



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

The Northern Ireland Protocol – Making Peace or Waging War?

A text analysis of the DUP & Sinn Féin's framing of the Northern Ireland protocol

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Since Brexit was announced there have been many researchers worrying about what would happen to the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. A protocol created by the EU and the United Kingdom was established to secure peace at the border. Northern Ireland has a turbulent history marked by conflict between the two ideologically opposed groups, nationalists and unionists. This thesis investigates whether the two sides, nationalists and unionists, have major differences regarding the protocol and whether this can lead to a possible return of the ‘troubles’. The study analysis the two sides largest parties and therefore asks the question “Does the Northern Ireland protocol create a new line of division between Sinn Féin and the DUP?”. In order to analyse this, a qualitative text analysis has been used, and the material used are various texts published on the newsfeed from the selected parties. The analysing tool used is based on framing theory. The results of this thesis have found that the two parties opinions contradict each other regarding the protocol. The protocol has been welcomed by Sinn Féin and rejected by the Democratic Unionist Party. Concerning the two groups history, there is a considerable possibility for the emergence of a new line of division between Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party.

Key Words: Northern Ireland Protocol, Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin, Democratic Unionist Party, Framing theory.

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1. Introduction

“But inattention in the case of Northern Ireland, particularly on Brexit, is complacent and dangerous; peace in Northern Ireland remains fragile” (Edward Burke 2016, 4).

47 years of membership in the European Union for the United Kingdom ended on January 31st 2020. Boris Johnson achieved his goal of taking the UK out of the EU, and Brexit was a fact (Anon 2021, 4). Since the two nations, Ireland and the United Kingdom, became members of the EU in the same year, 1973, there was a discussion of the possibility that the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland would disappear or be less important. This would later come to be the truth through that the EU provided a constitutional framework within which the peace process could unfold. Including that the EU shaped the framework of the “Good Friday Agreement” in 1998 which marked the end of “the troubles”- a bloody period in Northern Ireland's history.

When the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU in 2016 the discussion of the many problems and uncertainties by the border arose again. This especially when the actor who had been involved in establishing peace was removed and that Northern Ireland itself voted to stay in the EU (Byrne & Morrow 2016, 31) (Guelke 2017, 49). In order not to risk a resumption of the conflict, the EU once again had a major role in the creation of the Northern Ireland Protocol to secure peace along the border and the integrity of the single market together with the customs union.

Given the history along the border, the impact of a new agreement is therefore interesting to examine. The aim of this essay is to look on how the Northern Ireland Protocol has been received and used by the two main parties in Northern Ireland. By looking at two parties that are historically divided between different groups, this thesis intends to investigate with the help of a text analysis whether the protocol may create a new line of division between the two parties.

1.2 Research problem

The Northern Ireland Protocol did not come into force until January 2021, which means that there is very limited research on the protocol. The research prior to the protocol's

implementation concentrates on how the conflict regarding the border will recur after Brexit. Duparc-Portier & Figus (2021, 1) claims that researchers focus since the implementation of the protocol has been on the impacts of Brexit on the EU and the UK, not Northern Ireland. Their own research focuses on the economic impacts for Northern Ireland. How the protocol has affected the possibility of a recurring conflict between the two groups, the political sphere and especially how the parties' opinions and actions regarding the protocol has not yet been examined. This study will therefore contribute to this research gap.

As a starting point this protocol was designed to tackle a real problem; how to carry out Brexit at the border which has now become an EU border. How can dividing be avoided? Putnam (1988, 460-461) describes a political puzzle where domestic politics and international relations are entangled in each other. It can be seen as a two-level game where international negotiations have two audiences, the other international party and domestic audiences. This essay will be limited to focus on the domestic part of the negotiation, in this case the Northern Ireland protocol. It is a case of how an international agreement can be used and interpreted differently by domestic political actors. Given the history that prevailed between the two sides in Northern Ireland, could the protocol lead to a new conflict? The essay will be limited to an analysis of the two main parties on their respective political side, Sinn Féin on the nationalist side and the DUP on the unionist side.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is to see if the two sides, nationalists and unionists, have contradictions towards the protocol and if this can lead to a possible return of the conflict. The study will achieve this by investigating how the two main political parties in Northern Ireland, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin, view and use the Northern Ireland protocol along with examining what consequences this may create for future cooperation. The research question for this study is therefore: "Does the Northern Ireland protocol create a new line of division between Sinn Féin and the DUP?". Two sub questions will be added to help answer the research question:

- Which aspects of the Northern Ireland protocol do the parties criticize or welcome?
- How do the parties frame the protocol?

1.4 Disposition

After this introduction follows a chapter containing previous research regarding Northern Ireland together with a background of the two sides and a more detailed description of the Northern Ireland protocol. The chapter ends with a presentation of the theory that will be used in this thesis. Thereafter, a description of the material and how it was collected will be given followed by a description and discussion of the chosen method. A discussion of validity and reliability will conclude the chapter. The analysis chapter will begin by going through each party's results to the analysis too and then followed by a comparison. Lastly, the thesis will end with a conclusion.

2. Theory and previous research

This chapter of the essay will introduce previous research made on the area together with key concepts for the study. These have been selected to 1: present previous research worries for Brexit and the EU's importance for peace, 2: gain an understanding of the Northern Ireland community together with its history, 3: introduce the protocol and its consequences. The chapter ends with a presentation of the theory that the study will be based on.

2.1 Previous research

Before Brexit was introduced, a lot of research focused on how the peace at the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland would fail. It is claimed that the parliaments did not realise the seriousness of the risks that may reoccur in Northern Ireland with Brexit (Burke 2016, 4). The representation for Northern Ireland in Westminster's decision making has historically been low. For example, the second largest party in Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin is still turning down their seats in the British parliament. Even though 56% in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU, their voice was only partially heard in the debate regarding Brexit (Morrow & Byrne 2016, 31).

Previous research highlights that it was the European Union that made it possible for negotiations between Ireland and the UK which resulted in the innovation of the Good Friday Agreement. The agreement was built on international principles and had a structure based on the EU values which made the EU's framework central in the making of peace at the border

(Morrow & Byrne 2016, 31). The continuing membership in the EU for the two nations was incorporated into the agreement (Guelke 2017, 42). The EU membership has contributed with financial support and political assistance for the promotion of the peace (Burke 2016, 4). With the two nations being integrated members of the EU, the border came to matter less (Guelke 2017, 43). Previous researchers such as Morrow and Byrne (2016, 31) therefore claim that the EU has been the structural foundation of the peace in Northern Ireland and Brexit threatens that peace by removing its foundation and support system. This is a strong claim that the thesis will come back to in the conclusion.

2.1.1 Nationalists vs Unionists

To fully understand the fragility of the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland as well as the delimitation to the two parties in the study, we need to make a conceptual definition of nationalism and unionism. It is also important to have a brief awareness of the history between the two ideologies.

Here the parties' own definitions of their ideological positions are used. This because it is the parties' opinions and views on the protocol that are to be analysed, not the world's or voters' views of the parties. For Sinn Féin, nationalism means that they want to go back to Ireland being a national entity (Sinn Féin, n.d.). For the DUP, unionism means a strong bond with the United Kingdom and remaining a part of the union (DUP, n.d.). This clarification of the two parties ideological positions also agrees with Burke's (2016, 5-7) definition of the two sides but he also adds that unionists comprehend euroscepticism and he mentions that nationalist feel that EU membership has brought Ireland and Northern Ireland closer together. It is also important to note that there is a religious aspect of the two sides where nationalists are often catholics and unionist protestants (NE, n.d.). Conflicts between the two ideologies and religious groups have existed ever since England entered Ireland in the year 1167 (BBC, 2007). The bloodiest period in Northern Ireland, called "the troubles", lasted from the late sixties to the late nineties. During that period about hundred to three hundred people were killed each year (Hansson, Nilson, Möller, Karlsson & Beskow, n.d.).

"The troubles" ended when the terms of the Good Friday agreement were settled 1998 (Guelke 2017, 42). The agreement created a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland to meet both

of the groups interest and cooperation between them. A ministerial council for North and South cooperation was also interpreted to secure the ties between the Westminster and Dublin government. The Unionist side had a major advantage in the agreement, that Northern Ireland would still be a part of the United Kingdom. But nevertheless both of the sides agreed to the agreement. Previous research indicates that Brexit therefore goes against the population of Northern Ireland's approval and hence creates another threat against the fragile peace between the two sides (Guelke 2017, 46-47). Dornschneider and Todd (2021, 185) writes that the impact of the Good Friday Agreement has faded and Brexit has contributed to the two groups polarised opinions.

2.1.2 The Northern Ireland protocol and its Consequences

Since it is the Northern Ireland protocol that is the centre of the essay, a shorter description of the meaning of the protocol is required. The protocol begins by noting that there is a challenge to maintaining peace in Northern Ireland after Brexit. The Northern Ireland Protocol shall therefore cover the relationship as well as the history between Ireland and the United Kingdom and offer a solution to the challenge (The Northern Ireland Protocol 2020, 102).

For example, the protocol will protect the agreements made in the Good Friday Agreement such as continued north and south cooperation (The Northern Ireland Protocol 2020, 102). Another example is letting trading goods pass freely between Ireland and Northern Ireland while Northern Ireland still being in the United Kingdom's custom territory, and in that way securing the economic stability in Northern Ireland (Duparc-Portier & Figus 2021, 1). Northern Ireland will therefore stay in the Union with most goods but will stay in the UK regarding the customs. A requirement for checkpoints is therefore to have a jury consisting of both British and EU members to assess the goods (Anon 2021, 4).

Article 1 of the Protocol sets out the three objectives that the Protocol intends to fulfil (The Northern Ireland Protocol 2020:1, 103):

1. "This Protocol is without prejudice to the provisions of the 1998 Agreement in respect of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and the principle of consent, which provides that any change in that status can only be made with the consent of a majority of its people".

2. “This Protocol respects the essential State functions and territorial integrity of the United Kingdom”.
3. “This Protocol sets out arrangements necessary to address the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, to maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation, to avoid a hard border and to protect the 1998 Agreement in all its dimensions”.

In the protocol there is also “Article 16”. Article 16 gives the UK permission to abort the protocol and take appropriate measures to get the region back on track (The Northern Ireland protocol 2020: 29, 110). which should be triggered if the protocol somehow creates disastrous economic, environmental, or societal consequences for Northern Ireland.

The protocol shall be effective for four years before a vote in Stormont shall take place on the protocol future (Hansson et. al. n.d). But already just over a year after it was put into use, there have been reactions. The United Kingdom has not shown great enthusiasm over the protocol, propositions to replace the protocols agreements were published by the UK in July 2021 (Sargeant & Marshall, 2022). It has been claimed by supporters of the UK that the protocol has moved the border to take place between Northern Ireland and the UK instead. This is because it is said to lead to more political integration with Ireland and leave the collaboration with the UK behind (Anon 2021, 4) (Kent 2021, 120).

A previous survey from December 2021, containing opinion polls, shows the Northern Ireland voters' attitudes towards the protocol. 95% of each party's voters follow the parties ideological path of wanting to remain a part of the United Kingdom respectively to merge with Ireland (Ashcroft 2021, Unification, or the Union?, paragraph 2). The survey also shows the unionist voters' view to follow and support the United Kingdom's decisions, as about 66 percent of them thought Brexit was the right decision. But it shows even more clearly the nationalist voters' dissatisfaction with Brexit when 19 out of 20 thought it was the wrong decision (Ashcroft 2021, Brexit and the Protocol, paragraph 1). We also see that 89% of the DUP voters said that the shortages on groceries and other goods was a result of the protocol. They believe that the protocol needs to be reformed or abandoned due to fundamental shortcomings in its cause (Ashcroft 2021, Brexit and the Protocol, paragraph 4). On the other hand, we see that a majority

of Sinn Féin's voters believe that the protocol should remain because it accomplishes what it's supposed to.

Protests and riots against the border checks were raised by unionist voters in April 2021, symbolising the first violence created by the protocol. Researchers claim that there is a great risk of further violence between the inhabitants of Northern Ireland (Anon 2021, 4). Whether this further symbolises the parties' own attitudes and presentations of the protocol remains to be examined in this essay.

2.2 Theoretical starting point

The theoretical starting point for this theory is thus that Brexit and the establishment of the Northern Ireland protocol has created two political sides in the constituent unit. This study will therefore use and develop this theory as well as create an empirical contribution of how the major political parties produce and use the protocol. The study can eventually show how the parties are “framing” the protocol differently for their own success and distort the truth about the protocol to generate more voters and establish their views and opinions. The mentioned theory will therefore be developed as the political dividing lines created by the Northern Ireland protocol and how they are framed.

2.3 Framing theory

The framing theory is developed to show how power is exercised through information sources such as texts, speeches and news reporting, etc. Hence it has an impact on people's thinking activities which they then proceed to take with them when they make decisions (Entman 1993, 51).

To create *frames* is to choose parts of the reality and exaggerate them. At the same time you choose to keep the parts that you do not want to appear in the dark and in this way create an image of reality that the actor wants people to absorb (Entman 1993, 52). Stable frames are often linked to symbols, identity and ideology which can be a powerful way to shape opinions rather than a sincere view of a policy for instance. Competitive framing can occur when

information is cast in a positive and negative light by two different actors (Chong & Druckman 2007, 111 & 114).

A *framing effect* arises when the frames put forward in the information leads to a change in the receivers perception of a situation and affects their opinions (Slothuus & de Vreese 2010, 631). To succeed with a framing effect depends on how repetitive and, as mentioned earlier, how stable the frame is but also on what you're competing against. Chong & Druckman (2007, 111) acknowledge values to perchance be the most important factor to accomplish a framing effect.

For the elites, *issue framing* is an important factor to impact public opinion. Issue framing implies a process where an actor, in framing theory referred to “the communicator” constructs an issue their way and by that indicates to the receiver that the essence of the issue is the communicator's way (Slothuus & de Vreese 2010, 630). According to Esaisasson et. al. (2017, 218) framing is well known by political parties and they are proficient on how to best frame an issue their way, especially regarding electoral competition. Slothuus & de Vreese (2010, 642) writes that “political parties are among the most powerful forces structuring opinion formation” and that political parties are the main actors in “framing battles”.

3. Method and material

The study is empirical in the way that it will shine a new light on the material on the subject, regarding the Northern Ireland protocol and analyse the phenomena in practice. In other words, it will contribute to the research gap and collect new information about the political parties regarding their views and framing of the protocol.

3.1 Material

The material that will be analysed in this study are various texts published on the newsfeed from the selected parties' websites: the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin. It was not until January 2021 that the protocol was introduced, meaning it has only been active for about a year. This gives us a timestamp from when the parties began to react and respond to the

protocol's impact. Thus, for the relevance of the study - the selected material is dated from January 2021 and onward to the 08th of April 2022 when this analysis started. The chosen texts are taken from the parties' newsfeed on their websites, where "the Northern Ireland protocol" was typed into the search bar. (A complete list of the examined material can be found in appendix 1). The texts are selected from the parties' own websites regarding to see the parties' own views and frames of the protocol and avoid other people's interpretations affecting the analysis. This leads to primary sources being used instead of secondary sources such as newspaper articles and resulted in total 28 articles, 17 from the DUP and 11 from Sinn Féin.

3.2 Method

The goal for this essay is to analyse the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin's views and usage of the Northern Ireland protocol along with examining possible consequences this may create for future cooperation. A qualitative systematising text analysis is going to be used as the method to find a solution to this research problem. The chosen method is favourable when the purpose is to methodically take on large amounts of text. It helps to categorise and detect phrases in texts that will then be analysed using an analysis scheme based on the essay's selected theory (Bergström & Bóreus 2012 , 50).

This research is meant to see meaning and what kind of ideas are produced by texts which can be accomplished by a text analysis (Esaisasson et. al. , 212). The two cases presented in this essay can be seen as biased as it contains two political parties. But in text analysis it's not about how legitimate the cases' ideas are, it's more about how the ideas are presented through text and create meaning. This is because the baseline of the text analysis is that "all meaning has an effect" (Esaisasson et. al. 2017, 212). In this case it's about how the two analysis units act on the protocol regarding how it is aligned with their views and ideas. Esaisasson et. al. (2017, 213) also mentions that a text analysis also is suitable with the framing theory since it is about asking questions regarding the text.

The essay is not looking for specific words and how often they occur, nor does it contain that many analysis units that numbered values can be applied, which would have been suitable for a quantitative text analysis. Instead, it contains two analysis units, and the study intends to see texts in their entirety and interpret them (Bergström & Bóreus 2012, 51). It's important for this

study to look at the texts in their entirety. It is also important to keep in mind that what is needed in the texts to answer the research question might not be in plain sight, so reading between the lines is necessary and key to finding the answers (Esaisasson et. al. 2017, 2011).

3.2.1 Analysing tool

A qualitative text analysis is, like mentioned earlier, meant to categorise texts with the support of a code- or analysis scheme (Bergström & Bóreus 2012 , 50). The analysis scheme that will be used in this study is based on the framing theory. Furthermore, the framing theory presents questions as an analysing tool to find frames that the communicators create strategically. The goal is to find the potential frames that the political actors use in this case (Esaisasson et. al. 2017, 218). To achieve this, this study will be using questions based on questions regarding framing analysis taken from Esaisasson et. al. (2017, 218-19). The questions that will be used are:

1. How is the protocol presented? Is it framed as a problem? In that case, what kind of problem is it framed like? and for whom is it represented to be a problem?
2. What kind of actors are in the framing? With what kind of characteristics, motives and capacity of action are they represented?
3. What course of action is made possible given how the protocol is represented?

3.3 Reliability and validity

Validity means if we practically examine what we in theory intend to examine (Esaisasson et. al. 2017, 58). In a text analysis it means if the right questions are asked to the analysed text (Bergström & Boréus 2012, 42). The material selected for this study is chosen on account of relevance for the study. The method and analysing scheme for this study is chosen to extract the best results from the material. Which gives the essay a high validity.

Validity can be divided into two sub categories, internal validity and external validity (Esaiasson et. al. 2017, 59). Where internal validity means how valid the conclusions that can be drawn from the method are and external validity means how the study's research and conclusion can be generalised to include more than the specific research. The internal validity of the study relies on the importance of objective interpretations of the material, this study will attempt to use the same accuracy and sharpness when reading the material. This will be

achieved by having this in mind throughout the whole analysis. This study's external validity can appear low as Northern Ireland is quite a distinct case. But instability in an European and EU country affects all of the EU and Europe as a whole. As well as countries divided between ethnic and religious groups can be found in other parts of the world. This shows that Northern Ireland still makes an interesting political puzzle.

Reliability refers to the accuracy of the measurements and possibilities for replication of the study (Bergström & Boréus 2012, 42-43). The interpretive element plays a major role here as well. But the study solves this through objectivity and specifically asks questions about the material via the analysis tool. This means that the same results should be received by repeating the study, provided that the person replicating the study provided is also objective.

4. Analysis

In this chapter, the results of the analysis are reported in accordance with the analysis tool previously presented. First Sinn Féin's frames will be presented. The same thing will then be done with the DUP. It is important to note that the results are the found frames from the two parties. The results are followed by a discussion of the party's frames and how they see on each other. As previously mentioned, it is important for the author of the essay to be objective so as not to damage the validity of the study.

4.1 Sinn Féin

1. How is the protocol presented? Is it framed as a problem? In that case, what kind of problem is it framed like? and for whom is it represented to be a problem?

Sinn Féin has great faith in the protocol, which is clearly seen in their texts. For example: "The Irish Protocol is a cornerstone of the overall Withdrawal Agreement and is now part of EU/British government policy. It is not going to be unpicked or removed" (McDonald, 2021a).

They feel that the protocol represents the Northern Ireland people and is an attempt to preserve their views and pursue the Good Friday Agreement. Therefore, the protocol is vital as seen in MacManus (2021a) text:

“The Protocol is evidence that the EU have listened to the voice of people in the north of Ireland and have made great concessions in order to protect the peace process and uphold the Good Friday Agreement. We have argued over the years that the voice of people in the north needs to continue to be heard in the implementation of the protocol and in the wider peace and political process”.

Although they admit that the protocol has flaws, it is not the protocol that is the problem, but the shortcomings are based on the UK's withdrawal from the EU. “While the Protocol is imperfect, it is the jointly agreed mechanism to mitigate the impacts on economic relations within the new trading realities created by Brexit” (Kearney, 2021a).

Sinn Féin focuses on the fact that Northern Ireland voted to stay in the EU and therefore claims that Brexit has changed Northern Ireland's position and governance for the worse, which you can see in the following quotations.

“The imposition of Brexit on majorities in the north of Ireland and Scotland, who voted to remain within the EU has had profound political, economic and social consequences. Brexit has detonated a constitutional earthquake at the heart of what has been known as the 'United Kingdom’” (Kearney, 2021b).

“Brexit and Brexiteers sought to isolate the north from the rest of Europe against the democratic wishes of a majority of the people” (McDonald, 2021b).

Thus, Sinn Féin's texts show that Brexit is the problem and the protocol is a safety net that will help Northern Ireland and its governance back on its feet. If the protocol is removed the stability in Northern Ireland will be lost.

“The north’s insulation from the worst effects of Brexit will be lost. The increased foreign direct investment interest and inquiries in this region because the Protocol is in place, will come to an end. And the growing dual market access opportunities for local businesses will evaporate” (Kearney, 2021c).

It’s obvious that Sinn Féin uses a type of issue framing however it’s not the protocol, but Brexit that is framed as the problem. They mean that the protocol maintains the peace, raises the voice of the Northern Ireland people and by keeping the trade links to the EU market it will make the region’s economic sphere will prosper. The Sinn Féin frame of Brexit is that Brexit poses a threat to the people of Northern Ireland. This by shielding Northern Ireland from the EU and

not enforcing the agreements from the Good Friday agreement. According to Sinn Féin, this will go against the opinions of the Northern Ireland residents, jeopardize the peace and harm the economic growth.

2. What kind of actors are in the framing? With what kind of characteristics, motives and capacity of action are they represented?

In Sinn Féin's framing we find four main actors: Sinn Féin, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the Democratic Unionist Party.

Sinn Féin believes that the European Union is an ally in protecting the protocol and the Good Friday Agreement. They argue that the EU should focus on talks with Ireland for securing Northern Ireland's cooperation and integration with the EU. Sinn Féin is relying on the EU to take their side and oppose the movements created by Brexiters against the protocol, as seen here: "It is important that the EU works to counter the activities of those forces in the north who opposed the Good Friday Agreement, and who have now seized upon the current situation in order to heighten tensions" (Brady, 2021).

The European Union has an important role together with the United Kingdom to take responsibility for implementing the agreements made in the protocol (Kearney, 2021a). But according to Sinn Féin the UK will not take on such a responsibility. The UK's goal is to disconnect Northern Ireland from the EU and thereby oppose the democracy in Northern Ireland, because it goes against its residents (McDonald, 2021b). Sinn Féin claims that the United Kingdom's politics is virulent and dishonest:

"Both the Tories and the DUP are engaged in the worst type of toxic politics, and all at the expense of workers and families, businesses, manufacturers and the agri-food sector in the north" (Kearney, 2021c).

The United Kingdom is, according to Sinn Féin, tossing thoughtless daunts about triggering Article 16. Article 16, as mentioned earlier, gives the UK permission to take appropriate measures to abort the protocol and get Northern Ireland back to stability. Sinn Féin claims that the protocol is saving Northern Ireland from a disaster and triggering Article 16 is what would be catastrophic for the region (Kearney, 2021c).

Sinn Féin believes that the unionist forces in Northern Ireland have, and still are going against basic human rights and equality. Nor have they respected the power sharing together with Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin describes that this together with their choice to support Brexit and abandoning of the protocol has led to a tumult within unionism. Furthermore, this has led to a weakening of the DUP because their loss of votes for going against the public opinion

“The outworking of Brexit and the decision of the DUP to support it, the inevitable disaster of the post-election pact with the English Tories and the loss of the unionist majority in Stormont have created a political landscape which many within the leadership of the DUP seem incapable of reconciling themselves to” (McDonald, 2021b).

According to Sinn Féin, the DUP's policy of implementing Brexit will partly destroy the political stability in Northern Ireland but also go against the democratic values. They have a clear view of what the DUP needs to do next, or they will be the reason for Northern Ireland's fall,

“The DUP need to work alongside the rest of us to meet the challenges and maximise the opportunities of the Irish protocol. Businesses want the Protocol to work, and they expect their political leaders to work together to deliver on solutions to the practical challenges they face” (McDonald, 2021b).

Sinn Féin believes that there will be a disaster for Northern Ireland if the government in the UK together with the DUP succeed in replacing the protocol. They both need to abandon the idea that there is a better solution than the protocol.

“The achievements of the political process, the success of the all-island economy, and the very basis of the Good Friday Agreement are being endangered by this Tory and DUP wreckers’ agenda... So, both the Tories and DUP need to step back from the brink. There is no credible alternative to the Protocol. They know this to be true” (Kearney, 2021c).

In this case Sinn Féin is the communicator. They are constructing the texts so that their view of the protocol is received. According to their texts they are the protectors of the protocol because the protocol is vital to the Northern Ireland community. It will secure the economic stability and is of great importance for a potential united Ireland. They are also keen to emphasize that they are the ones who look after Northern Ireland's best interests and respect the remaining parties. This is seen in the following quotations: “Sinn Féin is determined to see respect for

both the Good Friday Agreement and the northern Irish protocol in all of their parts” (MacManus, 2021b) and “Our approach to the process of constitutional change needs to be about inclusion not marginalization” (Kearney, 2021b).

3. What course of action is made possible given how the protocol is represented?

There is a couple of statements that is frequently used in Sinn Féin’s texts. It is that the protocol should stay put as it is, any problems regarding the protocol should be settled within the protocol’s own framework and full implementation of the protocol will lead to stimulation of the whole Northern Irish society (Kearney, 2021a) (Kearney, 2021d).

“There is no credible alternative. It will not be renegotiated. It is here to stay...
The focus now must be on full and flexible implementation of the Protocol to give certainty, simplicity and stability for local businesses, and reassurance to wider society” (Kearney, 2021d).

Sinn Féin’s believes that all actors regarding Northern Ireland, such as the EU, the UK, Ireland, and the Northern Ireland parties, needs to work together to get the protocol implemented smoothly. They believe that Brexit will bring new economic together with societal challenges. The protocol is, according to Sinn Féin, the solution to those problems.

“Brexit throws up new trading realities which are hugely challenging, and instead of sabre rattling we need to work together to make the protocol work smoothly and to deal with teething problems” (McDonald, 2021a).

“We need the protocol because Brexit is bad news for Ireland and for the north in particular” (McDonald, 2021b).

There is also another aspect that Sinn Féin believes the protocol can facilitate and is also what they believe is the only option to ease tensions around the border. This is to unite Northern Ireland and Ireland (MacManus, 2021a). As mentioned before, Sinn Féin believes it would be disastrous for Northern Ireland if they would lose their link to the EU and that dual market access. They paint a picture of empty shop shelves, lack of medical supplies and outrages costs of weekly supplies (Kearney, 2021b). In fact, they believe that there is no other solution than constitutional change possible at this point. They give the people a choice in this question:

“The prospect of an eventual unity referendum provides a choice for citizens - between a union with an increasingly unstable, inward looking, Tory dominated, Brexit Britain - or the opportunity to be part of a new, outward looking, modern, pluralist Ireland” (Kearney, 2021e).

In this quote there is no question of Sinn Féin’s frame. What they see for Northern Ireland’s future will be a peaceful society in prosper or an unstable Northern Ireland in the hands of the United Kingdom. In fact, they believe that a successful united Ireland is merely a couple of years away (Brady, 2021).

4.2 Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)

1. How is the protocol presented? Is it framed as a problem? In that case, what kind of problem is it framed like? and for whom is it represented to be a problem?

The Democratic Unionist Party, in short the DUP, feels strongly against the protocol which permeates all their texts, for example:

“The Protocol is the problem. It failed to protect the Belfast Agreement and its successors. It has placed a border in the Irish Sea which is damaging our economy to the tune of £850m per year and has undermined the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom” (Robinson, 2021).

That the protocol costs £850m each year is a recurring argument in the DUP’s rhetoric of showing how the Northern Ireland Protocol is an extensive problem for Northern Ireland. For the DUP it is a symbol of the broken trade bond to the UK (Donaldson, 2021a). That the trading bond is, according to the DUP, the Northern Irish economy’s foundation. According to the DUP the protocol is enclosing Northern Ireland in European Union laws for customs and trade, putting an end to a free flow of goods from the UK and is therefore hurting Northern Ireland’s economy (Donaldson, 2021b) (Poots, 2021). It constrains inhabitants’ choice by removing established supply chains and companies deciding that the Northern Ireland market is a too big of a risk to do business in (Donaldson, 2021c).

“The current arrangements leave Northern Ireland semi-detached from both of these markets and any pursuit of new opportunities will be inevitably outweighed by the high cost of barriers to trade with Great Britain” (Paisley, 2021).

It is not just the economic aspects that the DUP is presenting in their texts but also the constitutional. They claim that the protocol undermines the Northern Irish democratic

foundations and previous agreements (Donaldson, 2021d). The DUP declares that there is not a single unionist that is for the protocol and the membership to the United Kingdom is written in Northern Ireland's constitution which means that the protocol damages the relation to the UK and undermines people's British identity (Paisley, 2021).

“DUP Leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP, alongside the Leaders of Northern Ireland's other unionist parties, opposes the Northern Ireland Protocol and call for it to be replaced with arrangements that fully respect Northern Ireland's position as a constituent and integral part of the United Kingdom” (Donaldson, 2021b).

According to the DUP, it is a continued desire of the people of Northern Ireland to be part of the United Kingdom and the protocol (Donaldson, 2021b). The protocol is an obstacle to this as it threatens Northern Ireland's membership of the Union and thus threatens the will of the people.

“The Protocol is an existential threat to our place in the United Kingdom. It must be replaced by arrangements that restore our place within the UK internal market and which can command the support of unionists as well as nationalists” (Donaldson, 2022a).

The DUP claims that the protocol is not promoting peace and it does not live up to the Good Friday Agreement. In the Good Friday Agreement, it was written that change requires authorization from both sides and cooperation should be equal between Northern Ireland - Ireland and Northern Ireland – the UK. Now the DUP argues that the UK is left out and is therefore going against the agreement that was meant for peace and stability for Northern Ireland and its people (Donaldson, 2021b).

2. What kind of actors are in the framing? With what kind of characteristics, motives and capacity of action are they represented?

The four actors who were prominent in the DUP's texts are the British government, the European union, Sinn Féin and themselves.

The cooperation together with the British government is important for the DUP, in this case with the help of removing the protocol and reunite Northern Ireland with their main trading partner (Donaldson, 2021d). The DUP calls for the UK to take the threat of Article 16 into action, “If the EU is unwilling to recognise the harm caused by the Protocol then the U.K.

Government must take appropriate unilateral action using Article 16” (Donaldson, 2021e). They believe that the conditions for triggering it is already reached and it’s up to the British government to correct the failure of the protocol because, according to the DUP, the EU will never realise its mistake of putting the protocol into action (Donaldson, 2021e). The DUP’s leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, says (2021g) “It’s time for action from Downing Street. The longer this Protocol stays, the more harm it is inflicting on our economy and the Union”.

The DUP accuses the European Union of ignoring the political instability that the protocol is creating and that they had no sense of realism when making the arrangements in the protocol. They claim that if the EU wants to fulfill the Good Friday Agreement the protocol it’s not the way to do it. According to the DUP the EU must accept and revere the community in United Kingdom and the Northern Ireland’s position in it to secure stability and peace. The protocol is an obstacle to that community (Donaldson, 2021c). The DUP claim that the EU’s unwillingness to see this shows how they do not have respect for Northern Ireland’s stability and future (Donaldson 2021h). The DUP demands the EU to stop using Northern Ireland as a tool to reach and affect the UK after they left the union. This is not only putting the Northern Ireland at risk but their inhabitants as well:

“When the EU makes such a blanket rejection of proposals it demonstrates a willingness not only to use Northern Ireland to ‘punish’ the United Kingdom, but even to put the health of people in Northern Ireland at risk. Even under the Protocol there was an agreement by the EU to work “at pace” yet issues remain at a standstill” (Cameron, 2021).

“The idea that the EU can prevent people in Northern Ireland having equal access to vital medicines as is available in the rest of the UK, is utterly reprehensible and indefensible” (2021a).

That the EU is still deciding on laws and regulations for the Northern is, according to the DUP, undemocratic because it is a foreign jurisdiction after Brexit (Wilson, 2021). The EU must realise that the protocol needs to be renegotiated and abandon their stubbornness, it is the only way according to the DUP to solve the issues created by the protocol:

“It is time for the European Commission to recognise that the Protocol has failed. They need to come back to the table with a willingness to renegotiate an outcome which respects the economic and constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom” (Donaldson, 2021c).

The DUP accuses Sinn Féin on spreading false news that the protocol and the EU is financing peace. Nor do they accept Sin Féin's claim that the DUP rules irresponsibly and that they cannot cooperate (Weir, 2021). In response the DUP claims that “Sinn Fein only wants parties in the Northern Ireland Executive that they agree with. So much for powersharing. So much for respect” (Donaldson, 2022b). According to the DUP, while Sinn Féin spends their time supporting the protocol Northern Ireland shatters. The DUP means that Sinn Féin can’t stand anything that has a slight connection to the UK, everything from rose bushes to cross community services they hate on (Donaldson, 2022b). If Sinn Féin wants to help Northern Ireland, according to the DUP, they need to assist in pushing the EU and the British government to renegotiate or abandon the protocol completely:

“If Sinn Fein want to demonstrate a commitment to responsible politics then they should call for the UK Government to legislate in this area. They could also join in calling for substantive engagement between the UK and the EU to find the solutions which are necessary for both political and economic stability here” (Weir, 2021).

The DUP wants to gather Unionist across Northern Ireland to work towards a common goal: removing the sea border between Northern Ireland and the UK and therefore defeat Sinn Féin’s plan to unite with Ireland (Donaldson, 2022b). For a long time the DUP has warned about the protocol failing Northern Ireland, but other parties than the unionist refuses to listen (Donaldson, 2021h). It means that it is up to them to get Northern Ireland back on track:

“The DUP will use its influence in Westminster to get a better deal for Northern Ireland but its about time some other Parties in Northern Ireland added their influence to remove this Protocol and get a better deal for hard pressed Northern Ireland households” (Paisley, 2022).

3. What course of action is made possible given how the protocol is represented?

The DUP has a clear plan for the future of the protocol, this includes renegotiate or abandon the protocol together with restoring the relationship to the United Kingdom (Donaldson, 2021c).

“...there can be no alternative to the Protocol. The DUP believes this position is unsustainable. The way forward will be through fundamental renegotiation, not remaining wedded to narrow political framework that has already failed” (Paisley, 2021).

They have also made seven points that future agreements need to fulfill so that the issues that occurred with the protocol are not repeated. In summary, the meaning of this is to avoid a border between Northern Ireland and the UK, give the people of Northern Ireland a voice in future agreements and require a majority of the peoples vote to amend the constitution to reduce their share in the UK (Donaldson, 2021c).

The DUP feel that the Northern Irelands and the UK's sovereignty has been discriminated and any solution to the protocol needs to declare this sovereignty:

“...any agreement which fails to ensure a proportionate and equitable solution which respects the sovereignty of the United Kingdom and restores our unfettered place within the Internal Market, cannot command the support of the unionist community” (Paisley, 2021).

Their goal is to remove the current sea border between Northern Ireland and the UK. If the border is not removed, they are willing to call a referendum and ultimately leave the people of Northern Ireland to decide:

“... if there is no action to remove the Irish Sea Border then we will have no option but to ask the voters in Northern Ireland for their verdict” (Donaldson, 2021g).

4.3 Summary of the analysis

We can clearly see two types of *issue framing* coming from the two parties. The issue in this case is the protocol and the two parties' standpoints regarding the protocol contradict with each other. Simply summarised, Sinn Féin believes the issue is not the protocol but the event leading up to the making of the protocol, namely Brexit. The protocol is the solution to the economic, governmental, and societal problems that arose, according to Sinn Féin, after Brexit. For the DUP the problem is the making of the protocol because it deprives them of their main trading partner and constitutional ally, the United Kingdom. By illustrating how the two parties view the protocol, it becomes clear how profoundly the two differ. As previous research has shown that the two sides have historical ties to two different countries. The nationalists, Sinn Féin that wants to unite with Ireland and the unionists, the DUP who wants to nourish and keep the Northern Irelands status as a part of the United Kingdom. The alliances to those different countries by the two parties has historically been a sensitive point for conflict. Furthermore,

both says that the other appears weak and that their own standpoints are strong in society. They're both describing each other as unsuitable to govern a country and neither believes that the other respects the agreed cooperation.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to analyse how the Northern Ireland Protocol has been received and used by the two main parties in Northern Ireland. Earlier research has underlined a high degree of concern over what is to happen at the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, since historically there have been violent clashes between these two ideological and political groups. The protocol was presented as the solution to this problem, but this study shows that it has instead created a new border between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

The study has answered the two sub questions by showing that the protocol has been welcomed by Sinn Féin and rejected by the Democratic Unionist Party. Quotes from articles regarding the two parties show that there are strong differences of opinion regarding the effect of the protocol, as shown in the analysis. With the help of the sub questions, the findings of this thesis provide an answer to the main research question by showing that there is a considerable likelihood of an emerging new line of division between Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party. Coming back to Morrow and Byrne's (2016, 31) claim that Brexit threatens the peace by removing its foundation and support system. What Brexit has done is return a political struggle for its contestants. No one wants to go back to violence, but the political struggle will continue.

This study contributes to previous research by raising the awareness of a deepening conflict because of the tense situation in Northern Ireland that this study has demonstrated. Future research can continue on the same path and see how this develops in the future. For example, studying the outcome of the local election in Northern Ireland that took place on the fifth of May 2022, an interesting aspect to look at would be to see if the election has effected the situation.

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Appendix 1: Analysed texts

Sinn Féin

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