Twitter Thread by Yet Another Columnist



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One wonders how long Lord Frost will retain his new position. The personnel decisions made by the PM are nothing if not frequent, ruthless and mercurial.

The whole affair is very curious. While I am sure that Lord Frost's elevation owes much to his relationship with the PM and the perceived success of the Brexit negotiation, it is very curious indeed that allegedly it took a threat to resign to secure this new role.

A role which is needed (although might have been structured differently) but was to a large effect previously undertaken (with reasonable success) by Michael Gove who one might imagine may not be entirely happy with this diminishment of his responsibilities.

What might have happened to have resulted in this dramatic and to some extent destructive move (which appears to have been played out in the context of a wider struggle that saw Oliver Lewis (previously Lord Frost's (LF) negotiation deputy)?

The original sin, of course, is the agreement to the Northern Ireland Protocol. Who knows who did what to who or thought what about what but my speculation is the PM either did not understand the consequences of the Protocol or was assured they could be successfully addressed.

Either way, it is his responsibility. I'm not sure the consequences of the Protocol are fully understood. The PM has successfully delivered Brexit, his mission statement, but in so doing has presided over, willed and in effect approved a rupture in the union.

My suspicion is that this is taken very seriously indeed. And as a result any wheeze, scheme, idea etc that contributes to addressing the (in this context) faults of the NIP, this rupture of the union, receives a very friendly audience (also see the IMB).

A short while ago, a very strange event occurred. As part of its new vaccine export policy, the EU almost triggered / triggered and then retracted A16. This foolish misstep rightly received considerable opprobrium.

HMG saw this as an opportunity to address its issues with the NIP. This might have been advanced quietly or loudly. We saw a 'loud' response in the letter Gove sent to Maros Sefcovic, the tone of which was reminiscent of the combative Vote Leave approach to the negotiations.

But then something surprising happened. The letter's sabre rattling seems all but forgotten when after the Gove / Sefcovic meeting both sides issue a joint statement in which they talk of their 'frank but constructive discussion' and state their 'full commitment' to the NIP.

The combative rhetoric is abandoned, the temperature is lowered, and the primacy of the NIP as the legal and political context in which all related issues must be solved is upheld, in the process diminishing the practical viability of A16 as an instrument to effect change.

You can perhaps look at this in 2 ways. Either (i) HMG (represented by Gove) missed a huge opportunity to address the offending parts of the NIP or (ii) the opportunity was hugely overstated, the letter did more harm than good, and as a result HMG / the EU decided to move on.

Either way, and yes perhaps for many other different reasons (this is all speculation) just over a week later Michael Gove's EU responsibilities are transferred to Lord Frost who becomes cabinet minister responsible for the relationship with the EU. /ends