

May caves in to Ireland, but now the battle moves to th...

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Reports have it that Theresa May has conceded [all that Ireland demanded](#) of her this morning. [According to the Guardian](#):

According to sources, MEPs were told by the chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, that Theresa May had conceded after days of intense talks that the province would be treated as a special case with “continued regulatory alignment” between the north and south of the island after Brexit.

A draft of the text of a 15-page joint agreement between the European commission and the British government is said to include a commitment in paragraph 48 that “in the absence of agreed solutions the UK will ensure that there continues to be continued regulatory alignment” with the internal market and customs union.

Please don't get me wrong: I am delighted if that is the case. But let's be under no illusions here. May has conceded to those she has to appease in the next day or two to get trade talks started, but there's no way that this issue is resolved. The issues her concession raises are enormous. These are my tweets in response to the news:

Banter apart, these are the issues:

- * Unless this is an agreement for the whole of the UK then we now have internal borders in this country;
- * I think the Scots are bound to ask for the same deal now: why wouldn't they?
- * And I am sure the City will.
- * What is more, I am up for putting money into Jolyon Maugham's Good Law Project to fund a human right's application to say I want the deal Northern Ireland is getting.

And then there is the politics:

- * The DUP will go mad when they appreciate that this has to mean internal borders with Northern Ireland if the rest of the UK does not have alignment;

- * The Tory right wing will go ballistic because this concedes the end of the Union, in effect;
- * And the business lobby will be saying they're either upping sticks for Northern Ireland now, or will be demanding the same deal for the rest of the UK.

All of which suggests, as I said this morning, that May has solved nothing at all. She's just won a tiny bit more time.

But in that case Labour has also to get nearer to the point where it says where it stands. It has to say:

- * Does it support this deal?
- * If so, where does it think the border is?
- * Or will it stick with the customs union and single market?
- * And if so will it vote for or against this agreement, and why?

As I previously predicted, Ireland is now where the Union, with with Europe and within the UK, can be saved or broken. Nothing has changed. Thats still true. But the fault lines are now more stark than ever and the battle to come more obvious.

And there is still a solution, of course: we could go the Norwegian route. Candidly almost nothing else works now. But I can't see May delivering it without Labour support, and is that what they want to do? And if so, why?