

Northern Ireland exports to Republic jump one third as PM attempts to resolve Protocol standoff

As negotiations around the Protocol rumble on, Northern Ireland is finding a thirsty buyer from its nearest neighbour in the Republic which increased its imports from the region by over £1 billion last year.

Imports to the Republic from Northern Ireland climbed by 32% to £4.8 billion in 2022, a jump from £3.6 billion in the previous year, according to Dublin's Central Statistics Office.

The data came as Prime Minister Rishi Sunak visited Belfast to meet with Stormont leaders to hammer out a deal on the protocol, raising expectations that a resolution could emerge in the coming weeks. The DUP has refused to form an Executive following last spring's elections in protest against the arrangement with Europe which it feels annexes Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK.

The party was also at odds with the current arrangement where the European Court of Justice to have oversight of Northern Ireland trade in the future.

Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, the leader of the DUP, asked about the prospect of continued European Court of Justice oversight, said he wants Northern Ireland companies to abide by UK rules when trading within the UK market.

"When we trade within the UK then we should follow UK standards and UK rules, that is our clear position," he said. "When we're trading with the European Union, then of course

the products that we make, the goods that we want to sell to the European Union have to meet EU standards, that's the same across the whole of the United Kingdom.

“So, we are looking for an outcome that addresses the issue of where do we stand in relation to our ability to trade within the United Kingdom and its internal market, and that is, in essence, what we need to get as an outcome from this negotiation.”

In the meantime, the protocol doesn't appear to have deterred trade between Great Britain and the Republic.

Imports climbed to £21 billion in 2022 from £13.68 billion in 2021 despite an increase in red tape for both importers to the Republic and exporters from GB to the Republic.