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Karen Bradley: Nothing will undermine our commitment to upholding Belfast Agreement in all its parts - BelfastTelegraph.co.uk

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Northern Ireland Secretary Karen Bradley

Today we mark the 21st anniversary of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement. Often, the word historic can be overused. In the case of the Agreement, however, it is entirely justified.

It was a momentous occasion in the history of these islands, offering a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, between Northern Ireland and Ireland and between the UK and Ireland.

The Agreement marked the transition from decades of violence to a brighter, more prosperous future for everyone.

It was the result of painstaking negotiations, not just in the months leading up to April 10, 1998, but also over the previous number of years when the foundations were laid.

I pay tribute to all those who were involved from all political parties and traditions for the courage and leadership they displayed.

This Government's commitment to the Agreement remains steadfast - to the constitutional principles it enshrines, the political institutions it establishes and the rights it guarantees.

As the UK leaves the European Union nothing will undermine the UK Government's commitment to upholding the Agreement in all its parts.

After 21 years it is perhaps easy to forget some of achievements made possible by the Agreement.

That would be a mistake. We should never underestimate or forget the remarkable gains that the Agreement brought about.

It settled the constitutional future of Northern Ireland on the principle of consent, with Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution amended to reflect that.

Power-sharing devolved government was provided for at Stormont with strong new bodies to foster greater north-south and east-west co-operation.

People's rights, culture and identities were protected, while the policing and the criminal justice systems were reformed to make them more accountable and widely acceptable.

Since 1998 the benefits of the Agreement, along with its successors, have been striking.

The security situation, while sadly still present, is unrecognisable from what occurred during the Troubles.

The economy has grown, with employment rates at a record high.

Northern Ireland is now the second favourite location for foreign direct investment outside London.

Tourism is booming, and in just three months the eyes of the world will be on Northern Ireland for the Open Championship at Royal Portrush.

There is, therefore, much to celebrate in the new, vibrant Northern Ireland.

Yet I am far from immune to the serious challenges that remain.

First and foremost among these is the lack of devolved government at Stormont and the other institutions that depend on it.

As a Government, we remain fully determined to re-establish a political process involving the five main Northern Ireland parties so that devolution can be restored at the earliest opportunity.

That is what people in Northern Ireland want and expect.

Then there are opportunities and challenges of leaving the EU.

Throughout this process the UK Government has placed protection

of the 1998 Agreement at the heart of our negotiating position. We will continue to do so. That means no hard border on the island of Ireland, no customs border down the Irish Sea and respect for the constitutional and economic integrity of the UK.

In addition, it means upholding the rights of all citizens who live in Northern Ireland. I understand the concerns expressed by some about securing their rights as Irish citizens to bring in family members after the UK leaves the EU. Let me assure people that I am working with the Prime Minister and Home Secretary to ensure a solution can be delivered that is fully consistent with the letter and spirit of the Agreement.

Twenty-one years on, let us remember the renewed sense of hope and optimism that greeted the news of the Agreement on that Good Friday in 1998.

Let us renew the same sense of determination as we seek to build a stronger, more prosperous Northern Ireland that works for everyone.

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