[Article – Deal or no deal: MEPs debate state of play on Brexit talks](#)

The UK is currently set to leave the EU at the end of October 2019. Any extension would have to be requested by the UK government and agreed by the remaining 27 EU countries.

Negotiators agreed the text of a draft withdrawal agreement in November 2018, but it has not yet been ratified. It was rejected by the UK's House of Commons on three occasions. In 2019 new Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced he would seek to renegotiate the agreement.

MEPs discussed the state of play on 18 September and also adopted a

[resolution](#) reiterating their support for the EU's position and stating they would reject any withdrawal agreement without a backstop.

During the debate speakers stressed the risk of a no deal Brexit.

Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, said: "The risk of a no-deal remains real and basically is going to come down to a decision by the UK government, but will never be the choice, the preferred option of the European Union. And that's why I think it is better now to focus on what we can do in terms of concluding that deal, something which is desirable and still, in my view, possible."

Manfred Weber (EPP, Germany): "At the moment, it's not Britain that is leaving the EU, but jobs and businesses leaving the UK. A third of the British businesses are planning on or already leaving. Many here in the plenary regret the Brexit outcome, but I must tell you that during the election campaign, it was a powerful argument to tell the Europeans it's stupid and it creates a lot of uncertainty…That's why you helped us a lot."

One of the most difficult issues in the Brexit talks is the backstop to prevent a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier insisted that the backstop is a pragmatic solution to concrete problems: "We don't want to go back to a physical border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; we want to protect the integrity of the single market and we want to preserve the whole island's economy."

S&D chief Iratxe García Pérez, from Spain, called on Boris Johnson to guarantee the acquired right of EU citizens living in the UK: "Ordinary citizens should never have to pay the price of the mistakes made by their political representatives," she said. She also added that her group supports the British people if they want to change their decision on Brexit: "The S&D group has always viewed Brexit as a historical error and we are prepared to support the British people if they do decide to revisit that decision."

Parliament's Brexit coordinator Guy Verhofstadt (Belgium, Renew) said he thought a deal was still possible, but criticised the UK's handling of citizens' rights and called for the "automatic registration of all our EU citizens". Turning to future trade relations, he said: "This Parliament will never accept an agreement where Britain has all the advantages of free trade, of zero tariffs and does not align with our ecological, our health, our social standards…" He added: "We will never accept a Singapore by the North Sea. That will never happen"

Philippe Lamberts (Greens/EFA, Belgium): "We did not choose Brexit but we respect the choice of the majority of voters in the UK. The best demonstration of that is that we are acting in good faith in negotiating the agreement, which will govern the separation that we regret."

"The British government wants a deal, not any old deal, but one that is acceptable to the British parliament and the British people," said Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR, UK), calling for goodwill and flexibility from both the EU

and the UK. He questioned the motives of those proposing a further extension of UK membership in the EU. "What's the point of further delay? Some of you may think that if we drag this out a bit more, then there will be a change of regime in Britain and maybe a change of heart. I believe this is a total delusion."

Marco Zanni (ID, Italy) said that EU institutions shouldn´t give lectures on democracy to the British Parliament: "I am concerned about the fact that decisions freely taken by people, which don´t please the institutions of the EU can never be accepted." According to Zanni, the EU is afraid of losing Britain because this would be a "demonstration of the errors of the past by the EU".

Martin Schirdewan (GUE/NGL, Germany) said: "When I joined Parliament, I heard a Brexiteer saying that an empire had to be destroyed and he was referring to the European Union. The only thing Brexiteers have achieved is to push the UK into its greatest political crisis for decades. One in which workers and pensioners are going to have to pay the biggest price. This policy is neither in the interest of the people of Britain nor of Europe."