

The EU believes Theresa May's 'unstable' government could collapse before Brexit



Gabriele Zimmer MEP.

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- **The European Union believes Theresa May's government could fall before Brexit negotiations finish, a leading MEP has suggested.**
- **Gabriele Zimmer — who sits on the European Parliament's Brexit group — told BI the EU fears the “unstable” UK government could fall at any moment amid growing worry over the Irish border issue.**
- **In an interview with BI this week, Zimmer also rubbished claims that a free trade deal could be signed by next year, and said she would not support transition being extended.**

LONDON — The European Union fears Theresa May's government could collapse before Brexit negotiations reach a conclusion, a leading member of the European Parliament's Brexit steering group has told Business Insider.

Gabriele Zimmer told BI that Brussels believes May's “unstable” government may not survive until the end of Brexit talks in March 2019.

Asked whether the EU fears the UK government could fall, Zimmer, who has represented Germany as an MEP since 2004, said: “Yes, of course. We are looking at what's going on.”

She cited the recent resignation of Amber Rudd as a sign of the government's fragility.

“Last week we had a meeting with members of the UK Home Office to discuss the procedure for registering EU citizens. One day later, we had the change the address of the secretary of state for internal affairs [Home Secretary] in our letter,” she said, referring to Rudd being replaced by Sajid Javid.

She added: “We need more clarification and clear answers. It’s not just the government that is unstable — it’s the whole environment.”

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Her remarks come as the UK government faces a race against time to come up with a workable customs proposal for avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland.

The EU has told Prime Minister May she must produce a solution by the next European Council summit in June after her two previous proposals were rejected.

Brussels figures fear failure to find a solution to the Irish border question by June will dramatically increase the chances of no-deal, which could then trigger the collapse of the Conservative government.

A source close to the European Parliament’s Brexit taskforce told BI this week they felt a no-deal Brexit followed by a general election was “increasingly likely,” based on the UK government’s struggle to come up with a way of preserving the frictionless Irish border.

A quick Brexit trade deal is an ‘illusion’



REUTERS/Francois Lenoir

Zimmer also laughed off Brexit Secretary David Davis’ recent suggestion that a future UK-EU trade deal can be finalised in the time that remains before Article 50 talks finish in March 2019, and suggested that even an agreement on the broad terms of a deal is looking increasingly unlikely while the Irish border issue remains unresolved.

“Look how long it takes negotiations over agreements between the EU and other regions in the world,” she said.

“We have to negotiate with the United States about the steel tariffs and whether they will exist or not. Yes, we have to find a way to keep close cooperation with Britain. But it is a long process.”

Zimmer added: “If by June the British side does not have a concrete proposal that can be discussed in the European Parliament and put on the table at the Council summit, then I don’t know how we could possibly even have the main points of a free trade agreement by March next year. It’s an illusion.”

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There have been suggestions that May’s government may be forced to request an extension to the proposed 20-month transition period if it feels it needs a greater amount of time to prepare for Britain’s exit from the EU.

A senior source in the European Parliament has told BI that the European Commission would be prepared to include an extended transition period in the final draft of the withdrawal agreement if Britain requested it.

However, Zimmer suggested this wouldn’t have the whole support of the EU, telling BI that a long transition would only create new deadlines rather than solutions to existing problems.

“The British government always at the last moment before deadlines moves a little bit,” she explained.

“If we agreed to make the transition period longer, it would mean new deadlines, new deadlines, new deadlines. What we need are decisions. We need to know exactly what happens after the end of March 2019 and after the transition period in 2020.

“Also, don’t forget that in 2019, we’ll get a new Parliament, and it would need to take up that work. I don’t think it would give us any progress. We will lose time and time.”

Tom Brake, Liberal Democrat MP and supporter of the People’s Vote campaign, said: “The Brexit negotiations are a mess and the Government is totally unstable, with different factions in the Cabinet pulling in different directions. This has not gone unnoticed by our friends in the EU.

“Even if a good Brexit deal were possible, how can that happen when the Government doesn’t even know what it wants and is at war with itself?

He added: "The best way forward is for MPs to take control of the process and give the public a People's Vote on the terms of the final Brexit deal."

Source: <http://www.businessinsider.com/mep-gabriele-zimmer-eu-believes-theresa-may-government-could-collapse-before-brexit-talks-finish-2018-5>

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