

## Boris Johnson Gives 'Final Deal' to Brussels

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*The final blueprint for the UK government's EU withdrawal proposal was delivered to Brussels on Wednesday. **David Frost**, the government's Brexit envoy, handed over the document, headed 'A fair and reasonable compromise' and addressed to EU **President Jean-Claude Juncker**.*

In the proposal, Johnson stresses that a failure to achieve a withdrawal agreement with the EU would represent 'a failure of statecraft for which we would all be responsible'. He also makes it clear that the UK would not accept the Irish backstop proposal put forward in previous deals by **Theresa May** and instead outlines an alternative vision for the Irish border – a series of customs checkpoints beyond the frontier between north and south. This would mean Northern Ireland would effectively stay within the single market, but leave the EU customs union, importantly avoiding tariffs on goods. However there would be customs checks on goods travelling between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland – something which so far has been unacceptable to both the EU and Irish government.

Jean-Claude Juncker said on Wednesday he welcomed Boris Johnson's enthusiasm to obtain a deal ahead of the EU summit on 17th October, this coming in the midst of rumours however that Johnson may well boycott the summit if the EU rejects his deal. The ball is now firmly in the EU's court, as according to the Benn Act passed by parliament, if a deal is not negotiated by 19th October, then the UK government must ask Brussels for an extension to the negotiation period. However it's highly unlikely now we will see an extension period to the negotiations; not only is **Boris Johnson** adamant that the UK will leave Europe 'come what may' on 31st October but the EU as well has indicated that it would not look favourably on the Brexit uncertainty being prolonged even further.

Yet there is no sign that the UK opposition – the Labour party headed by **Jeremy Corbyn** – or the Scottish National Party will vote through such a deal, even if it is accepted by the EU.

Corbyn pronounced the draft proposals as 'unworkable and not serious' and announced today that he would even be prepared to expel MPs from his party who voted Johnson's deal through. SNP Westminster leader Ian Blackford didn't hesitate to tell Johnson what he thought of him, stressing that his deal is 'dead before it even left the podium of the Tory conference'. Calling for the Prime Minister's resignation, Ian Blackford said he wanted to put him 'on notice' and that his party would do everything it could to secure an extension to the Brexit negotiation period and avoid a No Deal Brexit. He complained that although the views of Northern Irish had not been taken into account when putting a deal together, the opinion of Scottish voters, who largely voted to remain in the EU, had not been taken into account at all.

Meanwhile on Thursday the Irish foreign minister Simon Coveney said that the Republic would not be supporting Johnson's deal which would mean that 'one party or indeed a minority in Northern Ireland make the decisions for the majority'. He said it was not consistent with the terms of the Good Friday agreement. By 'minority' Coveney is referring to the Democratic Unionist Party, headed by Arlene Foster, currently in a coalition government with the Conservatives and who have said they support Johnson's proposals regarding the Irish border. But without the support of the Republican party Sinn Fein and Republic of Ireland, it's not likely that his deal will either be passed by the EU or the UK parliament.

But not getting a deal is unlikely to deter the Prime Minister in his determination to get the UK out of the EU by 31st October. A massive government advertising campaign has been launched, with billboards, pamphlets and adverts popping up online and on social media to promote the idea that the UK is leaving at the end of October. And it was clear from Boris Johnson's speech to the House of Commons on Thursday that he is defiant in his resolve that Britain must leave on that date, regardless of the Benn Act passed in parliament last month to prevent such a potentially destructive No Deal Brexit. His statement read: 'If our European neighbours choose not to show a corresponding willingness to reach a deal, then we shall have to leave on 31 October without an agreement, and we are ready to do so.' It couldn't be plainer.

There have been various suggestions for how he could circumvent the legislation, from ignoring the law and potentially landing in jail (!) to filing a legal challenge against the Benn Act on the grounds it was constitutionally illegitimate - something which the Prime Minister himself hinted at on Tuesday. It remains unclear to politicians and commentators alike exactly what strategy Johnson will resort to, however, and he is likely to keep his cards very close to his chest as we edge closer towards the Brexit deadline.

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