

Delay and the European Parliamentary elections.

I see no point in delaying our exit from the EU. I have never understood why we would be able to strike a good deal after March 29 if we were unable to strike a good deal in the 2 years 9 months of delay so far in implementing the decision of UK voters. Leave voters expect Parliament to implement the decision, not to seek out ways to undermine , delay or cancel it.

Yesterday the President of France and the Prime Minister of Spain both seemed opposed to the idea of delay in Brexit. France might consider it if the UK had changed her mind about leaving and now wanted a second referendum. Mrs May rightly continues to rule that out. Neither favoured a delay or further negotiations about the draft Withdrawal Agreement. Spain like Ireland strongly believes the Irish backstop has to stay in place unless and until both the EU and the UK agree it can be removed.

There is a general briefing line coming out of Brussels that any delay could not be longer than two to three months anyway. They argue that the UK will cease to be represented in the European Parliament from 2 July when the newly elected Parliament takes over. The UK is not planning to field candidates, and the EU has decided to redistribute some of the UK seats to other countries and to abolish the remainder. If the UK is not in the Parliament it cannot legally be a member of the EU as it is no longer represented in the body that is an important co legislator with the Council, responding to the agenda and draft laws of the Commission.

Mrs May has always made clear the UK will not be contesting the next European election. It is a good fortune that the old Parliament expires shortly after the official date for Brexit. There have been no moves from rebel MPs in Parliament to seek to reinstate UK candidates or UK seats, which would of course require the consent of the EU. Whilst nomination papers do not have to be in before April, some party campaigns have already begun on the continent and parties are preparing for the new distribution of seats resulting from the UK's departure. The longer the UK leaves wanting to fight the election the more unreasonable it would be to other EU members to seek to join in when others have planned their election campaigns around the configuration of the Parliament without the UK.

I assume neither the Labour nor the Conservative parties will be wanting us to contest the EU elections. Were they to do so it would create great anger amongst the Brexit supporters in the country who would see it as breaking promises to leave. It would create ideal conditions for pro Brexit parties to do very well at the expense of traditional parties.

Delay would make the UK look weak. It would increase and prolong uncertainties. It would invite the EU to demand even more concessions. The UK always said No deal is better than a bad deal. If you issue such a statement you have to be prepared to carry it out.