

EU suggests Northern Ireland checks could be cut to ‘a couple lorries a day’

The EU's chief negotiator on Brexit has suggested that physical checks on goods travelling across the Irish Sea could be cut to a “couple of lorries a day”.

[Maros Sefcovic](#) said the union stands ready to work in a “open and constructive way” with [Britain](#) following a statement from the new [Prime Minister](#) on the prospect of a negotiated settlement on the [Northern Ireland](#) Protocol.

It comes as the UK and EU have been embroiled in a row over Britain's proposals to override parts of the controversial post-Brexit treaty, as it seeks to reduce trade barriers with the region.

On Wednesday, [Liz Truss](#) said her preference is for a negotiated solution to the dispute.

But she said such a resolution would have to deliver “all of the things we set out” in the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, which is currently making its way through Parliament.

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The legislation would allow ministers to unilaterally scrap the arrangements the UK signed up to as part of the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement.

In an interview with the Financial Times, Mr Sefcovic said he was “encouraged” by Ms Truss’s recent remarks.

“We stand ready to work in an open and constructive and intensive way,” he said.

He argued that the trade border would be “invisible” under the EU’s plans, with goods processed “remotely” while making their way to Northern Ireland, as long as the UK provides real-time data on their movements.

Mr Sefcovic suggested physical checks would typically only be made for a “couple of lorries a day”, when “there is reasonable suspicion of ... illegal trade smuggling, illegal drugs or dangerous toys or poisoned food”.

The treaty is designed to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland after Brexit.

But it has proved deeply unpopular with unionists because it has introduced new trade barriers in the Irish Sea.

It has sparked a powersharing crisis at Stormont, with the DUP withdrawing from the Executive in protest.

Irish Taoiseach Micheal Martin said last week that a “pathway” to resolving the issues with the arrangement can be found “if there is a will”, and that his Government will work with Britain and the EU “to do the practical and sensible thing”.

He said a strong partnership between the two Governments is “vital” to underpin the Good Friday Agreement and support peace and prosperity on the islands.