

Full Text of Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams TD's speech on visit of EU Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier to the Oireachtas on Tuesday May 11, 2017.

Ceád Mile Fáilte go Éire, Mr. Barnier.

Tá súil agam go mbeidh do chuairt faisnéiseach agus Suimiúil

My name is Gerry Adams.

Is Uachtarán Shinn Féin mé.

Sinn Féin is an Irish Republican party.

We are an all-Ireland party.

We have the largest group of Irish MEPs in the European Parliament.

Sinn Féin has TDs, MLAS, Senators, MPs, MEPs and Councillors.

We have a significant mandate and are the only party substantially organised across this entire island.

Sinn Féin is opposed to the partition of Ireland.

We are a United Ireland party that wants an end to British involvement in Irish affairs.

We are working for the unity of all the people of this island based on equality, respect and reconciliation.

We believe absolutely in the core values of equality, liberty and fraternity.

With others, Sinn Fein has played a central role in the development of the peace process and in the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements.

We helped to create, and we were part of, the national and international efforts which brought an end to conflict on this island – not least with the EU as a critical partner for peace over the past twenty years.

For those who were previously denied the right to work peacefully for a United Ireland the Good Friday Agreement commits the governments to legislate for a United Ireland if the people consent to this.

Sinn Féin campaigned against Irish membership of the EEC in 1973.

Since then every European treaty has taken further powers from the Irish state.

Sinn Féin wants a different type of European Union.

We want a social Europe which promotes peace, demilitarisation, economic and social justice, international solidarity, and greater democratic accountability.

Today's European Union is wedded to neoliberal policies.

These have created widespread hardship as austerity, deregulation and privatisation have undermined the social function of states and the rights of citizens, including the rights of workers.

Increasingly people across the EU are uncomfortable with its direction.

This has assisted the growth of far-right parties which exploit people's fears.

Brexit is a consequence of that.

During the Brexit referendum, Sinn Féin campaigned for a Remain vote in the North.

It is clearly not in interests of the people of this island, whatever their background or views, to have one part of the island outside of the EU and the other part inside.

I know that you value the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement.

I am sure you are aware that any agreement by the EU that violates an international treaty - which is what the Good Friday Agreement is - would contravene EU Treaty obligations.

Brexit is not just an issue for the north.

It will adversely affect our entire island - if we let it.

It is vital its challenges are met on that basis.

It is clear that Brexit will have a serious and detrimental effect on Irish jobs and businesses, in particular in the agriculture and agri-food sectors.

It is already having a major negative impact.

The aim of the European Union should be to prevent a land frontier between the EU and Britain on the island of Ireland.

To achieve these goals the North of Ireland should be afforded designated special status within the European Union.

Ireland should also have a veto on any agreement reached between the EU and the British Government that does not include this position.

Designated special status is the best and only way to ensure that the entire island of Ireland remains within the European Union.

It is an imaginative solution that addresses the complexities of the problem.

It does not affect the constitutional status of the North.

That will only be changed by a referendum.

Designated Special Status within the EU is the position endorsed by this Dáil.

It is endorsed by the majority of MLAs in the Northern Assembly.

It also recognises that the people of the North voted to remain part of the European Union.

It is the solution being advocated by representatives of our border communities.

Some of them are in the public gallery here today and I welcome them.

The Tory government in England should not be allowed to reject that vote and drag the North out of the EU against the democratic wishes of citizens.

Designated special status for the North within the European Union is not about a hard Brexit, or a soft Brexit.

It's about the best interests of our economy, our peace process and our people.

It is also a democratic imperative.

It's about retaining the freedom of movement of goods, people and services on the island of Ireland.

Any restriction on the freedom of movement would represent a hardening of the border.

This would severely damage social and economic cohesion.

It would be unacceptable to people living in border communities and to people right across the island.

Special status would ensure the North's trading relationship with the rest of Ireland and the EU – particularly in relation to business, tourism, the all-Ireland energy market, agriculture and agri-foods – will be maintained

It is about allowing all of Ireland to remain in the Customs Union, the Single Market and under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

It's about maintaining the European Convention on Human Rights.

It's about protecting the rights of citizens in the North, who have a right to Irish citizenship, and therefore to citizenship of the European Union.

Access to EU rights and services across employment, workers conditions, social security and healthcare must also be protected.

None of this is beyond our collective wisdom or ability.

It requires political flexibility from the EU.

Of course, the little Englanders may object.

But remember they are looking for special arrangements with the EU for themselves

There are already unique arrangements in place for other states.

The European Union has been flexible.

There are different forms of integration and relationships for member states and non-member states.

These include Overseas Countries & Territories Status, the European Free Trade Association and Separate Customs Union.

In light of the provisions for Irish unity in the Good Friday Agreement, the European Union should not diverge from EU norms.

Sinn Féin would like a referendum on Irish Unity within the next five years.

However, the immediate challenge facing the EU and the people of Ireland is how to meet the threat of Brexit.

The only way to adequately deal with that is through a designated special status for the North of Ireland within the European Union.

Many thanks, Mr. Barnier for your presence and your attention.

Merci Beaucoup.

Go Raibh Maith Agat.