



27.11.2024

MISSION REPORT

following the INTA delegation to London, the United Kingdom, from 28 to 30 October 2024

Committee on International Trade

Members of the mission:

Bernd Lange	(S&D) (Leader of the mission, INTA Chair)
Nina Carberry	(EPP) (INTA Standing rapporteur for the UK)
Jörgen Warborn	(EPP)
Brando Benifei	(S&D)
Pierre Pimpie	(PflE)
Barry Cowen	(Renew)
Sandro Gozi	(Renew) (Chair of the Delegation to the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly)

Introduction

The Committee on International Trade (INTA), as the committee responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the Union's common commercial policy and its external economic relations, has been following and scrutinising the evolving EU-UK trade relationships very closely since the start of the 'Brexit' process, under the EU-UK Withdrawal agreement, in particular the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and more recently the Windsor Framework agreed in 2023, and afterwards under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation agreement (TCA). Moreover, the United Kingdom (UK) remains one of the EU's most important trading partners.

Together with the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), INTA was responsible for the joint implementation report on the EU-UK TCA, adopted by Parliament in November 2023. That report highlighted in particular: *"Parliament's commitment to closely monitor the implementation of the TCA"* and called *"for Parliament's participation in any future review procedure for the agreements"*.

INTA also adopted an opinion to the first Parliament report (by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)) on the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement of March 2023, in particular on the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. In its resolution, Parliament reaffirmed *"its commitment to closely monitoring the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, in particular in relation to citizens' rights and the Protocol"*.

During the previous legislative term, a delegation of INTA Members visited Belfast, Northern Ireland, twice, in 2022 and 2023. The delegation met Northern Ireland Assembly political parties' representatives as well as civil society and business representatives to exchange views and gather information regarding the implementation of the Protocol. In 2023, the delegation also visited Dublin, Ireland, and held meetings with representatives from the Irish authorities and a panel of Irish business representatives to discuss similar issues.

The INTA visit to Northern Ireland in 2022 was the first official EP Committee ad hoc delegation to Northern Ireland and to the UK, since the UK's withdrawal from the Union on 31 January 2020.

Timing wise the INTA visit to London from 28-30 October 2024 was ideal as it took place just a few weeks after the beginning of the 10th Parliamentary legislative term and the announcement by the UK Prime Minister STARMER of a 'reset' of UK-EU relations and his meeting with Commission President VON DER LEYEN on 2 October 2024 in Brussels with the announcement of a EU-UK summit in 2025.

Purpose of the mission/general context

The purpose of the visit was to exchange views and gather information, through direct engagement with senior UK government officials, UK parliamentarians, in particular Select Committees' Chairs, and other stakeholders such as business representatives and trade experts, on global trade issues and challenges, as well as on the implementation of trade aspects of both the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, in particular the Windsor Framework, and the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

The UK and the EU are faced with the same challenges at global level regarding international trade. The increased geopolitical tensions have brought both competitiveness and economic security to the forefront, as well as the issue of the impact on global supply chains.

In addition, the democratic consent vote of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly on the continuation of the application of major provisions of the Windsor Framework is due to take place in December 2024.

Finally, the first review of the TCA is due in 2026.

Meetings

As regards the UK Government, the Members met with Nick THOMAS-SYMONDS, Paymaster General and Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations, and Hilary BENN, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

In the House of Commons, the Members met with Simon HOARE, Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and Liam BYRNE, Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, as well as the members of the Committee.

In the House of Lords, the delegation met with Lord JAY, former Chair of the former Windsor Framework Subcommittee, and Baroness Ritchie and Lord Empey, former members of the Subcommittee. The delegation also held a meeting with Lord RICKETTS, Chair of the European Affairs Committee, as well as the members of the Committee.

Furthermore, the Members had a dedicated meeting with several Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland.

The Members met some leading UK experts in trade and EU-UK relations, the chair and vice-chairs of the UK Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) as well as EU business representatives from the Chambers of commerce.

Members were interested in hearing directly from UK parliamentarians and officials about the intentions and agenda of the UK government regarding future EU-UK relations as well as the current trade issues at global level, considering, at the time of the visit, the upcoming presidential election in the United States.

Similarly, the delegation was also keen to listen to business representatives to learn more about EU-UK trade flows, the frictions that companies, in particular SMEs, are facing, including regarding workers' mobility, and about the possible concrete measures which could be envisaged to improve the situation.

Regarding Northern Ireland, Members wanted to find out how the matters on the ground had developed since the last delegation visit in 2023, considering, in particular, the ongoing implementation of the Windsor Framework, the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive, as well as the political situation with the upcoming democratic consent vote in the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly.

On the whole, the discussions demonstrated the UK willingness to improve and deepen EU-

UK relations, in a practical and effective manner, and explore the possibilities of new ways of cooperation in the near future. Despite what seemed to be some limitations on the side of the UK, some stakeholders still saw the potential for improvements as regards Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures regarding trade in goods with a possible veterinary agreement, the mutual recognition of professional qualifications and standards, touring artists, youth mobility, and for more cooperation on climate change policies as well as regulatory and global trade issues.

As regards Northern Ireland, UK stakeholders were optimistic that the consent vote would pass with a simple majority but, unfortunately, without cross community support. They made a positive assessment of the Windsor Framework despite a persistent democratic deficit in Northern Ireland, disappointing figures on foreign investment and some remaining issues regarding East-West movement of goods, the dispatch of parcels, the supply of veterinary medicines and the labelling of products only destined for Northern Ireland, which needed to be addressed by both parties in a pragmatic and constructive way, and even urgently with regard to the supply of veterinary medicines.

Conclusions and follow up

This very timely and insightful visit enabled the Members of the INTA Committee to have a first-hand exchange and a better understanding of the UK views regarding EU-UK trade and economic relations, the implementation of EU-UK Agreements, including the Windsor Framework, as well as global trade issues and challenges both the EU and the UK are facing.

The meetings took place in a positive atmosphere with useful first-hand insights and open and fruitful interaction with all interlocutors. The visit enabled both sides to gather information on the state of play of current and future EU-UK relations and hear the views from a wide range of UK stakeholders involved in EU-UK relations and in Northern Ireland, at the highest level and from various political backgrounds.

INTA and its dedicated Monitoring Group on the UK will continue monitoring closely the implementation of the TCA and the Windsor Framework as well as the latest developments in EU-UK trade relations, including EU-UK co-operation at global level.

The findings of this visit will feed into the Committee's work, in particular in the upcoming joint implementation report on the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, together with the AFET Committee.

The reporting back from the delegation took place during the INTA Committee meeting of 18 November 2024.

Annex: Final programme
 Press Release

ANNEX

<p style="text-align: center;">Programme INTA ad hoc delegation to London (United Kingdom) 28 OCTOBER - 30 OCTOBER 2024</p>
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Monday 28 October 2024 (joint programme INTA-AFET-SEDE)

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| 13.30-14.30 | Welcome and introductory briefing by the Head of the European Parliament Liaison Office (EPLO) in the UK, Susanne Oberhauser |
| 14.30-15.45 | Briefing by the EU Ambassador to the UK, Pedro Serrano |
| 16.00-17.30 | Meeting with EU Member States' Ambassadors |
| 18.00-19.30 | Reception offered by the European Parliament Liaison Office in the UK on the occasion of the visit of the three Delegations |

Tuesday 29 October 2024

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| 9.15-10.00 | Meeting with Nick Thomas-Symonds, Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations, Cabinet Office |
| 11.00-11.30 | Meeting with Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland |
| 12.00-13.00 | Meeting with Simon Hoare, House of Commons, Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee |
| 14.15-15.00 | Meeting with Liam Byrne, House of Commons, Chair of the Business and Trade Committee |
| 16.00-17.00 | Informal meeting in the House of Lords with Members of the European Affairs Committee |
| 17.00-17.45 | House of Lords, meeting with Lord Jay, former Chair of the former Windsor Framework Subcommittee, Baroness Ritchie (Labour, former SDLP) and Lord Empey (UUP), former Members |
| 17.45-18.30 | House of Lords, meeting with the Chair, Lord Ricketts, and the Members of the European Affairs Committee |

Wednesday 30 October 2024

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| 8.00-9.00 | INTA, AFET and SEDE Chairs: press breakfast |
| 9.15-10.15 | Meeting with Northern Ireland MPs or parties representatives |
| 10.30-11.30 | Meeting with Trade Think Tanks experts |
| 11.45-13.00 | Meeting with the UK Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) Chair, Vice-Chairs and members |
| 13.15-15.00 | Meeting with EU business - Chambers of commerce of Member States |

Trade MEPs travel to London amid talk of ‘strengthened cooperation’ Press Releases

INTA

24-10-2024 - 13:20

A delegation of six MEPs from the Trade Committee, along with the Chair of the Delegation to the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly, will travel to London from 28 to 30 October.

The delegation’s aim is to meet with representatives of the UK government, UK parliamentarians, EU businesses and civil society to gain insight into the implementation of the trade provisions of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), which is scheduled for review in 2026. MEPs are also keen to hear from businesses, civil society, and political parties regarding the implementation of the Windsor Framework, designed to address challenges faced by citizens and businesses in Northern Ireland.

This visit takes place against the backdrop of efforts by the new UK government and the European Commission to “strengthen cooperation” in EU-UK relations. Additionally, the Northern Ireland Assembly is set to vote later this year on key provisions of the Windsor Framework, adding urgency to the discussions.

The UK remains a key trading partner for the EU, and the Trade Committee is responsible for overseeing the implementation and monitoring of the EU's common commercial policy and its external economic relations. Since Brexit, MEPs have been following closely the evolving EU-UK trade relationship. This will be the first official visit to the United Kingdom by Parliament’s Committee on International Trade in this new parliamentary term.

The delegation will be led by the Chair of the International Trade Committee (INTA), Bernd Lange (S&D, DE), and will include Nina Carberry (EPP, IE), standing rapporteur for the UK, Jörgen Warborn (EPP, SE), Brando Benifei (S&D, IT), Pierre Pimpie (Pfe, FR), Barry Cowen (Renew, IE), and Sandro Gozi (Renew, FR), Chair of the Delegation to the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly.

Quote

“I am very pleased that our committee's first mission of this new term will be to the UK. Although the UK is no longer part of the EU, we will always maintain a special relationship. I welcome that the new government is seeking a reset in EU-UK relations and look forward to meeting government members to explore how such a reset might look like in practice.

Regarding the Windsor Framework and the TCA, we are keen to see how these arrangements work in practice and welcome the chance to speak with various actors on the ground. As we prepare to review the TCA, these insights will be valuable for our parliamentary work,” Bernd Lange said ahead of the visit.

Background

The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) entered into force May 2021, and together with the Withdrawal Agreement, sets the framework for the EU-UK relationship. The Windsor Framework, reached in 2023, came up with joint solutions on for instance customs, agri-food products, VAT, state aid, and medicines to deal with the effects of Brexit in Northern Ireland. In October 2024, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen met and agreed to identify areas where "strengthened cooperation" would be mutually beneficial. The EU remains the UK's largest trading partner, accounting for 40% of the UK's foreign trade in goods in 2022, while the UK is the EU's third-largest trading partner, representing 9.8% of its trade according to the Commission.