



PRESS RELEASE

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CHIEF MINISTER'S STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT – 21 MARCH 2019

Last night the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom addressed the nation about the Brexit options facing the United Kingdom.

With 8 days to go, the options are being more limited and starker and starker.

The options bear little similarity to the false prospectus that was presented to the British public by the Leave Campaign at the time of the referendum in 2016.

The land of milk and honey which was presented to the voters has not materialised.

We all knew it would not materialise.

As all Honourable Members of this House knew, the options that the EU were going to be prepared to put on the table were always going to be those that are now available to the UK.

These are the options that work for the EU whilst it - of course - rightly protects the integrity of the single market and the certainty of EU law.

And the greatest unfairness I hear is the criticism of the UK's negotiating team that have agreed the Withdrawal Agreement.

That team, led by Oliver Robbins, has done a magnificent job for Britain and for Gibraltar.

History will reflect that.

The same is true of the Gibraltar officials who have negotiated or supported the negotiations for Gibraltar.

In fact, Mr Speaker, as we all know and all agree, the best trading relationship, the best deal, that can be secured with the EU is clearly continued EU membership.

We all in this House agree with that.

But let's be clear: the UK voted - in a flawed referendum - to leave the EU.



The UK, in a general election held thereafter, voted majoritarily for parties that committed to honour that vote to leave the EU.

The Parliament has voted to activate the Article 50 notification.

But things have now moved on further.

The same Parliament has now voted to rule out a no deal Brexit.

So the net effect of that is that the UK is now in a situation where its Parliament either votes for the Prime Minister's deal or seeks to negotiate a different one via an extension of membership.

That extension of membership can only happen if there is an agreement with the EU.

The EU has made clear it will only countenance extension for a good reason, not to keep up the paralysis and the pain.

Mr Speaker, for us the position is clear.

We voted to remain and we want to remain with the UK.

But if that option is gone, and leaving is the only option - we will want to leave in a managed way, with a deal.

That deal is the Withdrawal Agreement.

If the UK does not agree a Withdrawal Agreement next week, and if it cannot then agree an extension with the EU, or the terms of that extension are unacceptable, then the only way to honour the vote of Parliament, is to revoke the Article 50 notification.

I said as much last week in this House and I have been saying so since last year.

Even if a person is a Brexiteer - other than a 'no deals' zealot - then revocation is still the best way to deliver a managed Brexit if there is no agreed extension.

This House will recall that in March 2017 the EU pushed the UK to give the Article 50 notification by saying it would not negotiate the Withdrawal - let alone the future relationship - until the notice was received.

Well, having negotiated with them for the past two years, the EU's cards are all on the table now.

By revoking the Article 50 notice, we will - even if we go back with a further notice - take back control of the negotiations.

It will allow the UK to come to its collective senses one way or the other.



To see the Withdrawal Agreement is good and support it.

To see the Withdrawal Agreement is bad and plan how to renegotiate it.

To see that leaving is a bad idea and forget about it.

To put the Withdrawal Agreement or other options to a new Referendum.

Although let's be clear that a new referendum is just a new procedure - a new role of the dice - not a new destination.

But through the mechanism of the revocation, IF MPs don't support the Prime Minister's Withdrawal Agreement, the UK can UNILATERALLY TAKE BACK CONTROL of the process of leaving the European Union.

And that works for every shade of remain or Brexit except for the minority NO DEAL "WTO" zealots.

Mr Speaker, it is also important that we do not over hyperbolise any argument with one week to go before our departure.

Never has it been truer that a week is a long time in politics.

So I would say to everyone watching our proceedings - even leaving without a deal is not an existential crisis for Gibraltar.

Yes it is not our preferred option.

But it will be worse for the UK and for the EU than it will be for us.

But the sun will rise next Saturday morning even if we have left the EU without a deal.

Because, in Gibraltar, the Government has done its job.

We are ready to leave with or without the Withdrawal Agreement, for an extension, for a revocation or for a new referendum.

In every one of those scenarios, we have protected Gibraltar's position or planned how we will react in the best interests of Gibraltar and its people.

The unrelenting hard work we have done in the past three years is paying off now as Gibraltar can see we have covered all bases going forward.

Whichever way the UK Parliament and the Prime Minister now finally decide to go, whatever extension the EU may or may not agree, we have a route map forward for Gibraltar.

That was our key job. It's what we have successfully done.



And I want to say something about this House, Mr Speaker.

We have many disagreements in this place.

It is right and natural that we should.

But we have done our jobs here also, even if it just by dint of the House allowing us to do our jobs and because of our inbuilt majority.

Via our Brexit Select Committee, via the Government's negotiating team and with the support of our community and our businesses, we have secured the future, whichever of the options develops after the end of next week.

Whatever happens next week, we know what we will do and we will continue to prosper and grow this community.