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Chief Minister's Statement To Parliament - EU Council Extension to Brexit Deadline

Mr Speaker,

The United Kingdom has agreed a further extension for its and our departure from the European Union.

As Honourable Members will be aware, the Second Special Meeting of the European Council on Article 50 of the Treaty, held last night in Brussels, resulted in an offer being made to the UK for such an extension.

The President of the European Council, Mr Tusk, offered the Prime Minister, Mrs May, an extension of the Article 50 notification period until the 31st of October 2019.

Mrs May has accepted that proposal for an extension.

The extension contains no condition that Gibraltar should consider objectionable.

The extension has set a maximum period – subject to future negotiations for a further extension.

It has not, however, set out a minimum period.

The UK can leave the EU if a Withdrawal Agreement has been finalised before then.

Alternatively, the UK can still crash out of the EU – as a matter of EU law - if no Withdrawal Agreement is finalised and the UK fails to hold European Elections.

The holding of those elections is a condition of the long extension, but it is not one we would find objectionable.

In this latter respect, the UK has already legislated to hold the EU Elections, as have we in Gibraltar.

The whole House will want to reflect our nations thanks to the Clerk, in his capacity as returning officer for Gibraltar in EU elections, for having moved quickly to ensure that we are able to hold the 2019 EU Election in Gibraltar on Thursday the 23rd May this year.



Not since our first opportunity to vote in these European Elections will our votes have been so important, Mr Speaker.

The politics and drama of Brexit are playing out on the screens of international news channels and all members will be aware of what is unfolding.

The Prime Minister has made a statement to the House of Commons this afternoon upon her return from Brussels.

All Honourable Members will know that on Monday the House of Commons had legislated a non-Government Bill into law by the European Union (Withdrawal) (No5) Bill 2019.

The Cooper-Letwin legislation, as the law is known, in effect rules out a departure of the UK from the EU without a deal, as a matter of UK law.

The underlying reality though is that UK law and EU law need to align in order for a no-deal Brexit to be avoided – even by accident.

Those mechanisms are being now put in place.

I will shortly therefore be signing a further amendment to our own European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2019 to amend the date provided for in our own law for exit day.

Honourable Members will recall I did that already on the 28th March to change the date of 29th March and replace it with references to tomorrow or the 22nd of May.

Essentially, Mr Speaker, the pressure for the Prime Minister to revoke the Article 50 notification in the absence of an agreed or agreeable long extension is now off.

There is now no need for a revocation of the Article 50 notice to avoid a no deal departure from the EU.

I discussed the circumstances in which such a revocation might be necessary or indeed appropriate and preferable with the Prime Minister on Friday last week.

These related principally to a cliff edge or an extension which contained objectionable conditions.

There was no such objectionable condition in the long extension offer last night from the EU Council which might have led Gibraltar to push for revocation instead of acceptance of the long extension – other than the possibility that it might end the nightmare of Brexit immediately and would allow the UK to take back control of the Brexit timetable.

The pressure in that respect is now off.

But there is now time.

And as President Tusk said, we should not waste that time.



If the House of Commons is not able to agree to give effect the Withdrawal Agreement, and given it has also wisely now legislated not to allow the UK to leave the EU without a withdrawal agreement, the fact is that the stalemate reached in the UK Parliament is unlikely to shift or change.

In those circumstances, we must be alive to the fact that there are ongoing talks between the Conservative Government and the Labour Opposition.

These talks could lead to a breakthrough on agreement for the UK to pass the or a Withdrawal Agreement.

This could include a requirement for a so called 'confirmatory referendum'.

Mr Speaker, given where we are now, the Government will continue to take the position it has consistently taken:

We will continue to insist that the safest option for Gibraltar is to remain in the EU.

We will continue to support THE Withdrawal Agreement as a way for the UK to leave the EU with a deal.

We will continue to support a referendum being held – now referred to not as a second referendum but as a 'confirmatory referendum.'

The long extension now agreed gives time for that.

To this end I accepted an offer to address a PUT IT TO THE PEOPLE rally in Westminster in London on Tuesday.

I was happy to speak alongside serving UK Government Minister, the Honourable Huw Merriman MP.

Also speaking at the rally were, the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Sir Vince Cable, who kindly introduced me to the audience;

Ms Caroline Lucas, the Leader of the Green Party;

Mr Ian Balckford, the leader of the Scottish National Party at Westminster;

Ms Anna Soubry, one of the members of Change UK or The Independent Group or TIGGERS;

Mr David Lammy of the Labour Party;

Ms Anna Turley of the Labour Party;

Ms Liz Saville of Plaid Cymru;



Mr Sam Gyimah, Conservative former Minister for Universities;

Rt Hon Mr Dominic Grieve, Conservative former Attorney General;

And Dame Betty Boothroyd, former Speaker of the House of Commons, and dear friend of Gibraltar of whose visit to Gibraltar we have a plaque in our own lobby that I was pleased to remind her off at the people's rally event.

All political parties were therefore represented.

And Gibraltar was represented.

Mr Speaker, we continue our intergovernmental work and planning with the UK Government to leave the EU with the or a deal – in case that happens.

We continue our intergovernmental work and planning with the UK Government in case we leave without a deal – in case that happens.

And Mr Speaker we continue to represent the mandate of the People of Gibraltar in the 2016 Referendum to remain in the EU, warts and all, at every opportunity we have to promote that as a realistic, alternative option.

Mr Speaker, although the pressure is off in public, we have worked very hard to be ready for the morning of the 30th March to ensure we could handle a departure from the EU with or without a or the deal.

We had done the same again for a potential no deal departure tomorrow night.

And we continue to work in the background in that respect to ensure the work we have done is useful if we need to rely on it at a later date.

We plan for everything, ignore nothing and prepare for everything and hope that we shall be able to look back and consider all of that wasted time if we ultimately remain in the EU.

Although even if we were to remain in the EU, we would now do so in much better shape in some respects.

I should also add, Mr Speaker, that the measures taken by the 27 for no-deal Brexit, in particular on visa free travel, that some have trumpeted triumphantly, are going to be of no effect, at least not this week.

So we continue our work, Mr Speaker and we will all as a people know who to vote for in the EU Elections, if they are held, once we know who stands for a confirmatory referendum or other mechanism that enables us to show our preference continues to be to remain in the EU.

For the House, Mr Speaker, we expect that we will now be able to resume 'normal service'.



I therefore expect to adjourn this afternoon to return to the House on Thursday the 2nd May at 3pm to continue with questions, motions etc.

I shall very much look forward to that and I am sure all Honourable Members will too.

If I may say so, Mr Speaker, these past couple of weeks, as the political leaders of our nation at this time in the history of our affairs, Ministers in my Government have looked over the cliff edge that a no-deal Brexit represents.

We would easily survive such a Brexit.

But it would be unpleasant.

It would undoubtedly bring difficulties to some aspects of people's lives, despite our greatest efforts.

And it is ultimately unnecessary.

For those reasons, I am very happy that it is an outcome that is at least for now avoided and which we should seek to continue to avoid going forward.

I therefore commend this statement to the House and trust that as matters develop, the outcomes that have hitherto appeared inevitable, may seem less and less certain or inescapable as they now also appear less and less impending.