

The five primates of the UK and Ireland have written this joint letter in today's Financial Times, setting out their serious concerns about the UK Internal Market Bill.

As the Anglican Primates of the four nations of the United Kingdom and Ireland, we wish to highlight the grave responsibility of peers in the House of Lords today as they debate the UK Internal Market Bill. We are taking the rare step of writing together because the decisions implemented in this Bill will profoundly affect the future of our countries and the relationships between them.

The Bill represents a profound shift in how trading relationships within the UK will be regulated and governed. This will not be a return to a trade regime that existed before UK joined the EU; it will be an entirely novel system, replacing one that evolved slowly and by careful negotiation over decades.

The Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd have made clear that the Bill's weakening of both the principles and the effect of devolved policymaking is of constitutional significance. Moreover, if the Bill is made law without consent from devolved legislatures (as will happen if it is not amended to address their concerns), this will further undermine trust and goodwill among those who govern the different parts of the United Kingdom.

The Bill is, of course, not just concerned with domestic law. It currently asks the country's highest law-making body to equip a government minister to break international law. This has enormous moral, as well as political and legal, consequences.

We believe this would create a disastrous precedent. It is particularly disturbing for all of us who feel a sense of duty and responsibility to the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement – that international treaty on which peace and stability within and between the UK and Ireland depends.

The UK negotiated the Northern Ireland Protocol with the EU to 'protect the 1998 Agreement in all its dimensions'. One year on, in this Bill, the UK Government is not only preparing to break the Protocol, but also to breach a fundamental tenet of the Agreement: namely by limiting the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights in Northern Ireland law.

If carefully negotiated terms are not honoured and laws can be 'legally' broken, on what foundations does our democracy stand?

We urge lawmakers to consider this Bill in the light of values and principles we would wish to characterise relationships across these islands long after the transition period.

The Most Reverend John McDowell, Archbishop of Armagh

The Most Reverend Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

The Most Reverend Mark Strange, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church

The Most Reverend John Davies, Archbishop of Wales

The Most Reverend Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York

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