

Canada should demand Britain respect Good Friday Agreement

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By Mary Lou McDonald

While both Ireland and the world struggle to deal with the impact of COVID-19, a secondary drama with long-lasting implications is playing out between Britain and the EU. In the pursuit of leverage in Brexit negotiations, the British government is prepared to use Ireland — and the Good Friday Agreement — as collateral damage in a game of brinkmanship.

Last week, I wrote to the leaders of federal parties in Canada seeking support to protect the Good Friday Agreement and prevent a hard border being imposed on the island of Ireland.

The people of the North of Ireland voted against Brexit, recognizing its threat to progress and stability. But Westminster ignored the will of these voters, imposed Brexit and threatened a hard border across Ireland.

The EU and Westminster agonizingly negotiated a legally binding Withdrawal Agreement that prevented the return of a hard border.

Both sides moved on to trade deal negotiations. The EU and the British government must strike a deal soon, or the trading relationship will default to World Trade Organization's rules and tariffs.

The threat of a hard border has reemerged.

In September, the British government unveiled the Internal Market Bill. They acknowledge this legislation would breach the Withdrawal Agreement, and so break international law. The British government's approach with this bill threatens to undermine the Good Friday Agreement.

There was widespread condemnation of the legislation from Ireland and the wider international community.

The Internal Market Bill is a unilateral move by the British government, without consultation or support from the majority of parties in the North or the Irish government.

The move was an act of bad faith in the negotiations with the EU; basically, an ultimatum of “you can agree to want what we want, or we will do it regardless.”

The North of Ireland’s parliament opposes the British government’s approach, in conjunction with the Irish government and the EU.

In a sign of unprecedented solidarity, the 27 EU member states and the U.S. Congress have made clear declarations: there will be no trade agreement if the British government continues with their course of action and the Good Friday Agreement is undermined.

I now ask Canada to join with the EU and U.S. Congress, and stand in solidarity with Ireland in the need to respect our peace agreements.