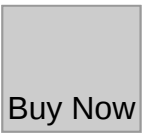




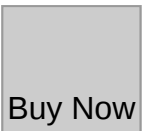
Brexit time ‘extraordinarily volatile’ says Coveney

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[Brexit time ‘extraordinarily volatile’ says Coveney](#)

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Former Tánaiste (Irish deputy prime minister) Simon Coveney has said his time dealing with the British government over Brexit and Northern Ireland was “an extraordinarily volatile and difficult period”.

As tánaiste and foreign affairs minister, Mr Coveney was involved in talks over Brexit and attempts to restore Stormont during the period of collapse between 2017 and 2020.

He told BBC NI’s Good Morning Ulster programme on Thursday that Brexit and “so much turnover” of NI secretaries of state posed “a huge challenge”.

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On Wednesday Mr Coveney announced he will not stand in the next Irish general election.
The EU and UK flags

When Simon Harris was appointed taoiseach (prime minister) earlier this year, Mr Coveney said he did not want to continue in the cabinet, in order to allow the new Fine Gael leader pick new ministers.

The 52-year-old Cork South Central TD (MP) told Good Morning Ulster that instability in the UK government affected its relationship with Ireland.

‘So much turnover’ of NI secretaries

During his time as a foreign minister he worked with “six secretaries of state for Northern Ireland, six foreign secretaries, four prime ministers, and I think seven different Brexit negotiators for the British government,” he said.

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“That was an extraordinarily volatile and difficult period where it was hard for politicians to build trust when there was so much turnover.”

He added: “My job was to try to provide stability, consistency, certainty in terms of the Irish position because of course Brexit wasn’t our choice, but we were confronted with trying to make Brexit work as best we could from an Irish perspective.”

He said it was “a huge challenge for the political system and unfortunately during that period, because of the pressure the British government was under they made decisions unilaterally rather than in partnership with the Irish government which of course has been the basis for the peace process for more than 25 years”.

‘Opportunity to improve’

Mr Coveney said Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer “knows Northern Ireland intimately” as he worked in

NI for years, and welcomed Hilary Benn's appointment as secretary of state.

He said he thinks that Sir Keir's administration will bring in some change to problems caused by post Brexit agreements, but he doesn't expect "radical change of direction in terms of unwinding Brexit".

Rather, he said he hopes for change to smaller challenges, such as barriers to trade and "exploring whether it's possible to look at a common veterinary agreement between the EU and the UK".

"We do have treaties that Brexit is now based on so it won't be easy to change those, but I think the atmosphere for discussion, the trust between both sides certainly has the opportunity to improve," he said.

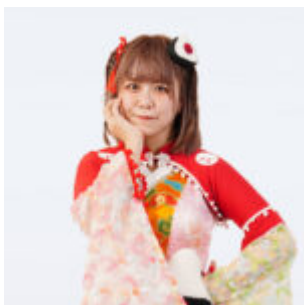
Mr Coveney also believes Ireland's position in the EU will be good for the UK.

"Ireland will be a big ally to the UK in terms of making sure it's understood in Brussels and in the EU institutions, because for us the closer the relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU, the better for Ireland," he said.

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