

# No-deal is a very real prospect. We must ensure we are ready: article by Michael Gove

Last week, I was honoured to be asked by our new prime minister to lead on this government's No 1 priority – preparing the country to leave the EU, come what may, on October 31. Three years after an historic and decisive referendum vote by the British people, the United Kingdom is finally on the cusp of leaving the European Union.

With a new prime minister, a new government, and a new clarity of mission, we will exit the EU on October 31. No ifs. No buts. No more delay. Brexit is happening.

It's our aim to ensure we can leave with a deal. We want to continue with warm and close relations with our friends, allies and neighbours in the EU. We will do everything in our power to conclude a good agreement that honours the referendum result and secures a brighter future for us outside the single market and the customs union.

What we can't do, however, is simply present parliament once again with the same withdrawal agreement it's already rejected three times. You can't just reheat the dish that's been sent back and expect that will make it more palatable.

So we need a new approach and a different relationship. Critically, we need to abolish the backstop and ensure we find a different way to handle trade, and other important relations, on the island of Ireland.

In the days and weeks ahead the prime minister and his team will undertake intensive efforts, talking to the EU's leaders, to secure a path to a better outcome for us all.

But while we are optimistic about the future, we are realistic about the need to plan for every eventuality. The EU's leaders have, so far, said they will not change their approach – it's the unreformed withdrawal agreement, take it or leave it.

We still hope they will change their minds, but we must operate on the assumption that they will not. The prime minister has been crystal clear that means we must prepare to leave the EU without a deal on October 31, and I fully support this approach.

No deal is now a very real prospect, and we must make sure that we are ready. A lot has already been done. Thanks to hard work by ministers past and present, and outstanding efforts by the civil service, we have made significant progress.

We have negotiated trade agreements with partners around the world, worth

more than £70bn. We have signed continuity agreements with key allies in order to secure our borders and nuclear defences.

We have provided guidance to businesses, redeployed gifted public servants to new frontline roles, developed new IT systems, passed necessary legislation and supported those government departments with the biggest responsibilities in managing this transition with new resources.

But there still remains much more to do. Planning for no deal is now this government's No 1 priority – and that is why we have, since Wednesday, been accelerating preparations.

First, all the necessary funding is now being put in place. You cannot properly prepare for a change of this magnitude without the money to make it happen. And the chancellor has agreed every penny needed for no deal preparation will be made available.

Second, the government machine is being retooled for the task. I am an unabashed admirer of the many brilliant people in our civil service. I have worked with them in four departments as they have risen to huge challenges and driven change. They now know, along with every minister in the government, that delivering Brexit on time is the most pressing task before all of us.

Third, the cabinet secretary has created a new, unified, Whitehall structure to co-ordinate action across departments and accelerate decision-making.

Leaving the EU, and taking back control of our money, laws and trade, inevitably requires us to develop new systems, processes and ways of working. Outside the EU we can develop smarter ways of supporting our farmers, attracting new investment, generating technological breakthroughs and trading globally.

Delivering those new opportunities requires us to reshape government, change what happens at our borders and develop new models of regulation. That work is required whether or not we get the good free trade deal we all want, or have to leave without a deal at the end of October. Much of the work we are accelerating, to prepare for no deal, is work that is vital for any successful future outside the single market and customs union.

But, of course, there is also additional work we have to do to ready the country for the specific circumstances of leaving without a deal this October. Government is preparing, but so must many others. From taking your pet abroad, to ensuring freight can cross the channel smoothly, there will be new approaches required.

That is why we will shortly launch one of the biggest peacetime public information campaigns this country has seen, so that citizens, communities and businesses can prepare for what will happen if there is no deal.

The entire machinery of government will work to help ensure our businesses will be ready, our factories will be ready, our hospitals will be ready – and the British people will be ready.

We will be ready because we are not approaching this task with an attitude of business as usual. We are taking tough decisions and challenging conventional wisdom, so that we can deliver on the will of the British people.

Above all, we have the courage of our convictions and are determined to deliver for our country. Because that is what this new prime minister and new government are all about.

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