

Note of the First Meeting of the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA)

Brussels 12-13 May

1. The Convener and Deputy Convener attended the first meeting of the PPA as observers.

UK Government

2. Michael Ellis, Minister for the Cabinet Office addressed the Assembly on the state of play within the Partnership Council on behalf of the UK Government.¹

Ukraine

3. The Minister emphasised the close working relationship between the UK Government and the EU in taking action in support of Ukraine and in agreeing punitive sanctions against Moscow. This includes –
 - six waves of punitive sanctions against the Russian economy, cutting off funding for its war effort;
 - military, humanitarian and economic assistance for Ukraine; and
 - measures to reduce our reliance on Russian hydrocarbons.
4. The Minister noted that while these are significant steps, the UK and EU must be prepared to go further.

Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA)

5. The Minister noted that the governance of the TCA is running smoothly and that through the Partnership Council and the Specialised Committees the EU and the UKG have ensured effective implementation of the agreement including technical discussions on matters ranging from intellectual property to road transport.
6. However, the Minister also stated that the UK Government is deeply disappointed that the EU countries continue to delay formalising the UK's participation in Horizon Europe (and Copernicus, Euratom Research and Training). The UK Government's view is that there is no practical reason for the delay and the EU is not fulfilling its commitments in this regard that they made when the TCA was agreed. They continue to press the EU to resolve this issue.

Withdrawal Agreement

¹ [Address to the Inaugural UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/address-to-the-inaugural-uk-eu-parliamentary-partnership-assembly)

7. The Minister noted that while the UK and EU have worked closely together on implementing the Withdrawal Agreement and while there have been positive examples of good cooperation he also identified concerns in relation to both citizens rights and the Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol.
8. On citizens' rights the Minister stated that while cooperation with the EU has been constructive, the UK continues to hold some concerns. Outstanding issues include ongoing reports of UK nationals facing difficulties accessing their rights in declaratory Member States, non-compliant resident processes, insufficient safeguards and a lack of detail on appeals processes. The UK Government has called on the EU to take proactive and immediate action to resolve those issues.
9. On the Protocol, the Minister stated that it is not working and has created a two tier system where people in Northern Ireland are not treated the same way as everyone else in the UK. He told the PPA that the UK Government has never actually proposed scrapping the Protocol and they do not intend to but they do need to see significant changes to it.
10. He also told the PPA that the UK Government's clear view is that the EU proposals would take us backwards and that it is hugely disappointing that the EU have confirmed that they will never change their mandate, and because of that, the situation is now very serious.

European Commission

11. Vice President Sefcovic addressed the Assembly on the state of play within the Partnership Council on behalf of the European Commission.² He began by emphasising the EU and the UK are partners with shared values and must continue working together to tackle global challenges, not least Russia's aggression against Ukraine. He stated that the EU's objective is to have a stable relationship with the UK based on international agreements.

Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol

12. The Vice President stated that given the current position of the UK government on the Protocol, this is not where he would like relations to be. He pointed out that agreement was first reached on the UK's withdrawal from the EU including the Protocol and then agreement was reached on the future partnership between the EU and the UK (Trade and Co-operation Agreement).
13. He emphasised there could be no future partnership without an orderly withdrawal and that the two agreements were ratified by both the European and UK Parliaments. He also stated that the Protocol is the only solution that "squares the circle" between Brexit and the situation on the

² [Remarks by Vice President Šefčovič \(europa.eu\)](#)

island of Ireland, and its implementation is a priority and precondition for a constructive bilateral relationship.

14. To move forward he told the PPA that the EU and UK must work together to address practical problems, recognising that the Protocol has not been without challenges. He added that the EU has always sought practical and durable solutions. For example, it has proposed an express lane for good moving from GB to NI for goods that will be consumed there.
15. The Vice President also stated that to move forward there needed to be political will to make the Protocol work. He told the PPA that the UK has simply not taken the opportunity to explore fully with the EU the potential of the flexibilities the Commission has presented.
16. The EU's position is that it will not renegotiate the Protocol and unilateral action to disapply it is not the way forward. The Vice President stated that only joint durable solutions will answer the needs of people and businesses in NI, and the Commission is committed to working in this vein.

Trade and Co-Operation Agreement

17. The Vice President highlighted the EU's Domestic Advisory Group, which consists of NGOs, business and employers' organisations, and trade unions from across the EU which has already met three times to discuss the implementation of the agreement.
18. He also noted that the Partnership Council has now adopted the operational guidelines for the Civil Society Forum and that its first meeting is due to take place in June or early July, bringing together different civil society actors from across the EU and UK.
19. With regards to the substance of the TCA he stated that fisheries and more generally the level playing field provisions have required particular attention.

Statement by the PPA Co-Chairs

20. The PPA co-chairs, Ms Nathalie Loiseau and Sir Oliver Heald published a joint statement following the plenary session.³ They stated that the PPA had an opportunity to exchange views with the European Commission and the UK Government on the state of play within the Partnership Council.
21. The PPA also considered the importance of building a new multi-dimensional EU-UK relationship, as well as how to strengthen our cooperation on energy, in the context of high energy prices and the war in Ukraine.

³ [1st EU-UK Joint Statement - 13 May 2022.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

22. EU-UK cooperation in relation to the war in Ukraine was also discussed and the joint statement expressed complete support and solidarity with the people and government of Ukraine and condemned in the strongest possible terms the unprovoked and unjustifiable Russian assault. The joint statement also included support for the strong sanctions imposed against Putin's regime and welcomed the decisive action undertaken by the EU and the United Kingdom, together with our allies, in support of Ukraine and its people.

Rules of Procedure

23. The PPA agreed its rules of procedure. This includes Rule 8 which allows that elected representatives from other national and regional Parliaments and assemblies may be invited to attend the meetings of the PPA in an observer capacity. Rule 5 states that there shall be a presumption that the meetings of the PPA shall be held in public and papers will be shared with all those attending.

Future Work

24. PPA members discussed priorities for future work. Issues raised included

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- More frequent and thematic meetings, including the establishment of working groups prior to the next plenary;
- Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly should be involved in any working group on the Protocol;
- The role of the PPA should include seeking to influence decisions of the PPA;
- The PPA should prioritise consideration of 5 to 10 actionable proposals.

25. Potential areas of work included -

- Horizon Europe;
- Defence co-operation;
- Energy policy;
- Co-operation on policing;
- Foreign affairs;

- Culture/musicians;
- Citizens' rights.

Committee clerks
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