

Exiting the European Union

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons)

I thank the Chair and members of the Exiting the EU Committee for today's statement and their excellent report. The Committee I chair, the Health and Social Care Committee, has been very concerned about what could happen, in the event of no deal, to the future supply of medicines and devices because of the challenges to the supply chain. Will the Chair of the Committee set out in what other areas he is seeing concerns about the lack of contingency planning being published so that we can scrutinise what is happening and prepare for the future?

Hilary Benn Chair, Committee on Exiting the European Union

Ministers have said to us that work is going on to prepare for the possibility of no deal. The Committee has previously expressed its view that a no deal outcome would be very damaging to the British economy and create a great deal of uncertainty. That is why we say in the report that we do not accept that a rejection of the deal will then automatically lead to us leaving with no deal, because it would be for Parliament, in the end, to decide whether it was prepared to leave the European Union with no deal. That would be a matter for every single one of us as Members.

I think the nearer we get to March 2019, the more there will be concern if the possibility of no deal being agreed becomes greater than it is at present. I still hope and believe that agreement will be reached because, frankly, neither side in this negotiation should contemplate with any equanimity the prospect of leaving with no deal. The consequences would be exceedingly serious, as we learned from the evidence we heard from the Port of Dover when we visited it, in terms of practical things like keeping the lorries flowing, never mind the medicines, never mind aircraft, never mind broadcasting rights, never mind data transfer. There is a very long list of questions on which people know how the system works today and they want to know how it will work once we have left, but they are very worried about what would happen if there were no deal, and my own personal viewâ€”I have expressed it in the House beforeâ€”is that that is not something we should contemplate at all.

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