

## EU braces for no-deal Brexit but hopes for the best as summit kicks off

Written by Martin Banks on 17 October 2018 in News  
News

The prospect of a no-deal Brexit is looking increasingly more likely as the two sides gear up for a crunch two-day summit which begins today in Brussels.



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With the clock ticking down on the Brexit timetable, European Council President Donald Tusk admitted that while the EU side was “preparing for a no-deal scenario,” he urged leaders not to give up on an agreement being reached between the two sides.

The European Parliament’s Brexit steering group has insisted it will not back any Brexit deal unless the UK agrees to a “workable, legally operational and all-weather backstop.”

The steering group and Tusk's comments came against the backdrop of the latest impasse in the long-running Brexit negotiations and UK Prime Minister Theresa May is expected to plead with EU leaders to drop their Irish backstop proposal at a make-or-break summit dinner in Brussels tonight.

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May used an emergency Commons statement on Monday to say the EU's plan “threatens the integrity of our United Kingdom” because it could lead to the creation of a customs border in the Irish Sea.

She said that the negotiating team of chief EU negotiator Michel Barnier had told her there was not time to evaluate a UK-wide counter-proposal “in the next few weeks”.

## “GET TOUGH”

Ahead of the summit, which is scheduled to last two days, parliament's Brexit steering group, chaired by Alde leader Guy Verhofstadt, broke its recent silence on the Brexit talks by issuing a “get tough” statement.

Signed by Verhofstadt and five other group members, it read, “It is our very strong view that the Withdrawal Agreement must include a workable, legally operational and all-weather backstop for the Ireland/Northern Ireland border fully in line with the Joint Report of last December and Prime Minister May's letter to President Tusk of 19 March 2018.”

The statement continued, “Without such a backstop, the European Parliament would not be in a position to give its consent to the Withdrawal Agreement.”

“Responsible as we are, we must prepare the EU for a no-deal scenario, which is more likely than ever before.” European Council President Donald Tusk

It reiterated the group's “full support” for Michel Barnier and his “negotiating strategy.”

The group is composed of German MEP Elmar Brok, Italian member Roberto Gualtieri, Belgium's Philippe Lamberts, German deputy Gaby Zimmer and Danuta Hubner, from Poland.

## HOPE FOR MAXIMUM PROGRESS

Tusk said in his statement that he had invited May to address the 27 member states this week, “giving the UK Government's assessment of the negotiations.”

He said the hope from the recent summit of EU leaders in Salzburg was that there would be

“maximum progress and results that would lead to a deal in October.”

However, Tusk continued, “As things stand today, it has proven to be more complicated than some may have expected.”

Despite growing pessimism about the prospects of a deal, as planned, this week, Tusk adds, “We should nevertheless remain hopeful and determined, as there is good will to continue these talks on both sides.”

“But at the same time, responsible as we are, we must prepare the EU for a no-deal scenario, which is more likely than ever before.”

He said, “Like the UK, the Commission has started such preparations, and will give us an update during the meeting.

“But let me be absolutely clear. The fact that we are preparing for a no-deal scenario must not, under any circumstances, lead us away from making every effort to reach the best agreement possible, for all sides.

“This is what our state of mind should be at this stage. As someone rightly said: 'It always seems impossible until it's done.' Let us not give up.”

Further comment came from German chancellor Angela Merkel who said, “We were actually pretty hopeful that we would manage to seal an exit agreement... At the moment, it looks a bit more difficult again”.

## About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament magazine

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