

Brexit “Transition”: The Calm before the Storm for Boris

By [Johanna Ross](#)

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UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson met with French counterpart Emmanuel Macron last week in Paris as part of his continuing tour with European leaders in a last-minute attempt to strike a deal over Brexit. President Macron echoed the words of German Chancellor Angela Merkel who when meeting the UK PM on Wednesday gave him just 30 days to come up with an alternative to the Irish backstop. She said that the time was nigh for Britain to put its proposals forward and vowed to ‘put our all’ into finding a solution to the current stalemate.

Macron for his part said he would like some ‘visibility’ on the UK’s plan to withdraw from the EU on October 31st, emphasising that waiting till the last minute was not an option. He said:

“We should all together be able to find something smart within 30 days if there is goodwill on both sides.”

Furthermore he emphasised the importance of the Irish backstop, highlighting it was an ‘indispensable’ guarantee for the stability of Ireland but also as a way of protecting the integrity of the European single market.

Boris Johnson however made it absolutely clear that the backstop, which would avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland if a deal had not been reached by the end of the Brexit transition period, was ‘undemocratic’ and could not be contemplated, as it effectively would keep Britain in a customs union with the EU. He went further to say that ‘under no circumstances’ would the UK get to the point of imposing checks or controls of any kind at the Irish border and that he thought there were ways of protecting the single market and allowing for Brexit to take place.

Given their opposing stances towards these crucial aspects of the Brexit deal, the likelihood of the UK and EU coming to any consensus over EU withdrawal is not high. And despite the positive vibes coming from discussions last week, the Irish border question will continue to present difficulties in the negotiations. Boris Johnson may have been ‘powerfully encouraged’ as he said by the conversations with Merkel and Macron last week but the reality is that with just over two months to go till Britain is due to leave the EU, no concrete proposals have been put forward by the UK government as an alternative to previous rejected deals. And even if the EU is to approve another version of a withdrawal agreement, it’s still unlikely to be passed by a predominantly pro-Remain parliament.

In which case one could argue that Johnson’s European tour last week was nothing more than a performance for onlookers at home. The fact is that Johnson is preparing for a No

Deal Brexit, and has been since he took office – as Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon [confirmed](#) after her meeting with him last month. Indeed with the prospect of a lucrative trade deal with the US in the pipeline and encouraging rhetoric from President Donald Trump during their meeting on Sunday at the G7 –

“We’re going to do a very big trade deal, bigger than we’ve ever had with the UK,” Trump said – Johnson is well on the way to leading the UK out of the EU on October 31st with no deal in place.

And where is the UK opposition in all this, you may ask? Well, quite frankly in a state of disarray. Indeed, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn’s attempt to gather cross-party support for his plan to call a vote of no confidence in Boris Johnson followed by the formation of a national unity government, was a damp squib. Whilst gaining a positive reaction from the Scottish National Party, Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson rejected Corbyn’s proposal to lead such an interim government outright, suggesting instead several other candidates. Despite the considerable opposition to Brexit at Westminster, there remains a lack of unity and consensus amongst Remainers which continues to prevent a credible force against Brexit from forming. Instead, with the arrival of Boris Johnson on the scene, and the charisma and leadership qualities he naturally possesses, the Conservatives have now surged in the polls to become, according to one [survey](#), 17 points ahead of Labour. This now suggests that given a general election, Johnson’s chances of succeeding over Corbyn are now far greater than they were when his predecessor, Theresa May, was in power.

Having said that, now is the calm before the storm for Boris. With a [report](#) into the full extent of government preparations for a No Deal Brexit having been leaked last weekend, it is now clear that what mayhem awaits. Shortages of food, medicines, are all anticipated; not to mention what impact it will have on the economy as a whole. And despite positive talk surrounding a trade deal with Trump, Johnson admitted it probably wouldn’t be negotiated within a year. Brexit may have been messy up till now but it looks like it’s about to get a whole lot more chaotic...

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