

Vice President Maroš Šefčovič  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi/ Wetstraat 200  
1049 Brussels

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By email: [cab-sefcovic-contact@ec.europa.eu](mailto:cab-sefcovic-contact@ec.europa.eu)

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE WITHDRAWAL AGREEMENT

We are writing to set out our view of the key issues affecting our region and our people at this very important juncture. We welcome the opportunities we have had to participate in the work of the Joint Committee on the Withdrawal Agreement, and to you for the time and attention you have given to the issues.

As you know, as First Minister and deputy First Minister we hold very different political views on the merits of the current process and of the Protocol to the Withdrawal Agreement. However, we are strongly united in our determination to secure the best possible outworking of the current negotiations, within the framework of the Withdrawal Agreement.

The most pressing issue we face is in relation to the application of sanitary and phytosanitary controls on goods arriving here. The challenge of introducing practical and effective working arrangements that achieve the necessary purpose of these controls is unique in scale and context.

The Protocol includes a statement of determination “***that the application of this Protocol should impact as little as possible on the everyday life of communities in both Ireland and Northern Ireland***”. It is hard to imagine a more fundamental aspect of everyday life than the purchase of daily food supplies. Hence we would ask you to recognise how important it is that the current consideration of the detail of how the Protocol will be applied takes our unique context into account.

Last week, there was a meeting that included representatives from our main supermarkets here. These representatives have emphasised how critical the current situation is, with a real threat to the continuity of the supply of existing food and other products to our market unless these issues are urgently addressed and solutions found. This is unacceptable situation for us to be in, especially so late in the process.

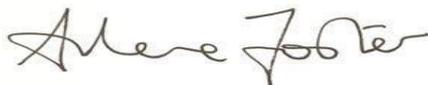
We welcome the constructive work that the negotiating teams on both sides are doing to seek a pragmatic application of the principles and purpose of the SPS controls and we commit our own officials to play as full and positive a part in this process as may be possible. “Best endeavours” as indicated and explained in Article 6(2) of the Protocol can and must secure an outcome which guarantees the normal flow of agri-food products to our people – an outcome that would lead to material price increases and/ or reduced choice for consumers would be an unacceptable consequence which cannot have been the intention of anyone when the Withdrawal Agreement was settled.

We recognise clearly the absolute importance of the SPS controls to the European Commission and the Member States and we would want to make it clear that we are not asking for anything that would create any form of health risk. We are hopeful and confident that with goodwill and pragmatism an agreed approach can be settled and applied. In any case, we are doing all that is possible to ensure that the necessary processes will be in operation to ensure goods can flow through our ports of entry at the end of the Transition Period.

We have also made clear to the Cabinet Office in London our position on the other issues that the Joint Committee is mandated to address, and our officials have been contributing as fully as possible to some of the technical discussions that are underway. We look forward to urgent resolution of these issues, as businesses here need clarity as soon as possible on the precise detail of the changes that will affect them. So we would look forward to seeing significant decisions resolved and confirmed at the next meeting of the Joint Committee. Some of these issues will be easier to implement in the context of a free trade agreement, but urgent action to resolve the issues in the Protocol need not and should not be dependent on that process.

We hope that you find this letter a helpful confirmation of the issues that are of most concern to us and that good progress can be made very quickly. We remain very grateful for the attention you are giving to these issues and the approach you are taking.

We are sending copies of this letter to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to the two Chief Negotiators, and to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Irish Government.



**THE RT. HON. ARLENE FOSTER MLA  
FIRST MINISTER**



**MICHELLE O'NEILL MLA  
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**