

Speech: PM statement in the House of Commons: 12 March 2019

On a point of order, Mr Speaker,

I profoundly regret the decision that this House has taken tonight.

I continue to believe that by far the best outcome is that the UK leaves the EU in an orderly fashion with a deal, and that the deal we have negotiated is the best and indeed the only deal available.

Mr Speaker, I would like to set out briefly how the Government means to proceed.

Two weeks ago, I made a series of commitments from this despatch box regarding the steps we would take in the event that this House rejected the deal on offer. I stand by those commitments in full.

Therefore, tonight we will table a motion for debate tomorrow to test whether the House supports leaving the European Union without a deal on 29 March.

The Leader of the House will shortly make an emergency business statement confirming the change to tomorrow's business.

This is an issue of grave importance for the future of our country. Just like the referendum, there are strongly held and equally legitimate views on both sides.

For that reason, I can confirm that this will be a free vote on this side of the House.

I have personally struggled with this choice as I am sure many other Honourable Members will. I am passionate about delivering the result of the referendum. But I equally passionately believe that the best way to do that is to leave in an orderly way with a deal and I still believe there is a majority in the House for that course of action. And I am conscious also of my duties as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of the potential damage to the Union that leaving without a deal could do when one part of our country is without devolved governance.

I can therefore confirm that the motion will read:

That this House declines to approve leaving the European Union without a Withdrawal Agreement and a Framework on the Future Relationship on 29 March 2019; and notes that leaving without a deal remains the default in UK and EU law unless this House and the EU ratify an agreement.

I will return to the House to open the debate tomorrow and to take interventions from Honourable Members. And to ensure the House is fully informed in making this historic decision, the Government will tomorrow publish information on essential policies which would need to be put in place if we were to leave without a deal. These will cover our approach to tariffs and the Northern Ireland border, among other matters.

If the House votes to leave without a deal on 29 March, it will be the policy of the Government to implement that decision.

If the House declines to approve leaving without a deal on 29 March, the Government will, following that vote, bring forward a motion on Thursday on whether Parliament wants to seek an extension to Article 50.

If the House votes for an extension, the Government will seek to agree that extension with the EU and bring forward the necessary legislation to change the exit date commensurate with that extension.

But let me be clear. Voting against leaving without a deal and for an extension does not solve the problems we face. The EU will want to know what use we mean to make of such an extension.

This House will have to answer that question. Does it wish to revoke Article 50? Does it want to hold a second referendum? Or does it want to leave with a deal but not this deal?

These are unenviable choices, but thanks to the decision the House has made this evening they must now be faced.