

## Jacqueline Foster urges UK MPs to back new Brexit deal

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News

The Conservative MEPs' deputy leader Jacqueline Foster has urged MPs in the UK to vote in favour of the newly-adapted Brexit deal brokered by Prime Minister Theresa May.



Jacqueline Foster | *Photo credit: European Parliament Audiovisual*

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This evening will see the second meaningful vote taking place in the House of Commons, with UK MPs first voting on amendments and then on the deal itself at 7pm.

Ahead of the vote, Foster said, "I welcome the additional clarification of the Withdrawal Agreement and urge colleagues in Westminster to support it tonight."

"I wish to leave as planned on March 29, along with the 17.4 million people who voted for Brexit," she added.

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Theresa May visited Strasbourg late on Monday night to hold last-minute talks with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

Negotiations resulted in what May called legal assurances to the EU Withdrawal Agreement, which will prevent the backstop from becoming permanent.

After May's visit, Parliament's Brexit steering group convened for a late-night meeting, starting after midnight, with Jean-Claude Juncker and Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, to discuss the "new" deal.

Socialist group leader Udo Bullmann said, "For us, Brexit will always be a tragic mistake. However, the EU has always worked in a constructive way to ensure that the UK leaves the EU in an orderly manner."

"I wish to leave as planned on March 29, along with the 17.4 million people who voted for Brexit" **Jacqueline Foster MEP**

"It is clear from yesterday's agreement that the EU continues to do that until the last minute. However, we cannot provide further clarifications - the deal the UK Parliament will vote on tonight is the final one."

"Of course, if the UK Parliament rejects the deal again then something major needs to change. We will always be open to working for a closer EU-UK relationship and would still welcome the UK changing its mind on the historic mistake that is Brexit," he added.

Further reaction came from Swedish Greens MEP Linnea Engstrom who also told this website, "It's a bit of a show but this might be just the thing that convinces some of the parliamentarians to vote in favour of Mrs May's deal. Let's hope for the best."

UK Socialist MEP Richard Corbett commented, "The PM has focused entirely seeking a fig leaf on the Irish Backstop to appease her backbenchers. But that is not the main problem with her botched Brexit deal. It's the costly, job-destroying, rights-threatening Brexit [that] is the problem. As it bears no resemblance to what was promised, it should go back to the people to decide."

Party colleague Linda McAvan told this site, "I think it's pretty clear to everyone that nothing fundamental has changed. The Prime Minister has kept her redlines and not reached out to opposition parties. So her strategy is unchanged: with the clock ticking, keep the pressure on the extreme Brexiters in her own party and the DUP to cave in and accept the deal just to get the Withdrawal

Agreement across the line.”

Speaking at a news briefing in Strasbourg on Tuesday, Greens co-leader Philippe Lamberts said, “I am not sure anyone knows what will happen in today’s vote. Thus far, the UK political class has shown how to form a majority against ideas. Let’s see if can do the same in favour of something but we are 2 weeks away from the UK leave date.”

“After Mrs May’s visit the withdrawal declaration has, in my opinion, not changed. The rest is all about interpretation. On Monday, we (the EU) clarified the intentions of the various parties without changing the WD.”

“For us, Brexit will always be a tragic mistake ... [We] would still welcome the UK changing its mind on the historic mistake that is Brexit” **S&D leader Udo Bullmann**

“The drama associated with Mrs May’s last-minute dash to Strasbourg on Monday night was part of the political theatre that surrounds Brexit but we just seem to be going round in circles.”

“Will it [May’s visit] make any difference? Let’s wait and see.”

The UK media were, generally, not optimistic that May’s meetings in Strasbourg will make any difference to the outcome of the vote on Tuesday with several leading political pundits still predicting a defeat for her deal.

Further comment came from former UK Liberal MEP Andrew Duff who told this site, “It’s the last blast for the Irish backstop. Any further changes to the deal will only be towards a softer Brexit, effectively modifying May’s red lines. For nationalist MPs this is as good a deal as they’re going to get, therefore. If the deal is defeated tonight it will be time for the grownups to take control.”

The new legal assurances May says she secured on Monday consist of three documents.

The first is a joint legal interpretative instrument in relation to the backstop, which builds on the assurances issued in the joint letter by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council President Donald Tusk in January.

The EU and UK have agreed in the instrument that it would be inconsistent with “good faith” and “best endeavours” requirements for “either party to act with the objective of applying the [backstop] Protocol indefinitely.”

“As it [Brexit] bears no resemblance to what was promised, it should go back to the people to decide” **Richard Corbett MEP**

If either party were to act with this intention, the dispute would be brought before the independent arbitration panel.

A ruling from the panel that one side was seeking to apply the protocol indefinitely would be binding and could ultimately give the aggrieved party “the right to enact a unilateral, proportionate suspension of its obligations under the Protocol.”

The instrument also contains further assurances for Northern Ireland, and a joint commitment to establish a “negotiating track” to replace the backstop with “alternative arrangements.”

These alternative arrangements “are not required to replicate [the backstop] in any respect, provided that the underlying objectives continue to be met.”

The second document is a joint statement supplementing the Political Declaration on the future UK-EU trading relationship. This reaffirms the UK and EU’s joint commitment to begin negotiating the future relationship as soon as possible and makes it clear that the future relationship may apply provisionally pending ratification.

It also includes EU recognition of the UK’s commitments on workers’ rights.

The third document is a unilateral declaration by the UK. This emphasises the UK’s interpretation that if agreement on a future relationship is not possible, then the UK would be able to begin “instigating measures that could ultimately lead to disapplication of obligations under the Protocol.”

## About the author

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