

EP Brexit Steering Group calls on the UK to overcome the deadlock

EP Brexit Steering Group discussed today, 23 January 2019, the state of play of Brexit in light of last week's meaningful vote and Prime Minister May's Statement last Monday.

It calls on the UK to clarify its position in the coming days.

European Parliament's Brexit Steering Group under the Chairmanship of its coordinator, Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, BE), welcomed the Government's decision to waive the fee for EU citizens applying for the UK's settled status scheme, something the European Parliament has consistently pushed for. It called on the EU Member States to follow this example with respect to all UK citizens residing on their territory.

The BSG stressed that following the rejection by the House of Commons of the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration, the UK Government must work together with all political parties in the House of Commons to overcome this deadlock. It expects the UK side to come back as quickly as possible with a positive and viable proposal on the way forward.

The BSG reiterated that the Withdrawal Agreement is fair and cannot be re-negotiated. This applies especially to the backstop, since it is the guarantee that under no circumstances will there be a hardening of the border on the island of Ireland while at the same time safeguarding the integrity of the Single Market. The EU remains clear, firm and united on this even if the negotiated backstop is not meant to be used. Therefore, the BSG insists that, without such an "all-weather" backstop-insurance, the European Parliament will not give its consent to the Withdrawal Agreement.

The BSG also reiterated Parliament's long standing position that it is open to a much more ambitious future relationship, should the UK consider this. This would not only allow for a closer EU-UK future partnership but could also avoid deployment of the backstop. It expects greater clarity next week from the UK on its position on the EU-UK relationship for the future. The BSG recognised that a rejection of the Agreement increases the chances of a disorderly exit of the UK, which cannot be mitigated by any form of specific arrangement(s) between the EU and the UK. It stressed that while a no deal exit would not be in anybody's interests, the only responsible course of action remains to continue and to intensify work on no deal planning. It reiterated the European Parliament's determination to ensure in such a case that there would be no disruption for EU citizens in the UK or for UK citizens in the EU.

Next steps

The BSG will reconvene immediately after the vote in the House of Commons on the 29 January to discuss the way forward, and the European Parliament will hold a debate at its sitting of 30-31 January.