

# LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

6 February 2019

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for taking the time to meet last week to discuss the Brexit negotiations and our alternative approaches to finding a deal that can command support in Parliament and be negotiated with the EU.

There is, as was demonstrated last week, a clear majority in Parliament that no deal must now be taken off the table and that there can be no return to a hard border in Northern Ireland in any circumstance.

We recognise that your priority is now to seek legally binding changes to the backstop arrangements contained within the Withdrawal Agreement, as we discussed when we met.

However, without changes to your negotiating red lines, we do not believe that simply seeking modifications to the existing backstop terms is a credible or sufficient response either to the scale of your defeat last month in Parliament, or the need for a deal with the EU that can bring the country together and protect jobs.

As you have said many times before, the EU has been clear that any withdrawal agreement would need to include a backstop to guarantee no return to a hard border on the island of Ireland.

Labour has long argued that the Government should change its negotiating red lines and seek significant changes to the Political Declaration to provide clarity on our future relationship and deliver a closer economic relationship with the EU. That would also ensure that any backstop would be far less likely to be invoked.

The changes we would need to see include:

- A permanent and comprehensive UK-wide customs union. This would include alignment with the union customs code, a common external tariff and an agreement on commercial policy that includes a UK say on future EU trade deals. We believe that a customs union is necessary to deliver the frictionless trade that our businesses, workers and consumers need, and is the only viable way to ensure there is no hard border on the island of Ireland. As you are aware, a customs union is supported by most businesses and trade unions.





- Close alignment with the Single Market. This should be underpinned by shared institutions and obligations, with clear arrangements for dispute resolution.
- Dynamic alignment on rights and protections so that UK standards keep pace with evolving standards across Europe as a minimum, allowing the UK to lead the way.
- Clear commitments on participation in EU agencies and funding programmes, including in areas such as the environment, education, and industrial regulation.
- Unambiguous agreements on the detail of future security arrangements, including access to the European Arrest Warrant and vital shared databases.

We believe these negotiating objectives need to be enshrined in law before the UK leaves the EU to provide certainty for businesses and a clear framework for our future relationship.

We recognise that any negotiation with the EU will require flexibility and compromise. Our first priority must be a deal that is best for jobs, living standards, our communities, in the context of increased and more equitable investment across all regions and nations of the UK. That approach should guide how alignment with EU regulations is to be maintained in future, as well discussions on dispute resolution, the role of the ECJ, and competition and migration rules.

EU leaders have been clear that such changes to the Political Declaration and a closer relationship are possible if such a request is made by the UK government and if the current red lines change. We believe that a close economic relationship along these lines would make it far less likely that any backstop arrangements would ever be needed.

The Government's failure to secure a deal that can command the support of Parliament means time has run out for the necessary preparation and for legislation to be finalised. Following last week's rejection by the House of Commons of 'no deal', all necessary steps must be taken to avoid such an outcome.

My colleagues and I look forward to discussing these proposals with you further, in the constructive manner in which they are intended, with the aim of securing a sensible agreement that can win the support of parliament and bring the country together.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Corbyn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeremy Corbyn MP  
Leader of the Opposition