

EU rejects demand to scrap Irish backstop

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● Brussels insists that the backstop is essential to preserve the integrity of European trade

● Johnson wrote to EU that Britain could not accept what he called the “anti-democratic” backstop

Brussels, Belgium

The EU yesterday rejected British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's demand to scrap the Irish border backstop plan to achieve a Brexit deal, saying he had offered no workable alternative.

Johnson wrote to EU Council President Donald Tusk on Monday to insist that Britain could not accept what he called the “anti-democratic” backstop, a mechanism to avoid border checks between EU-member Ireland and British-ruled Northern Ireland.

Since taking office last month, Johnson has been adamant Britain will leave the European Union on October 31 come what may and has stepped up preparations for a chaotic “no deal” departure that would cause major economic disruption.



A demonstrator, dressed as a clown and wearing a mask of Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, protests outside the gates to Downing Street on Whitehall in London

But the European Commission, the EU executive which has led Brexit negotiations with London, dismissed the proposal in Johnson's letter that the backstop could be replaced with a “commitment” to find “alternative arrangements”.

“The letter does not provide a legal operational solution to prevent the return of a hard border on the island of Ireland,” commission spokeswoman Natasha Bertaud told reporters.

“It does not set out what any alternative arrangements could be, and in fact it recognises there

is no guarantee that such arrangements will be in place by the end of the transitional period.”

The clash comes as Johnson prepares to travel to Berlin and Paris, where he hopes to convince German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron to give ground in the search for a Brexit deal.

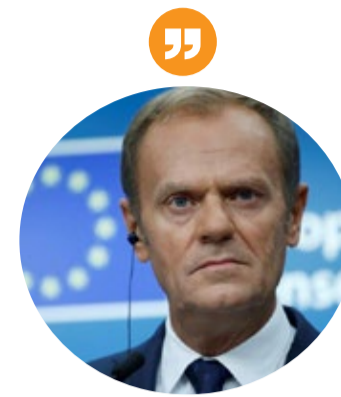
Telephone talks of nearly an hour on Monday evening with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar failed to yield any obvious breakthrough, with Varadkar's

office issuing a statement afterwards insisting the withdrawal agreement containing the backstop cannot be changed.

Johnson's diplomatic offensive continues at a G7 summit in the French town of Biarritz at the weekend, where Johnson hopes to show off his warm relations with US President Donald Trump as a signal of post-Brexit Britain's global ambitions.

Gored by Tusk

Brussels insists that the backstop -- which would keep the UK in EU customs arrangements



Those against the backstop and not proposing realistic alternatives in fact support reestablishing a border. Even if they do not admit it

DONALD TUSK
EU COUNCIL PRESIDENT

to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland -- is essential to preserve the integrity of European trade and to avoid risking a return of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

Tusk took to Twitter on Tuesday to give a robust response to the hard line struck by Johnson's government in recent weeks.

“The backstop is an insurance to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland unless and until an alternative is found,” Tusk wrote.

“Those against the backstop

and not proposing realistic alternatives in fact support reestablishing a border. Even if they do not admit it.”

Critics say the backstop -- part of the Brexit divorce deal struck between the EU and Johnson's predecessor Theresa May which British MPs have rejected three times -- would keep Britain tied to EU rules potentially indefinitely.

But the EU and Ireland say that British offers to find “alternative arrangements” are too vague and give no solid legal guarantees, amounting to little more than an invitation to trust London.

Brussels has repeatedly said it will not reopen or renegotiate the near 600-page withdrawal agreement but is willing to tweak the accompanying “political declaration” on future EU-UK ties.

So far the UK has not requested any meetings, commission spokeswoman Bertaud said -- which suggests London is pinning hopes for progress on the one-on-one meetings with Merkel on Wednesday and Macron on Thursday.

With both sides appearing intransigent, fears are growing that Britain will crash out without a deal, and leaked government contingency plans have laid bare the dire impact such an outcome would have.

The report published in the Sunday Times warned of food, fuel and medicine shortages, chaos at ports and even possible civil unrest.

Italy PM says to resign as crisis comes to a head

Rome, Italy

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said yesterday he would resign, lashing out at far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini for pursuing his own interests by pulling the plug on the government coalition.

“I'm ending this government experience here... I will go to the president of the republic (Sergio Mattarella) to inform him of my resignation”, after a Senate debate, Conte said after an almost hour-long speech to the chamber.

“It is irresponsible to initiate a government crisis,” Conte said after Salvini began his efforts to bring down the government in the hope of snap elections he hoped would make him premier.



Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte (L) speaks with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development, Labour and Social Policies, Luigi Di Maio (R) after delivering a speech at the Italian Senate, in Rome

“It shows personal and party interests,” Conte said of the end of the alliance between the anti-migrant League and the anti-establishment Five Star Movement.

Conte was speaking following a week of fallout from Sal-

vini's decision to back out of the alliance on August 8, plunging the eurozone's third-largest economy into political turmoil.

Afer Conte announced his intention to resign, Salvini hit back saying: “Thank you, finally, I would do it all again.”

Sony buying studio behind hit ‘Spider-Man’ video game

San Francisco, United States

Sony Interactive Entertainment on Monday announced a deal to buy Insomniac Games, the studio behind hot-selling “Spider-Man” and “Ratchet & Clank” video games.

Sony did not disclose financial terms of the acquisition that will add Insomniac to its stable of studios making games exclusively for the Japanese consumer electronics giant's PlayStation consoles.

“Insomniac Games is one of the most highly-acclaimed development studios in the industry and their legacy of best-in class storytelling and gameplay is unparalleled,” Sony Interactive Entertainment Worldwide Studios chief Shawn Layden said in a statement.

The take-over will need regulatory approval. California-based Insomniac



Sony did not disclose financial terms of the acquisition

was founded some 25 years ago and fielded successful video games including “Ratchet & Clank,” “Spyro the Dragon,” and “Resistance.”

The studio worked with Sony interactive and Marvel Games on “Spider-Man,” which has sold more than 13.2 million copies worldwide, according to Sony.

Sony is out to add Insomniac to its stable of studios as it prepares a new generation PlayStation.

Huawei dismisses new suspension of ‘unjust’ US ban

Beijing, China

Huawei yesterday dismissed Washington's three-month delay to a ban on US firms selling to the Chinese tech giant and said the decision would not change the fact it had been “treated unjustly”.

The US Commerce Department effectively suspended for a second time tough rules

stopping the sale of components and services to the telecoms titan and a prohibition on buying equipment from it.

However, it also said it would add 46 more companies to its list of Huawei subsidiaries and affiliates that would be covered by the ban if it is implemented in full -- taking the total on the list to more than 100.

Seoul to fine Volkswagen over ‘illicit’ emissions devices

Seoul, South Korea

South Korea said yesterday it would issue fines and file criminal complaints against Volkswagen and its luxury arm, Porsche, for installing “illicit devices” that helped multiple diesel vehicles cheat pollution standards.

The environment ministry said over 10,000 vehicles sold in South Korea by Volkswagen and Porsche from May 2015 to January 2018 were fitted with the devices, resulting in 10 times more nitrogen oxide emissions than standard levels.

The certifications for eight models -- including Audi A6, Volkswagen Touareg and Porsche Cayenne -- will be revoked and the carmakers will face an estimated fine of 11.5 billion won (US\$9.5 million), the ministry said.

“We plan to continue responding firmly to manipulation of gas emissions in future,” a ministry official told reporters.

Audi, which is also owned by Volkswagen, said in a statement that it “takes note of the announcement... and will take the necessary measures to minimise inconvenience to the customers” once the South Korean environment ministry has approved the recall plan for the models concerned.



Al Baraka Islamic Bank (AIB - Bahrain) has named Fawzeyya Abdulla Salem as the winner of the Grand Prize of BD 10,000 and Abdulla Abdulla Naser Alhamzai as the winner of the One Year Salary of BD 555 Per Month of the alBarakat Investment Account Monthly Draw for August 2019. The remaining 80 winners in the August 2019 Raffle Draw won themselves cash awards which were split between 20 winners of BD 500 each and 60 winners of BD 300 each