



Department
for Exiting the
European Union

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Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP
Chair, Exiting the EU Committee
House of Commons
London
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22 March 2019

Dear Hilary,

Last night the Prime Minister met President Tusk following the EU Council's discussion on the UK's request for the approval of the Strasbourg supplementary documents and for a short extension to the Article 50 process.

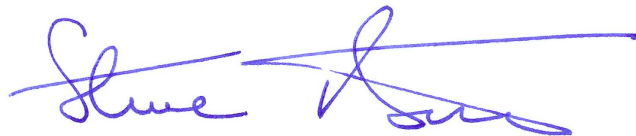
The Government welcomes the Council's approval of the legally-binding assurances in relation to the Northern Ireland backstop which the Prime Minister negotiated with President Juncker last week. This should give extra assurance to Parliament that, in the unlikely event the backstop is ever used, it will only be temporary; and that the UK and the EU will begin work immediately to replace the backstop with alternative arrangements by the end of December 2020.

The Council also agreed that if the UK Parliament approves the deal next week, in order to provide time for the UK Parliament to agree and ratify a Brexit deal, the date of our departure will now be extended to 22 May. If Parliament does not agree a deal next week, the EU Council will extend Article 50 until 12 April. At this point we would either leave with no deal, or put forward an alternative plan.

If this involved a further extension it would mean participation in the European Parliamentary elections.

Our permanent representative to the EU has now written to President Tusk confirming the agreement of the Government of the United Kingdom to the extension of the period under Article 50(3), and to the draft European Council Decision taken in agreement with the United Kingdom.

I am placing a copy of this letter, of Sir Tim Barrow's letter, and of the draft Council Decision, in the library of the House.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steve Barclay', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**RT HON STEVE BARCLAY MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION**