

No-deal Brexit would be EU's fault, says Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson has ratcheted up his game of chicken with the EU over Brexit, claiming it will be the fault of Brussels if Britain leaves the bloc without a deal.

The prime minister said it was now “their call” whether they wanted a deal or not.

It comes as the First Minister of Wales Mark Drakeford said he shares “fundamentally different views on Brexit” to Mr. Johnson after the pair met this evening.

Welsh sheep farmers have previously warned of “civil unrest” in the event of no-deal.

A Welsh government spokesperson said after Mr. Johnson and Mr. Drakeford's meeting this evening: “The first minister repeatedly warned of the catastrophic impact Brexit would have on Wales and pressed the prime minister on what support would be available for Welsh industry and agricultural sectors – no details given about new or alternative markets.

“The first minister pressed the prime minister to hold a second referendum to test the views of the people.”

Mr. Johnson had earlier visited a poultry farm near Newport where he said Wales' farming sector would have the support it needs in the event of no-deal.

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The prime minister added: "If their markets are going to be tricky, then we will help them to find new markets.

"We have interventions that are aimed to support their incomes."

Meanwhile, Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns has suggested new global markets, including in Japan, will be available to sheep producers after Brexit."

Helen Roberts, development officer for the National Sheep Association (NSA) in Wales called on Mr. Johnson to "stop playing Russian roulette with the industry, which he appears to be doing at the moment".

Asked about the possibility of civil unrest, including roadblocks and tractor protests, among sheep producers, she told BBC Radio 4's Today: "I think they will, I think it's time to come and stand up for ourselves and be counted."

Mr. Johnson's declaration that it will be the EU's fault if the UK fails to secure a Brexit deal came after he clashed with the Irish prime minister over the controversial backstop in the pair's first discussions.

In a first phone call with Leo Varadkar since becoming UK prime minister - on his sixth day in 10 Downing Street - Mr. Johnson repeated his stance that he will only agree to a Brexit deal that "abolishes" the backstop.

But, offering no sign a Brexit breakthrough is close, Mr. Varadkar repeated the EU's position that the UK's withdrawal agreement cannot be renegotiated.

Inserted into the UK's yet-to-be ratified divorce deal with the EU, the backstop is

an insurance policy designed to avoid a hardening of the border on the island of Ireland, should this not be averted by the future UK-EU trade relationship.

Mr. Johnson has described the backstop as “anti-democratic” due to its provisions for the UK to remain closely aligned to the EU for an indefinite period.

He has promised to take the UK out of the EU on 31 October “do or die”, raising the prospect of a no-deal Brexit – cited as one of the factors behind recent falls in the pound.

Giving Downing Street’s account of Mr. Johnson’s call with Mr. Varadkar on Tuesday, a spokesperson said the prime minister had told his Irish counterpart that his “clear preference is to leave the EU with a deal, but it must be one that abolishes the backstop”.

Mr. Johnson was also said to have told Mr. Varadkar that the UK government “will never put physical checks or physical infrastructure” on the Irish border “in all scenarios” after Brexit.

The prime minister has previously described how “alternative arrangements” to physical border checks could provide a solution.

But Mr. Varadkar was at odds with Mr. Johnson’s view of the backstop, according to the Irish PM’s office.

A spokesperson for the Irish leader said: “The Taoiseach emphasized to the prime minister that the backstop was necessary as a consequence of decisions taken in the UK and by the UK government.”

Mr. Varadkar was also said to have explained that the “EU was united in its view that the withdrawal agreement could not be reopened”.

“Alternative arrangements could replace the backstop in the future, as envisaged in the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration on the future relationship, but thus far satisfactory options have yet to be identified and demonstrated,” the spokesperson added.



Image: Irish PM Leo Varadkar told Mr. Johnson the Brexit deal can't be reopened

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Mr. Varadkar also invited Mr. Johnson to Dublin to continue discussions on Brexit and efforts to restore a power-sharing agreement in Northern Ireland.

Downing Street's account of the call did not reference a possible trip to Dublin, but the pair were said to have "agreed to stay in contact" while Mr. Johnson was "looking forward to visiting Northern Ireland shortly".

Mr. Johnson later described a "very good conversation" with Mr. Varadkar during a visit to a farm in Newport, South Wales, as he repeated his message that the current Brexit deal is a non-starter.

"Parliament has thrown this thing out three times, everybody understands that deal won't work, that withdrawal agreement won't work," he said.

Mr. Johnson was also expected to visit the Brecon and Radnorshire constituency in Wales, where a by-election is being held on Thursday that could see the prime minister have his House of Commons majority cut to just one.

The pound was trading a little higher at Tuesday lunchtime since recent falls.

It was back at €1.09 and \$1.2171, meaning it had come off the fresh 28-month low of \$1.2122 earlier in the day.

Source:

<https://news.sky.com/story/prime-minister-boris-johnson-says-no-deal-brexit-will-be-eus-fault-11773406>

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