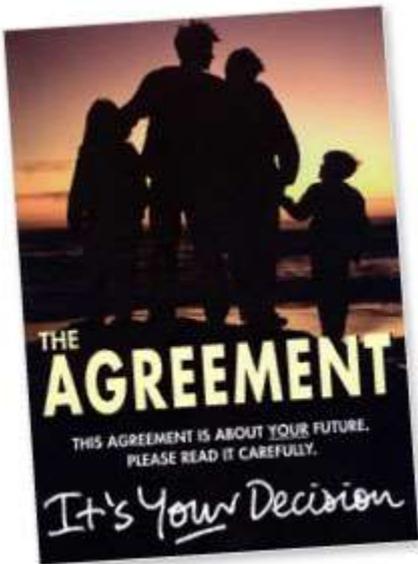




The Good Friday Agreement

Read this introduction to the Agreement, found on the Northern Ireland Assembly educational site (1):



"The Belfast Agreement is also known as the Good Friday Agreement, because it was reached on Good Friday, 10 April 1998. It was a peace agreement between the British and Irish governments, and most of the political parties in Northern Ireland, on how Northern Ireland should be governed. The talks leading to the Agreement addressed issues which had caused conflict during previous decades. The aim was to establish a new, devolved government for Northern Ireland in which unionists and nationalists would share power.

On the constitutional question of whether Northern Ireland should remain in the UK or become part of a united Ireland, it was agreed that there would be no change without the consent of the majority. This is called the 'principle of consent'. Majority opinion in the future could be tested by referendum.

The two main political parties to the Agreement were the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), led by David Trimble and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), led by John Hume. The two leaders jointly won the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize. Other parties involved in reaching agreement included Sinn Féin, the Alliance Party and the Progressive Unionist Party. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which later became the largest unionist party, did not support the Agreement. It walked out of talks when Sinn Féin and loyalist parties joined, because republican and loyalist paramilitary weapons had not been decommissioned".

The Good Friday Agreement and Brexit

Below are some extracts from an article by The Atlantic, published a year ago around Easter 2018 (2):

Brexit, perhaps more than any one thing, has brought into relief the tenuous foundation on which the Good Friday Agreement rests. One key to the entire arrangement was the open border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that the European Union guaranteed.

"The DUP doesn't want any ambiguity or doubt about the importance of Northern Ireland for the United Kingdom," Katy Hayward, a political sociologist at Queen's University Belfast, told me. She noted that the party's objection to Northern Ireland remaining part of the EU customs union—a solution that has been floated by Brexit negotiators to avoid the need for a customs border—stems from political insecurities of the past. "If there's any sense that Northern Ireland could possibly drift further away from Britain and closer to Ireland, that makes Unionists feel very anxious. ... They fear that a United Ireland may come out as a result."

Though the agreement acknowledges Northern Ireland's constitutional status as a part of the United Kingdom, it leaves open the possibility of a future united Ireland if majorities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland want it—a decision the accord says would be decided by referendum, and one which both the British and Irish governments would be compelled to honor.

(1) http://education.niassembly.gov.uk/post_16/snapshots_of_devolution/gfa

(2) <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/good-friday-agreement-20th-anniversary/557393/>

