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'Soft Brexit is dead': Nick Clegg admits his fight to keep UK in Single Market is over



- [James Crisp](#), brussels correspondent

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Nick Clegg has conceded defeat in his fight to keep Britain in the EU's Single Market and Customs Union and admitted that 'soft Brexit' is dead.

The former deputy prime minister attacked Brexiteers as "very rich, very angry old men" before comparing them to Bolsheviks who had no mandate for hard Brexit.

Theresa May would be victorious in creating a Britain free of the influence of Brussels, Sir Nick told the Lisbon Council think tank on Monday evening, but he called on Westminster MPs to vote down her final Brexit deal.

“This week is the week that the illusion of a so-called soft Brexit has died,” he said after Mrs May reiterated that Britain [would not seek continued membership of the customs union](#).

Sir Nick, a former MEP and committed Europhile, said: “It was always a nonsense in my view, but there was a feeling that maybe Theresa May would pluck up courage that she’s never displayed hitherto to defy her right-wing.

“There was a slight sense that she was starting to realise the error of her preemptive declaration of red lines, [that this] was going to lead her to try and sue for peace on an emollient basis.”

Mrs May has always insisted that Britain would leave both the Single Market and Customs Union because that would be the only way the UK could regain control of its immigration and trade policy.

Sir Nick lost his seat in the general election last year. He said that MPs had a duty to vote down the final Brexit deal.

He said, “It’s not a democratic choice, you have a democratic duty to say, ‘Thanks but no thanks.’ There’s no escape to this Brexit cul-de-sac that doesn’t start with MPs taking that courageous decision this autumn.”

Today, the ex Liberal Democrat leader is in Strasbourg, where the European Parliament is sitting. He will meet with Guy Verhoftstadt, the parliament’s Brexit coordinator.

His spokesman said that Sir Nick would urge EU chiefs to give Britain “more time and space”, if MPs voted down the Brexit deal.

Without that extra time, Britain would likely crash out of the EU without a deal, which would hurt both the UK and EU.

The latest round of Brexit negotiations began in Brussels today, with talks over the proposed transition deal and the Irish border high on the agenda.

On Monday in London, Michel Barnier, the EU’s Brexit negotiator warned Theresa May that leaving the Customs Union will result in “[unavoidable barriers to trade](#)” as he said: “the time has come to make a choice”.