



Matt Wrack General Secretary
Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road,
Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE
fbu.org.uk | @fbunational
020 8541 1765 | office@fbu.org.uk

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TO: **ALL MEMBERS**

Dear Brother / Sister

'NO DEAL' BREXIT

Please find below, a statement agreed by the Executive Council at its meeting on 17 January 2019.

Opposition to a 'no deal' Brexit

The Executive Council recognises that leaving the European Union with 'no deal' is a catastrophic scenario that will damage the UK economy and wider society.

The Executive Council opposes calls for a 'no deal' Brexit because of its impact on the interests of firefighters and other workers.

Consequences of a 'no deal' Brexit

The Executive Council notes the potentially calamitous consequences of a 'no deal' Brexit, as highlighted by unions in certain sectors. These include:

- *The uncertainty for migrant workers' immigration status, with industrial implications for key sectors such as the health service, construction, farming and other industries. This has led to some unions such as Unite launching helplines for their members.*
- *The impact on the UK automotive industry jobs due to uncertainty on tariffs and other trade barriers, regulations, supply chains and consumer confidence.*
- *The impact on the NHS, including on the workforces, from doctors to nurses and cleaners, as well as the supply and quality of medicines.*
- *The impact on transport, including at ports and Eurotunnel. Imperial College London estimates that two minutes additional transit time per lorry at Dover and the Channel Tunnel translates into a 30 mile traffic jam.*

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- *The impact on workers' rights, including workers in the UK losing rights currently held and those rights keeping pace with developments across the rest of Europe.*
- *The impact on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which would immediately have different customs, regulatory and food safety regimes.*

The Executive Council notes the Westminster government's mismanagement of 'no deal' preparations, illustrated by the awarding of contracts to Seaborne Freight to run additional services, despite having no ships and no usable harbour at Ramsgate.

*The Executive Council further notes the Treasury document **EU Exit: Long-term economic analysis (November 2018)**, which predicted that a 'no deal' Brexit would reduce UK GDP and GDP per capita by between 6% and 9% after 15 years.*

WTO rules

The Executive Council does not accept that in a 'no-deal' scenario, the UK can switch instantly to World Trade Organization (WTO) rules seamlessly and without consequences. The WTO currently has 164 members. It is a negotiating forum for its states to create international trade rules and a legal apparatus to oversee how they put the rules into practice.

WTO rules would mean the immediate introduction of new tariffs and other trade barriers. All members of the WTO must have a schedule of commitments related to the terms of market access for their trading partners. Britain does not have an independent schedule but is part of the EU schedule. On 24 July 2018, the Westminster government submitted a "draft schedule". Objections have already been raised by at least 20 countries.

The Executive Council notes that the WTO is one of the institutions imposing neoliberal trading arrangements over many decades. It has very little democratic oversight and a very weak legal framework. WTO arbitration mechanisms work extremely slowly and enforcement is weak. The WTO is no friend of workers or trade unions and has faced regular opposition and protest from trade unions, farmers' organisations and environmentalists. The FBU and other unions can have no trust or confidence in the WTO.

Implications for firefighters

The Executive Council notes that a 'no deal' Brexit will have consequences for FBU members' work and living standards.

Current and retired FBU members and their families could be affected by uncertainty over their immigration status and access to health and travel plans, whether they currently live in the UK or within the European Union.

A Thompsons briefing, Guidance for EU workers on applying for settled status (January 2019) explained that EU citizens continuously resident in the UK since at least 30 March 2014 will have a legal right to remain in the UK permanently, but those arriving after that date have no guarantees. Similarly, a specific right of residence for Irish nationals is not set out clearly in UK legislation.

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Implications for firefighters/Cont....

The Executive Council is concerned about the implications for the Grey Book, which explicitly refers to European law, including the Working Time Regulations 1998, and Health, Safety and Welfare at Work legislation and the Information and Consultation Directive.

Solidarity

The Executive Council is also concerned about the impact of a 'no deal' Brexit on cross European Union firefighter cooperation, including on disaster planning, joint rescue work and training exercises.

The Executive Council has gained a great deal of intelligence and advice from European firefighter unions, including the EPSU firefighters' network, the Scandinavian study programme and from individual unions tackling firefighter cancers, pensions and other matters.

FBU conference has underlined the importance of firefighter-to-firefighter cross border solidarity links across Europe as a vital priority for the union.

Demands

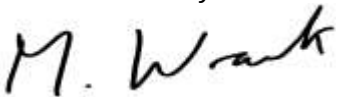
The Executive Council condemns the Westminster government's mismanagement of Brexit and calls for a general election to resolve the deadlock.

The FBU calls on the Westminster government to:

- 1. Prevent a 'no deal Brexit' because of the impact on workers' living standards in Britain and internationally.*
- 2. Immediately guarantee existing rights for all EU nationals living in Britain and secure reciprocal rights for UK citizens who have chosen to make their lives in EU countries.*
- 3. Find an urgent solution to the Brexit deadlock.*

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally



MATT WRACK
General Secretary

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