

His Excellency Josep Borrell
High Representative for Foreign Affairs
Vice-President of the European Commission
European External Action Service
9A Rond Point Schuman
1046 Brussels
BELGIUM

Dundalk, 2nd April 2020

Dear Vice-President Borrell,

First of all, I hope that you, your family and staff are all well and safe. I also extend my condolences to you for the many thousands of your compatriots in Spain who have died as a result of the coronavirus. Like the rest of Europe and the world, we are also suffering the crisis here in Ireland, and I am convinced that together as Europeans we will overcome it successfully.

I am writing following a report in the Irish media regarding the refusal of the British Government to grant the European Union authorisation to open an office in Belfast¹. I read this with some concern, for it is clear that Article 12 of the Irish protocol states that EU officials shall have the right to be present during any checks and controls carried out by British authorities. Indeed, such a presence is vital for the good functioning of the protocol, and therefore to preserve the integrity of the EU Single Market.

I come from Dundalk, which is on the border with Northern Ireland, strategically located half-way on the road between Belfast and Dublin. Dundalk has a major stake in ensuring that future relations between Ireland and the UK remain smooth and friendly, and as member of the European Committee of the Regions and of Louth County Council's Economic Development and Enterprise Support Committee, this is an issue I am following very closely.

¹ *UK refuses EU request for Belfast office*, Tony Connelly, RTE Europe Editor, 1 April 2020
<https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2020/0401/1127912-eu-belfast/>



It is true that a physical presence of the EU in Northern Ireland post-Brexit is a highly sensitive matter, given the divisions in the North over its new status outside of the EU. Yet it would clearly facilitate the work of EU officials tasked with observing the checks and controls if they could be conveniently located. I believe such an option exists, which can cover the needs of the EU, while avoiding the sensitivities that exist in the UK over this matter. I therefore wish to suggest that you consider setting up the office in the historic town of Dundalk. It is a large vibrant town of nearly 40,000 and strategically located on the border. We host many large international companies including PayPal and WuxiBiologics. Along with industry we host a large third level institution with over 5,000 students and with being only one-hour's drive from Belfast and a 45-minute drive from Dublin airport, Dundalk provides a perfect location for the EU officials who will need to operate within Northern Ireland. The fact that it is within EU territory would give the EU full control of the office. I realise that this last point would inevitably mean the office itself may fall within the competence of other services of the European Commission, but I am sure that would not be a major obstacle, given the many advantages.

If you find this proposal of interest and wish to explore it further, I would be happy to arrange a visit for yourself or your representatives at the earliest possible opportunity once the coronavirus travel restrictions are lifted. In the meantime, I remain at your disposal should you require additional information.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Very best regards,



Cllr Erin McGreehan

Louth County Council

European Committee of the Regions

info@erinmcgreehan.com



Cllr. Erin
McGreehan

