

Speech: PM press statement at European Council: 14 December 2018

At this Council meeting, I have held a series of discussions with my fellow leaders on the Brexit deal and I was crystal clear about the assurances which are needed on the backstop having heard the views of MPs in the House of Commons.

I reiterated that it is in the interests of the EU as well as the UK to get this over the line. A disorderly Brexit would be good for no-one.

At 27 level, the EU have published a series of conclusions.

The EU made clear:

- that it is their firm determination to work speedily on a future relationship or alternative arrangements which ensure no hard border by 31 December 2020 so that the backstop will not need to be triggered.
- If the backstop was ever triggered, it would apply only temporarily and the EU would use its best endeavours to negotiate and conclude expeditiously a subsequent agreement that would replace the backstop.
- That the EU stands ready to embark on preparations so that negotiations on the future partnership can start as soon as possible.

As formal conclusions, these commitments have legal status and therefore should be welcomed.

As I have always said, the guaranteed way of avoiding the backstop is to have the future partnership in place by the time the implementation period is over. The EU is very firmly committed to this course.

But MPs will require further assurances, and I have discussed that this morning with my EU partners, including Presidents Tusk, Juncker and others.

I note there has been reporting that the EU is not willing to consider any further clarification. The EU is clear – as I am – that if we are going to leave with a deal this is it.

But my discussions with colleagues today have shown that further clarification and discussion following the Council's conclusions is in fact possible.

There is work still to do and we will be holding talks in coming days about how to obtain the further assurances that the UK Parliament needs in order to be able to approve the deal.

I say again. It is in the overwhelming interest of all our people – in the EU and the UK – to get this done, and as quickly as possible.