



COMMENTARY

Why you should be prepared for a No-Deal Brexit

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Chaos. Simply googling the word will quickly land you on a Brexit news article — the majority of which are now detailing several reasons as to why you should be prepared for a No-Deal Brexit. Reasons range from MPs flippant and turntable decision-making behaviour to Theresa May's third meaningful vote on the withdrawal agreement being rejected. The number one reason, however, is that the European Union itself is now officially ready for a No-Deal Brexit. On the 25th of March the EU released a press publication stating that they have completed preparations for the possible “no-deal” scenario on 12 April.

This does not mean that all hope is lost, or that the EU has given up. The EU is simply facing up to the reality that being prepared for a No-Deal Brexit is the most likely and sensible plan. Given that the Withdrawal Agreement was not ratified on the 29th March, a “no-deal” scenario is now more likely than ever before to occur on the 12th April.” As European Commission Secretary-General Martin Selmayr put it: “the 12th April is now the new 29th March.”

In response, Donald Tusk has now called a European Council summit for the 10th of April in preparation for the 12th. While the European Union will continue to hope that a hard Brexit will not be the outcome, the failure of the British parliament to agree on the deal and assure the British public has left much to be desired. Looking back at just the last two weeks of votes, debates and interviews in Britain have shown that MPs are incapable of making progress on reaching an agreement, and that they will most likely continue to waste time, argue, focus only on self-preservation and self-interest and, ultimately, lead themselves to a disappointing and frustrating nowhere. The UK's reputation, people's jobs and livelihoods are at stake, yet all this time spent on the Brexit merry-go-round shows that these very real concerns are distant in the minds of the MPs in at Westminster.

The latest twists and turns:

Brexit thus far has been a complicated and ever-changing topic for the citizen who occasionally reads into it and the past week was no different. The week of the 18th of March was a hectic week, beginning with PM Theresa May's plans to hold a third meaningful vote being shattered by an unexpected ruling issued by House Speaker John Bercow. He declared that the government could not send May's Brexit deal back for a third vote in parliament immediately unless substantial changes were made to it¹. This proved a major spanner in the works for May who spent the rest of the week between Brussels and London, first blaming MPs for blocking Brexit and then asking the EU to postpone Brexit, in the hope that it would give the UK more time to pass a deal or find a solution.

Following May's request, the European Council [agreed](#) on Thursday 21 March to extend the UK's departure date to 22 May 2019, provided the House of Commons approved the Withdrawal Agreement by 29 March 2019 at the latest. If not, the European Council agreed to an extension until 12 April 2019.

The past two weeks saw 12 indicative votes being rejected in parliament leaving MPs throwing their arms up in the air, quite literally, at the lack of progress being made. The indicative votes have been described as an opportunity for Parliament to take back control but the rejection of all twelve indicative votes thus far have far from succeeded in painting a more lucid picture of what anyone wants.

It's no wonder that Michel Barnier and his negotiating team continue to ask the UK what exactly their desired version of exiting the EU and their future relationship with it is. The spectacle that is Brexit came to a head on March 29th, when the fateful would-be Brexit day instead saw MPs reject the

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/mar/18/what-has-john-bercow-done-now>

withdrawal agreement for the third time. The UK is now expected to indicate a way forward, and May has asked the EU for an extension until May 22nd, in order to come up with a new plan to leave with a deal. Although, MPs have approved one Bill obliging Theresa May to seek a lengthy delay to [Brexit](#) rather than leave the EU without a deal at the end on April 12th. But Theresa May is under no obligation to follow this Bill and can continue her agenda as she always has.

Britain's fall from grace:

If you think that Britain will solve this problem and not end up with a hard Brexit, then you haven't been paying attention. Over the past five months Westminster is in no different of a position than the one it began with, except that perhaps now parliamentary representatives can also add tarnishing Britain's reputation to their list of achievements. Displaying behaviour more reminiscent of a turncoat than a redcoat, British MPs have switched sides on the withdrawal agreement multiple times, losing respect and credibility along the way.

Boris Johnson who once called the deal “a suicide vest for Britain's economy” has now said he would vote for the deal. Hard-Brexiteer Jacob Rees-Mogg voted against the deal twice, stating it would leave Britain “a slave state” and held champagne parties after the deal was originally rejected. He has now decided that he would vote for the deal.² Brexit and the Leave campaign were built on lies. The hypocrisy and contradictions displayed by politicians and elected representatives have not subsided since the initial Brexit referendum. Led by people devoid of any principles, Britain is now in serious danger of sleepwalking into a No-Deal Brexit.

Yet, Brexit is far from over, and we are staring down the barrel at a minimum of two more years of strife and uncertainty. Looking back in a few years' time we will wonder why we weren't prepared, and how we could have ignored the signs that that there was no driver at the Brexit wheel, just the EU continuously laying the tracks to try to prevent this runaway train from derailing.

Marches and Signatures: (what the people want)

In between all this, a large march took place in London with estimates of 1 – 1.5 million marchers and an online UK Parliament petition to “Revoke Article 50 and remain in the EU” had at last time of checking 5.9 million signatures³.

However, at the Number 10 lobby briefing, the significance of the marches and the signatures were raised and, although the prime minister's spokesman did not say exactly what was said about the march and the petition, he did not give the impression that a lot of time was spent discussing them, or that they are having much impact on the government's thinking. The spokesman accepted that there were “strongly-held views” on Brexit on both sides. But he said the PM's view was that the country had staged a “very large democratic exercise” and voted to leave, and that MPs had to honour this. However, a recent YouGov poll found that one in five private voters have changed their mind on Brexit.

This is who MPs on both sides fail to take account of the mood of the ‘private majority’ in their campaigning. Peter Kellner, a former president of YouGov said “The people whose minds are changing- typically younger voters, especially women - belong to the private majority who are usually

² <https://www.commonspace.scot/articles/14035/analysis-capitulation-boris-and-rees-mogg-tories-are-course-their-greatest>

³ <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/241584>

are happy to discuss Brexit with family and friends but wouldn't tend to participate in local MP's public meetings."⁴ Therefore the private majority's voice is not loud but it is likely to prove decisive.

The EU's preparations for a No-Deal Brexit:

From December 2017 onwards, the European Commission has held extensive technical discussions with EU27 Member States both on general issues of preparedness and contingency work, as well as specific sectoral, legal and administrative preparedness issues. The Commission has also completed its tour of the EU27 capitals. The aim of these visits was to discuss national preparation and contingency plans and to provide any necessary clarifications on the Commission's preparedness and contingency action.⁵ The Commission has emphasized that "the visits showed a high degree of preparation by Member States for all scenarios." Whatever the outcome of Brexit may be, the EU has now stated it is prepared for all possibilities.

Yet, up to now, the EU has held out hope that the withdrawal agreement will be ratified and that there would be no need to put the no-deal preparations to use; "we are working, we are prepared. Yesterday, we had many 'no's and now we are waiting for a 'yes'," said EU chief negotiator, [Michel Barnier](#), as he emerged from a meeting during the European Council summit in late March. Barnier told diplomats during the meeting that a no deal was now "the most plausible outcome", and that there was an urgent need to war-game the bloc's response to it. The EU is to step up its "full-on crisis" preparations, according to a diplomatic note.⁶ The European Commission has published 90 sector-specific preparedness notices. These provide detailed guidance to the different sectors affected by Brexit and are available online [here](#).

The "no-deal" contingency measures include:

- **PEACE programme:** the continuation of the PEACE programme on the island of Ireland until the end of 2020. As for the post 2020 period, the Commission has already proposed to continue to strengthen cross-border support for peace and reconciliation in the border counties of Ireland and Northern Ireland as part of its next Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027.
- **The EU Budget:** in a "no-deal" scenario, the EU will be in a position to honour its commitments and to continue making payments in 2019 to UK beneficiaries for contracts signed and decisions made before 30 March 2019, on condition that the UK honours its obligations under the 2019 budget and that it accepts the necessary audit checks and controls.
- **Ship inspections:** this aims to ensure legal certainty and secure business continuity in shipping.
- **Road and Air connectivity and safety:** these two measures will ensure basic air and road connectivity in order to avoid full interruption of air and road traffic between the EU and the UK in the event of a "no-deal" scenario for a limited period of time, provided that the UK gives reciprocal treatment to EU companies and operators.
- **Rail connectivity:** ensures the validity of safety authorisations for certain parts of rail infrastructure for a strictly limited period of three months to allow long-term solutions in line with EU law to be put in place. This is, in particular, related to the Channel Tunnel and will be conditional on the United Kingdom maintaining safety standards identical to EU requirements.

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/nov/13/poll-one-in-five-private-voters-have-changed-their-mind-on-brexit>

⁵ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-1813_en.htm

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/mar/28/eu-discusses-terms-for-talks-after-no-deal-brexit>

- **Re-alignment of the North Sea – Mediterranean Core Network Corridor:** This adds new maritime links between Ireland, France, Belgium and the Netherlands to the core network, and introduces a new funding priority to the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).
- **Erasmus+ Programme:** the EU will continue to operate relevant funding or grants to current students and trainees abroad participating in Erasmus+ at the time of the UK's withdrawal.
- **Visa reciprocity:** visa-free travel to the EU for UK nationals if the UK also grants reciprocal and non-discriminatory visa-free travel to all EU citizens. Other contingency measures include; safeguarding social security entitlements, climate policy and ensuring the functioning of the emissions trading system, financial services, fishing rights and compensation.

What the future holds:

Theoretically, the UK could now request another extension or leave without a deal. Although it might seem preferable, a long extension would raise a whole series of new complications in itself as the UK could face having to take part in the European Parliament elections scheduled for May 2019. As long as her deal continues to be rejected, May will continue to threaten No-Deal and with each passing day without progress that scenario is becoming more and more likely. It seems May is staring headlong into the political abyss, with one foot already firmly in it, but there may be a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel – for her deal at least. She knows she needs MPs' support to get this deal through and in the most recent turn of events has turned to her political opposition, the Labour Party, to try to garner enough support and votes to finally see her deal pass. She will need all the votes she can possibly get, as in the words of CBI⁷ deputy Director-General Josh Hardie, “the winner takes all approach means everyone loses. Indicative votes must deliver. Only MPs can end this nightmare.”⁸

The European Court of Justice has ruled that the UK may unilaterally revoke Article 50, thereby cancelling Brexit altogether, but, politically, that's not likely to happen.⁹ With an estimated 1-1.5 million marchers taking to the streets of London recently to demonstrate against Brexit and a UK Parliament petition to “Revoke Article 50 and remain in the EU” garnering over 6 million signatures,¹⁰ one solution to this political deadlock that has been gaining support is to put the vote back to the people. Norbert Röttgen, chairman of the foreign affairs committee in the German Bundestag considers it “natural to give the vote back to the people,” and there are many who agree with that viewpoint. The real question is what the object of a second referendum would be; would a second vote on whether to leave the EU take place or would the controversial Withdrawal Agreement be put to the people?

As our political analyst [Irene Christodoulaki](#) points out “Political opportunism aside, the issue is obvious: if MPs can change their minds, why can't the people?”¹¹

If you still believe that a No-Deal Brexit won't affect you then I would implore you to read this [piece](#) by the BBC that highlights ten ways you could be affected by no-deal. To know more about how to prepare for a “no-deal” scenario, EU citizens can contact [Europe Direct](#) for any questions. Call Freephone **00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11** from anywhere in the EU, in any official EU language. The European Commission has also published a series of [reader-friendly factsheets](#) in all EU languages.

⁷ Confederation of Business Industry

⁸ <https://www.ft.com/content/ae8fb16e-39cb-3f97-8eff-99c9330bd57e>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-46481643>

¹⁰ <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/241584>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/TheWiseRaccoon>

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