Twitter Thread by Peter Foster

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It's OUT! My latest #Brexit Briefing for @FinancialTimes - examining @BorisJohnson "buy now, pay later" Northern Ireland Protocol, why the EU-UK trust deficit is killing it, how that can be restored - because it needs to work. /1

@FinancialTimes @BorisJohnson The danger here is that lingering animus over the opportunistic nature Johnson's Faustian bargain - dividing his Kingdom in order to 'get #Brexit done' and win an 80-seat majority - is clouding judgement on both sides of the Channel /2

@FinancialTimes @BorisJohnson The facts of the Protocol are no less true for Johnson's constant denial of them - that there would be checks, that there really is a trade border that now prevents plants and pets from travelling freely from Bedford to Ballymena as M.Gove reminds us. But these are other facts/3

@FinancialTimes @BorisJohnson Firstly, NI remains part of UK, even if it is now has EU customs rules.

Secondly, NI remains politically divided and fragile; the Good Friday Agreement is a constant work in progress.

Thirdly, both the EU and the UK agreed to this unsatisfactory arrangement jointly. /4

@FinancialTimes @BorisJohnson Fourthly, therefore, they have a joint responsibility to make it work because

Fifthly - and most importantly — there is no alternative to it. /5

@FinancialTimes @BorisJohnson The last three years established that a technological north-south border isn't happening - technologically OR politically.

And the UK will not agree to the strictures of “no regulatory divergence” that underpinned May's decision to say in the EU single market for goods./6

@FinancialTimes @BorisJohnson Which leaves everyone - London, Brussels, Dublin and Belfast - stuck with this unsatisfactory arrangement that needs to be made to work in as unobtrusive and politically sensitive way as possible - everyone's grievances to one side, which is stupidly easy to say, I know /7

@FinancialTimes @BorisJohnson But it does need to *work* - that means the border needs to function properly as @MarosSefcovic has said - or you start to create the conditions for the very same north-south border that we're all trying to avoid here. /8

@FinancialTimes @BorisJohnson @MarosSefcovic The UK does recognise this need for functionality - even if its behaviour last year by unilaterally threatening to break the terms of the deal - has raised doubts on the EU side about London's real commitment to the deal. /9

@FinancialTimes @BorisJohnson @MarosSefcovic But at the same time, if the EU keeps on treating the GB-NI border like the Dover-Calais border and as a 'test' of UK probity and trustworthiness, there is a risk of a downward spiral that, in the absence of alternatives, leads nowhere good /10

It was interesting listening to NI logistics operators this week talking to @CommonsNIAC about how processes could be simplified and streamlined whilst still giving the EU the data/certainty they need /11

https://t.co/Eurz92g0EG

@CommonsNIAC This is v technical stuff, but it is surely worth exploring more deeply - in the light of the 'unique circumstances' of Northern Ireland how both sides can - to coin a bitter phrase - have their cake and eat it here /12

@CommonsNIAC In his letter @MarosSefcovic says that functionality is a "prerequisite" for further easements and facilitations - but it is important that the EU really means that, and can approach this in a outcomes-based, not legalistic way. /13

@CommonsNIAC @MarosSefcovic The problem - as we all know - is that this deeply unsatisfactory deal really requires trust and good relations on both sides. And the reality is that that is sadly lacking - @michaelgove dinging Brussels for its "integrationist theology" (and EU return fire) all symptomatic /14

@CommonsNIAC @MarosSefcovic @michaelgove On the upside, it seems that @MarosSefcovic and @michaelgove did manage to lower the temperature last night over their London Deliveroo dinner party and seek "workable solutions" /15

https://t.co/5vRgzIqKjP

@CommonsNIAC @MarosSefcovic @michaelgove UK officials are pretty guarded in their optimism - this is far from sorted - BUT the willingness of the EU side to engage/listen with NI business is taken as a positive, both in Whitehall but also in NI as @MichaelAodhan tells me in that news report. /16

@CommonsNIAC @MarosSefcovic @michaelgove @MichaelAodhan The danger, talking to folk in Brussels, is that France, Germany are failing to separate out the Protocol form the rest of the deal - and are determined to keep both London (and Dublin) "honest" here, and in the process are deepening a mess they don't really understand/17

@CommonsNIAC @MarosSefcovic @michaelgove @MichaelAodhan Of course, they might "understand" better if @michaelgove @DavidGHFrost @BorisJohnson all did more to settle the relationship that, on many fronts, looks testy - and likelier to get testier as more and more realities of the Canada-style trading start to land /18

@CommonsNIAC @MarosSefcovic @michaelgove @MichaelAodhan @DavidGHFrost @BorisJohnson There needs to be a really collective effort not to make Northern Ireland the casualty of this post-divorce feuding. If the border can bed in, then there are even some upsides - ask the NI shellfish operators, they can send to Europe, no depuration required ;) /19

@CommonsNIAC @MarosSefcovic @michaelgove @MichaelAodhan @DavidGHFrost @BorisJohnson Anyway. On the upside, this week has ended in a better place than it began, and that - in #Brexit world - is surely progress. Fingers crossed it continues.

Good weekend all. ENDS

@CommonsNIAC @MarosSefcovic @michaelgove @MichaelAodhan @DavidGHFrost @BorisJohnson PS...if you got this far, here is the #Brexit Briefing in question

https://t.co/Y8dBxZOcsi