



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

**Brexit: crunch time ahead - my latest thoughts following this week's votes.**

On Wednesday, the House of Commons again debated the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) and progress in relation to the Prime Minister's ongoing negotiations around the *Withdrawal Agreement*, in advance of a further 'meaningful vote' being brought forward in due course, but at the latest by the 12th March 2019.

Several amendments were selected by the Speaker, some of which were subsequently voted on. I voted against all of the amendments which were pressed to a vote.

I voted against Labour's amendment to deliver a Customs Union/Single Market membership form of Brexit. This does not deliver the Brexit the British people voted for. It would severely restrict our ability to have an independent trade policy. It would see us subjected to EU-mandated regulation indefinitely. It would also restrict our ability to have a fairer, skills-based immigration policy, rather than EU free-movement.

Given this amendment was defeated, Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party has now switched to advocating for a second referendum. I have written extensively about my opposition to this policy previously, and you can find the links to those statements below.

I also voted against the SNP's amendment which sought to take no-deal off of the table permanently. If this amendment had succeeded, it would have crippled the UK's negotiating position, by eliminating a legitimate means by which we can leave the EU on the 29th March, as planned.

I was pleased that the Government accepted the amendment of my good friend and colleague, Alberto Costa MP. His amendment sought to protect the rights of UK citizens in the EU, and vice versa. It did not require any new agreement, but it did call on the Government to guarantee these rights swiftly, regardless of the outcome of the negotiations. Had we needed to vote on this, I would have supported it. I believe my constituents would agree that this is the right thing to do: giving certainty to our European colleagues, friends and neighbours who live here, as well as our British friends and family living elsewhere in the EU.

I was also one of 22 MPs who voted against an amendment tabled by the Labour MP, Yvette Cooper. It stated that if MPs vote to delay Brexit, the Government should seek an extension from the EU and bring forward legislation to change the date of the UK's departure. This formalised commitments made by the Prime Minister on Tuesday during her Statement to hold these votes, should a revised *Withdrawal Agreement* be defeated.

For me, this is entirely unacceptable, and I did not hesitate to vote against it. I cannot support an extension of Article 50, especially if only to support Parliament's indecision. The only circumstances in which I could support an extension - and a very short one at that - would be to facilitate the signing and ratification of any agreement passed by the House.





As it is in UK law that we will leave on the 29th March, potentially without a deal, we have seen significant movement by the EU on visa-free travel, road haulage and airports, among other contingency plans covering many policy areas. I have written about 'no-deal' extensively in the past. I have also noted with interest recent commentary that the EU would be anticipated to allow a 9-month transition if no agreement is reached by that date, and we leave on a 'no-deal' basis.

So what happens now? The new 'meaningful vote' will come before the House by the 12th March. MPs will be asked whether they support any renegotiated *Withdrawal Agreement*. I hope that the clear instruction set down by the 'Brady amendment' for legally-binding changes to the backstop a few weeks ago will have been fulfilled. I will make a judgement on that when the details are published and decide how I will vote. But in line with the 'Cooper amendment', if the *Withdrawal Agreement* is rejected again, a vote will subsequently be held on whether or not to leave the European Union on the 29th March, as planned, without a deal. In those circumstances, as it stands, I intend to vote in favour of a 'no-deal' Brexit on the 29th March.

If that vote fails, there will be a further vote on whether or not to extend Article 50 and delay our departure. In those circumstances, as it stands, I intend to vote to reject any extension. I believe we must not countenance further delay. I am fearful that if we don't leave on the 29th March, we may never leave. I have also taken into consideration my discussions with local businesses trading with other EU countries, who tell me they have made appropriate 'no-deal' contingency plans. What they want above anything else, is certainty. Delaying Article 50 would only extend the current uncertainty, perhaps indefinitely.

I must say that I am worried. I said before Christmas that the vast majority of MPs did not, and do not, support leaving the EU, and many pay lip-service to delivering it, but their actions tell a different story. The behaviour of so many MPs, and the outcome of the votes that are taking place, only speak to that problem, and I am acutely conscious that there could come a point where Brexit is lost altogether. This would be a democratic disaster and is something I would prefer not to think about - but I must.

Ultimately, 64% of people in Corby voted to leave the European Union, and 58% of those in East Northamptonshire did. That outcome, and the expectation of it being delivered, was further reaffirmed in the 2017 General Election. In our constituency, the parties committed to delivering Brexit in their manifestos attracted over 96% of the vote combined. I am determined this decision must be respected and upheld. In the coming weeks, I will therefore continue to vote in accordance with that mandate - essentially, exercising my votes to 'protect Brexit'.

For context, you can find my earlier statements on this evolving process, here:

<https://tinyurl.com/y3dvtyaq>

<https://tinyurl.com/y6pqcj3m>

<https://tinyurl.com/y5p32eez>

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