

Press release – Statement by David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament

I have just had a meeting with Prime Minister Johnson. I came here in the confident hope of hearing proposals that could take negotiations forward. However, I must note that there has been no progress.

As you know, a deal between the EU and UK requires not only a positive meaningful vote of the House of Commons, but also the European Parliament's approval.

It is therefore important that the UK Prime Minister hears directly from the European Parliament on its approach to Brexit. I am grateful to Mr Johnson for giving me that opportunity.

Our approach is very straightforward. We think an orderly Brexit, the UK leaving with a deal, is by far the best outcome. The deal that we thought had been agreed with the UK last year was a text the EP could have supported. It resolved all the issues associated with the UK's withdrawal from the EU. It provided certainty for citizens and businesses. It looked forward to a close future EU-UK relationship. As things stand, it remains the best possible agreement.

As I explained to Mr Johnson, the Parliament will not agree to a deal at any price. We will not agree to a deal that undermines the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process or compromise the integrity of our single market. This we made plain in our resolution adopted with a huge majority in September.

We have examined the UK proposals to replace the original backstop and our response is that these are a long way from something to which the Parliament could agree. In addition, they are not immediately operable.

Negotiations, I know, are continuing and the Parliament, through its Brexit Steering Group, is being kept fully informed by Michel Barnier of the progress on those talks.

There are two alternatives to a deal at this juncture: extension or no deal.

On an extension, the Parliament is open to this possibility, should there be a good reason or purpose for this. But requesting an extension is a matter for the UK and it is not my place to comment on the political controversies or legal issues that are being debated in the United Kingdom.

As far as no deal is concerned, we are very clear that this would be a very negative outcome. It will be economically damaging to both parties, in particular to the UK. It will have very serious consequences on the island of Ireland. It will increase uncertainty for business and above all for citizens. "No deal" would clearly be the responsibility of the UK government.

On citizens, we will continue to ensure that in all scenarios their rights are protected.

I do hope a no-deal outcome can be avoided, but if not, the EU has taken the necessary measures to prepare for this outcome.

I continue to place my faith in good sense and responsibility but among friends, duty demands that we tell each other the truth.

Thank you.