

# Boris Johnson is edging closer towards agreeing a new Brexit deal



- **The Democratic Unionist Party which props up the Conservative government is willing to drop one of its strict Brexit red lines, according to reports.**
- **The Northern Irish party is reportedly willing to accept a regulatory border in the Irish sea.**
- **This could pave the way to a compromise agreement between Boris Johnson and EU leaders.**
- **However, it would likely fall way short of replacing the backstop in a way that is acceptable to Ireland and the rest of the EU.**
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Boris Johnson is edging closer towards agreeing to a new Brexit deal after the Democratic Unionist Party, which supports his minority government, reportedly indicated that it was prepared to drop a major red line.

The DUP has been one of the main barriers to the UK parliament ratifying a deal, due to its opposition to any divergence between Great Britain and Northern Ireland after the UK leaves the EU.

The Northern Irish party repeatedly voted against Theresa May's Brexit deal due to this opposition, leading to the collapse of her deal and her ultimate resignation as prime minister.

Under that deal, the 'backstop' for preserving the invisible Irish border would lead to Northern Ireland following EU single market rules, while the rest of the UK would not.

However, The Times newspaper reports on Friday that staunch unionist party indicated to Johnson it would now be prepared to accept some regulatory checks in the Irish sea between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

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This could be a key development in boosting the prime minister's chances of a revised agreement with the EU.

The prime minister has said he will take the UK out of the EU without a deal unless Brussels agrees to scrap the backstop in its current form and that he would rather "be dead in a ditch" than delay Brexit for a third time.

The House of Commons last week passed a bill that would require him to request an extension if he fails to secure a deal after a crunch summit of European leaders on October 18.

As a result, the prime minister has since floated the idea of replacing the backstop with a model under which Northern Ireland would follow the same rules as the EU when it comes to "agri-food" checks on animal and plant goods.

## **How significant is the DUP's reported concession?**



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The DUP moved quickly to reject the Times newspaper report. Foster tweeted that the party would not accept any barriers between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and described the story as "nonsense."



*Arlene Foster@DUPLleader*

*UK must leave as one nation. We are keen to see a sensible deal but not one that divides the internal market of the UK. We will not support any arrangements that create a barrier to East West trade. Anonymous sources lead to nonsense stories. #frontpages*

Even if the DUP did drop this particular red line, a deal on replacing the backstop would likely still be a long way off.

The Times report adds that the DUP will not accept any deal which would keep Northern Ireland in a customs union with the EU and that the party wants “alternative arrangements” to deal with new customs checks.

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However, the EU has repeatedly said that the technology needed to carry out such checks without the need for physical infrastructure does not exist. Brussels is pushing for a backstop under which the province would stay in the customs union and follow swathes of single market rules until alternative means of preserving the border are ready.

Plus, Johnson’s suggestion of an arrangement covering agri-food goods excludes an array of other goods which cross the Irish border and would require checks in the absence of an agreement.

It’s also unclear whether a Brexit deal based a Northern Ireland-only backstop would get through Parliament.

Numerous pro-Brexit Conservative MPs in the European Research Group have demanded that Johnson scraps the entire Withdrawal Agreement, not just the backstop for Northern Ireland.

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