

## **Veteran MEP gives Brexit withdrawal deal fifty-fifty chance of success**

Written by Martin Banks on 15 November 2018 in News  
News

So called 'Hard Brexit' still most likely outcome says Jo Leinen



**Photo credit: PA Photos**

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Two members of the European parliament's Brexit steering group have given a guarded response to the draft withdrawal agreement which was agreed on Wednesday by Theresa May's cabinet.

German Socialist MEP Jo Leinen said he believed the British Prime Minister had no more than a "fifty-fifty chance" of getting the deal approved by the UK Parliament and that a so-called "hard Brexit" - the UK leaving the EU next March without a deal - was still "likely."

The draft withdrawal agreement covers so-called "divorce" issues as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

It includes a "financial settlement" from the UK, thought to be about €45bn.

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The near-600 page agreement was unveiled publicly for the first time at a news conference in Brussels late on Wednesday by Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator.

Barnier told reporters, "We still have a long road ahead of us on both sides."

If the deal fails to win the backing of the Westminster parliament, Theresa May would have to draft another agreement.

A sign of the difficulties facing May came as early as on Thursday morning when Barnier's UK counterpart, Brexit Secretary Dominic Raab, resigned saying he could not "in good conscience" support the agreement. This was followed soon afterwards by a second resignation, by the country's Work and Pensions Secretary Esther McVey.

Earlier, Junior Northern Ireland minister, Shailesh Vara, also resigned in protest at the deal. reports suggested about up to 10 ministers were unhappy. May is due to give a statement to the Commons later on Thursday.

The EU says much work still needs to be done on Brexit, despite agreeing a draft withdrawal document with the UK.

"The EU has no room and time for renegotiation. The Brexiteers around Boris Johnson with their fundamental opposition play with fire and take citizens and the economy hostage. If the deal does not pass the House of Commons, a hard Brexit is likely" **Jo Leinen MEP**

And there are concerns over the real possibility that the draft Brexit deal could be voted down by the UK Parliament in a few weeks' time.

On Thursday, Leinen giving his reaction to the deal, told this website, "The agreement on the table would permanently protect the rights of Europeans living in the UK and of British citizens living in the EU. It would also put an end to the uncertainties for businesses.

"It is the evening that crowns the day. The agreement still has to overcome some hurdles, both in the UK and from the EU's side. Prime Minister May now has the mammoth task of getting the troublemakers in her party and her government under control and to organise a majority in the House of Commons. I think her chances are fifty-fifty.

"A rejection by parliament or the British cabinet would have fatal consequences. The EU can only accept an agreement if it prevents a border on the Irish island - for an indefinite time. The EU has no room and time for renegotiation. The Brexiteers around Boris Johnson with their fundamental opposition play with fire and take citizens and the economy hostage. If the deal does not pass the House of Commons, a hard Brexit is likely."

The veteran MEP added, "However, a second referendum or even new elections could become possible if the UK faces the threat of leaving the EU without an agreement."

"It is also clear that the agreement can only be a temporary solution. After a two year transition period, during which the UK will have all the obligations of a EU member, the country will stay in the customs union until a new treaty for the economic relations with the EU has been agreed."

"While I hope one day the UK will return, in the meantime this agreement will make Brexit possible, while maintaining a close relationship between the EU and UK, the protection of citizens' rights and the avoidance of a hard Irish border" **Guy Verhofstad MEP**

More reaction came from Guy Verhofstadt, the ALDE group leader who chairs the European parliament's Brexit group. He told this site, "While I hope one day the UK will return, in the meantime this agreement will make Brexit possible, while maintaining a close relationship between the EU and UK, the protection of citizens' rights and the avoidance of a hard Irish border."

On Thursday, another senior MEP, Philippe Lamberts, co-leader of the Greens/EFA group in Parliament, also told the Parliament Magazine, "Brexit has always been a lose-lose game for both the UK and the EU. Given the constraints of self-imposed Tory 'red lines' and the Good Friday Agreement, this text is the best the EU could offer without undermining its foundations."

"The adoption of this text could avoid the UK crashing out of the EU, which would be the worst form of Brexit. However, make no mistake: under this deal, the UK would be in a much weaker position to face the challenges of this century than it is now as an EU member."

"The only way to take back control in this world is by working together: a truly Global Britain is one that takes its full place at the heart of the European Union."

"Now that we have the deal on the table, British citizens know what Brexit will really mean for them. That's why it would be fair to ask them whether Brexit is the future they want. If not, we would warmly welcome their continued EU membership."

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Meanwhile, UKIP deputy Nigel Farage described the agreement as "the worst deal in history".

A provisional timetable would see the draft go before a special EU summit on 25 November before being voted on by the UK parliament in December. If it is then rejected, the UK government has 21 days to put forward a new plan.

If any new plan is also rejected, this could result in the UK leaving with no deal. If, however, it is approved by the parliament, an EU Withdrawal Agreement Bill would be introduced early in 2019.

The European Parliament would then have to vote on the deal but only a simple majority is required to pass. Council approval would then be needed: 20 countries representing at least 65 per cent of the population must agree.

The UK is due to leave the EU by 29 March 2019 after which a transition period begins. This transition period is scheduled to last until December 2021 but, as the draft agreement states, this could be extended.

## About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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