

Timetable to Brexit?

The next few days will once again be important in settling whether we leave the EU or delay it again.

According to the EU's timetable the UK government would need to send a letter on Friday of this week requesting a further delay, as the EU needs two working days to consider it before the European Council on April 10th. The letter would need to set out how long a delay the government was seeking, and for what purpose. The context is the EU's clear statements that it will not re-open negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement, and that the UK has to sign the Withdrawal Treaty and implement it in UK law to be able to enter talks about a so-called future partnership agreement. Mrs May's idea of a close and wide-ranging partnership, or the ideas of a customs union, Common Market 2.0 and other close alignments would only be feasible if the UK has signed the Withdrawal Treaty.

The added complication driving the current timetable is the European Parliamentary election. April 12th is the last date for the UK to set up an election to that body. The UK would be required by EU Treaty law to elect new MEPs if its EU membership is going to extend beyond May 22nd, the date of the election. There is a reluctance on both sides of the Channel to allow this for obvious political reasons.

The EU has said it would only consider a long extension if the UK promised a second referendum or a General election. They have no wish to renegotiate the Agreement, which is take it or leave it.

Mrs May's statement was unacceptable. There must be no more delay. Labour's policy of trying to stay in the Customs Union is against the Conservative Manifesto and all Mrs May's promises to date. She did not take it off the table in her address to the nation but let it be briefed she will take it off for her talks with Labour. It cannot be taken off the agenda as it is the default position. It is also the preference of a majority of Conservative MPs and of most Leave voters. Mrs May could only get her Agreement through if Mr Corbyn promises to vote for it and to vote for the subsequent legislation to implement it, as the DUP and many Conservatives will not vote for the Agreement with a Customs Union and single market laws added on to it.