

EU must compromise on Brexit deal: Johnson



AFP/London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday urged EU leaders to drop their opposition to renegotiating Brexit, as the pound slumped on growing concerns about a no-deal departure.

Johnson, who took office last week, wants to change the exit terms struck by predecessor Theresa May but insists he will leave the European Union without any agreement at all if necessary on October 31.

Brussels has said it will not reopen the text.

“The withdrawal agreement is dead,” Johnson told reporters during his first visit to Scotland. “I am confident we will get a deal but it is also right we prepare for no-deal,” he said.

The government has not yet announced plans for Johnson to visit EU capitals, and a spokeswoman indicated he would not go until Brussels changes its stance.

“He obviously wants to meet EU leaders and negotiate but not to be sat down and told that the EU cannot possibly reopen the

withdrawal agreement,” the spokeswoman said.

The Confederation for British Industry (CBI), the country’s top business lobby group, said companies now needed to be on an “emergency footing” because of the growing likelihood of no-deal.

The pound lost more than 1% of its value against the dollar yesterday, hitting a two-year low. In a report, the CBI warned that both Britain and the EU were not prepared for a no-deal Brexit and urged businesses to step up contingency plans.

The group’s head of EU negotiations Nicole Sykes tweeted that it was “like putting sandbags down for a flood”.

“Your kitchen’s still going to be underwater but MAYBE we can save the bedroom upstairs,” she wrote.

The Institute for Government also warned that a no-deal Brexit would “dominate government for years”, allowing little room for other domestic priorities outlined by Johnson such as health, education and transport.

The think-tank said such an outcome would also place the United Kingdom, which includes England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, “under unprecedented pressure”.

On his first visit to Scotland as prime minister, Johnson visited a military base before meeting Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson, who has been opposed to a no-deal Brexit.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar has also said that a no-deal Brexit would make more people in Northern Ireland “come to question the union” with Britain.