

50 shades of delay

Remain leaning MPs dream of all kinds of delay. Some would accept a short delay, hoping it would lead to another short delay. Some want a long delay. Opposition MPs want a delay for a General election or a second referendum. It is difficult to see the Conservative party in Parliament voting for either a General election or a second referendum. A small number of Conservative MPs want a delay effectively for a renegotiation which the EU has not offered. In the recent free vote on delay 200 Conservative MPs refused to back the Prime Minister's short delay until April 12th, which passed on Opposition votes.

Parliament's indicative votes about a different future from either leaving without the Withdrawal Agreement or leaving with it imply negotiation of a delay. The problem with this approach is that the things they want relate to the second part of the negotiation with the EU as defined by the EU. The EU has made clear the UK has to sign the Withdrawal Treaty. Parliament has three times rejected before such talks take place.

The wish of a lot of MPs to have a customs union relationship could only happen after signing the Withdrawal Agreement which they rightly refuse to do. The EU has said they would consider a long delay as long as the UK participates in the European elections in May. This is a very uninviting prospect for either of the two main political parties, who could expect a strong challenge from pro Brexit parties angry at the delay.

Yesterday Parliament was offered just four choices for the future, as the number of propositions was whittled down. Because it is a Remain dominated Parliament there was no Brexit option left to choose from. Leaving without signing the Withdrawal Agreement was removed and my preference for a WTO/Free Trade offer exit was not available either. We had a Customs union proposal. We were offered a plan to create Common Market 2.0 with a customs union and single market membership, implying freedom of movement, some financial contributions and acceptance of single market laws. We had a motion to require a confirmatory public vote for any exit plan, which would mean a referendum running any final deal against staying in, with no proper Brexit option on the ballot paper. There was finally a motion to secure a delay or failing that to revoke our notice to leave.

The government should have asked all Conservatives to vote against all four options, which all pro Leave MPs were willing to do. All four were against the Conservative Manifesto of 2017. It was good to see there was a majority against all of these ways of stopping Brexit. The Cabinet should take note and agree our exit on 12 April without the Withdrawal Agreement.