

Brexit: Global and Political Affairs Unit Briefing

16 January 2019

Background

Last night in Parliament MPs voted on the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration on the future relationship between the UK and the EU (“the Brexit deal”). The Government was defeated by 230 votes, a margin far in excess of predictions made before the vote.

The defeat means the Government cannot proceed with ratifying the Brexit deal and passing the legislation necessary for its implementation.

The Prime Minister told MPs immediately after the vote that the Government would now reach out to “Senior Parliamentarians” to forge a way forward, and would return to the House of Commons on Monday with details of how it plans to proceed – as required following last week’s defeat on presenting ‘Plan B’ to Parliament.

Given the scale of defeat on a key plank of the Government’s agenda, the Labour Party, as the Official Opposition, announced last night that it will table a No Confidence motion in the Government today.

What is likely to happen now?

The No Confidence motion is expected to fail, since the European Research Group (the most strongly Brexit wing of the Conservative Party) and the Democratic Unionist Party have pledged their support for the Prime Minister. Both groups are united in their opposition to a Corbyn-led Government.

A General Election and change of Government is therefore highly unlikely at this stage.

In terms of the Brexit deal, the Prime Minister’s offer to work with “Senior Parliamentarians” is not expected to result in a significant change of direction for two reasons. Firstly, it appears “Senior Parliamentarians” does not necessarily include opposition party leaders, meaning it will not mobilise MPs in high enough numbers to tip the balance in favour of the Government’s position, i.e. the 256 Labour MPs. Secondly, reports suggest the Prime Minister is not prepared to change her negotiating ‘red lines’, namely ending the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union, ending free movement, taking the UK out of the single market and the customs union and ending the payment of “vast” sums of money to the EU budget each year. This conflicts with the Labour Party’s position of seeking a customs union with the EU and a close single market relationship.

For these reasons, it is also unlikely the EU will offer any further significant concessions – the UK Government’s ‘red lines’ haven’t changed, and there is no indication of winning round significant support for the deal in Parliament.

This leaves two most likely outcomes:

1. Article 50 extension – the EU is preparing to extend the Article 50 time for negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement and future relationship until July (when the new European Parliament would be sworn in, following the May European elections. The UK would not take part in those elections).

This would be the case even in the unlikely event that some version of the Withdrawal Agreement is approved by the UK Parliament, since there isn’t now the time to pass the necessary legislation to make the agreement have effect in domestic law.

But Article 50 will only be extended for a purpose – for further negotiation, to pass the necessary implementing legislation (if Parliament has agreed the deal), to hold a General Election, or to hold a referendum.

2. No Deal – leaving the EU without a deal is still a real possibility, the default position in law being that we leave on 29 March 2019 (this is written into legislation). A majority of MPs do not want

this outcome but there is no clear roadmap for positive action to avoid it. The EU is more prepared for a No Deal outcome than the UK, as things stand.

It would appear the Prime Minister will continue the strategy of running down the clock to put pressure on MPs who most fear No Deal to back the Withdrawal Agreement. It is possible more MPs may back the deal as the threat of No Deal (the default as at 29 March) or No Brexit (the more things drag on, or as a result of a People's Vote referendum) becomes more imminent.

It is possible there will be indicative votes in Parliament on alternative courses of action. There is clearly a majority in Parliament against No Deal but it is not clear that there's a majority FOR an alternative.

There remains no majority in Parliament for a 'People's Vote' referendum. While there is significant pressure on the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn to back a People's Vote, he is not inclined to do so. His reticence in calling for a vote of confidence in the government has been because Labour policy, as agreed at its Party Conference last September, is to consider a second referendum only if the preferred route of calling for a General Election fails. Once the attempt at forcing a General Election has failed today, pressure to pursue a second referendum, or People's Vote, will only increase.

What will this mean for the University of Nottingham?

Last night's events prolong the uncertainty for businesses and individuals up and down the country, including the University.

Given the two most likely scenarios mean either a continuation of the status quo (Article 50 extension) or a No Deal scenario, this means providing reassurance to colleagues as well as stepping up preparations for No Deal.

What will the University of Nottingham be doing?

The University is preparing for Brexit in a number of ways and colleagues are invited to feed into these different activities, as outlined below:

- *Reassurance and support for our EU staff -*

The EU Settlement Scheme enables EU citizens to apply for either settled or pre-settled status (for those who've been here fewer than five years), allowing them to continue living in the UK post-Brexit. The University of Nottingham has 800 staff who are EU citizens. The University will pay the registration fee for all European staff and their families should they wish to apply for settled status under the scheme, and Human Resources are providing support for people making applications. Contact Megan.Garner@nottingham.ac.uk for further details and read more on the Vice-Chancellor's [blog](#).

The Vice-Chancellor will be hosting The University of Nottingham European Staff Celebration event 5-7pm on 19th March to celebrate the contributions of EU staff. The University is also looking for suggestions (or volunteers) of European colleagues who might be willing to put themselves forward as a case study for a video to be shown at the event itself, as well as other formats to be used more widely afterwards. More information is available [here](#). Please email Alex Miles with your suggestions Alex.Miles@nottingham.ac.uk.

- *Preparing for No Deal -*

Given this is the default position in law, in the absence of an alternative course of action being pursued, the University is stepping up its preparation for the UK leaving the EU without a legal framework in place ("No Deal"), primarily via the No Deal Incident Management Team, chaired

by Registrar Dr Paul Greatrix. It has been monitoring developments to manage University operations in the event of No Deal. This includes ensuring the preparedness of our supply chains to continue to provide research materials, goods and services; continuity of travel arrangements to the continent and associated insurance issues; and contractual and legal issues in the event of a No Deal scenario. In light of the Parliamentary vote on the Withdrawal Agreement, the Taskforce will be stepping up its contingency planning in partnership with Schools and professional service areas.

- *Looking beyond Brexit -*

The University's *EU Taskforce* provides strategic direction for the University to prepare for and navigate a post-Brexit environment. Chaired by Deputy Vice-Chancellor Andy Long, and reporting to the University Executive Board, it is modelling scenarios and developing approaches to ensure the University continues to thrive post-Brexit in terms of its student recruitment, research partnerships, funding and grants, and evolving its global outlook.

Further reading

BBC - [Brexit: what could happen next?](#)

For more information contact Amy Williams, Global and Political Affairs,
amy.williams@nottingham.ac.uk