

Where are we on the road to Brexit?

It has been a slow process so far, thanks to the delay imposed by the courts over sending the Article 50 letter.

There were always four tasks to complete for exit after the referendum decision. We have now completed the first two.

We have sent a formal notification to leave. This fulfils all the Treaty requirements to leave, and has a date of 29 March 2019 for our departure. It means our departure is valid in international law.

We have now passed legislation to ensure the UK Parliament and courts take back control the day we leave the EU. This also ensures legal continuity, providing that all current EU law remains in force as UK law on exit day, which had to be that same 29 March 2019 date.

We now need to see if there is a deal concerning our future relationship that the government thinks is worthwhile. The EU wishes us to sign a Withdrawal Agreement, but this is not a legal requirement of the Treaty and would presumably only occur if the UK government is satisfied that its terms are reasonable and it is complemented by a good future relationship agreement.

The final act will be Parliament's decision as to whether we should accept the government's deal and implement that in UK law, or whether we should leave without a deal.

Some have sought to turn the Parliamentary decision on the final deal into a vote between the deal and not leaving the EU, rather than a vote on whether to leave with or without the deal on offer. This was the underlying agenda to the arguments about a "meaningful vote". It was finally wisely agreed not to put instructions to Parliament on how we should proceed after the deal has or has not been concluded into law.

It is difficult to understand why some want Parliament to be able to veto Brexit at the end of the process. After all the referendum decision was made by the people, and the Parliament voted overwhelmingly to leave when it voted for the Article 50 letter to be sent. The UK would be in an exceptionally weak or absurd position if Parliament vetoed the deal on offer and vetoed leaving without a deal. Why would the EU want to improve its offer in those circumstances? And how and why would the EU take the UK back into membership on current terms?

The anti Brexit forces claim to be new champions of Parliamentary sovereignty after all those years when they were busy giving it away to Brussels. They have to accept that Parliament has decided to leave and made that clear when it sent the letter. They also need to remember that 3 times now the Commons has voted by large majorities against staying in the single market and customs union. A mature sovereign body has to recognise when it has made a decision.