



## Will the unity of the 27 crack?

by John Springford, Sam Lowe and Beth Oppenheim  
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The 27 European Union member-states will be just as unified in the Brexit negotiations on the future relationship as they were on the withdrawal agreement because the EU's integrity is more important to them than new barriers to trade with Britain. That's the conclusion of a new policy brief by the Centre for European Reform (CER) think-tank published today entitled '[Will the unity of the 27 crack?](#)'. Bottom line, the paper argues that this means Britain should expect a trade deal that offers a similar degree of EU market access to Canada, unless the prime minister softens her red lines. For comparable market access to EU membership, all of her red lines would have to go.

Although the EU-27 have different views on the future relationship with Britain and some will take a bigger hit from Brexit than others, the EU-27 have an overriding desire to protect the European single market and maintain the level playing field that underpins it. They believe their best chance of getting what they want is to stick together. The argument that the City of London's status as Europe's largest financial centre provides the UK with leverage has been overdone.

While some EU member-states are less supportive of the hard line pursued by Berlin, Paris, and Brussels, those countries want Brexit to be softer in different ways and lack leadership. Ireland and Germany, the two countries that are most exposed to Brexit have endorsed the unified approach. Also, France and Germany usually get their way when they work together. And with the bloc beginning to discuss its next budget, recipient countries are unlikely to want to bite the hand that feeds them by making a stand over Brexit.

*"Theresa May will be on a hiding to nothing if she's hoping to divide the EU-27 in the next phase of the Brexit talks. While some countries would certainly be willing to offer Britain a better deal, they are either too small, like Ireland, or too isolated diplomatically, like Poland and Hungary. The economic fallout from Brexit is simply not big enough for EU-27 countries to offer Britain a special deal, and risk the EU's integrity by doing so,"* said John Springford, CER deputy director, who wrote the paper with Sam Lowe, research fellow, and Beth Oppenheim, researcher.

### Note for editors:

For further information on the policy brief and to request an interview with John Springford or Sam Lowe, please contact Nick Winning in the CER press office on [pressoffice@cer.eu](mailto:pressoffice@cer.eu) or + 44 (0) 20 7233 1199. Follow us on: [@CER\\_EU](#) and the authors on [@JohnSpringford](#), [@SamuelMarcLowe](#) and [@Beth\\_Oppenheim](#).