

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