

JOHN BARON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Ref: JB/BHY

20th November 2018

Dear Prime Minister,

Brexit – Withdrawal Agreement

As you will recall, I helped to lead the campaign in the 2010-2015 Parliament for an in/out EU referendum. I believe the referendum pledge at the 2015 General Election was a key reason behind the Conservatives' electoral success. However, this Agreement is not only bad for this country but puts at risk trust in the political system.

Agreeing to a backstop which, should trade negotiations fail, allows the EU to permanently suspend the UK inside a customs union goes against the referendum result, your own words at Lancaster House, and the 80% of the electorate which voted for both main parties at the last General Election. It not only increases the chances of a bad deal, but could also come to be seen as a betrayal of those who voted for Brexit by an out-of-touch political elite – a second referendum would be equally as damaging.

Such an approach would only benefit UKIP. The UK is one of the few countries in Europe where anti-immigration parties are in retreat. This could change, as trust regarding the introduction of a fair and controlled immigration policy could weaken if Parliament cannot be relied upon to leave the EU. This might carry to other areas – contrary to the remainers' view, Brexit is not just about immigration.

Meanwhile, a backstop would forbid any trade deals with other countries – a key advantage which should flow from Brexit. It would also inflict further regulations on Northern Ireland and so create barriers within our UK. The cost of £39 billion would buy no guarantees whatsoever – the backstop offers the EU little incentive to negotiate a constructive deal.

The British people voted to 'take back control'. They did not vote to leave us in a permanent state of rule-taking without any influence as to how these rules are shaped. In such a situation, the alternatives become more attractive. The Canada+ deal offered by the EU would be preferable. As would WTO rules, by which we already profitably trade with the rest of the world and through which many other countries thrive outside the EU.

Throughout these negotiations the Government has treated Brexit as a damage-limitation exercise, rather than an opportunity to be seized. This has encouraged the European Commission to be intransigent – concessions have been pocketed, without return. The Irish border issue has been magnified out of all proportion → goods and complex supply chains transverse the globe.

The WTO option was certainly not sufficiently explored. Inward investment is about relative advantage. Lower tax rates, greater labour market flexibility, our language and financial expertise, our universities and skilled workforce, are key determinants – not 3-5% tariffs. Trade prevails. Witness the present record low unemployment and inward investment.

I have always disagreed with MPs plotting to remove a party leader who has won a General Election, and I am not about to change my mind now. As a Brexiteer who has attempted to steer a middle course between the ERG and the Government – and who at times has reached out to all sides in attempts to reach compromises – I must nevertheless inform you that I will have to vote against this Withdrawal Agreement if it is not amended. I still hold out that it may.

Yours ever

John Baron MP

The Prime Minister
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