



Official Report (Hansard)

Wednesday 30 December 2020
Volume 134, No 3

Contents

Executive Committee Business

Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union 1

Assembly Members

Aiken, Steve (South Antrim)
Allen, Andy (East Belfast)
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)
Anderson, Ms Martina (Foyle)
Archibald, Dr Caoimhe (East Londonderry)
Armstrong, Ms Kellie (Strangford)
Bailey, Ms Clare (South Belfast)
Barton, Mrs Rosemary (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Beattie, Doug (Upper Bann)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Blair, John (South Antrim)
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)
Bradley, Maurice (East Londonderry)
Bradley, Ms Paula (North Belfast)
Bradley, Ms Sinéad (South Down)
Bradshaw, Ms Paula (South Belfast)
Brogan, Ms Nicola (West Tyrone)
Buchanan, Keith (Mid Ulster)
Buchanan, Thomas (West Tyrone)
Buckley, Jonathan (Upper Bann)
Bunting, Ms Joanne (East Belfast)
Butler, Robbie (Lagan Valley)
Cameron, Mrs Pam (South Antrim)
Carroll, Gerry (West Belfast)
Catney, Pat (Lagan Valley)
Chambers, Alan (North Down)
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)
Dickson, Stewart (East Antrim)
Dillon, Ms Linda (Mid Ulster)
Dodds, Mrs Diane (Upper Bann)
Dolan, Ms Jemma (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Dunne, Gordon (North Down)
Durkan, Mark (Foyle)
Easton, Alex (North Down)
Ennis, Ms Sinéad (South Down)
Flynn, Ms Órlaithí (West Belfast)
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)
Gildernew, Colm (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)
Hargey, Ms Deirdre (South Belfast)
Harvey, Harry (Strangford)
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)
Humphrey, William (North Belfast)
Hunter, Ms Cara (East Londonderry)
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)
Kearney, Declan (South Antrim)
Kelly, Mrs Dolores (Upper Bann)
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)
Kimmins, Ms Liz (Newry and Armagh)
Long, Mrs Naomi (East Belfast)
Lunn, Trevor (Lagan Valley)
Lynch, Seán (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Lyons, Gordon (East Antrim)
Lyttle, Chris (East Belfast)
McAleer, Declan (West Tyrone)
McCann, Fra (West Belfast)
McCrossan, Daniel (West Tyrone)
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
McGrath, Colin (South Down)
McGuigan, Philip (North Antrim)
McHugh, Maolíosá (West Tyrone)
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
McLaughlin, Ms Sinead (Foyle)
McNulty, Justin (Newry and Armagh)
Mallon, Ms Nichola (North Belfast)
Maskey, Alex (Speaker)
Middleton, Gary (Foyle)
Muir, Andrew (North Down)
Mullan, Ms Karen (Foyle)
Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)
Nesbitt, Mike (Strangford)
Newton, Robin (East Belfast)
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)
O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
O'Toole, Matthew (South Belfast)
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Rogan, Ms Emma (South Down)
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)
Sheerin, Ms Emma (Mid Ulster)
Stalford, Christopher (South Belfast)
Stewart, John (East Antrim)
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
Sugden, Ms Claire (East Londonderry)
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)
Weir, Peter (Strangford)
Wells, Jim (South Down)
Woods, Miss Rachel (North Down)

Northern Ireland Assembly

Wednesday 30 December 2020

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union

Mr Speaker: Having been given notice by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister under Standing Order 11, I have summoned the Assembly to meet today for the purpose of debating a motion on the trade and cooperation agreement with the EU.

Mrs Foster (The First Minister): I beg to move

That this Assembly takes note of the trade and cooperation agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate — it is actually three hours; we will have to correct that. We have three hours for the debate in total. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. Four amendments have been selected and are published on the Marshalled List. The Assembly should note that all of the amendments are mutually exclusive so, if an amendment is made, the Question will not be put on any subsequent amendments. For example, if amendment No 1 is made, the Question will not be put on amendment Nos 2, 3 or 4. If amendment No 1 is not made, I will put the Question on amendment No 2 and so on. In accordance with the flexibility given to me by the Business Committee, an additional hour has been added to the total time for the debate, which is three hours.

I call the First Minister to open the debate on the motion.

Mrs Foster: As Members will be aware, the United Kingdom and the European Union have reached agreement on the terms of their future

relationship. The text is extensive and will require careful legal scrutiny by our policy officials and legal advisers over the coming days and weeks. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, it is not the beginning of the end but, rather, the end of the beginning.

We formally left the European Union on 31 January 2020 but the transition period will formally end at 11:00 pm on 31 December. The European Union (Future Relationship) Bill, which enables the United Kingdom Government to ratify and implement the agreement, was published yesterday and was introduced to Parliament today.

That provides limited time for the Executive and the Assembly to fully scrutinise the implications of the agreement and the proposed Bill. Whilst that is regrettable, the Executive felt it was important that the Assembly had the opportunity to have its say on what has been agreed, and that is the purpose of today's debate.

Members will be well aware that, for various reasons, all parties in the Executive have held different views on the decision to leave the European Union and on the impacts and potential benefits that that decision will inevitably bring. Whilst acknowledging those differences, it is equally important to recognise that, as with Members in the Chamber, we have been unified in our commitment to secure the best possible outcome for our communities, businesses and citizens. We have been clear in our engagement, both with the United Kingdom Government and the European Union, that that can be best achieved through a comprehensive future relationship agreement that minimises the impact on our society, businesses and the economy and that allows Northern Ireland to prosper.

The UK and the EU have heralded the agreement as an unprecedented zero-tariff, zero-quota deal. However, it is much wider than a trade agreement and covers a wide range of areas from transport to security. However, there will be significant changes for all businesses trading between the United Kingdom and the

European Union. For Northern Ireland, there is the added complexity of the interaction between the agreement and the protocol, with the Joint Committee decisions on the protocol only being formally agreed on 17 December. While providing clarity, the lateness of both the agreement and the Joint Committee decisions on the protocol presents an enormous challenge for our businesses and society in preparing for the end of the transition period.

There are many challenges that lie ahead in rebuilding our economy following the events of the past year, and we recognise the different sensitivities across the House and our communities. The challenge and the opportunity is great. We can acknowledge that there are fundamental differences across the parties in the Executive and between Members here today, but the Chamber must fulfil its obligations to challenge and scrutinise the Executive. However, ultimately, our focus must be on working together to support our businesses and communities.

Since January, we have faced significant challenges with both Brexit and in managing the COVID pandemic. Mr Speaker, let me acknowledge the wonderful news this morning about the approval of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine. It is a tremendous testament to the world-class strength and brilliance of our United Kingdom scientists and means that our wider vaccination programme will roll out across Northern Ireland next week.

The Executive's priority for Brexit was to ensure that the needs of Northern Ireland were understood and reflected in the future relationship with the EU. That was particularly important given that we are the only region of the UK that will have a land border with the European Union. While it will take time to fully scrutinise the agreement, our focus will be on the degree to which it addresses our concerns and how we influence implementation to fully reflect our unique circumstances.

At this point, I want to focus on a few aspects of the agreement that are particularly important. First, on trade, the agreement is for a zero-tariff, zero-quota deal on qualifying goods which goes beyond any trade deals that the EU have previously agreed with third countries. However, whether a good will qualify will depend on rules of origin and the significant detail that is set out in the annexes to the agreement. That will require detailed scrutiny for the impact on our local industries and economy, and an assessment will also be required on the interaction between what has been agreed on trade and the application of

article 5 of the protocol on goods "at risk" moving into the EU single market.

The agreement appears to provide greater recognition of the unique position of transport here. Similarly, on justice and security it is welcome that the deal preserves operational capability on law enforcement and criminal justice, most importantly with the Republic of Ireland. Key measures enabling the continued exchange of criminal records and sharing of DNA, fingerprints, vehicle data and passenger details are crucial to ensure operational effectiveness and public safety. It is also welcome that the agreement provides for effective extradition arrangements and enables bilateral cooperation between member states.

This is a complex agreement and implementation will be a challenge and will need to be carefully monitored to ensure that no unintended consequences occur. We have experienced at first hand the benefit of our involvement in the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee (WAJC) and of our officials in the specialised committee, and it will be essential that we are represented in the governance structures of both agreements as we move forward. We will be pressing the United Kingdom Government for that level of access, and I have raised the issue as late as yesterday.

This is the start of a new era in the relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU, and, in Northern Ireland, we will want to maximise the opportunities that the new arrangements will provide for our local economy. We need to be prepared to work together to advance the interests of Northern Ireland in this new relationship, irrespective of our political views.

I want to make a few comments as DUP leader. As part of our consideration of the deal, we are mindful of the fact that Northern Ireland will operate in line with the protocol imposed upon Northern Ireland; a protocol brought about by the skewed view of the interpretation of the Belfast Agreement. We have consistently opposed the protocol and voted against it in the House of Commons. We warned the May and Johnson Governments about treading that path, but, sadly, they have decided to impose it on the people of Northern Ireland.

I note some of the commentary of those unionists and architects of the Belfast Agreement who continue to peddle untruths about October 2019. The outline deal of 2 October 2019 did not, of course, propose an all-Ireland regulatory zone with Irish Sea checks. The key element of the 2 October deal was the

consent protection; divergence from the rest of the United Kingdom on standards and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures could only happen —.

Dr Aiken: Will the First Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: No. I want to finish the speech.

Divergence on SPS could only happen if there was a cross-community vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The consent protection was removed and, therefore, we could not support such an approach as it would risk divergence from the rest of the United Kingdom. That was made clear immediately and is a matter of public record. Those are the actual facts, Mr Speaker, as opposed to the alternative version that we have heard peddled recently.

Our guiding principle throughout the period of exit negotiations has been that Northern Ireland's place within the internal market of the United Kingdom must not be undermined and that Northern Ireland must continue to enjoy unfettered access to and from Great Britain. Whilst we accept that the agreement brings about zero-tariff and quota arrangements between the United Kingdom and the EU, thus removing many goods from attracting tariffs between GB and Northern Ireland, the fact remains that the agreement does not assist Northern Ireland in the context of having to operate under the Northern Ireland protocol. So, in another place today, my parliamentary colleagues will vote against the agreement, and, to be clear, we do so on a point of principle and not because we supported a no deal option. A free trade deal is better than no deal, but, for Northern Ireland, this deal does not undo the detrimental aspects of the protocol.

Understandably, many in Great Britain will be able to support these agreements today, as applied to Great Britain, but, sadly, for Northern Ireland, we will be governed by the arrangements in the protocol.

Mr O'Toole: Will the First Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: No. While Northern Ireland will remain in the United Kingdom's customs territory, and we are out of the common agricultural policy (CAP) and the common fisheries policy (CFP), we will be aligned with the EU for manufactured goods, food and animal products, alongside other EU-imposed restraints. The removal of the so-called cliff edge on 1 January will be welcome, but more work will be required to ensure that we can maintain free-flowing business supply lines from

Great Britain into Northern Ireland. To that end, we will continue to work with the Government to mitigate against those damaging practical outcomes flowing from the protocol. We have been engaged in that process over the Christmas holidays.

Ultimately, we will test and judge all these issues on the basis of how they operate in practice and whether they deliver the unfettered access that we were promised as far back as the joint UK/EU report of December 2017. There will need to be further urgent work undertaken by the UK Government to deliver for Northern Ireland, particularly on those matters where a final outcome has not yet been secured. Government need to be bold and, where necessary, prepared to act unilaterally to bring about those outcomes that underpin our full place in the most important internal —

Mr Speaker: The First Minister's time is up.

Mrs Foster: — market for us, that of the United Kingdom.

Dr Archibald: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Insert after "Assembly":

"asserts our opposition to leaving the European Union; calls for the full implementation of the protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland to mitigate some of the most negative impacts of Brexit; and"

Mr Speaker: You will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech.

Dr Archibald: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. Politically, and in every other way, this year has been dominated by the coronavirus pandemic. However, for the past five years, one issue — in fact, one word — has dominated our political discourse, and that is Brexit.

12.15 pm

There is, of course, no mandate for the Brexit that is being foisted upon the people of the North. Our wishes have been ignored by a detached and disinterested British Government — successive British Governments, in fact. The Assembly has not consented to Brexit, and Sinn Féin will not be giving its consent to an LCM on the Tory Brexit agreement. Likewise, Wales and Scotland are not giving their consent to what is essentially a hard Brexit. It is a bad deal for us

all. As Manufacturing NI said, it is the first trade deal that makes trade more difficult than the status quo.

Brexit is an agenda that was driven by narrow, English nationalist motives and a harking back to the halcyon days of an empire long gone. Its casualties are our businesses and economy, the rights of young people and citizens, our European funding, and workers across Britain and the North. The trade deal that was agreed on Christmas Eve may mark a new chapter, but Brexit and its consequences will be with us for the foreseeable future. To be abundantly clear, there is simply no good Brexit. There is a trade deal, which is better than none, and a protocol to provide some mitigation from the worst impacts, but it remains a fact that we are enjoying less favourable circumstances in our trade, relationships, ease of movement and funding than we enjoyed as members of the EU. How anyone can celebrate that is beyond me.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Dr Archibald: No, I do not get an extra minute.

For many businesses, organisations and individuals, what becomes reality on 1 January remains a confusing mess. There is a lack of preparation time, as the British Government ran down the clock until the last minute, and threw spanners in the works with the IM Bill along the way, which hindered progress. It means that there is just one week between a deal being agreed and it becoming effective. Businesses, like the rest of us, are still digesting the details and their implications.

The protocol that was agreed with the withdrawal agreement provides some protection. It ensures no hardening of the border across this island, which ensures that all-island supply chains, which are vital in some sectors, can continue. However, Brexit brings the gift of friction, and that friction is in the Irish Sea. It will, undoubtedly, bring with it difficulties and complexities for business. No one has argued that the protocol is some silver bullet, but imagine how much worse it would be if there was no protocol and we were looking at a regulatory border across the island — in the middle of those vital supply chains. Those arguing against the protocol need to remind themselves why there is a protocol. It is because of Brexit — a Brexit that most of them championed.

The agreement on the protocol that preceded the trade deal provides some relief, through the grace periods, for businesses, but we need to

see real effort from the British Government and their agencies in ensuring that those periods are utilised and that, when they end, the difficulties are minimised. We need the trader support service to do what its name suggests and support those businesses that are trading between here and Britain. We need to see considerable resources in place to make sure that that happens. The Department for the Economy and its agencies need to step up and ensure that all businesses of all sizes, including our small and microbusinesses, have access to the information and support that they need, and that the practical realities of trade are communicated effectively.

Of course, it seems to have come as a surprise to some DUP Ministers that their Departments are facing a loss of funding as a result of Brexit. No one could have seriously believed that the British Government were going to fund us to the same extent that the EU did with its considerable funds. Whatever those on the other side of the Chamber might argue, we in the North have been a net beneficiary of EU funding. We have benefited considerably, much beyond our Barnett consequential, from EU funding. Our farmers, universities and community and voluntary sector rely considerably on EU funding, and are now depending on the much-mooted shared prosperity fund, but they are still unclear as to what that funding picture will be and how it will be administered.

We effectively left the EU in January of this year — something which, for ideological reasons, some across the Chamber welcome — but, come tomorrow night, when it is a practical reality, many here will feel sadness and loss. Those people who considered themselves European, as well as British or Irish, and who valued their rights and entitlements as EU citizens, face a loss of some of those. Ironically, it is the Irish Government who have stepped up and offered some continuation of those rights. They are going to fund ERASMUS for our young people so that they can continue to benefit from that important opportunity to work and study across the EU. They are going to continue to ensure that citizens here can continue to access the European health insurance card.

We are lucky that, to date, our interests, those of our citizens, economy, businesses and peace agreement have been championed by the EU, but we need to have our voices heard in the future. All the sectors mentioned — farmers, universities and community and voluntary sector — need to input in the future where EU regulations will continue to apply. We

need to see real, effective North/South collaboration to ensure that that happens.

The protocol provides protection for the all-island economy and North/South cooperation. We need to build on that. There are huge opportunities to build on relationships across this island, with access to the EU, which must be capitalised on, in particular, as we plan recovery from COVID-19 and take the necessary action to address the climate emergency.

For those citizens who value their EU citizenship, there is a route back to the EU through a unity referendum. That is a debate and conversation that continues to grow.

Go raibh maith agat.

Dr Aiken: I beg to move amendment No 2:

At end insert:

”; and calls on the United Kingdom Government, in view of the very serious impediments to the Northern Ireland economy being created by the trade and cooperation agreement and the protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, to apply safeguard measures as laid out in article 16 of the protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland for a period of at least one year.”

Mr Speaker: The Member has 10 minutes to propose amendment No 2 and five minutes to make a winding-up speech.

Dr Aiken: I call on all parties across the Assembly to join us in calling for the UK Government to do what they need to, to put the people of Northern Ireland first and apply the safeguards laid out in the protocol because of the forthcoming depression that is likely to occur.

We call on both the UK and EU Governments to recognise that the so-called trade and cooperation treaty does not make Northern Ireland's position easier and the severe implications of the imposition of this unequal protocol treaty, and agree to derogate from the requirements to introduce many of its provisions for at least a year. The reasons and need for that are becoming abundantly and overwhelmingly clear.

There are many flaws in the trade and cooperation agreement, not least that its provisions were to have ameliorated the worst aspects of the Northern Ireland protocol.

Whereas the threat of tariffs have been removed for now, the non-tariff barriers are of such a degree that they will significantly distort business, agriculture, trade, security and not least how democratic accountability is provided for the people of Northern Ireland. Sadly, we have already heard from some that the Northern Ireland protocol needs to be made to work, as if it were some form of safeguard to the Belfast Agreement, when that is patently not the case.

On Friday, with the imposition of the Irish Sea border, we will be in a place apart; a new place that, as we approach our centenary, some in the Assembly will welcome as some sort of precursor of an economic island entity, ignoring totally the reality of the massive impact on our economy, people and democracy. These are the only factors that we, as MLAs, should focus on.

Indeed, who better to explain this than the DUP's own very recent best friends, the Conservative European Research Group (ERG), that stated only yesterday that:

“The Protocol provides for continuing direct jurisdiction of the European Commission within Northern Ireland and binding European Court of Justice (ECJ) jurisdiction.”

Somehow, Boris Johnson stretched the truth again today by stating that the ECJ would have no role in the United Kingdom. Just who is he kidding? Neither the primacy of the European Commission or the ECJ is capable of being challenged by this Assembly.

I turn specifically to the trade and cooperation agreement (TCA). Let us take, for example, the bizarre rule that, through the TCA, goods going from GB to the EU, including the Republic of Ireland, will not be subject to customs rules for up to six months. Yet, in Northern Ireland, because of the Northern Ireland protocol, we are part of the EU customs zone, and customs formalities will apply to all goods moving from GB into Northern Ireland from Friday.

We will also have to apply controls over regulated goods, such as chemicals, food, automotive and medicines. EU requirements on approval, labelling and packaging will have to be met before those goods can be placed on the Northern Ireland market. That is particularly the case for product labelling and country NI identification marks, controls that few of our businesses are ready for, or are likely to be, for well over a year.

In agriculture and agribusiness, we have been told, by no less a figure than Michael Gove, that our sausages are safe for a maximum of six months. Taking aside the flippancy of his remarks, they highlight that, under the TCA, less generous provisions have been made for the UK than, for instance, between New Zealand and the EU.

The level of special sanitary and services checks that will have to be made on our major supplier of food — our own nation — are significantly more than those that are required of our Antipodean friends, again adding costs, and may significantly reduce supply. We are also seeing significant disruptions to our parcel trade right when, due to COVID, the e-economy has never been more important due to customs requirements that are not being required elsewhere in our nation.

The requirement for a level playing field to be maintained, whilst the stated aim of Brexit was to allow the UK to diverge, will also create a significant problem in that EU subsidiary state aid rules, to which we in Northern Ireland must remain aligned under the protocol, will negatively impact our ability to compete in the UK internal market and associated opportunities to fully benefit from inclusion in future UK free trade agreements. We can already envision support for our aerospace industry being challenged by the EU, along with the very necessary additional support that we will have to give to our airports and air routes as our competitors at Dublin Airport will have additional duty-free benefits that we will not.

This is not the best of both worlds. It is not even the least worst option. It is an EU/Boris Johnson-created potential economic depression. It is a potential disaster in the making, the full implications are only beginning to roll out, and we as an Assembly have no say in them. Before Christmas, I asked the First Minister at Question Time whether she or the deputy First Minister had raised these issues at the Joint Committee and, further, whether she had asked for article 16 to be triggered. She stated that that was the role of the EU and UK representatives. That is a failure of leadership. At this very point, we should all be pointing out the dangers ahead. As we in the UUP have pointed out time and again, this shows the massive democratic failure of the protocol. On the most important question on our economy post COVID, we have absolutely no say: none. The only role that the Assembly has and that Executive Ministers have is to nod through and accept legislation and regulations set elsewhere. If that is not a definition of undermining the principle of consent as set out

in the Belfast Agreement, I do not know what is. We as an Assembly, regardless of constitutional hue, must have a mechanism to call a stop to actions that we can already see are leading directly to serious economic, societal —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Dr Aiken: No.

— and environmental difficulties that will persist and will severely impact on an already much-COVID-damaged economy. Until we achieve the ability for Northern Ireland and its Executive to call for the triggering of article 16 to protect us from the forms of the imposition of the protocol, we should all, as Members of the Assembly, clearly call for the UK Government to trigger it today. The safeguards need to be implemented to secure our economy and to help us through these extraordinarily difficult times.

I ask the Assembly to support our amendment.

Mr Middleton: I beg to move amendment No 3:

At end insert:

"but regrets that, while a free trade deal is better than no deal, for Northern Ireland this agreement does not undo the detrimental aspects of the protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland; and calls on the Northern Ireland Executive to continue to work with the United Kingdom Government to mitigate those damaging outcomes flowing from the protocol."

Mr Speaker: The Member will have 10 minutes to propose amendment No 3 and five minutes to wind up.

Mr Middleton: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate today.

Just a few months ago, a survey conducted by the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce found that only 7% of traders thought that they understood what the trading terms would be once the transition period ends. Throughout this process, businesses have been consistent in their calls for clarity. Unlike many Members, business accepts that the result of the referendum was very clear and that there was a democratic process that brought about the UK leaving the European Union. Our First Minister, other Ministers, MLAs and colleagues, including me, have engaged with those businesses and listened to their real concerns throughout our constituencies.

The UK-EU agreement reached on Christmas Eve removes a cliff edge relating to tariffs and quotas for the whole of the United Kingdom in trade with the EU. This has, of course, been welcomed by many. Whilst we accept that the agreement brings about zero-tariff and quota arrangements between the UK and the EU, thus removing many goods from attracting tariffs between GB and NI, the fact remains that the agreement does not assist Northern Ireland in the context of having to operate under the Northern Ireland protocol. Ultimately, the agreement is intended to mitigate some elements of the protocol that pose a serious risk to local business. However, it does not override the fact that the protocol, by allowing divergence in regulations between different parts of the UK, can never provide the standstill certainty or security that many of our businesses need and deserve. As my party leader said, additional work will be required to ensure that we can maintain free-flowing trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That position is reflected in the amendment that we have tabled, and we urge Members across the House to support it.

12.30 pm

A free trade deal is better than no deal, but, for Northern Ireland, the deal does not undo the detrimental aspects of the protocol. As I said, there will be a need for further urgent work to be undertaken by the UK Government to deliver for Northern Ireland, particularly on the matters for which a final outcome has not yet been secured. The Government need to be bold and, where necessary, prepared to act unilaterally to bring about outcomes that underpin our full place in the most important internal market for us: the internal market of the United Kingdom.

For our part, as a party, we will continue to work with the business community to strengthen Northern Ireland's economic position post Brexit and, indeed, post COVID. In the coming period and in the aftermath of COVID-19, it is important that we work to strengthen Northern Ireland's position. We are committed to working with our business and industry representatives to help them as we collectively try to rebuild our economy, and that will involve working with the Government to mitigate the damaging practical outcomes that flow from the protocol. The DUP has consistently opposed the imposition of the protocol and continues to believe that it will damage rather than promote prosperity across the Province. Let us not forget that the driving force behind the protocol was an inaccurate and hyped-up argument about the sanctity of the border and the Belfast Agreement.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Would he agree with me that, when we refer to the Belfast Agreement, some Members see it as the law of the Medes and the Persians: cast in stone and irrevocable? That is all well and good until it comes to the principle of dual consent. Apparently, those who have argued for dual consent in this place for 30 years now suddenly believe in majorities getting their own way.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Member for his contribution. It is important, I completely agree with it, and I will touch on it more in a few moments.

Again, let us not forget the driving force behind the protocol. We have seen play-acting and amateur dramatics on the border and heard inflammatory and divisive language, with regular Brit-bashing in the Chamber. Is it not ironic that the very people who used the border to their advantage during the terrorist campaign are those who now say that they are acting in the best interests of those who live here? The majority of people in Northern Ireland will understand that that is just not the case. In reality, businesses and families in Northern Ireland will judge any deal not by those notions but through the lens of everyday prosperity.

Our guiding principle has been that Northern Ireland's place in the internal market of the United Kingdom must not be undermined and that Northern Ireland must continue to enjoy unfettered access to GB. The extent to which arrangements impact in practice on trade, jobs, incomes or the choices in the supermarkets will be the true test of what has been agreed.

Finally, as has been mentioned, the measures are ultimately temporary. The NI Assembly will eventually have to have its say. The Government need to be prepared to act unilaterally to underpin our place in the UK market. The arrangements flowing from the protocol are, of course, temporary, and the Northern Ireland Assembly will have the opportunity to revisit the protocol and vote on it in four years' time. We remind everyone involved and the European Union specifically that, unless arrangements have the support of unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland, they will ultimately fail. On that basis, on-the-ground implementation must not in any way disadvantage the people of Northern Ireland or our place in the United Kingdom.

In closing, I urge Members across the House to support the amendment that has been tabled by the DUP, listen to the many voices out there in

the public domain and support those in our communities.

Ms Mallon: I beg to move amendment No 4:

At end insert:

"; rejects Brexit, in line with the democratically expressed view of the people of Northern Ireland; notes that this deal will mean new barriers to trade and other negative consequences for Northern Ireland's economy and society; and calls for the implementation of the protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, positive efforts to make arrangements work for all the people of Northern Ireland, and for this Assembly to decline legislative consent to the British Government to impose the European Union (Future Relationship) Bill, their inferior trade deal and their Brexit against the will of the people of Northern Ireland."

Mr Speaker: The Member will have 10 minutes to propose amendment No 4 and five minutes to make a winding-up speech.

Ms Mallon: Here we are in Christmas week, and, as democracy takes no break for holidays, it is right that we have come back here today to debate and, through our amendment, have the opportunity to vote on this significant and far-reaching issue, just as the other devolved Administrations are doing. Brexit and its fallout, including the trade deal that was heralded over the weekend, will have far-reaching consequences for all of us on this island, especially for us in the North. Our young people especially will live with the Brexit factor for years to come.

I will be clear today; the SDLP wanted no part in Brexit, and, importantly, nor did the people whom we represent. We believe that the future of the island is best served by being at the heart of the European project, not on the sidelines or, even worse, with our nose pressed up against the glass of the EU. I make this pledge today to the people of Northern Ireland on behalf of the SDLP: now that we have been forced out of the European Union against our will, against the democratically expressed will of the overwhelming majority of our people, we will, for as long as it takes, campaign for our return to full membership of the European Union. That can happen through another UK referendum, which will happen sooner or later, and it will be propelled by the experience and the realisation of the Welsh, Scottish and Irish people that their political future was, in the years between 2016 and 2020, forged by a narrow English nationalism that was facilitated by the DUP and

allowed to override the needs and wishes of the rest of us. The referendum result will be undone by the generations not yet old enough to vote, but it will be undone, and the SDLP will be part of the great undoing. It can also happen through the reconciliation and realignment of Ireland as a political entity. It was Mark Durkan, when he was MP for Foyle, who secured the written clarification from the then British Government Brexit Secretary, David Davis, subsequently confirmed in a European Council declaration that Northern Ireland is the only part of these islands that can rejoin the European Union without an article 49 negotiation. Just as the SDLP was at the heart of that important act, we will continue to be at the heart of that movement too.

There is no good Brexit. The SDLP never wanted any Brexit. However, it was important for our business community that Brexit was accompanied by a trade deal. In partnership with the trade bodies, we are working through the deal that was published at the weekend, and we will continue to work with them to ensure that Northern Ireland as a region benefits, where possible, from the incoming arrangements.

The fact that three of the five Executive parties were always opposed to Brexit and recorded that opposition in votes in the Chamber says a lot about what Brexit means for Northern Ireland. As for the other two parties, it is not clear where the UUP stands on Brexit, and, as for the DUP, just a few months ago, it was feted by Boris Johnson, the ERG, the Tory media and the shady financial backers of its famous London newspaper Brexit ads. Boris Johnson has lied to the DUP so often, so publicly and so consistently that it is painful. The truth, regardless of the deflection tactics, is that this is a self-inflicted wound. Brexit, the Northern Ireland protocol, the trade deal, the sea border — all of it belongs to the DUP, lock stock and barrel. It tries to deny it and pass responsibility on to others, but the people of Northern Ireland are not stupid. The businesses of Northern Ireland are not stupid. The trade unions, civic society, the third sector and all who stand to lose out are not stupid. It would be good if the DUP would stop acting as if we were stupid.

As an example, Invest NI will lose out on approximately £90 million a year as a direct consequence of Brexit. Invest NI, whose job it is to attract new businesses and support existing ones in the North and which is at the heart of the Department for the Economy, will take a massive Brexit hit. That means that our constituents and the businesses that employ our people and offer a route to post-COVID

recovery will lose out. Those are the outworkings of the DUP's position on Brexit. That is the reality of its Brexit in Northern Ireland.

The DUP will today, in Westminster, vote against the EU-UK trade deal: what an irony. It also now, via our amendment, has the opportunity to withhold consent in this House — all parties do. Today, the SDLP is moving its amendment because, just as Scotland and Wales have had their say on whether the trade deal is acceptable to their people, so should our Assembly.

For three years, we were denied an Assembly and a Government, but, today, we have an Assembly and an Executive, and we must make our voice heard. We must allow the voice of our citizens to be heard to oppose a British-imposed Brexit on the lives of people across Northern Ireland. The SDLP is asking this Assembly to reaffirm our rejection of Brexit and to decline legislative consent to the British Government to impose the European Union (Future Relationship) Bill, which will bring new barriers to trade and negative consequences for our society and our economy. This inferior trade Bill does not protect the interests of our economy or our people in the way that Northern Ireland deserves.

Professor David Phinnemore of Queen's University Belfast points to the thinness of the agreement in areas such as services, on which our economy relies. He summed up the challenge clearly when he remarked:

"The substance of arrangements does little to address the disruption that Brexit will cause for cross-border cooperation."

While we recognise and have long called for the full implementation of the protocol, the Northern Ireland protocol remains as it is.

While the SDLP recognises that there aspects of the deal that are helpful and welcome, many provisions are limited and many of the challenges that Brexit has threatened for years will now impact on our society and economy. This Assembly must recognise the magnitude of this moment, the seriousness of the context in which we will now be forced to live. The days and weeks ahead will present new challenges, and we all must rise to them for our citizens because we all know the hard, cold truth that London simply is not interested in our interests. A deal will always be better than no deal, but the SDLP never, ever said that any deal will be acceptable. This Assembly should not accept the imposition of an inferior Bill or deal that

leaves Northern Ireland worse off and our people with a future less than they deserve.

I understand that Scotland and Wales are to reject this deal. They are to reject the future that Boris Johnson and his cronies in Number 10 want. We should also make clear our rejection of a narrow, isolated future, not on our own behalf but on behalf of those who we represent.

The European Union, as an ideal, is about bringing people together. On one level, it is as simple as that. This year, in the SDLP, we lost our spiritual and political leader, John Hume. John believed that our membership of the European Union was a key factor in bringing about peace to this island we share. He said:

"Membership of the EU has ... obliged people to work together in promoting common interests within the EU."

The EU has also helped to promote better relations between North and South as people discover their common interests.

The SDLP had always argued against the erection of new borders or new barriers anywhere across these islands. That is why we, uniquely among parties in Northern Ireland, registered to campaign against Brexit. It is why we proposed remaining in the European single market and the customs union. We have proposed solutions that will mitigate the damage caused by withdrawal from the EU because we understand the economic impact of new trade friction points, but we also understand the psychological impact of new land or sea borders on people and communities. The sad truth, a constant in our political history, is that all of this was entirely avoidable.

One beacon of light this week, however, in the wake of the Brexit trade deal, was the clarification from the Irish Government that they will continue to facilitate third-level students here to access the ERASMUS programme no matter the colour of their passport. I want to say that the SDLP welcomes the efforts of the Irish Government, in particular their work to protect our island from a hard border. While this deal is less than we deserve, we do recognise the effort that has been made for people across Ireland.

We have to live with this trade deal because we have no choice, but there should be no celebration in this moment for either side. As a party, the SDLP has a strong history of bringing our people and communities together, and we in the SDLP will keep on working, keep on talking and keep on doing proper, mature

politics to reconcile our people, to free them from poverty, prejudice and injustice and put them back at the heart of the European project.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the next Member, I remind all Members that they have up to five minutes to speak.

Mr Dickson: I am a European, and no one will take that away from me. I rise as Alliance Party economy spokesperson, and I welcome the opportunity to speak on this debate. The Alliance Party will support amendment Nos 1 and 4 and oppose amendment Nos 2 and 3.

12.45 pm

I do not think that it could come much later, but this has been another page in the history books of what has been a dire and difficult year. It is a moment of sorrow and reflection at what we are ultimately losing after being on a roller coaster that people and businesses boarded in 2016 or, indeed, even earlier.

In the Chamber today, someone has already quoted Churchill, and I will also do so:

"If you destroy a free market you create a black market."

There is no such thing as a good Brexit. It builds on outdated notions of a nation state and is designed to put up walls, causing friction and distancing ourselves from the largest trading bloc in the world. It demotes the United Kingdom in terms of diplomatic influence, leaving us as a more isolated, medium-sized economy in a world of large trading blocs.

It really did not need to be this way. For example, we could have left the political structures but stayed in the single market and/or the customs union, but, instead, we now have a mess of red tape, barriers and bureaucracy for businesses and individuals. Indeed, we have more rules today than those which we are leaving behind.

In regards to the protocol, it is to be welcomed that we have a grace period and increasing clarity, but ongoing flexibilities and support will be vital. We do not want to put up barriers to trade anywhere, but that is exactly what this type of Brexit and the UK Government have chosen to do. The protocol is the outcome of such choices, and we must make it as frictionless as possible.

Unfortunately, the agreement leaves behind our participation in a range of activities, such as the

European structural and investment funds. Alliance has serious concerns about the shambolic and half-hearted plans, for example, for the shared prosperity fund that is supposed to replace them. We still have little information on the amount of funding, the design of the programme and who will manage it; all while groups that are funded via the European social fund, for example, are telling us that they need information and certainty now.

It is regrettable and also welcome that the Irish Government have had to step in to prevent Northern Ireland citizens from losing some of their rights, from European health insurance to participation in the ERASMUS+ programme. I hope that there is further scope for participation in other programmes, such as the European Solidarity Corps, if the UK continues its disinterest in continuing these key initiatives that many of our people, businesses and voluntary organisations directly benefit from in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker, this is, indeed, where we are. Unfortunately, this process has shown the limits of our influence, not least of all to one particular political party in this Chamber, despite all its vaunted promises. Nevertheless, we have to work with what we have. Perhaps there is one silver lining: with suitable flexibilities, streamlining and, crucially, certainty, Northern Ireland may indeed be at an advantage to the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland in terms of goods. I would like to see that work continue, particularly through our Department for the Economy. However, it has been mentioned that services are to be excluded from this, which, in a service-based economy, will represent huge barriers to our businesses and customers. I hope that we can make progress on this and the considerable benefits that could be realised with proper participation in a single market. People living on the border well know the nuisance of roaming charges, for example, and the United Kingdom Government should now be taking action to ensure that those charges will not return.

I do not think that anyone here can be happy with the Brexit that we have, for many different reasons. It is clear that it will harm Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom and that this deal is far from what our economy and society need. The Brexit process is far from over, and those who think that today will end the debate are living in cloud cuckoo land. We will be debating the impacts and the problems of this Brexit and its consequences for many years to come. My party will work to continue to build bridges, not borders. That is what the Alliance Party stands for in this community. We will be

working towards the closest relationship possible with the European Union, and we will work to mitigate, as far as possible, the social and economic damage that Brexit threatens.

Mr Storey: I am glad to take part in today's debate. The First Minister opened the debate by quoting one of our nation's greatest prime ministers Sir Winston Churchill, and the Member who spoke previously, Mr Dickson, also quoted him. I will follow in that vein. It was Sir Winston Churchill who said that:

"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

We have heard in the Chamber today all the woes, all the ills, all the concerns and all the difficulties that will beset us as we leave the European Union, but let us remember that we do so not because there was a democratic deficit but because the United Kingdom voted so to do.

We have heard a lot today about the principle of consent. As my colleague rightly said in an intervention, all of a sudden, the principle of consent has almost been consigned to history by the references to the Belfast Agreement. Let us remember —.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mr Stalford: I asked Mrs Mallon to give way, but she chose not to. Mrs Mallon referred to "Scottish people, Welsh people and Irish people": does my friend think it is telling that she could not find it within her to refer to "British people"? What does that say about her vision of the future?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Storey: That is the case. I will say again as I have said before in the House, when will we have respect for Northern Ireland? As we stand on the verge of celebrating our 100th anniversary, there are still derogatory comments like "the North". That is Donegal and Malin Head, because "the North" in Northern Ireland is Rathlin. Let us have some respect. Let us show respect to Northern Ireland. What we have seen over the last days is an attempt to undermine the democratic principles. Ms Mallon said that there will be another referendum: "We will undo what has been done". What if that referendum gives us the same outcome? Will they then accept the

democratic wish of the people of the United Kingdom?

Most Members will know that I do not read a lot of books. I have plenty of books, but I am not the world's greatest reader. However, some time ago, I read 'Clean Brexit'. In that book, reference was made to some of the great events that took place over two centuries and changed the political landscape of these islands. In 1846, there was the repeal of the Corn Laws. In 1931, the UK left the gold standard. In 1945, after the Second World War, our nation was on its knees. Out of the ashes of that terrible time in our nation's history, the National Health Service became a reality, national insurance became a reality and free compulsory secondary schooling became a reality. In 1979, we had the Thatcher revolution, which gave to this nation economic prosperity. All we have heard this morning is, "We will lose" and "We will be worse off". As one commentator said yesterday, it is not the best of all deals but it is not the worst of all deals. What I suggest to Members who voted to leave the European Union is to show that sense of optimism and show some respect for democratic principles.

The representative from Sinn Féin said that there was no mandate for Brexit. There was a mandate. She went on to refer to the fact that it was driven by narrow nationalism. Sinn Féin would not be engaged in anything like that. It would not be engaged in any party politics like that. Then the Member talked about the impact on our businesses. What happened 28 years ago, on 13 November 1992, in the town that she represents? The IRA blew the heart out of Coleraine. That was seen as politically opportunistic. That was seen as advancing the cause. We have a party in the House that has opposed Europe at every stage down through the years. Now, because of political opportunism, not because of some pragmatism, it sees an opportunity to do Northern Ireland down.

I stand here today realising that there are challenges ahead, but there are also opportunities. Let us give the message to our businesses that we will work with them and do everything for them to ensure that they prosper and build a better future for us all and that that prosperity is not tagged with orange and green, nationalism or some other political ideology but is driven by the best interests of the people whom we represent. I say to Members: let us ensure that we have the debate and that it is based on reality.

The Member for the SDLP mentioned a legislative consent motion. I think that the Sinn Féin representative said that they would not —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Storey: — give their consent. Members will be glad to know that we do not need legislative consent because the deal will be passed —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Storey: — in the House of Commons, the very place from which the Members opposite stay away but still get their allowances.

Mr McAleer: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion and in support of amendment Nos 1 and 4. I speak from an agriculture and rural affairs perspective.

I want to point out that the food and drink sector in the North employs 100,000 people. It feeds 10 million people and provides 30% of private-sector employment. For the past four years, the Brexit crisis, which we did not vote for in the North, has caused absolute mayhem in the sector. The North voted to remain. Brexit is an imposition on us all.

With or without the deal, Brexit will cause friction, and friction causes delay and cost. From 1 January, there will be non-tariff barriers to trade, east and west. We will have SPS checks on goods that are traded across the Irish Sea. I noted commentary at the weekend from the British Government, who estimate that 40% to 70% of freight that arrives at the ports will not have the appropriate documentation to sail. That is absolutely incredible. That is a huge burden on those drivers. We saw what happened to drivers at Dover over the Christmas break. We are also dealing with perishable stock and food that is coming across. That has the potential to cause mayhem. We have seen that in Holyhead, in Wales, they are creating a contraflow to deal with that. At Cairnryan, they are leasing a disused airport to cope with that possibility. That is a consequence of Brexit that could have a huge impact on us here. Come 1 January, we will have customs and SPS checks. Next year, we will have customs arrangements in place. Again, all that can add more bureaucracy and cost to consumers and businesses here.

There is the sheep issue. Thousands of sheep are stranded over in Scotland. They cannot come across here. That is a consequence of Brexit. There has been no resolution to the seed potato issue. Indeed, there has been no

resolution to the issue of breeding animals. They cannot come across here. That has a huge impact on the pedigree trade.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he find it strange, then, that his colleague in the Irish Parliament, Matt Carthy, the Sinn Féin agriculture spokesman and his equivalent, criticised the reduction in the money that is currently available from the EU, when he said that the common agricultural policy had taken a huge hit and was lower than it had been in 2014 and that the rural development fund had also taken a substantial cut and had been halved? That was when we were part of the European Union. What does the Member say to that?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McAleer: I thank the Member for his intervention. He has pre-empted me, because I was coming to the topic of funding.

One of the biggest consequences of leaving the EU against our will is the fact that we will lose EU funding. We get £300 million a year on average for single farm payments. That is 100% EU-funded money that goes directly to farmers and agri-food businesses to keep them going. Whilst we have had promises from the British Government until the end of the mandate, there is nothing beyond that at all.

We are also being dragged out of the rural development programme. The previous programme, which was introduced by the former Agriculture Minister and, now, deputy First Minister, was a £623 million programme over six years. We are being taken out of that. Not only are we being taken out of that, but we are not allowed to carry over into the next financial year the £34 million that we had not spent. That £34 million is there only because there was some unspent money as a result of COVID. That is also a signal of the British Government's intent towards the North. The separate state aid regime in Britain also has the potential to place our agribusinesses at a disadvantage.

1.00 pm

One of the things that is spooking the sector — which, again, is to do with Brexit and the recent deal — is that it is very clear that Britain has an agenda to open access to its market through trade deals with Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and the Mercosur countries in South America. That could potentially have a huge impact on farmers here and in the South of Ireland, because Britain, as has been quite

rightly pointed out here on many occasions, is their biggest market. If we have a situation whereby Britain enters into trade deals with countries, particularly those that are big agricultural exporters, they will displace our share in the British market, which will have a huge impact on our producers.

In terms of labour, 70% of employees in processing factories here are from countries beyond Britain and Ireland, mostly from the EU. Indeed, 95% of the vets in our abattoirs graduated overseas, mostly in other EU countries, and we are not 100% sure what the situation will be after the transition period. In the recent deal, there is no reference to a rolling over of the recognition of professional qualifications.

It is the same thing with fish. The sea-of-opportunity promise was made by the British Government. However, the British fishing industry will lose its frictionless trade with the EU and the 25% increase in the quota may well be outweighed by the additional costs and burdens of bureaucracy.

I heard British Prime Ministers, including Winston Churchill, being mentioned a few times, but one person who has got it right all along is the former British Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine. He said:

"We must welcome the news that Brexit does not end in the chaos of no deal with the sense of relief of a condemned man informed that his execution has been commuted to a life sentence."

Mr Givan: In 2016, the people of the United Kingdom voted to remove themselves from the European Union. Yes, it divided the nation and it divided this country, but nevertheless a majority voted to leave the European Union. They voted to leave, and the arguments were well rehearsed, because they wanted to take back control, they wanted to have sovereignty, they wanted to have power with the people and residing close to the people, they wanted parliamentary sovereignty in the United Kingdom and they wanted judicial sovereignty in the United Kingdom. That is what the people voted for. They voted for a United Kingdom that was open with the rest of the world and not shackled to 27 other European countries and the restrictive natures in which they operate in a global perspective. They voted for that openness. Those hopes have not been fully realised. Even in this deal, they have not been fully realised for people in Great Britain, and they certainly have not been fully realised here for the people of Northern Ireland.

However, the values that motivated people to vote in 2016 for those fundamental freedoms are the same values that will continue to drive those of us who sit on these Benches to realise the dreams of those people. It is the political elite who regard those people as the stupid ones. Nicola Mallon referenced stupidity; the peasants voted to get out of the European Union, but the political elite are the ones who know better. Far be it for the political class to fulfil the ambitions of the people who voted. Indeed, the SDLP said that it was against any deal that resulted from the democratic wishes of the people of the United Kingdom. So we know the democratic principles of the SDLP run very, very thin when it comes to respecting the wishes of the people, but we will continue to fight for them.

Then, we had the movement that took place to introduce the protocol. The protocol is owned by the SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party, so when we look at the costs that are going to be placed upon our businesses, we need look no further than those three political parties in this Chamber. Of course, the Republic of Ireland did not help; it did not want to police its own border and so pushed for the kind of barriers that came through in the protocol. It was unable to carry out the basic function, on behalf of the European Union, of maintaining the integrity of the border, and so did not want to do it here. However, there was a priority given to North/South relationships. I can understand that from Sinn Féin and the SDLP, but the Alliance Party prioritised North/South to the detriment of east-west, and that will not be lost on the people of Northern Ireland.

The increased costs of bureaucracy are owned by those parties that failed to accept Brexit as voted for in 2016, but there are opportunities. There are opportunities through the Joint Committee and I hope that we see a much more productive engagement by the Republic of Ireland, albeit that they have seceded their powers to the European Union when it comes to the Commission and so on. We need to see them, now, working in the interests of businesses here in Northern Ireland. If they want to create the best of both worlds, the power is in the hands of the European Union to put Northern Ireland first. If we are part of the single market, they should make sure there are no barriers to trading because they are still insisting on barriers being put up.

Of course, Her Majesty's Government have now got the power to act unilaterally if the people of Northern Ireland are placed at an economic disadvantage. They can do that because we

have given them the power to do it as a result of Brexit.

Mr Stalford: I appreciate the Member giving way. Having opposed entry into the Common Market and having opposed the Single European Act, having opposed the Maastricht Treaty, having opposed the Lisbon Treaty, having opposed the European Constitution and having opposed every single European treaty that created the EU, does my friend agree that it is rank hypocrisy for Sinn Féin to now pose as defenders of the European Union?

Mr Givan: The Member is absolutely right and my colleague from North Antrim made those very points. The overriding objective of their campaign is for the reunification of Ireland and so any other principle will be cast away. Sinn Féin dispensed with its Brexiteer position because that did not suit its agenda. Sinn Féin can explain why it prefers a globalist-based European Union system that is distant from the working man and woman, remote and unaccountable. That is the European Union that it wants to remain shackled to.

Today's debate leads us into the constant constitutional argument, but I am confident that, as Great Britain benefits from the trade deals, we too benefit as a result of being part of the United Kingdom. People in this jurisdiction will look at being part of the fifth-largest economy in the world. They will look at the financial support that is being given to us, even over the past 12 months as a result of the COVID pandemic. They will also see how the United Kingdom has led scientifically and at how the vaccination programme is being rolled out. While I am pleased that the first vaccinations took place in the Republic of Ireland yesterday, the residents of 80% of our nursing homes have been vaccinated. That is what people will look to when they test the tangible benefits of being in the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Givan: I am confident that Northern Ireland's future is very secure for many generations to come within the union that matters — the United Kingdom.

Mr Gildernew: It is ironic that the First Minister and the previous contributor mentioned the vaccine. Yesterday, I welcomed the fact that over 33,000 people here have received the Pfizer vaccine. It was developed by a Turkish immigrant who was working with a German company in conjunction with a Belgian manufacturing plant. The world has moved on,

while Britain has moved backwards. There is no question that narrow English exceptionalism and interests have taken over here.

Dr Archibald: Will the Member give way?

Mr Gildernew: Yes, go ahead.

Dr Archibald: It is likely that many of those who were involved in the research that led to the creation of the vaccines were funded by European sources.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Gildernew: Absolutely. In my role as Sinn Féin's health spokesperson, I agree that that is a critical point.

I also heard Members on the opposite Benches quoting Winston Churchill extolling taking opportunity from difficulty. He could hardly have meant that you would create the difficulty in order to find the opportunity, so I do not think that that is overly relevant either.

The Member opposite talked about looking at the negative and at the doom and gloom. Surely he read the British Government's own analysis right at the start when they identified that, given that this was the first time that a nation had entered trade negotiations to take themselves out of a trading arrangement, there would inevitably be additional costs, including non-trade, non-tariff costs.

As part of my research for this debate, I serendipitously came across the fact that the collective noun for turkeys is a rafter. At present in Westminster, we are seeing a rafter of Tory turkeys voting for Christmas at Christmas time and cheered to the rafters by the DUP all the way.

Unfortunately, we all have to live with the damaging and lasting impacts that that is likely to bring, and that includes the health sector. We are seeing the loss of the European health card. While the Irish Government have stepped in to ensure that the card continues, there are no guarantees and we need to see how that scheme rolls out in practice. Doctors, nurses and other regulated professionals will now have to wade through a maze of red tape to have their qualifications recognised, whereas at present there is a seamless system in place. I believe that that will have significant impacts on cross-border health workers who cross the border in both directions.

I have been discussing the issue of medicines and essential supplies with the Department of Health since 2019. We had been assured all along that the issue had been dealt with: supply chains would deal with the issue, and everything was in place. At the time, I made the point to officials that it does not matter what plans are made if lorries cannot get out of Kent to bring the medicines here; that is going to create a problem. We have seen that writ large over the past couple of weeks. We depend on an integrated supply chain for medicines. At the very last minute — a number of weeks ago — an arrangement had to be arrived at whereby an additional 12-months' supply was bought. That was not a solution to the problem, but breathing space to try to find a solution. However, those are the types of problems that Brexit is piling up for us. There is no good Brexit; we did not vote for it, but we are being dragged out along with the English Government. The Member opposite talked about Brit-bashing. There has not been much need for that because they are doing quite a good job of that themselves through the self-inflicted exit from their current trade deal.

There is also a significant problem that has been discovered in recent weeks. The new immigration system will very negatively impact on many future EU citizens: citizens who we need, value and who contribute in a range of ways across our business and health and social care sectors. Surely, if we have learnt one thing from COVID, it is that the skilled workers are those who provide care, supply equipment and work on the front line. We are now going to place additional barriers to their entry to our job market. We are going to put them through language tests and place salary levels at a point that will discriminate against them. Again, there is a notion of a skilled economy, but we need workers who have a range of skills and many of them will be discriminated against as a result of the regime that has been brought in.

As my colleague mentioned earlier, the issue of medical research and cooperation has been evident in the past number of months. However, we do not know about the future. Again, the Irish Government has said that it will guarantee the ERASMUS scheme, but those connections and relationships matter. We are about to throw a massive hurdle in the way of all of that, and it will impact on our system.

At present, we are all quite aware of the high-level cooperation with the North West Cancer Centre and paediatric cardiology services. However, there are over 150 other cross-border service level agreements. Some or all of those may survive this trauma. However, the ongoing

development of those linkages for the benefit our population will now be under severe threat. Make no mistake about it: on a small island those things matter. We need to ensure that we are working effectively and cooperatively with each other. At present, we can see that the world has moved on and Britain has moved backwards. We cannot be dragged along in their wake; our society deserves better.

Ms McLaughlin: Brexit was always going to be bad for most of the people across the UK and Ireland, North and South. This deal is not the worst possible outcome because we now know that the British Government accepts that a bad deal is better than no deal.

The past five years of self-inflicted political harm have already caused substantial damage through loss of investment, loss of potential jobs and, already, the loss of some of our most valuable workers, who have returned to the other parts of Europe from where they came to add value to our National Health Service, to our care homes and to our businesses.

1.15 pm

All that was obvious to most people in the Assembly from the outset. It has to be recorded that the DUP's support for Brexit was the biggest own goal for unionism. It was interesting to hear DUP MP Gregory Campbell speaking on BBC radio earlier this week about the opportunities presented by Brexit for Northern Ireland's economy. He said that it would encourage companies to locate here as it would give them access to both the EU and UK markets. I look forward to the Executive putting in place an economic strategy that supports the growth of an all-island economy. I am disappointed not to have seen that as yet, but, still, Brexit will create a bad outcome for Northern Ireland. It will be a particularly bad outcome for citizens who choose to identify as British and for those who were born in Britain and are not entitled to an Irish passport.

The Irish Government have been proactive and decisive in protecting many rights of people living in Northern Ireland, not just those with Irish passports. ERASMUS and EU healthcare are just two examples. Thanks, too, are due to the European Union for its diplomacy of dignified calmness throughout the torturous negotiations. The EU and the Irish Government have worked tirelessly on behalf of the people on this island in order to keep an open border, recognising that it is essential for our economy, our cross-border social connections and our peace. The continuation of the Peace

programme is of enormous importance, especially for our border areas. The Peace programmes have delivered much progress over the past three decades, and PEACE PLUS will continue that work. It is a clear sign that the EU remains committed to us in the North and will not turn its back on us, just as the majority of the people in the North did not reject our link to the European Union.

For many reasons, Northern Ireland is different from Great Britain. Along with Scotland, our voters wanted to stay in the European Union. They wanted to recognise their European identity, wanting cooperation and partnership with the European continent, our neighbours in the South and our neighbours in the east. Northern Ireland is also different economically from England, Scotland and Wales. Our businesses have more transactions with businesses in the South than they do with businesses in Britain. Northern Ireland is unlike Scotland, Wales and England in doing more business outside the UK than within the UK.

Our future has to be outward-looking and focused on external trade and improving our productivity by investing in skills and infrastructure. We can do the best by embedding our relationships with the South. We need an all-island economy that builds infrastructure and prosperity. The reality is that Brexit will be the basis of much greater all-island cooperation and partnership. We will increasingly have a much stronger all-island economy, and that is to be welcomed. We would like to take the opportunity also to strengthen our other all-island partnerships, especially in health and education. I particularly thank the Irish Government for their commitment to supporting the expansion of higher education in Derry, something that my party has been calling for from the Assembly for many decades.

I can see positives, but the cost has been severe. We have lost investment, we have lost jobs, and our international relationships have been undermined. Many of our citizens have had rights removed: the rights to work, study and live in the EU. Some of our professional firms face new obstacles to doing cross-border

—

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms McLaughlin: — business, with the loss of recognition of qualifications.

I ask Members to support amendment No 4.

Mr Beattie: Happy new year to all of you for the coming days. I hope that it can be peaceful.

The motion asks for the Assembly to note:

"the trade and cooperation agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union."

So I take note. I note the insidious Northern Ireland protocol that forms part of the trade and cooperation agreement. There will be a trade border down the Irish Sea, separating Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom. I note that the DNA of some unionists is on that protocol. I note that the EU ERASMUS+ will be replaced by the UK Turing scheme, no doubt creating further division in Northern Ireland as some, internally and externally, try to undermine the United Kingdom as they try to create an educational resource. However, people in Northern Ireland, be they British or Irish citizens, will have the choice of both.

The European health insurance card will continue for all citizens who hold one until its run-out date. It will be replaced in the UK by the global health insurance card. Surely that is a good thing, but, already, I see people trying to undermine it. I do not get it. We will continue to coordinate with Europol and Eurojust, and I note that the European arrest warrant will be replaced by a surrender agreement. I will look to see which friendly nation adheres to the limited grounds for refusal that are mentioned in the agreement. In respect of law enforcement, biometric material, including DNA and fingerprints, and vehicle registration details will be shared between the UK and EU member states via member state contact points, but I note the loss of access to the Schengen information system. That may affect cross-border and wider European Union judicial cooperation in such areas as missing persons. Northern Ireland will remain under the direct jurisdiction of the European Commission and the European Court of Justice without having any elected representation or elected input. Northern Ireland will be ruled by committee, and some in the Assembly salivate at the idea of that.

The draft trade agreement allows cooperation on the peaceful use of nuclear energy, including training cooperation, guarding, movement and transfers. That includes radioisotopes in medicines and radiation in agriculture.

I note how the Belfast Agreement has been undermined, at best, and breached, at worst, with no consideration from those in the Assembly and in the European Parliament who

said that we must protect the agreement at all costs.

The European Union will not ratify the trade and cooperation deal until the end of February, so it is still a draft deal and will remain so until that date. The First Minister is right when she says that we are not at the end of the Brexit saga. It is a great Brexit, but it is certainly not a UK Brexit. Northern Ireland has been separated from the United Kingdom in trade and justice. The Ulster Unionist Party warned of that impact on Northern Ireland's position within the UK, but we were ignored. Instead, some followed the lead of English nationalists who have no interest whatever in Northern Ireland. We have to face that fact.

I cannot support or be in favour of the trade and cooperation agreement. My vote will be a protest vote, as will those at Westminster, because the Government there, supported by Labour, will vote it through. As a unionist, my job is to maintain, protect and promote the union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, so I will have to make it work. If I do not make it work, the people of Northern Ireland will suffer even more, and it will damage our union even more.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beattie: That is the stark position that I find myself in. It is unenviable.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Beattie: Sorry, Christopher.

Mr Muir: I thank the First Minister and deputy First Minister for bringing the debate to the House. Today, we debate the motion and the amendments that have been selected. It is perhaps important to reflect on the fact that the almost inevitable passing of the trade deal by Westminster will result in a vastly different and new future for Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK from Friday.

Over the course of our history, relations between our islands have improved and been strengthened — North and South, east and west — thanks to the EU. Friction has been removed, checks abolished and common standards enjoyed to protect the rights of workers and citizens and protect the environment and to enable businesses to grow. It saddens me greatly that, in the year in which so passionate a pro-European as John Hume passed away, we are set on a course away from the EU and the benefits that it offers. Exit

from the EU on the basis of the agreed deal is vastly better than a chaotic no-deal crash-out, but, no matter how it is constructed, Brexit is bad for Northern Ireland, people, business and the environment. It has triggered active serious discussions about the constitutional future of Scotland and Northern Ireland. Those who seek to deny that should take their heads out of the sand. The fact that the DUP campaigned for Brexit and paid for advertisements in London newspapers makes it all the more incredible.

We did not have to have a deal like this. A soft Brexit that kept the UK in the single market and the customs union could have been pursued but was pushed firmly off the agenda by the ERG and the DUP. The loss of frictionless trade was then a *fait accompli*. With the UK set on course for a hard Brexit, as reflected in this short trade deal, the protocol was inevitable. It is not ideal — on the contrary, it is the least worst outcome — but I have yet to hear any viable alternatives, besides fantasy, unicorn solutions.

Those who say that the border should be on the island of Ireland as opposed to the Irish Sea should pick up an atlas and have a look at the number of border crossings. Rather than acting as a hurler on the ditch, Alliance, led by our Brexit spokesperson, deputy leader Dr Stephen Farry, has been actively seeking ways to mitigate the impact and secure maximum possible flexibilities with regard to the protocol. The derogations and grace periods secured to date are to be welcomed. It remains an absolute scandal that the UK Government failed to request an extension to the transition period as businesses struggle to adapt to the new rules, many of which were only published a few days ago.

All of that is in the context of the economic carnage caused by the pandemic. We are not ready for the changes coming about on 1 January, and the blame lands fairly and squarely at 10 Downing Street and not on those who are fighting to earn a living wage and put bread on the table.

I recognise the arguments put forward by Dr Aiken concerning the invocation of article 16. However, the stark reality is that the threshold for invoking that article has not been met. The fact is that the window for scrutiny of the deal has been made deliberately narrow, and we sit here on 30 December to scrutinise it. That just adds to the reasons why it should be opposed.

A quick review of the details of the deal reveals real concerns, and more and more are expressed as people examine the details. As

my colleague Stewart Dickson outlined, services are excluded from it. Future participation in ERASMUS is ruled out. An alternative programme, known as the Turing scheme, is now offered, which, to me, does an injustice to Alan Turing's life and legacy. I thank the Irish Government for their commitment to the future participation of Northern Irish students in ERASMUS and for helping to ameliorate some of the aspects of the deal. However, overall, it is a bad deal for Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is certain to be short-changed when it comes to the Shared Prosperity Fund and other funding due to replace the EU programmes.

If anything, the deal looks like a relatively short agreement to remarry after our divorce on 31 January 2020 but with extensive prenuptials based on real fears that one party — namely, the UK — will diverge, especially since it has already been spotted window shopping and talking about divergence. Time will tell whether the new marriage will work, but I fear that it will not. The best marriage is a future in the EU. However, we have to make a go of this relationship, because it is the only deal presented to us. I will not hesitate in the future to turn back and say, "I told you so".

1.30 pm

Ms Bailey: Of course a deal is better than no deal, but let us stop fooling ourselves that Brexit holds benefits for Northern Ireland, its businesses or its people. Let us remind ourselves that Northern Ireland, like Scotland, voted against Brexit. We should not be relieved that a bad deal for Northern Ireland has been done, or that we have been given a choice between bad and really bad, because bad is bad is bad, Mr Speaker. There is little in this future relationship Bill that will lessen the Irish Sea border, for example, and no one here thinks that that is a good thing. Boris Johnson wanted a hard Brexit, and it seems that this is as close as he could get. While there has been much lauding that a deal has been reached, it would be wise to remind ourselves that Prime Minister Johnson has a long record, as Mrs Mallon mentioned, of U-turns and lies. Of course, he seems to have no issue with threatening to break international law, as was supported and announced by our very own Secretary of State, Brandon Lewis. Time will tell, really, what the commitment to this deal is, for this current Government cannot be trusted. Some here know that better than others.

For the duration of this Brexit process, we have been given no proper scrutiny time and no proper access to relevant papers. We have had

SIIs, SRs and LCMs all being rushed through without full understanding of their impacts. I am somewhat relieved that, here today, the recall of this Assembly is simply to debate a non-binding motion and not to vote anything through, since this deal was done less than a week ago and contains massive changes for people's lives and businesses. It is our job to fully scrutinise and fully understand exactly what we are being told to do, and Brexit is being done to us, for we have no power in this process and no inclusion in the negotiating teams. Neither have the Irish Government. We have all been passengers. This has been an EU/UK Government process, and every devolved region has been no more than an influencer or a concern raiser.

I want to focus on people and on the changes that are going to be brought about by this Bill come Friday — some of the changes to people's lives that will come into effect on Friday. Some have been mentioned. For example, from Friday all Northern Ireland university students can still access ERASMUS+ programmes. It is just that now the Irish Government will facilitate that, and not the UK Government, who are their actual Government. British students are going to need a visa and will potentially face hefty increases in university fees — and roaming charges, as has been mentioned. They are back, and that will cause so much daily frustration to those living anywhere near close to border regions. Of course, the price caps have gone with that.

What if you need medical assistance in the EU? Well, Irish passport holders will see no change, really. For British passport holders, the UK Government have actually recommended that you go and get yourself comprehensive insurance once your current health certificate expires, despite the coming new global health card system.

All Irish citizens will retain free movement rights, and that will extend to children and spouses, but British citizens will not. So, in practice, we can actually still travel freely, buy as much duty-free as we can, come home via Dublin, and all will be well. Should we be advising all our citizens to get themselves an Irish passport, if they have not done so already? I know that I have signed many, many applications. Of course, remind them not to forget their green card if they are taking their car with them across the border or into Europe with a UK registration. Your pet passport will still be valid, so feel free to bring the dog.

The Green Party has never supported Brexit. We absolutely acknowledge that it is here and it

is happening; the momentous changes start now. There are indeed opportunities to be had in the times ahead, because radical change is needed if we are to mitigate the climate and biodiversity crisis that is upon us, as well as Brexit. Do we have the leadership, do we have the —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Bailey: — imagination, and do we have the will to do right: to secure a future relationship and build the new systems needed?

Mr Allister: Friday is 1 January, which will be 220 years from the activation of the Act of Union. Article 6 of the Act of Union was the fundamental building block and foundation of the Union. It was to the effect that there would be free and frictionless trade across and within the entirety of the United Kingdom, from which every citizen could benefit. Sadly, on this 1 January coming, article 6 of the Act of Union will be trashed by the protocol, which creates friction in trade within the United Kingdom and causes the creation of an Irish Sea border to aid that friction. Of course, that brings with it the odious imposition of laws that we never made, that we cannot change and that will be supervised by a foreign court in a foreign jurisdiction.

Make no mistake about it: the protocol is a dire consequence for every citizen in Northern Ireland. We will all live through its dire consequences. Therefore, we have to ask the question of how it arose. Well, the truth is that it arose because nationalism, aided by their little helpers in the Alliance Party and some useful idiots in commerce, so baulked at the very thought of an extra camera on the land border that they pushed the border to the Irish Sea. Some — Mr Beattie used the word — will now "salivate" at the consequences. They do not care about the consequences for the people of Northern Ireland. Rather, they see it as an advance towards partitioning the United Kingdom and unifying the island of Ireland economically. That is why they salivate, but it is the people of Northern Ireland who will suffer immensely in consequence of that.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to Mr Allister for giving way. Earlier in the debate, we were told the collective noun for turkeys. I looked it up: apparently, the collective noun for hypocrites is a congregation.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Allister: Well, I think that that says it all. That congregation will be those who will wring their hands, lament and pretend that they are upset that their citizens cannot readily access goods through Google or any of the other suppliers or that their companies cannot readily import. They will say, "How terrible", but they are the originators. It is they, in this House, who egged it on, who had to see it done and who will now impose that price on us all.

My other sadness about this is that the DUP is a party that knows the issues, although the Irish Sea border is the product of the betrayal of Brexit. Let me say, this is not the Brexit that I voted for. My ballot paper did not ask, "Do you want GB to leave the EU and leave Northern Ireland behind, abandoned in the EU's customs union, single market and VAT regime?". No, it invited me to vote to leave as we joined, as one nation. One of my great sadnesses is that, although the Irish Sea border is being delivered by the betrayal of Brexit, it is a DUP Minister who is building the infrastructure.

Although the DUP today in Westminster will vote in principle and correctly against the deal, in this House it has been voting to implement the protocol. I say this to the DUP, pretty directly: there is a huge onus upon you to ensure that the ambition of this protocol, of building an all-Ireland economy, is thwarted at every turn. You have heard it today; that is the ambition. It is self-evident; it always was the price for Europe to sacrifice Northern Ireland. As the lead party of unionism in the Government, the burden upon you is immense to make sure that, at every turn, in every small and every large measure —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Allister: — you utterly thwart the building of an all-Ireland economy, because you know and I know what the next step is.

Mr Carroll: Mr Speaker, I will be breaking from some convention in this debate by not quoting Winston Churchill. He was an imperialist butcher who believed that the British Empire was superior to people here and in every country that the British Empire colonised across the world.

Boris Johnson's reactionary and calamitous Tory Government is presiding over the worst crisis in living memory for working-class people collectively across these islands. Their disastrous handling of Brexit is one element of it, but, of course, Brexit dangerously intersects with the COVID health crisis, economic ruin, job

losses and a deep social crisis that Britain and Ireland are now deeply in the throes of. In the past 48 hours, Britain has had more new cases of COVID-19 than France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and the South of Ireland combined. It has been horrific to watch as cases have multiplied locally and deaths have increased yet again. Obviously, our thoughts are with everyone affected by it. It is astounding that people are coping at all, our healthcare staff included. It is a winter like no other and a year like no other for far too many unfortunate people.

The prospect of a no-deal Brexit during this pandemic was clearly deeply troubling for many. No doubt many breathed a sigh of relief in recent days. However, the trade deal being debated currently in Westminster, by a Government made up of posh, rich, Tory MPs, is not a good deal for working-class people here in Ireland or across the water. It may give us cause to be troubled in the near future. We in this Assembly should use this opportunity to collectively reject the deal.

As usual, Boris Johnson approached the announcement of a trade deal on Christmas Eve with much bluff and bluster, presenting it as a good deal, but the truth is far from that. No gains will be made for working-class people under this Tory Brexit, and it is not the ringing commitment to a fairer and more equal society that we so desperately need. The details of many areas of the deal remain unclear as the vote swiftly approaches, and parts are yet to be fully negotiated and settled. Yet the Tories' commitment to pay cuts and further austerity measures speaks volumes about what we can expect in the coming year.

The Tory vision of exiting the EU was a fantasy to bolster the British Empire. They were happy to use racism in order to advance it and even happier to throw their would-be allies in the DUP under the bus while they were at it. The new immigration system at the heart of the Tories' post-Brexit plans, elements of which were put forward in this House just a few weeks ago —

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: No, thanks.

— will restrict the free movement of people and begin the process of a racist, points-based immigration system. I strongly reiterate my opposition to that, again, as we sit on the precipice of a likely deal in Westminster.

The entire Brexit process has exacerbated the deep crisis at the heart of the British state — a reactionary state based on militarism, austerity and inequality; a state that continues to deny justice to the victims of its actions on this island and, indeed, its own island, particularly the people of Grenfell Tower; a state whose rotten record of austerity over the past decade is enough to illustrate the nefarious role of Britain in Ireland. I believe that progressives and radicals in Ireland should use the current context of crisis and instability in British capitalism to rid ourselves of the Tories once and for all.

We should recognise moves that have been made to prevent a hardening of the border in Ireland, but that should be only the beginning.

Historically, the border has divided people on this island, holding back progress and helping to bolster two conservative, right-wing states, North and South. For these reasons, we have always opposed a border, and, today, we repeat our call for a border poll.

1.45 pm

I submitted an amendment to today's motion to oppose outright Boris Johnson's deal, to call for a border poll and to endorse cross-border action on a range of political issues. However, it appears that only amendments tabled by the Executive parties were deemed to be acceptable.

Mr Speaker: Order, Member. I ask the Member to resume his seat. I know that you do not have much good to say about this institution, and that is fair enough. That is entirely your opinion, and, perhaps, you have a mandate for that. However, you have been here long enough to know the rules. Do not be questioning the Speaker's intention or motivation for accepting or rejecting amendments. Your amendment was dealt with with the same integrity as every other amendment, so I advise you strongly not to recommence that discussion.

Mr Carroll: Mr Speaker, I am just mentioning that my amendment was not selected. I was not casting judgement on you.

Mr Speaker: You were. I will not take any more discussion on it, so depart from it altogether.

Mr Carroll: I will bring my comments to a conclusion. I support amendment No 4. I certainly do not agree with everything in the amendment in the names of Matthew O'Toole and Nichola Mallon, and I am on record

detailing why. I am no friend of the neoliberal heart of the EU, but this amendment is the only opportunity today for us to send a message to Boris Johnson and Westminster that we have no truck with this deal, as other devolved institutions have had the opportunity to do so. Therefore, I critically support amendment No 4, and, in the aftermath of a Tory Brexit —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Carroll: — our immediate and primary aim should be to stand up for working-class people on these islands.

Mr Beggs: I support amendment No 2, in the name of Steve Aiken, and I also support amendment No 3. Today is a day of mixed emotions for me. It is a day when I am very proud to be part of the United Kingdom, a day when the new Oxford/ AstraZeneca vaccine has been approved by the United Kingdom Government, who have already purchased 100 million doses of the vaccine, which can help to protect me, my family and, indeed, everyone in the United Kingdom and in Northern Ireland. This will also be very beneficial to the Third World, given that it was developed on a not-for-profit basis.

However, it is also a very, very sad day for me because the Labour Party has indicated that it will support the UK-EU trade and cooperation agreement at Westminster, so it is certain to go through. When it is passed, it will cement in place the Northern Ireland protocol. As a democratic representative, I find the Northern Ireland protocol offensive. As a unionist, I find it offensive. I find it offensive because it breaches the consent principle in the Belfast Agreement, in that unionists and nationalists should agree to any change to our constitutional position. Our position in the UK has changed. As of 1 January, there will be a border down the Irish Sea. No one can argue that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom will not then be different, and it is for that reason that I am very, very sore.

As a member of the Assembly's Infrastructure Committee, I know that we gained advice that we should not have discussed and approved a statutory rule because it is to be the fiefdom of the new Joint Committee that will be governing all of us in many aspects of our lives. In particular, I understand that the chairman and the vice-chairman of the Joint Committee have to agree and that, once that is done, guess what? It becomes law and regulation in Northern Ireland. Who wants to live under such a regime? It is undemocratic. Ultimately, we

will, unlike the rest of the UK, continue to be ruled by the European Court of Justice on many issues.

The Ulster Unionist Party has warned other unionists, privately and publicly, about the dangers of even discussing or acquiescing to a border down the Irish Sea. Sadly, we were ignored. Boris Johnson took that door ajar, and he pushed it open, and he forced into his agreement something that suited him. I think that all unionists subsequently realised that it was a mistake to have acquiesced to that, and we now have this border down the Irish Sea.

Mr Gildernew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I will.

Mr Gildernew: Mr Allister is no longer in his place, but I want to comment, in light of what you said as well, that we heard reference — rather insulting, in my opinion — to "useful idiots". We are discussing this politically today in the context of politics. This has been a debate and a discussion right across our society. People who are involved in farming, agriculture, business and community development are entitled and were entitled to take part in that debate, and they have expressed their significant concern. That is why the protocol is necessary. The protocol is a result of Brexit.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Beggs: I have highlighted that it is a clear breach of the Belfast Agreement. There is not unionist consent for it. There has been a failure of nationalism, of the EU, of the British Government and of the Republic of Ireland Government to recognise that. I just wish that everyone would.

We have warned about the dangers of the protocol, which will be enacted on 1 January. As my colleague Doug Beattie stated, it is sad that some unionists' DNA is on that border down the Irish Sea. It is a sad fact that my East Antrim MP followed the lead of English nationalism and is still trying to justify his unjustifiable actions when he gambled the union and which have resulted in the border down the Irish Sea.

What does it actually mean? It will result in extra paperwork and bureaucracy when we move goods across the Irish Sea. Time is money: it takes time to complete that paperwork. Ultimately, it will result in additional cost to you and me and everyone in Northern

Ireland as consumers. We will all have to pay more. I have already learnt of one businessman who sought to get quotes for moving pallets next month. He is being charged a surcharge of £100 a pallet. Guess what? We will all have to pay for it. I am aware of another constituent who ordered a phone from EE. It is already a number of days late. When he went to track it, he discovered that it was being delivered by DPD. Of course, it is not delivering to Northern Ireland at present, unless that has changed in recent times. A number of delivery companies have indicated that they are not delivering here because of concern that it may breach some of the protocol and the bureaucracy that has yet to embed. Guess what? Someone else will have to deliver it and, no doubt, will charge extra for it — something that we all will have to pay.

On the movement of animals across the Irish Sea, I am aware that guide dogs for the blind is an area of concern. Passports will be needed to move dogs about. Perhaps veterinary inspections will mean even more expense to get them back here.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Beggs: It is important that we all work together and try to mitigate the costs, use the regulations that are in it —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Beggs: — in article 16 to try to make a better place for us all to live and do business.

Mr Blair: I state at the outset my membership of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, as I am likely to refer to policing-related matters in my speech.

I will start by reflecting on the fact that the challenging time frame of just one year to negotiate a comprehensive free trade agreement was almost impossible from the outset and, of course, was made worse by the coronavirus pandemic. The UK Government, devolved Assembly and EU have rightly diverted their focus and resources into dealing with the crisis, leaving an extensive list of questions surrounding Brexit unanswered and insufficient time to extensively scrutinise any deal.

As Alliance colleagues who spoke before me today have said, the UK-EU trade deal avoids a catastrophic no deal situation, but it is difficult to be enthusiastic about any deal that disregards the majority Remain vote in Northern Ireland and puts us in a more distant relationship with

the EU than before. Northern Ireland will face consequences and loss of opportunities no matter the details of the deal agreed between the UK and the EU. As has been said, there is no such thing as a good deal. All versions of Brexit will leave Northern Ireland in a worse situation than before and will see the loss of a broad range of opportunities and benefits, including the loss of freedom of movement and the impact on the service economy.

No one should underestimate the importance of the loss of some of the European freedoms to some of us in the Chamber. However, a UK-EU future relationship agreement is necessary to avoid that catastrophic no deal outcome. While Northern Ireland has some protection and even some comparative advantage due to the protocol, it is workable only in the context of a wider deal. A no deal would have created a broad range of major economic and other challenges for our region, alongside the knock-on consequences of wider disruption in Great Britain.

Turning to those policing matters and matters related to security, as I previously indicated, I want to say that it is probably fair to reflect that, if the initial reading is correct, the deal achieves a little more than had been feared. There are, however, remaining and serious concerns, such as future arrangements around the European arrest warrant, a very tight time frame of six months to try to fix data management arrangements and the reality that readjustment process realignment and changes on this scale are likely to have a significant impact on policing capacity and resources.

Notwithstanding this deal, Alliance remains strongly pro-European and was never prepared to give legitimacy or acquiescence to a hard Brexit. We will continue to advocate the closest possible relationship for Northern Ireland with the EU and to seek further flexibilities and mitigations regarding the implementation of the protocol. With colleagues and fellow Irish, Northern Irish and UK Europeans, we will, in the time ahead, explore all opportunities to rejoin the EU and to campaign for it. Until then, the situation and all that it brings must be owned by those who supported Brexit, campaigned for Brexit and campaigned on behalf of others for Brexit. Today, with colleagues, I will support amendment Nos 1 and 4 but oppose amendment Nos 2 and 3.

Mr Speaker: I call Matthew O'Toole to make a winding-up speech on amendment No 4.

Mr O'Toole: In addition to my winding-up speech on the SDLP's amendment No 4, I

indicate our broad support for amendment No 3 but ask colleagues to reflect on whether amendment No 4 offers slightly more weight to opposition to this specific deal. However, we support the broad intent of both amendments.

A lot can happen in four and a half years. Since mid-2016, the United States has elected and, thankfully, subsequently rejected Donald Trump. As we know, it took little more than three quarters of this year for researchers to come up with a series of vaccines to combat the novel coronavirus. This year, Liverpool even won the league for the first time in three decades. However, for the past four and a half years, the UK has been spending its time constructing a relationship with the European Union that will make it poorer, less influential and markedly less safe. It is the greatest single act of self-harm in the history of modern states.

In pursuit of an impossible perfection of sovereignty in an age when countries are interdependent and challenges do not recognise borders — challenges such as COVID-19 — the UK has devoted more than half a decade to agreeing an inferior relationship with the EU — the one set out in the 1,200 page document that MPs and MLAs are debating today. It was called taking back control. If gathering your Parliament on New Year's Eve to force through a 1,000 page trade deal with barely any scrutiny is taking back control and giving to your Parliament, my God, I do not know what we had before.

Yes, people voted for this. A majority in England voted for this but not in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland voted Remain, and, at every subsequent election, we have reasserted our preference for EU membership or, at the very least, a closer relationship with the EU than the UK has sought in this agreement. Thankfully, we have some of the protections in the Ireland protocol, which, as others have said, is far from perfect but essential with the UK pursuing such a divergent relationship with the EU, but the protocol only covers trade and goods. There will be marked disruption to our economy and our lives as a result of this deal and what is not covered by the protocol.

Let me take a few examples. This deal barely touches on services, which are the majority of our economy. As of Saturday, we will have fewer guarantees on how legal advice, engineering projects or digital marketing can be provided across the border. The legal ban on roaming charges will be gone. In 2016, in my old job, I wrote the press release that warned how roaming charges could be at risk, so I know of what I speak. The legal ban on roaming

charges will be gone, leaving mobile phone operators free to impose charges as they wish. As people in Warrenpoint and Strabane will know, you do not even have to cross the border to accidentally roam. There are few guarantees at all on financial services where we simply have to wait for the EU to decide how much equivalence UK financial services providers will have.

It is not just about the derivatives market and the City of London; this could have real-world consequences for our banking sector, where most of the biggest financial institutions have always been cross-border.

On law enforcement, the deal is certainly better than no deal, but it will make cross-border law enforcement, including extradition, as Members including Doug Beattie have acknowledged, slower and more cumbersome. It is a bad deal for everyone in the UK and everyone in Northern Ireland.

2.00 pm

One of the greatest mysteries of all is why those in the Chamber who claim to be the greatest supporters of the UK have been the greatest cheerleaders for a project that, all economic forecasters say, will make the UK poorer and less influential. It was not Irish nationalists or Remainers who did that: it was the DUP, a party that had the opportunity and power to deliver a better outcome for everyone, including the people of Northern Ireland, but chose instead to court the approval of fanatical Brexiteers and Tory chancers, who let that party and us down. Tomorrow is not Christmas Eve but New Year's Eve. However, I suspect that some members of the DUP may get a visit from three ghosts. I would not want to speculate about new years past, present or future that they would argue for, but I would hope that DUP members wake up on New Year's Day with a slightly different attitude from that which they have had over the past three or four years.

Brexit was always going to be particularly awful for this part of the world. Our society was uniquely exposed to the risks. We are the hinge point of the relationship between the UK and the EU. We were not properly considered either in the run-up to the referendum or in the aftermath. Take it from me, because I was there. That is why the SDLP is moving its amendment and will oppose the deal here and at Westminster. People in Northern Ireland, whatever their background and constitutional perspective, deserve so much better than this. That is why the Assembly should send a clear

message that we do not consent to the terms of the Brexit being imposed on us by Boris Johnson and his ideologues.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr O'Toole: I am immensely grateful to those in the EU, particularly Michel Barnier and his team —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr O'Toole: — *[Inaudible]* to protect our interests. We cannot consent to what is happening today. I commend our amendment to the Assembly.

Mr Stalford: Just as others have quoted Churchill, I am afraid that — ah, Mr Carroll is back. That is excellent, because I am going to ruin his Wednesday by quoting Margaret Thatcher at him. In her 1988 Bruges speech, Margaret Thatcher said:

"We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain only to see them re-imposed at a European level".

Unfortunately, the deal does that. It reimposes bureaucracy on us and reimposes the frontiers of the state. It is not fair to say that only one or two parties in the Chamber are responsible for this: three parties have spent the past four years demanding those provisions and a border up the Irish Sea in order to prevent checks on the land. Alliance, the SDLP and Sinn Féin own the provisions of the protocol. We all remember the trips to Brussels, going in and out of Barnier's office and saying, "We are campaigning and lobbying". You campaigned for this, you delivered it and you own it — not us.

I believe fundamentally that the case for leaving the European Union is a sound one. I am a good European, and that is why I believe in independent, sovereign, self-governing states that are responsible for their own money, their own laws and how they run their own country. The concept of being European is a lot older than a failing supranational structure like the European Union.

When we joined the European Union in 1972 and it was reaffirmed in 1975, it accounted for almost 30% of world trade; today, it is less than half that figure. The European Union is not some miracle cure for our economic ills; it is a declining market. Our future lies in expanding markets and improving trade with the rest of the world. The protocol's provisions are not helpful

to local business. That has been acknowledged. It is a source of profound regret to me that it is the Conservative and Unionist Party that is bringing in those provisions.

The hypocrisy that has been demonstrated by some contributions has been remarkable. To be lectured about British exceptionalism by a party whose name literally translates as "Ourselves Alone" is remarkable. To be accused of engaging in British exceptionalism from that source is just incredible. I thought that it was interesting in one of the contributions that — I raised this — Irish, Scottish and Welsh people were referred to but people like me — British people in Northern Ireland — were excluded. That is demonstrative of a mindset that we have seen over recent days.

I am British. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, and I will do everything in my power to keep it that way. My aspirations are just as legitimate as those of Members across the way, whether they consider themselves to be nationalist, European, Irish or whatever. I will not have the community that I come from and its aspirations delegitimised, as has been attempted during the debate. We are British, and we want Northern Ireland to stay within the United Kingdom.

I say to the Prime Minister that we do not and will not consent to the provisions of the protocol, because it damages the integrity of the United Kingdom. He should be in no doubt that what he has done is wrong and that it is wrong for any unionist, so called, to endorse the provisions. It is interesting as well —.

Ms Mallon: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: I will not get an extra minute, so I am sorry. The Member did not give way to me when I asked her.

It is interesting to note that the consent protections that were initially envisaged in the deal have been removed. At whose behest were the consent protections, which meant that the Assembly would have had a direct say on the operation of the protocol, removed? Alliance, Sinn Féin and the SDLP. The principle of dual consent applies only when it runs contrary to unionist positions but not in other circumstances. People can see the opportunism and the cynicism at the heart of that position.

Mr Nesbitt: I do not intend to rehearse the contributions of speakers, given that there are so many winding-up speeches. I would like to

focus on the impact of the trade and cooperation agreement on the fishing industry, which was decimated over the decades that we were bound by the common fisheries policy. That is why it believed it would be the poster boy for Brexit, quickly and clearly being seen to prosper, having left the European Union.

The industry's reaction is summarised in a briefing document in which the two representative bodies come together in an unprecedented manner as the Fishermen's Federation. I commend the document to the House, not least the asks that it makes of us, particularly on how the £100 million that Boris Johnson has promised for revitalising the UK fishing fleet is distributed. They make the argument that it must not be distributed via the Barnett formula because, if it is, all we will be able to afford is a new boat. It may be a big boat, but it is just a boat. It takes £40 million to modernise a port such as Portavogie. We must think carefully and lobby on that front.

Reading that document, I wondered whether, if the fishermen had known in June 2016 what they know today — that it would take four and a half years to get a deal and that the biggest promise in the deal would be to wait another five and a half years to hold on to the forlorn promise that we would finally take back control of our waters — they would have voted to leave. Not when the document states:

"The NI fishing industry had been led to believe it would be much better off. We are not."

Let us acknowledge their hurt but also listen to their positive asks for making the most of a bad deal.

In 2016, my party published 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU' and brought the framework strategy to the House for a debate. We lost that debate, which I regret because, in this debate, I have not heard one person who is anything other than unhappy with where we are today. What went wrong?

On one level, it went wrong because nobody thought Brexit through. The party to my left simply seemed to think that Brexit was the cure for all our problems, just as their partners in Stormont Castle seem to believe that a united Ireland is the panacea and the holy grail. Neither of them is right. The other issue is that, although Brexit is a long-term strategy, those who are delivering it — the Prime Minister and, sadly, the DUP — are short-term tacticians. On 9 June 2017, the DUP found itself holding the balance of power at Westminster. What was its

price for propping up the Government? It was tactical — £1 billion for public services. It could have been strategic. It could have had locked-in guarantees about the outworkings of Brexit and the implications for Northern Ireland. Today, would you not swap that £1 billion for a better Brexit? Would that not be a better long-term solution for Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: The First Minister has asked me to give way. My response is to quote her words back to her: no.

I did not support Brexit. I never sensed that it would deliver what the Brexiteers promised us. We have not taken back control. We did not leave as one, and we are now a place apart within the United Kingdom.

On 9 August 1974, Richard Nixon resigned as the 37th president of the United States. His tactic to try to excuse away the criminality of Watergate was to go for what he called "plausible deniability". I sense that the DUP is trying the same thing. The First Minister said that her party was consistent in its opposition to the protocol. However, on 2 October 2020, she called it a serious and sensible way forward. I also note that she said that it had been imposed on us. Well, now she knows how the 52% of us who voted Remain feel about Brexit [*Interruption.*] Plausible deniability did not work for Richard Nixon, and it will not work for the DUP [*Interruption.*] I commend amendment No 2.

Mr Speaker: Let us have some order, please. I call John O'Dowd to make his winding-up speech on amendment No 1.

Mr O'Dowd: It has been an interesting debate that, perhaps, could be summed up by Mr Nesbitt's reference to plausible deniability. As I listened to the contributions from the Members on the DUP Benches in particular, I was trying to figure out what exactly they were trying to state, sell or promote. At one stage, the deal was bad; then, it was good but the bad parts of the deal are to blame for the protocol and Brexit really had nothing to do with it. Well, Brexit has everything to do with it, and they own it all. Those who promoted Brexit, those who promised a new beginning after Brexit and sat in farmers' kitchens and told them that they would get rid of all the European red tape, that their profits would soar and that they would be selling meat and other products around the world and there would be fewer regulations own Brexit. They own the fact that those farmers will

be less well off than they were before Brexit. The people who told businesses that they would get rid of red tape and that their products would be sold under free trade deals around the world are responsible for those businesses now being less well off. They own it all.

In 2016, for whatever reason, when the DUP decided to support Brexit, it made a fundamental economic and political error. Brexit was the backdrop to the collapse of the Assembly later that year. I remember how, in April 2017, as negotiations were going on in Stormont Castle to restore the Assembly and the Executive — they were at quite an advanced stage, and there was huge potential for agreement — Theresa May called the election. The election took place, and the DUP hooked up with the Tory Party.

I hear a lot from the Benches opposite about consent, about the feelings of unionism and about Britishness. I recognise Christopher Stalford's Britishness. I support and recognise his right to be British, I do not support his position on the Union, but I support his right to be British. However, when the DUP decided to hook up and take power with the Tories, did it consider the impact that that would have on nationalism and republicanism? I do not think that it did. When the DUP decided to support Brexit and become advocates of a hard Brexit, did it ever consider what impact that would have on nationalism and republicanism on the island of Ireland? I do not think that it did.

Dr Archibald: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: A quick one, yes.

Dr Archibald: I am sure the Member will agree that it is quite interesting to listen to the utterances about consent. I am sure the DUP and UUP Members all know full well that parallel consent applies to certain Assembly procedures. It is laid out in the Good Friday Agreement. It is not to do with constitutional issues that will be decided by a simple majority.

2.15 pm

Mr O'Dowd: They know those positions full well.

The then First Minister and deputy First Minister attended the Joint Ministerial Council on European Negotiations that was due to take place on a Thursday. On the Tuesday, Teresa May made her famous speech and said that:

"We are leaving the single market ... [and] the Customs Union".

The DUP immediately supported that. Did the DUP take into consideration the impact on nationalism and republicanism on the island of Ireland? No, they did not. At no stage of this process have the current leaders of political unionism considered any of that. However, here is the lesson: when the DUP had its deal with the Tories, they were told that the Tories would sell them out, and the Tories did sell them out. The Tories sold them out because they did not see the DUP as co-equals; they did not see them as fellow Conservatives and Unionists. They, perhaps, saw them as Ulster men and Ulster women or Irish people, but they certainly did not see them as their co-equals.

The flaw in the Unionist strategy for this entire statelet has been that they have not seen their neighbours and political allies in the Chamber and political partners in the Executive as co-equals. When you do not see someone as a co-equal, you treat them as a lesser partner. You do not treat them with respect.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have time to give way to you.

You do not treat them with respect.

Mr Storey: You do not murder them either.

Mr O'Dowd: The strategy of political unionism over the 100 years that this state has existed has failed you.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr O'Dowd: I appeal to the Members opposite to start treating others with respect, and maybe we will find a strategy that works for us all.

Mr Storey: You have had 15 years to do that.

Mr Speaker: Order, Mr Storey.

I call the deputy First Minister to conclude, and she has 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech on the motion.

Mr Storey: *[Inaudible.]*

Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister): I want to offer my comments —.

Mr Speaker: Sorry, deputy First Minister. Mr Storey, I do not want to have to ask or rebuke you again. You spoke for a while this afternoon and everybody gave you respect during your entire contribution. Please offer the same respect. Thank you.

Mrs O'Neill: I want to speak with two hats, first as deputy First Minister and then as vice president of Sinn Féin.

It is evident that there are widespread differences across the House on the decision to leave the EU. However, there is agreement that it was in no one's interest to leave the transition period at 11.00 pm on 31 December without having a deal in place. The Executive have been unified in their commitment to secure the best possible outcome for our communities, businesses and citizens. It is clear that an outcome under which we would have been required to trade under WTO terms would have been disastrous for our economy, particularly for the agri-food industry. Many Members referred to the real-time implications for that industry.

The conclusion of the negotiations and this agreement marks the end of one phase, but it certainly opens up the beginning of another. Since the referendum result in June 2016, this has been a particularly difficult road to travel. Whether or not you agree with the decision to leave the EU, it is now our responsibility as elected representatives to work together to ensure that the withdrawal agreement, including the protocol and the future relationship agreement, are implemented in a manner that protects our citizens, businesses and economy.

Dealing with the challenges posed by the implementation of this agreement and the protocol is one area where citizens will look to us to work together for the good of everyone. Therefore, as we move forward it is essential that we are represented appropriately and proportionately in the governance structures of both agreements if the continued interaction between the agreement and the protocol are to be taken into account.

As many Members acknowledged in the course of the debate, the lateness of both this agreement and the Joint Committee decisions on the protocol presents an enormous challenge for our businesses and society to know exactly what they need to be prepared for. The development of clear guidance and communications will be vital in the next period to ensure that any impact is minimised.

It is clear that the agreement is complex, and implementation will be a challenge and probably an evolving process. The agreement will be implemented and will operate alongside the protocol. There will be interactions between them that will need to be monitored carefully to ensure that there are no unintended consequences.

We want to be equally clear now as the then deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, and the First Minister were when they set out in their 2016 letter to the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, that it is critical to our economy that our businesses are able to retain their competitiveness, North/South and east-west. It is critical that they do not incur additional costs that could lead to the relocation of businesses or increased costs for consumers here. The agreement does not mark the end of our representations on the issue but recognises that this will be a continuing priority for the Executive in the weeks, months and years to come.

Many Members have today recognised the importance of EU funds to our economy and the peace process. The Executive Office will work closely with the Finance Minister to ensure that the British Government are fully aware of the importance of replacing those funds and to ensure that the new shared prosperity fund will provide support to the many excellent projects that have benefited our communities.

Members picked up on a number of points that require clarity. For example, a number of Members referred to roaming charges, and it is correct to say that surcharge-free roaming, when travelling to EU and EEA countries, will no longer be guaranteed from 1 January, but we understand that mobile operators have stated that they have no current plans to change their mobile roaming policies, and we look very much to them in the time ahead on that.

Members rightly raised concerns about access to labour. Declan McAleer referred to the fact that this will cause huge challenges for many industries, not least the agri-food industry. It is really disappointing to say that our needs have not been reflected in the Government's immigration policy. However, we will continue to press on those issues.

SPS was raised. Again, it is really disappointing that there was not a higher level of aspiration to achieve a better deal on SPS in the negotiations. It is important therefore that we continue to engage through the governance structures.

Parcels were mentioned. Over recent days, many people have experienced the fact that they cannot get parcels delivered. That will have implications for small businesses that rely on that service as a way to secure goods and services.

These are all huge issues that we have raised and will continue to raise. All those things demonstrate that we are at a turning point, with much more work to be done.

I want to make some remarks as vice president of Sinn Féin. The first thing to say is that, for over four years, we have, regrettably, been exposed to the worst kind of toxic political discourse from Westminster and a Tory-inspired Brexit. The Tories have no mandate and no regard for the interests of the people here; the people that we all represent in the Chamber. There is no good Brexit for the people of the island of Ireland from whatever tradition or culture they may come. Brexit has caused huge division, instability, uncertainty and fear. It has stretched British-Irish relations after almost two decades of trying to renew that relationship between our two islands. For those of us who are opposed to Brexit, it has threatened those rights and entitlements that, as EU citizens, we benefit from, enjoy and, in many ways, have probably taken for granted.

However, many, throughout the course of the debacle, have seen the enormous political and practical benefits that the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) brought, in helping to safeguard citizens, businesses and society here from what would have been a much more catastrophic situation than the one that we find ourselves in today. The 27 member states that make up the EU, along with the United States Congress, recognised the value and success of the Good Friday Agreement. Importantly, they recognised that our special and unique circumstances required a bespoke solution. They recognised that, prior to the Good Friday Agreement, security checkpoints existed on the border between the North and South of Ireland. They recognised that the British Army military installations that had been built and reinforced —

Mr Beattie: Will the Member give way?

Mrs O'Neill: I will finish my point. They recognised that the British Army military installations that had been built and reinforced from the 1970s onwards were symbols of division and symbols of conflict. They recognised that the common travel area, full EU membership and the peace process combined meant that, 22 years ago, customs posts and

immigration checkpoints on the Irish border were demolished. They also recognised that people's daily life in the border region had been transformed and that the invisible border on the island of Ireland had become the greatest symbol of peace. Thankfully, our international allies recognised that any reversal of any of that would have had hugely adverse economic, social, political and security impacts on people in the border communities and across the island as a whole.

The pro-Remain parties in the Assembly, with others, have successfully defended the interests of citizens, workers, businesses and civic society by working together to protect peace, jobs, economic stability and people's livelihoods. That is reflected in the Irish protocol. It is the solution to avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland. It protects the all-Ireland economy and the GFA, in all of its parts, gives us access to the EU single market and the British internal market, and keeps the North aligned to the EU on regulations and standards. The protocol is secured, and will be implemented in full and operational from 1 January 2021. Nobody from any political quarter wanted us to crash out of the EU after the transition period ends tomorrow, with no terms of departure or future relationship with the EU, and over a cliff edge, coupled with the impacts of COVID. Therefore, although the fine detail of the trade and cooperation agreement has to be carefully analysed, there will be relief that a trade deal has been agreed, that special arrangements have been secured for the island of Ireland, as encapsulated in the Irish protocol, and that that will be implemented in full.

There is also a level of certainty for businesses, but there remains much more work to be done in the weeks and months ahead by the British Government on trader support. In the immediate term, we need to ensure that there is full support for those sectors that will struggle, despite today's deal, and we need to look at how the North's voice can be heard at an EU level in the coming years. I am very open to discussing with others in the Chamber the ways in which that could be facilitated, including through observer status for the Assembly within the European Union.

Under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, there is an inherent right, for those born on this island, to Irish citizenship, and, by virtue of that right, to citizenship of the European Union. Citizens who enjoy that right must be afforded the benefit of their citizenship. We know that at least 700,000 people born in the North hold an Irish passport and that about 200,000 of those made their first application after the Brexit

referendum. I welcome, therefore, the Irish Government's announcement that they will fund students from the North, regardless of what passport they hold, to participate in the hugely popular and successful ERASMUS programme. I had pressed the Government on that, as well as on funding the European health insurance card scheme, which I expect to be facilitated. That practical cooperation and collaboration on a North/South basis must continue and be strengthened.

To conclude, this is not the end of the road; it is a turning point. It is a defining moment in the history of Ireland. The future belongs to us all. I have described it as the decade of opportunity, because the decisions that we take now will determine the future of another generation. I want to see, and will work every day to see, all of Ireland, once again, back within the European Union.

Mr Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment Nos 2, 3 or 4.

Members are aware of the protocols for proxy voting, under Standing Order 112. I remind Members to ensure that social distancing continues to be observed while the Division is taking place. Please be patient at all times and follow the instructions of the Lobby Clerks.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 26; Noes 38.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Brogan, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Mr Kearney, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Rogan, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin.

Tellers for the Ayes: Dr Archibald and Mr McAleer

NOES

Dr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr

Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Stalford, Mr Stewart, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Givan and Mr Stalford.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mr Blair, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Carroll, Mr Catney, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Ms Hunter, Mrs D Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Muir, Mr O'Toole, Miss Woods

Question accordingly negated.

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

Mr Speaker: I have been advised by the parties that, in accordance with Standing Order 1(3), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 38; Noes 49.

AYES

Dr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Stalford, Mr Stewart, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Dr Aiken and Mr Givan

NOES

Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mr Blair, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Ms Brogan, Mr Carroll, Mr Catney, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Ms Hunter, Mr Kearney, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Muir, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr O'Toole, Ms Rogan, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin, Miss Woods.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McAleer and Ms McLaughlin

Question accordingly negated.

Mr Speaker: We will pause for one moment to ensure that all Members are back in the Chamber.

Question put, That amendment No 3 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 37; Noes 49.

AYES

Dr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Stalford, Mr Stewart, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Dr Aiken and Mr Givan

NOES

Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mr Blair, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Ms Brogan, Mr Carroll, Mr Catney, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Ms Hunter, Mr Kearney, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Muir, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr O'Toole, Ms Rogan, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin, Miss Woods.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McAleer and Ms McLaughlin

Question accordingly negated.

Mr Speaker: We will pause for a moment allow Members to come back to the Chamber.

Do we have Tellers? Sorry, I am ahead of myself [*Laughter.*]

Question put, That amendment No 4 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 49; Noes 38.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mr Blair, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Ms Brogan, Mr Carroll, Mr Catney, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Ms Hunter, Mr Kearney, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Muir, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr O'Toole, Ms Rogan, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin, Miss Woods.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms McLaughlin and Mr Muir

NOES

Dr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Stalford, Mr Stewart, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Dr Aiken and Mr Givan

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ms Mallon: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Northern Ireland Assembly has declined again to give consent to Brexit and to the Tory Government's inferior trade deal. Will you now write to the Commons' Speaker and the Prime Minister to convey immediately the view of the Assembly?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for that point of order. It was not really a point of order as such. However, that will be done. It is my intention to convey the results of today's sitting to the relevant authorities.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 47; Noes 38.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Blair, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Ms Brogan, Mr Carroll, Mr Catney, Mr Dickson,

Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Ms Hunter, Mr Kearney, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Muir, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr O'Toole, Ms Rogan, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms McLaughlin and Mr Muir

NOES

Dr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Stafford, Mr Stewart, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Dr Aiken and Mr Givan

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly takes note of the trade and cooperation agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union; rejects Brexit, in line with the democratically expressed view of the people of Northern Ireland; notes that this deal will mean new barriers to trade and other negative consequences for Northern Ireland's economy and society; and calls for the implementation of the protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, positive efforts to make arrangements work for all the people of Northern Ireland, and for this Assembly to decline legislative consent to the British Government to impose the European Union (Future Relationship) Bill, their inferior trade deal and their Brexit against the will of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Before we move to the final item on the Order Paper, I want to thank all the members of staff who have been working over the past number of days to prepare for today's proceedings, in particular the staff in the Business Office and the Speaker's Office who have been doing a lot of the unseen work, liaising with the various parties and Members tabling the motion and amendments. I want to

say a special thank you to all the staff who helped to facilitate the debate today, especially as they were on leave. We tried to promise staff before Christmas that they would be able to take their leave, so I will just leave that thought with you.

I thank all the Members for their contributions today. It was a healthy and mature debate that reflects on them very well., not only because of the complexity of the issues being debated, but also the manner in which they navigated through the difficulties of building public confidence.

I remind Members that the Business Committee has agreed that the Assembly should meet in plenary session tomorrow, and the sitting will commence at 11.00 am.

Adjourned at 3.52 pm.

Suggested amendments or corrections that arrive no later than two weeks after the publication of each report will be considered by the Editor of Debates.

They should be sent to:

✉ **Editor of Debates, Room 248, Parliament Buildings, BELFAST BT4 3XX**

☎ **028 9052 1135**

✉ **simon.burrowes@niassembly.gov.uk**

Hansard reports can be made available in a range of alternative formats, including large print, Braille etc. For more information, please contact:

✉ **Hansard Admin Unit, Room 251, Parliament Buildings, BELFAST BT4 3XX**

☎ **028 9052 1463**

✉ **hansard@niassembly.gov.uk**

The Official Report (Hansard) is licensed under the Open Northern Ireland Assembly Licence, which can be accessed here: [Open Data Licence](#)

[To receive an alert each time an updated plenary report is published, you can follow @NIAHansard on Twitter](#)