



Brussels, 9 April 2019

Dear colleagues,

Last week I received a letter from Prime Minister May requesting a further extension of the Article 50 period, until 30 June 2019. In her letter the Prime Minister states that the UK government's policy remains to leave the EU in an orderly way, and that it is therefore now seeking a consensus across the House of Commons on the right way forward. She also adds that, if the UK were an EU member on 23 May 2019, it would be under a legal obligation to hold elections to the European Parliament.

Given the risks posed by a no-deal Brexit for people and businesses on both sides of the English Channel, I trust that we will continue to do our utmost to avoid this scenario. Therefore I propose that we consider Prime Minister May's request for an extension at our meeting tomorrow.

However, our experience so far, as well as the deep divisions within the House of Commons, give us little reason to believe that the ratification process can be completed by the end of June. In reality, granting such an extension would increase the risk of a rolling series of short extensions and emergency summits, creating new cliff-edge dates. This, in turn, would almost certainly overshadow the business of the EU27 in the months ahead. The continued uncertainty would also be bad for our businesses and citizens. Finally, if we failed to agree on any next extension, there would be a risk of an accidental no-deal Brexit.

This is why I believe we should also discuss an alternative, longer extension. One possibility would be a flexible extension, which would last only as long as necessary and no longer than one year, as beyond that date we will need to decide unanimously on some key European projects. The flexibility would allow to terminate the extension automatically, as soon as both sides have ratified the Withdrawal Agreement. The UK would be free to leave whenever it is ready. And the EU27 would avoid repeated Brexit summits. Importantly, a long extension would provide more certainty and predictability by removing the threat of constantly shifting cliff-edge dates. Furthermore, in the event of a continued stalemate, such a longer extension would allow the UK to rethink its Brexit strategy.

Some of you have raised concerns that the UK's continued presence as a departing EU country would pose risks for the functioning of the EU27 at a time of key decisions on its future. To address them we would need to agree on a number of conditions: no re-opening of the Withdrawal Agreement; no start of the negotiations on the future, except for the Political Declaration; the UK would have to maintain its sincere cooperation also during this crucial period, in a manner that reflects its situation as a departing member state. We should remember, however, that the United Kingdom will remain a member state with full rights and obligations. And, in any event, the UK can revoke Article 50 at any time, as stated by the European Court of Justice.

Whatever course of action is taken, it must not be influenced by negative emotions. We should treat the UK with the highest respect, as we want to remain friends and close partners, and as we will still need to agree on our future relations. Neither side should be allowed to feel humiliated at any stage in this difficult process.

As you know, with Brexit there are no easy solutions. Both aforementioned options have their advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, let us discuss them in an open, creative, and constructive way.

We will meet at 18.00 for an exchange with European Parliament President Tajani. We will then hear Prime Minister May, before meeting for dinner at 27 in order to agree a response to the United Kingdom's request.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Donald Tusk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

D. TUSK