

HOUSE OF COMMONS HANSARD

European Union (Withdrawal) Act

05 December 2018

[2nd Allotted Day]

Debate resumed (Order, 4 December).

Question again proposed,

That this House approves for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the negotiated withdrawal agreement laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community’ and the framework for the future relationship laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom’.

Mr Speaker

Just before I ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to open the continuation of the debate on behalf of the Government, I feel that it is important that Members are aware of the correct protocol for today and for each of the remaining subsequent days in this overarching debate on the Government’s proposed deal.

It is true that it is a debate essentially revolving around one subject. However, I should remind colleagues that there are wind-up speeches each day from the Opposition and Treasury Benches, and the implication of that should be blindingly obvious to colleagues: if you speak in the debate it is incumbent on you to turn up at whatever hour the debate is concluded to hear the wind-up speeches. Yesterday, I am sorry to say, there were a number of examples of Members who spoke, in some cases at considerable length, in the debate, but who, on account no doubt of being very busy with many commitments and very full diaries, felt that they had to be elsewhere for the wind-up speeches. I know and I think that it may well be widely accepted that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition did not come for the wind-up of the debate, and, personally, I take no exception to that at all—it would have been marvellous to welcome them, but I quite understand why they could not be here—but in every other case, if you speak in the debate, please then do me the courtesy, or do the House the courtesy, of turning up for the wind-ups. With that little homily duly completed, I invite the Secretary of State for the Home Department to continue the debate.

13:11:00

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid)

It is a great pleasure for me to open this debate. I cannot think of a better way to celebrate my 49th birthday.

The coming weeks will be one of the most defining political periods not just of this Parliament or of our time as MPs, but since the second world war. I know that all hon. and right hon. Members will

have the national interest at the very forefront of their minds. Next Tuesday, we will be asked whether we will support the Brexit deal of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Each one of us will have to make that decision. It is my belief that the deal on the table is the best option available in ensuring a smooth exit from the European Union. It will ensure that we leave the EU, as planned, on 29 March next year, that we take back control of our borders, that we end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the UK and that we stop sending vast sums of money to Brussels. The deal will have a significant impact on two major areas of Home Office policy—security and immigration.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP)
rose—

Sajid Javid
I will very happily take an intervention from the right hon. Gentleman.

Nigel Dodds
I am very grateful to the Home Secretary. He has just mentioned taking back control and ending the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. I presume that he has seen the legal advice, published today, from the Attorney General, which makes it clear that, in fact, that is not the case in terms of the backstop, which he also says is indefinite. The advice says:

“NI remains in the EU’s Customs Union”—
not in some kind of customs arrangement—

“and will apply the whole of the EU’s customs acquis, and the Commission and CJEU will continue to have jurisdiction over its compliance with those rules”.

Northern Ireland will treat Great Britain as a third country. How can he possibly stand here and recommend this deal and say that it brings to an end the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice and takes back control?

Sajid Javid
I very much respect what the right hon. Gentleman has just said. He has shared it with the House on a few occasions, and I absolutely understand what he says. Let me just say from the outset: no one can pretend that this deal is perfect in every sense. Inevitably, there will be some compromises with this deal and with a number of objectives, including, as we have just heard from the Prime Minister in Prime Minister’s questions, a need to ensure that the commitments in the Good Friday agreement are upheld. What he is referring to is if—and it is an if—the backstop arrangement kicks in. He is right to point to the legal advice, but it is worth keeping in mind the fact that that situation does not necessarily arise, even if there is no final deal on the future arrangement by December 2020, because there is an opportunity for alternative arrangements, including extending the implementation period. Even if the backstop arrangement kicked in, he referred to, it is, at a minimum—legally from the European Union’s perspective—not sustainable because it is done under article 50 of the European Union’s own rules.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con)
Does my right hon. Friend not accept that, if we are maintaining an open border where there is a land border, it can only be done in a modern economy by having some form of customs union applying to both sides of the border? Unless and until someone else comes forward with an alternative way of timelessly guaranteeing an open border, the arrangement proposed is the only

conceivable one that is possible for the foreseeable future, until something better comes along. This was quite obvious months ago, and it is quite futile to start protesting about it now.

Sajid Javid

I always listen carefully to what my right hon. and learned Friend has to say on all matters. It is correct that this is one way to ensure, in that all-important border, completely frictionless trade, but I do not accept that it is the only way to do that. Although it is recognised in the agreement, under the backstop arrangement, that this is a way that clearly has been foreseen by this agreement, there are, as I said a moment ago, potentially other ways that that can be achieved, and it is right that we properly explore all possible alternative arrangements.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP)

Rather than listen to the advice of the Father of the House, will the Secretary of State listen to the advice of the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic, Mr Juncker and Michel Barnier in the EU and his own Government, all of whom have said that, in the event of a no deal or of any kind of deal, they would not impose a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, so, quite clearly, it must be possible to do this, despite the comments of the Father of the House.

Sajid Javid

What the right hon. Gentleman highlights is that it is important to listen to all voices. Again, it points to the fact that, although this is one arrangement, it is right that we look and continue to explore to see whether there are other arrangements that can lead to a more permanent and more easily acceptable outcome.

Sajid Javid

I will give way one more time, but I do need to make some progress.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)

I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. The legal advice released this morning makes it clear that the protocol does not provide for a mechanism that is likely to enable the UK lawfully to exit the UK-wide customs union without a subsequent agreement. It goes on to say:

“This remains the case even if parties are still negotiating many years later, and if the parties believe that talks have clearly broken down and there is no prospect of a future relationship agreement.”

Does that not undermine the point that he made a moment ago when he argued that this arrangement was not sustainable in the long term because of the limitations of article 50? The advice of the Attorney General is that it is going to last.

Sajid Javid

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. No doubt he has had some time to digest the legal opinion, but he might also note that it is perfectly consistent with what the Attorney General said at this Dispatch Box earlier this week. He made it clear then that, naturally, what he is providing is legal analysis, but this should also been seen in the context of the politics of such a situation, and he set that out quite clearly as well on the day. I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the remarks that the Attorney General made on that point earlier this week.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)

Will the Home Secretary confirm that if we approve the withdrawal agreement, the UK will have to pay a lot of money for many years after we have left the European Union, although there are no cash limits or numbers in the documents, and very general heads? Will he also confirm that the EU

will have preponderant power in deciding just how vast this open-ended commitment will be, and that it will be massively more than £39 billion?

Sajid Javid

In the withdrawal agreement, there is an estimated amount that the UK will pay. It will not be instant; it is over a number of years. The general figure that has been talked of by Government Ministers and others is a total of £39 billion.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)

Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid

I will come back to the hon. and learned Lady in a moment.

The Home Office is affected by this deal in two significant areas: security and immigration. Today I will set out what is on offer in these two important areas and why the deal is in the interests of the United Kingdom. Let me start with security. The Brexit deal negotiated by the Prime Minister delivers the solid foundation that we need for future security co-operation with our European partners. It avoids a cliff edge by providing for an implementation period, ensuring a smooth transition from current arrangements to a new, strong partnership.

An unplanned no deal Brexit would mean an immediate and probably indefinite loss of some security capability, which, despite our best efforts, would likely cause some operational disruption when we leave. As Home Secretary, I know which option I would prefer. I have seen at first hand how important it is to have a strong security partnership with our European allies. I have seen the potential dangers that such co-operation prevents, and the security and safety that it ensures.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind)

Of course, what the Home Secretary says about no deal is right, but the Chancellor has earned some respect for showing a level of candour this week by saying that there will be an economic trade-off with any form of Brexit. Will the Home Secretary be similarly open with the House and the public that there will be some form of security trade-off over Brexit in order to achieve the aims of the Brexiteers?

Sajid Javid

I point the hon. Gentleman to the assessment of the security arrangements in the deal that we published in quite some detail last week. I accept that, with this deal, security arrangements will inevitably be different because we will be a third country outside the EU, but I think we can safely say that it is the most comprehensive security agreement that the EU has with any third country.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)

The Home Secretary has spent some time giving evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs recently on the subject of database access. Yesterday, the Prime Minister was questioned by a fellow member of the Committee, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), on the question of whether Schengen Information System II is included in the agreement. The Prime Minister stated that it is referred to in the political declaration, but paragraph 86 of the declaration only refers to passenger name record data and Prüm, not to SIS II, which is a vital database. Will the Home Secretary now put the House straight as to the exact situation with those databases?

Sajid Javid

I will happily do so, although I do not have the exact paragraph before me. In terms of the SIS II database, the document refers to the wanted and missing persons database. It also refers to another database—on European criminal records—in a similar vein. The declaration says that we will consider co-operation on those databases, but it does not guarantee that.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab)

Could the Secretary of State point me to the pages in the document that he has published that give guarantees on our continued membership of Europol, Eurojust and the European arrest warrant? As a former Home Office Minister, I can tell him that they are critical to the safety of our citizens, but they are absent from the document.

Sajid Javid

The agreement clearly refers to the mutual exchange of data on passenger name records, DNA, fingerprints, vehicle registrations and fast-track for extradition—which I will cover later in my speech—as well as continued co-operation with Europol and Eurojust.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)

I just want the Home Secretary to clarify his answer. I cannot find any reference to SIS II anywhere in the political declaration. I am very happy to give him my copy if he does not have one with him. As the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who is also a member of the Home Affairs Committee, said, paragraph 86 refers only to passenger name record data and the Prüm database. It does not refer to SIS II. Will he clarify for the House that there is no reference to SIS II in the declaration?

Sajid Javid

I thank the right hon. Lady for the focus that her Select Committee has brought to this issue, including recently. Just to be clear, there is no claim that the document itself refers to the database as SIS II or to the European Criminal Records Information System database, for that matter. The document talks about considering continued co-operation on the kind of information that is in those databases. We will properly consider the matters to see whether there is a way to continue that type of co-operation.

Yvette Cooper

Will the Secretary of State give way one more time?

Sajid Javid

I will give way to the right hon. Lady one more time as she is the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Yvette Cooper

Paragraph 87 refers to considering further arrangements and arrangements that might

“approximate those enabled by relevant Union mechanisms.”

The SIS II database contains 76 million pieces of information. There is no sign that anybody is going to create another alternative database that contains just as much information, so what on earth does it mean to talk about approximating access to the SIS II database? Either we get access to it or we do not.

Sajid Javid

It means exactly what it says in paragraph 87, which is that we will “consider further arrangements” that will help the

“exchange of information on wanted or missing persons...and of criminal records”.

Give the right hon. Lady’s interest in these matters, she will be more aware than most Members of this House that we did not join this database until 2015. Before that, we were using other databases on wanted and missing persons, including the Interpol database, so there are other pieces of data that we can use for this type of information. However, it is good that we have an outcome whereby we will consider further co-operation on exactly this kind of important information.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con)

For all the concern that is being expressed by colleagues on both sides of the House, is the Home Secretary aware of a single Interior Minister or security agency chief around the whole EU who actually wants to reduce the level of co-operation that the UK currently has with the EU and the countries within it?

Sajid Javid

My hon. Friend makes a very good point. In all my discussions with Interior Ministers on security co-operation, I have not come across a single one who wants to reduce security co-operation. Every single one understands the mutual benefit that comes about through continued co-operation and information exchange.

The deal that the UK has reached with the EU will provide for the broadest and most comprehensive security relationship that the EU has ever had with another country. This agreement allows for our relationship to include various important areas of co-operation: continuing to work closely together on law enforcement and criminal justice; keeping people safe in the UK, across Europe and around the world through exchanging information on criminals and tackling terrorism; ensuring that we can investigate and prosecute those suspected of serious crime and terrorism; supporting international efforts to prevent money laundering and counter-terrorist financing; and combating new and evolving threats such as cyber-security. It also allows for joint working on wider security issues including asylum and illegal migration.

The declaration sets out that we should carry on sharing significant data and processes such as passenger name records, so that we can continue disrupting criminal networks involved in terrorism, serious crime and modern slavery; DNA, fingerprint and vehicle registration data, ensuring that law enforcement agencies can quickly investigate and prosecute criminals and terrorists; fast-track extradition to bring criminals to justice quickly where they have committed a crime; and continued co-operation with Europol and Eurojust.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)

The thing is that that is completely a wish list. It is all in the political declaration, but it is no more deliverable than a letter to Santa Claus—it really isn’t—because there is no settled policy on extradition, and no settled policy on a legal definition that could be delivered through the law courts on any of these elements. The proof of this is that the Government do not even have an immigration policy. It is all very well having a wish list, but how on earth could a serious Member of Parliament vote for nothing more than a wish list?

Sajid Javid

With regard to leaving the EU, the only wish list I am aware of that is worth nothing is Labour’s so-called six principles. That is the wish list that the hon. Gentleman has continually supported again

and again. In this deal, specifically on security co-operation, there is, for example, an agreement on mutual exchange of data on passenger name records, DNA, fingerprints, vehicle registrations and fast-track extradition. He should go and explain to his constituents how important that is to them.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)

Can the Home Secretary confirm that if we are out of the European arrest warrant and unable to put any identical arrangement in place, a number of countries will be unable in future, under their own constitution, to extradite their nationals to this country?

Sajid Javid

We are not going to have an identical way of extradition in future because there is no need for an identical way. We will be outside the European Union, no longer a member, so it is not appropriate that we are members of exactly the current mechanism—the European arrest warrant. However, that does not mean that we cannot continue to co-operate through an agreement with the EU on fast and expeditious extradition procedures and fast-track extradition. That is in the agreement; it has been agreed.

Kate Green

Will the Home Secretary give way?

Sajid Javid

No, I will not—I have to make some progress.

When it comes to external threats, we will be able to have an ambitious partnership on foreign policy, security and defence that will enable both sides to combine efforts for the greatest impact. It allows for ongoing co-operation on other important cross-cutting issues, including countering violent extremism and the spread of infectious diseases.

Of course, there is some further work to be done to ensure that we build on the foundation that this deal provides. This is not about wanting to stay close to the EU and its security arrangements just for the sake of it. We are leaving, and our relationship must change. This is about a hard-headed, pragmatic, evidence-based decision on what is the best security interest of the UK.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op)

Can the Home Secretary confirm that because we will not be participating in the PESCO—permanent structured co-operation—arrangements, we will have no seat in the room, no voice and no vote or veto within any of the foreign policy defence and security arrangements; we will not be in the European Defence Agency; and we will not, unless we have a special arrangement, be in the European Defence Fund? What is the point of that in terms of increasing our security?

Sajid Javid

I would say gently to the hon. Gentleman that of course when we have left the EU we will not be participating as direct members in those kinds of foreign security tools. We will have our own independent foreign and defence policy, and we will have the ability, if we choose, to align ourselves with the EU. He should also remember, and it is worth recalling in this House, that our security is underpinned across Europe by our membership of NATO, not membership of the European Union. Ultimately, I believe that this deal strikes the right balance on security, and we will keep Britain one of the safest countries in the world.

I turn now to the consequences for security of no deal. An unco-operative no deal would have an impact on protecting the public. There will be no implementation period smoothing our transition

into these new arrangements. The UK would have to stop using EU security tools and data platforms from March next year. There will be unhelpful implications for our law enforcement agencies and border guards. There would be disruption and they would have less information available to do their jobs, including identifying and arresting people who could threaten the security of some of our citizens. They would have fewer options for pursuing criminals across borders as we would lose the ability to pool our efforts through Europol and Eurojust. It would take longer to track, arrest and bring to justice those who commit crimes internationally. I have established and I chair a weekly Cobra-style planning meeting within the Home Office to plan for this eventuality properly in case it comes about. But no matter how effectively we prepare for no deal, setting aside the capabilities we have developed with our EU partners will of course have some consequences.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)

I have been listening to the Home Secretary very intently. He has not really given me the assurance I want on Europol. Can I give him a last chance just to mention Galileo?

Sajid Javid

The hon. Gentleman says that he has been listening very carefully. I doubt that, because I think I have given him and hon. Members an assurance about the security implications of this deal, and what the security situation may look like if there is no deal. It is clear to me: we are lucky to live in one of the safest countries in the world, and with this deal, we will continue to be one of the safest countries. Of course, even if there is no deal, there are some mitigants. There is no perfect mitigant. We will lose certain tools that certainly would have been helpful from a security perspective. But whatever happens, Britain will continue to be one of the safest countries in the world.

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)

Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the problems with the withdrawal agreement, whatever he has said, is that state aid provisions would prevent the Government from subsidising or supporting our defence industries in the same way that the EU can, and as we currently can under the EU treaties? Is that not a serious risk to our national security that the Government have failed to take into account?

Sajid Javid

I have listened to my hon. Friend carefully. So far, in terms of how those EU state aid rules apply to the UK at the moment, and will indeed apply through the implementation period, I have yet to see how that has a detrimental impact on our security apparatus and supply. However, given that he has raised this issue, it is worth looking at it more closely. If he will allow me, I will do so and get back to him.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)

Is not the Home Secretary giving us a completely false choice by saying that it is either this deal or no deal, particularly given the decision that we made yesterday in this House that clearly allows us, as a House, to choose different options than just this deal or no deal? Is he not giving us a false choice?

Sajid Javid

No, I am not.

I would now like to turn to the other big issue for the Home Office regarding this deal, which is immigration. Concerns over immigration were a key factor in how people voted in the referendum in 2016. People wanted control over immigration. They wanted future decisions on UK immigration policy to be taken in this country and by this Parliament. That is what this deal delivers. The deal

will allow us to create an immigration system that is not constrained by EU laws and that works only in the national interest. Free movement will end. In future, the decision on who comes to the UK will rest with the UK itself, and not with individual migrants. The UK will continue to be an open and welcoming country that attracts the best talent from across the world.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

Can I impress on the Home Secretary again the acute problems that there have been in fishing on the west coast of Scotland and, indeed, in Northern Ireland? I do not know how many numerous meetings I have had with various Government Ministers—they come and they go all the time—but will he look at this next year to make sure that it does not happen again? Will he make sure that we are getting crews on boats and that non-European economic area labour is coming in? The problem is going to get worse with the situation we have at the moment. The Home Secretary has this in his gift; it is not Europe that is stopping him. He can lift the pen and this will happen. He will be thanked and appreciated across the west coast of Scotland if he does that.

Sajid Javid

I am always happy to listen to Members. Indeed, I have met many Conservative Scottish Members of this House, who have made that point powerfully. We are listening. The hon. Gentleman refers to current issues, whereas I want to focus in this debate on the future immigration system.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab)

The Home Secretary is absolutely right to say that concerns about immigration were at the forefront of many reasons that people cited for voting to leave. Is it not therefore extraordinary that ultimately we do not know what the immigration policy and stance of this country would be after March? It necessarily will be interrelated with the future economic relationship. We have no certainty on that—we do not know what it will be—and he has not published his immigration Bill, so how can anyone know before this vote what they will be getting on immigration in the withdrawal agreement?

Sajid Javid

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that immigration was a big issue in the referendum debate and that the type of immigration system we have in the future will have an impact on our economic performance. I know he will be listening carefully to the rest of the debate, and I will give more information on what that system might look like. We are setting out the broad principles of the new system and will be publishing a White Paper, which will have much more—[Interruption.] We will be publishing a White Paper soon. [Hon. Members: “Soon!”] Yes, we will publish it soon.

Sajid Javid

I will give way in a moment.

I know that Opposition Members in particular are very eager for this White Paper. They do not have to wait long. It is worth keeping in mind that when the White Paper is published, that is not the end of the conversation. Like all White Papers, it is essentially the start of a broad consultation that will last for many weeks, where we will speak to many businesses and others, including right hon. and hon. Members. That will be a moment when we can set it out in much more detail.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con)

Speaking as a Brexiteer and somebody who campaigned for Brexit, I know that the most important determinant was sovereignty of this place, part of which was sovereignty to decide our own immigration policy and control our borders. We are not against immigration; we want controlled

immigration. Can my right hon. Friend assure us that the immigration policy will be non-discriminatory as far as the world is concerned?

Sajid Javid

I can give my hon. Friend that assurance, and I agree with all the points he made, including the importance of control of our immigration policy.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)

The Home Secretary and I both served in the Cabinet of the previous Prime Minister, and he will recall that the previous Prime Minister tried, without success, to get from the European Union a limitation on access to welfare payments for those who have just arrived here. Now we are leaving, and we say we want to take back control. The political declaration is very vague; it talks about social security co-operation. Is it our ambition to ensure that businesses cannot bring people over, pay them very cheap wages and expect them to claim benefits and live in squalid conditions? Will we now rule out access to many of those benefits, which cost a lot of money, for people who come over from the EU?

Sajid Javid

I agree very much with the sentiment of what my right hon. Friend said. I think it is fair to say that once we have left the EU, we will have a lot more flexibility in that area. To return to the previous question, the rules that we apply will be non-discriminatory. The broad intention is to apply the same rules to anyone, regardless of their nationality. It will be focused on an individual's skills—what they have to offer and the contribution they have to make—and we will not want welfare or any other type of social security payment to be part of someone's decision to come and work in this country. The White Paper will set out more detail on that.

Yvette Cooper

I thank the Home Secretary for giving way, and I want to put in a word for my fellow member of the Home Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross), who is hoping to catch his eye. The Home Secretary told us just eight days ago that the immigration White Paper would “certainly” be published in December. Is that still true?

Sajid Javid

It is certainly still my intention to publish it in December. That has not changed.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)

The Home Secretary said at the Home Affairs Committee that

“the meaningful vote is on the 11th. I hope it”—

the immigration White Paper—

“will come before that”.

That was just last week, yet on Monday he said on the radio that it was “very unlikely” that the White Paper would be published before the vote. What happened in those four or five days to change his mind? Does he think it is acceptable for the House to vote on the withdrawal deal without the information in the White Paper?

Sajid Javid

I will say two things to my hon. Friend, who makes a fair point. First, he asks what has happened. It is worth reminding him and the House that this is the most significant change in our immigration system in 45 years. Rather than rush the White Paper, it is important that we focus on the detail, get it right and get it out as soon as possible. Secondly, of course we should think of our new immigration system as part of our deal as we exit the European Union, but it is also clear that if we have no deal, there will still be a new immigration system. It is worth keeping that in mind.

Sajid Javid

I will give way to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who has been very patient.

Joanna Cherry

I just want to disturb the slightly cosy consensus arising between those on the Government Front Bench and some on the Labour Back Benches. The view on immigration in Scotland is different. Voters in Scotland do not want to reduce immigration. Business, the universities, the financial sector, the FinTech sector and the cyber-security sector in my constituency are very keen not to reduce migration to Scotland. Is he aware of that, and will he take that on board in his White Paper?

Sajid Javid

I think the hon. and learned Lady will agree with what I have to say next, which is that immigration has been good for Britain. It has made us a good hub for culture, business and travel, and it has boosted our economy and society in countless ways. That is as true for Scotland as it is for other parts of the United Kingdom. That is why, from the very start of this process, my first priority has been to safeguard the position of more than 3 million EU citizens currently living in the UK and almost 1 million UK nationals living in the EU. The withdrawal agreement guarantees the rights of EU citizens and their family members living in the UK and UK nationals living in the EU.

My message on this has been very clear. EU citizens make a huge contribution to our economy and our way of life. They are our friends, our colleagues and our neighbours, and we need and want them to stay, regardless of whether there is a deal. I can confirm that, even in the event of no deal, EU citizens and their families living here in the UK before we leave will be able to apply to the EU settlement scheme and stay. We will be setting out more details on that shortly.

Chris Bryant

I hope the Home Secretary will also think about the fact that it is not necessarily a win for British citizens to lose the right to travel, study and work elsewhere in the European Union, which has been vital to a whole generation of people in this country. More importantly, he says that he is going to change the immigration system, but is he still going to stick to this ludicrous proposal of getting net migration down to the tens of thousands? Even migration from other parts of the world outside the EU, over which the Government have had full control, runs at more than 200,000 a year. Will he say that they will get rid of that nonsense?

Sajid Javid

The hon. Gentleman mentioned students. I welcome student exchanges, and I want to see more students, whether from the EU or from outside the EU, choosing Britain as a place to study. We have been very clear. When it comes to students, for example, there is no cap on student numbers. In the past year, we have seen a significant increase in student numbers from across the world. That is just the type of country we want to remain—welcoming people, especially students and others, from across the world who want to study here or come here as tourists or those who can contribute skills that we actually need.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP)

Of course, we do not just want the students to come here; particularly in Scotland, we want them to stay here and contribute to our economy. Will the Home Secretary look at reinstating the post-study work visa, so that we are not educating young people from across the world simply for them to take their skills elsewhere and feed other countries' economies?

Sajid Javid

I actually have some sympathy with what the hon. Lady says. Interestingly, a report that I will mention in a moment—the independent Migration Advisory Committee report—talks about looking at some of the post-study work rights, and I am actively doing so. We have to be careful, however, that those post-study work rights do not in themselves become the reason for someone to choose to study in Britain. They must choose to study in Britain because of what our fantastic universities and other educational establishments have to offer. However, it is also sensible, when people choose to study in Britain and take qualifications in the skills needed in our own economy, that we have a sensible approach that allows them to stay and to continue to contribute, if that makes sense for us.

Joanna Cherry

I am struggling to understand what the Home Secretary is saying about post-study work visas. Is he saying that we should not deliberately try to attract talent to the nations of these islands? Is his position that we should not deliberately try to attract talent to the nations of these islands? Is that the Government's position?

Sajid Javid

That is the complete opposite of what I was saying, so either the hon. and learned Lady misheard me or that is what she would have liked me to say so that she can open it up as some sort of attack line in a press release. That is exactly what I did not say.

Joanna Cherry

Will the Home Secretary give way?

Sajid Javid

No. I am happy to make it clear that I welcome students who choose Britain, and I think we should take a fresh look at how we can retain talent, with people who have chosen to study in Britain continuing to work in Britain if that meets our economic needs.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con)

On the point about universities more broadly, they obviously rely on attracting the best academic talent to teach our students and international students. Will the Home Secretary briefly explain whether his immigration White Paper will make sure that we do not close the doors to that, reflecting on the fact that many of these professionals are not highly paid, and that salaries are often taken to translate to skill levels although in this case—it is the same with the performing arts—that does not hold?

Sajid Javid

My right hon. Friend speaks with a great deal of experience in this area, and she is absolutely right to point that out. Our universities do rely on academic talent, much of which comes from abroad, and that is to be welcomed. We must have an immigration system that continues to allow that, and we must take a careful look at the salary levels she has mentioned.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con)

Further to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), will the Home Secretary commit to looking at the extra costs and the bureaucracy that will fall on our health service and our care sector? As she has said, because of the salary threshold that applies, many of the key staff who enable our health service and care sector to function will fall below that salary threshold, and the extra costs that will fall on the care sector in particular are quite extraordinary. Will he commit to reducing bureaucracy and tackling that cost?

Sajid Javid

Again, a very important point has been raised by one of my colleagues. I absolutely make that commitment. My hon. Friend is quite right to raise it, because we have to recognise that as we move from the current system of freedom of movement, in which there is virtually no bureaucracy to speak of, to a system under which we will require visas for every worker, we must keep an eye on the paperwork and bureaucratic requirements and keep the system as simple and light-touch as possible. That applies not just to larger employers, such as hospitals or NHS trusts, but to the smaller employers that may be looking for skills but perhaps taking only one or two people a year, and we should keep that in our minds as well.

James Heappey

This is not just about doctors and nurses of course; in my constituency, an awful lot of those involved in agriculture and tourism are concerned to ensure that a seasonal workforce continues to be readily available. Will the Home Secretary reassure us that there is a mechanism in his plans to allow that sort of migration so that the needs of those very important industries in Somerset can be met?

Sajid Javid

I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. He will know that we have announced a pilot for the seasonal agricultural workers scheme, which we are starting early next year, working with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The purpose of the pilot is to make sure that we look carefully at how we can continue to meet the needs of that very important sector.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab)

I am sure the Home Secretary realises that 800,000 people in this country work in the automobile industry, and it is therefore very important that we get the specialist labour that facilitates research and development. That involves the universities, and not very much has been said in relation to Brexit about the plight of the universities if it is not handled properly.

Sajid Javid

The hon. Gentleman is quite right to highlight the importance of our automobile industry and the need for skills, particularly in areas such as engineering. I can give an assurance that we will want to make sure that the new immigration system allows for these vital skills where they are needed.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)

Will the Home Secretary confirm that in the case of a no deal, there will be an immediate hard border in Northern Ireland to stop the passage of people and products, and that in the event of a deal, people will just be able to fly into Dublin and walk into the UK via Northern Ireland?

Sajid Javid

No one wants a no deal, but I can confirm that in the event of a no deal, the UK Government would not do anything to create a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Unrestricted immigration has caused some people some concerns. As I have said, I will shortly introduce a White Paper, which will set out proposals for the future immigration system. I understand hon. Members' frustrations about the timing of the White Paper, but I say again that it is an entirely new system—the most significant change to our immigration rules in 45 years—and we need to take the time to get the details right. We have made it clear that it will be a system based on skills, not on someone's nationality.

The design of the future system has to be based on evidence about the needs of our economy. This is why we have commissioned the independent Migration Advisory Committee to report on the economic impact of EU workers and to ensure that the new system benefits Britain. In addition, we have been listening and engaging with businesses up and down the country to hear their views, concerns and ideas. I am grateful to all those who have taken the trouble to give us their views and have submitted evidence to the MAC. We have considered that advice, and we will be setting it out and taking it into account when we publish our White Paper.

Our future system will be flexible, so that the trade deals we agree with the EU and with others can allow businesses to provide services and move existing staff between offices in different countries, supporting our dynamic economy. The agreement we have reached with the EU will enable us to do this through visa-free travel for tourists and business travellers, and arrangements for service providers and for researchers and students.

Wera Hobhouse

The Home Secretary has been very generous in giving way. He did not actually answer the question from the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), but is it not time that we stopped demonising immigration and came clean about the fact that immigration is actually dictated by the job market, not by wishful thinking about how much immigration we would actually like? In fact, the figures that have come out showing immigration from the EU is down but immigration from outside the EU is up clearly demonstrate that we need immigration.

Sajid Javid

I feel that I have been very clear on that point. I just said a moment ago that immigration is good for our country and that we need a system that welcomes people and the talent we all want to see in this country. That will help this country, particularly our economy and our needs.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)

How does the Home Secretary feel that the immigration section of the Home Office will cope in the new regime when it cannot even run an effective, efficient and fair immigration service at the moment? It is already damaging Britain's reputation overseas in non-EU countries.

Sajid Javid

I am confident that the Home Office can cope with a big change in our approach to immigration. That is not to say that there are not lessons to learn from mistakes that have been made in the past, but it is important to ensure that when things go wrong—they do go wrong; that happens in any large organisation and it has happened under successive Governments—there is independent analysis and the proper lessons are drawn. That is exactly what we are doing in the Home Office. I am confident that with that, and with the talent we have in the Home Office, we can deliver the new immigration system.

Our immigration system must be tailored to support and give preferential treatment to highly skilled workers. Of course, there are sectors and businesses that have come to rely on low-skilled workers and continued access to migrant labour—I understand that—but in controlling migration, we should

always look to those in our own workforce first. We will need to work with businesses, so that they can adapt and play their part in increasing the skills of British people. We are also committed to ensuring that our world-class education sector can continue to grow and prosper, with no limit on the number of international students who come here to study.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)

On work, will the Home Secretary lift the ban on asylum seekers having the right to work?

Sajid Javid

We currently have no plans to change that arrangement, but it is one of the areas I would like to review.

Let me be very clear: the White Paper is intended to be the start of a new conversation on immigration. It is not the last word, but the start of an ongoing dialogue with employers, businesses and others who use our immigration system. The Home Affairs Committee has said we should aim for a greater consensus on immigration; I agree. Basing our policy on evidence and extensive discussion with those affected will help us to achieve that.

We plan to introduce new immigration rules from 2021, after the end of the implementation period. For the first time in over 45 years, the UK will have complete control over its immigration arrangements. We will ensure that we have a system that ends free movement, is fair and fast, and works in the interests of all parts of the UK.

Let me conclude by reminding right hon. and hon. Members that the British people were given a choice and were told that their choice would be honoured. This deal involves taking back control of our money, our borders and our laws, while also protecting jobs, security and our precious Union. For the first time in a generation, we will be able to build an immigration system that is designed in Britain, made in Britain, and serves only our national interest. The deal protects not only EU citizens living in the UK, but UK nationals living in the EU. It also upholds the first duty of any Government: keeping our citizens as safe as possible. I urge hon. Members to join me in supporting it.

14:03:00

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab)

In many ways, migration and security are at the heart of the debate around Brexit, so I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to it from the Labour Front Bench. I think, however, that after the events of yesterday evening there can be little doubt that this is indeed a botched Brexit. Ministers should be ashamed that they had to be forced to comply with a motion of this House. We heard a lot, when they were trying to argue that they should not have to comply, about the national interest. But we have read the legal advice. There is nothing in it that compromises the national interest. It may be embarrassing for the Government, but it does not compromise the national interest. As the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) pointed out, it is not actually the full legal advice. It may be that he wants to return to that matter.

I voted to remain and the Labour party campaigned to remain and reform, but my party has said from the beginning that we respect the referendum result. It is true that there were substantive reasons to vote for Brexit. Above all, there were the long-standing concerns about sovereignty, which were so well articulated over his entire lifetime by my late colleague, the former Member for Chesterfield, Tony Benn. Nobody would deny, however, that concerns about migration were not far from the minds of some, if not all, leave voters.

James Heappey

Does the Labour party support the continuation of the free movement of people—yes or no?

Ms Abbott

The hon. Gentleman will know that when we leave the single market, freedom of movement falls. We said that in our manifesto and we are saying it now.

The available research confirms the salience of migration to leave voters. In June 2017, a report collated from the British social attitudes survey revealed that the most significant factor in the leave vote was anxiety about the number of people coming to the UK. A comprehensive study published by Nuffield College drew similar conclusions.

Geraint Davies

Does my right hon. Friend not agree that since 2010 the Conservatives have made the poor poorer and then told them that the reason they were poor was because of foreigners, and that that is why they voted for Brexit? In fact, migration helps us. This is about not allowing right-wing propaganda to lead our country, and it is about staying in the EU and having a public vote on the deal.

Ms Abbott

All I can say is that the Labour party, whether in opposition or in government, will never scapegoat migrants. It does not help society, and it is not a constructive way to go forward politically. Who can forget Nigel Farage in the referendum campaign posing in front of the poster which showed floods of brown people surging into this country?

Joanna Cherry

The right hon. Lady mentioned a moment ago that one of the main reasons people voted to leave was a concern about sovereignty, and she referred to the views of the late and very well respected former Member for Chesterfield. May I ask her to speculate on this? Why is it that the Irish, the French, the Germans, the Spanish, the Dutch, the Swedish, the Danes—I could go on—do not share the same concerns that the English, not the Scots, have about sovereignty and the EU? Will she answer that question, because it is a question that genuinely puzzles me?

Ms Abbott

I do not think it is entirely true to say that those countries do not share those concerns. I think we would have to look to our very different national stories to understand that concern.

Migration is at the heart of this Brexit debate, and I am glad to have the opportunity to address it this afternoon. Before I turn to immigration, however, I want to speak about the other theme to today's debate: security. Ministers have been trying to drum up support for the Prime Minister's deal by saying that the alternative is no deal, which would be disastrous for security. But the Prime Minister's deal would be almost as bad. At best, we can say that it is a blindfold Brexit on security. At worst, it may be leading us off a cliff on security matters.

Ministers insist that the deal that is being put before this House will offer us better arrangements than any other third country. I put it to Ministers that that is not the point. The point is not whether there are better arrangements in other third countries. The point is whether these arrangements will give us the same assurances on security and fighting crime that we currently have. If we go through the deal, we can see that there appears to be a trade-off on security, because in order to achieve a seamless transition on a range of security, policing and justice matters and have the current level of

co-operation, it would require a new security treaty between the UK and the EU, yet there is no expressed aim in the exit document to move towards a security treaty.

Ministers cannot say that they are unaware of the need for a new security treaty. In Brussels, the stakeholders and commissioners who are concerned about these matters have been talking for two years about the importance of moving forward with a security treaty. Without a security treaty, we may run the risk of losing a number of tools that are vital to cross-border security, policing and justice, while other tools will be hampered or severely compromised.

Tim Loughton

The right hon. Lady appears to be putting all the blame for this on the United Kingdom. Is she not aware that when Rob Wainwright, the very distinguished British former head of Europol, appeared in front of the Home Affairs Committee, he said that all the current arrangements and data sharing from which we and our European allies benefit could be continued, and that that is what their security forces want? Those things are not being continued purely because of politics.

Ms Abbott

They could be continued—my point is that there is nothing definite in the deal that we are being presented with in the House that would make sure that they were continued. On the question of security, assertions, aspirations and a wishlist are not enough—we need a treaty.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)

Last year, 183 people were returned to this country from other European countries to face justice under the European arrest warrant. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that as things stand, that process will end?

Ms Abbott

I absolutely share that concern.

David Hanson

The critical point that my right hon. Friend needs to be aware of is that the European arrest warrant is subject to the ECJ for other European countries, and the Government have specifically said that we should not be a member of the ECJ, so we would have to have individual relationships with each country and would therefore be less safe under the Government's proposal.

Ms Abbott

I will come to that point, but I will say now that the Prime Minister's red lines, one of which was the ECJ, may well prove to have been reckless. The EU insists on treaty arrangements governing key aspects of international security, justice and policing, as do we. Without a treaty, courts have no legal basis to implement arrest or extradition warrants and cannot allow third countries access to criminal and other databases. We are on course to become a third country in our relationship with the EU. Because there is no security treaty planned or even aimed for in the exit documents, the level of co-operation between the UK and the EU post Brexit could be severely and unavoidably downgraded.

Ministers will be aware that neither France nor Germany will automatically extradite to non-EU countries—their constitutions say that. There will be a mutual loss of the use of the European arrest warrant, and the UK will no longer be able to access the Europol database in real time. In addition, as a third country, the UK's access to databases of criminal records, fingerprints, DNA and missing and wanted persons will be compromised. Ministers promise a future security partnership between

this country and the EU. However, the assurance on access to SIS II and the European criminal records information system is only that

“the UK and the EU have agreed to consider further how to deliver capabilities that, as far as technically and legally possible, approximate those enabled by EU mechanisms”.

That is not the same as assuring us of the same level of co-operation that we have today. In relation to the European arrest warrant, there is not even that promise. On passenger name records and the exchange of DNA, fingerprints, and vehicle registration, the agreement says:

“The UK and the EU have agreed to establish reciprocal arrangements”.

It does not say that they have established reciprocal arrangements; it is a wish for the future. However, without appeal and oversight by a court—that role is currently played by the ECJ—all these things could be subject to legal challenge in practice.

John Redwood

Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott

No, I need to make progress.

In addition, on the EU agencies Europol and Eurojust, about which Members have made interventions, the deal says:

“The UK and the EU have agreed, as part of the FSP, to work together to identify the terms for the UK’s cooperation via Europol and Eurojust.”

Working together to identify the terms is not the same as a guarantee of the same access and co-operation that we have today. As these are EU agencies, they are not in principle open to non-member states. Again, if that were to change, the legal basis for that would require a treaty.

Ms Abbott

I need to make progress.

The practical effects would be severe. Last year, the UK law enforcement agencies accessed SIS II checks 500 million times. UK authorities requested access to criminal records 3,000 times a week. The danger is that extradition arrangements would fall back on the 1957 European convention on extradition, which proved extremely time-consuming and cumbersome. Most members of the Council of Europe have reserved rights or derogations under the convention, limiting its effect. At worst, the gaps and loopholes created under this exit agreement could create a situation in which organised criminals and terrorists in the EU might come to regard the UK as a relative safe haven from justice. Under this agreement, absent any significant change to the issues I have enumerated, ongoing co-operation in cases and investigations may ultimately be compromised. On the basis of security concerns alone, no Member of the House should be signing off this deal.

Mr Kenneth Clarke

The right hon. Lady gives a very accurate list of consequences that follow from leaving the European Union, which is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary deftly avoided the question, “Is it not inevitable that the arrangements of this country for security and the fight against international crime will be weaker once we have left the European Union than when we were in it?”

As the right hon. Lady has committed her party to leaving, will she explain how Labour believes that it can negotiate anything other than this between now and next March? The Labour party has no remedy for this, unless it is thinking of reopening the question of our membership of the European Union.

Ms Abbott

As I said earlier, one problem in these negotiations, and one reason why they have not gone further, is the Prime Minister's reckless red lines, particularly on the ECJ. However, let me return to the issue of immigration.

John Redwood

Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott

I have to make progress.

Let me first deal with the status of EU nationals. I begin by saying how distasteful it was to many of us that the Prime Minister referred to "queue jumpers". She seemed to be implying that there was some unfairness or illegitimacy in their role in British society, whereas EU nationals play a vital role in business, academia, agriculture and public services such as health and social care. EU citizens and their dependants living here cannot be reassured by the terms of the deal. The Home Secretary has given general assurances, but the deal says almost nothing in detail about their rights, including work, residency and access to services. No one on either side of the House who has ever had anything to do with the immigration and nationality directorate can have confidence in the Home Office's ability to process the approximately 5 million applications that are required to process settled status applications. I am aware that the Home Secretary sets great store by his app, but he knows perfectly well that it cannot be used on iPhones, and although it has been trialled, the trials involved volunteers and only the simpler cases.

We have all seen the shameful chaos around the Windrush scandal. Today's National Audit Office report on Windrush is comprehensively negative. It criticises the Home Office for its poor-quality data; the risky use of deportation targets; poor value for money; and a failure to respond to numerous warnings that its policies would hurt people living in the UK legally. It is a damning report, and Ministers should be ashamed. EU citizens can only await with trepidation their further and deeper engagement with the Home Office.

Chris Bryant

My right hon. Friend and I represent very different constituencies, but they are both among the poorest in the land. One of the ironies of the present immigration situation is that my constituency now has the lowest percentage of people living in it who were not born in it for 120 years. One of the many benefits that my constituents have enjoyed in recent years has been the ability to live, work and study elsewhere. I understand all the arguments about wanting to limit the number of people coming into this country, though I personally find it quite distressing, but should we not make sure that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater? We need to make sure that our citizens have the right to study, work and prosper, whether they come from the poorest or the richest background in this country.

Ms Abbott

I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. If Members talk to younger people, they will hear that one of their biggest doubts about Brexit is that they do not welcome the idea that they will not be able to travel, work and study in the way they have done under our membership of the EU.

Then there is the question of the missing immigration White Paper. The Home Secretary said he did not want to rush to produce it. I remind the House that we were originally promised it in summer 2017, then the Government were going to produce it this February, then it was to be published in March, before the recess, then in July, and then after the Migration Advisory Committee report in October; now the Home Secretary assures us it will be published “soon”. What confidence can anyone have in post-Brexit immigration policy when Ministers still do not seem to know what they want—or, more to the point, cannot agree on what they want? How can the House be expected to vote on this deal without detail on proposed immigration policy?

We know that the Tories are stealing some of Labour’s terminology about a rational immigration system based on our economic needs, but I suspect that Ministers mean something very different. On this issue, Government rhetoric sounding like Labour is a very insincere form of flattery. The suspicion must be that the Government’s actual policy is to begin to treat EU migrants as badly as they have treated non-EU migrants over many years.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab)

There is one other factor, which my right hon. Friend may be coming to. Does she agree that it would be quite possible for the Government to apply free movement in a more restrictive way, particularly regarding the world of work, as other countries, such as France, have done? Would she like to speculate on whether one reason why the Government have not done that is that the Home Office is so overwhelmed and has been so greatly cut that it does not have the capacity to enforce such a tighter policy?

Ms Abbott

I welcome my hon. Friend’s intervention. The cuts have unquestionably had an impact on the Home Office.

The Government have suggested that they will distinguish between high and low-skilled migrants and discriminate in favour of the former. On the face of it, that is a logical position, yet all indications are that their real distinction will be between high and low-paid migrant workers, which will leave a range of sectors struggling with skills and labour shortages, including among nurses, social care workers, agricultural workers and others in the private sector. This artificial distinction between high and low-skilled migrants, which is really about income, is both unfair and potentially damaging to the economy,

The Government have long been promising a new immigration Bill for a post-Brexit environment, but it seems that there is a split in the Government—I know it sounds shocking—between adjusting the immigration system towards supporting our economic needs and a constant campaign against migrants and migration. They will probably try to do both—“have cake and eat it” politics. There is also no indication that they will drop their unworkable net migration target, which has never once been met but which allows a continuing negative narrative campaign against migration and migrants. The level of non-EU migration alone is currently running close to 250,000 a year, and that is migration over which the Government have absolute control. There is no indication either that they intend to end the hostile environment policy—rename it yes, but end it no—yet we know that it led directly to the Windrush scandal.

The spurious distinction between high and low-skilled migrants, which is really discrimination against the lower-paid, will have negative consequences for a range of sectors. We await with interest the publication of the immigration Bill to see how the internal differences within the Government are resolved, but the Government are asking all of us to vote for their deal without

telling us what their new immigration policy will be. This is a blindfold Brexit deal. As I said at the beginning, the Opposition honour and respect the referendum vote, but how can it be that Ministers are asking the House to vote for a deal that neither leavers nor remainers are happy with; asking us to vote for a deal when so many crucial issues, notably on security, are not yet clear; and asking us to vote for a deal that could endanger not just our economy but our security? The more we examine the deal, the more it becomes clear that the House cannot vote for it.

14:27:00

Mr Sam Gyimah (East Surrey) (Con)

It is with a sense of trepidation that I stand to speak from the Back Benches for the first time in six years and for the first time since I resigned last Friday in order to vote against this withdrawal agreement. I loved my job. Innovation, scientific endeavour and our universities represent the best of Britain, and they underpin our future and our place in the world, so I did not take the decision lightly. At this point, I would like to say congratulations and good luck to my successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), and wish him all the best in that job.

I carefully considered the deal, which has been described as having a remain flavour. Even as a remainder, it became clear to me that it was not politically or practically deliverable, and that it would make us poorer and risk the Union. I encourage everyone to look at the deal and come to their own decision. I believe that whether we are leavers or remainers we are all first of all British and that it is the national interest we care most about, but the political declaration is not a deal; it is a deal in name only. It is a framework for negotiation with a lot of aspirations. Yes, it has all been hard fought for and hard won—I give the Prime Minister and her team the credit for that—but, now that it is in front of us in Parliament, we have to look at it as parliamentarians. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary admitted at the Dispatch Box that the deal might not be perfect, almost implying that this was like trying on a pair of shoes that were not the right colour and perhaps a bit tight, but getting on with it and life would be fine. However, this deal is like a pair of shoes with holes in the soles. It is fatally flawed.

There are three big reasons for that. The first is that all the big issues, whether they relate to security, home affairs, agriculture, fishing, our independent trading policy or frictionless trade, have been kicked into the long grass. While the public are being told that this is almost like the end of the process, we are actually just finishing one process and about to begin on another long and arduous process. We will be doing that at a time when we will have given up our vote, our veto and our voice, and will have no leverage whatsoever.

The ultimate fall-back position in this deal is the Northern Ireland backstop. We will be negotiating with the clock against us, with a fall-back position that is existential for us and not existential for the EU, and we will be expected to get the best deal for Britain. I doubt very much that we will. I believe that, in voting for this deal, we will be losing and not taking control of our destiny. We must be clear-eyed as we go into these negotiations because they have been set up for failure. The EU will manage the timetable, it will manage the sequencing of the negotiations, it will set the hurdles and it will tell us when we can progress to the next stage. That is what happened in the first phase of the negotiations and that is what will happen in the second phase. We will always be in a position in which we have to walk away or fold, and I know what will happen: we will always fold because the clock will be ticking.

The EU elections next year will pose a big problem for us. In 2019, everyone in the EU will be focused on those elections, so I doubt that much progress will be made during the first year of our initial two-year implementation period. At the end of that year there will be a new Commission and

a new Parliament, which will not be party to the political declaration on which we will vote in the House. A new Trade Commissioner will be appointed. We will then have one year, as part of the first implementation period, in which to negotiate or go for an extension. In all likelihood we will go for the extension in June-July that year, so we will trip into the second implementation period and pay a significant amount of money for the privilege. We will go into the second period with a general election on the horizon, a Northern Ireland backstop that no one in the House wants, and yes, whatever assurances we are given, in all likelihood we will pay any price that the EU asks of us in order to get out of that backstop. So what do we have? We have “best endeavours” to rely on.

In my previous job as science and innovation Minister, I was involved in the Galileo negotiations. The EU stacked the deck against us time and again. Before the ink was dry on the transition deal, we were served notice that we could not participate in the security aspects, although when we were negotiating the deal we were led to believe that we could. We were then served notice that British industrial interests could not bid for contracts, even though British companies had built the encryption and security elements of Galileo—or, rather, they could do that, but they would have to move to countries within the EU in order to do so. We threatened to use our veto. The date of the vote was moved, and during the interregnum the EU changed the rules to involve simple majority voting, so our veto did not apply. Galileo is a foretaste of what is to come in these negotiations. We are setting ourselves up for failure by going down this route.

Carol Monaghan

The hon. Gentleman must appreciate that the concerns about Galileo were raised as long ago as the summer of 2016. It is simply not the case that the potential problems of access were not known during the negotiations. Many articles were written about it and many representatives of industry raised their concerns with us.

Mr Gyimah

The concerns were raised and were discussed. We signed a transition deal on the basis of best endeavours, only to realise that that was not the basis on which the other side was operating.

I bear no grudge against the EU for putting the EU first. I bear no grudge against the EU for aggressively prosecuting its interests. What does concern me is that, given the political declaration that we have before us, we do not have much leverage. The unique relationship that we are being told we can negotiate is unlikely to happen. What is most likely to happen is that we will be given a free trade agreement dictated to us by the EU.

We should level with the public. This deal does not bring closure. It is not a case of “Sign here, let us have a compromise and all the discord and disharmony that we have experienced over the last few years will suddenly disappear.” We will see Brexit Secretaries resign next year because so many of the issues have still not been thrashed out. The deal will not heal the divisions that we see in our country. Ultimately, we are at the foothills of a long and arduous process. Brexit will not be over as a result of the vote next week.

The Home Secretary said that there was no alternative, but I believe that that is a false choice. There are many options. What we have is a deal that has been engineered to put maximum pressure on all the other options in favour of the options that the Government are putting before us. We could list some of those options, and I will list them without prejudice initially. First, there is the Government’s deal. Secondly, there is the revocation of article 50. Thirdly, there is no deal. The important thing about those things is that all are within our control and do not require negotiation with the EU. If we want to negotiate with the EU, we can negotiate to extend article 50 in order to look at the backstop again. We can negotiate with the EU to extend article 50 in order to hold

another referendum. We can negotiate with the EU to extend article 50 in order to look at the Norway option, in which I know a number of colleagues are interested. The Government may box themselves in with their own red lines, but that is no reason for Parliament to accept being boxed in by those same red lines.

There is, however a constraint. The ultimate constraint seems to me that there is no majority for any option in this Parliament. There may be plenty of options, but I doubt that there will be a majority for them. I have said that we should not rule out, if need be, going back to the people. When I say that, everyone says that it will be corrosive of our politics, it will be destructive of our politics and it will be hugely divisive. We should not be presumptive about where the electorate are, but I believe that that is not a reason to vote for the withdrawal agreement. If we vote for the agreement, we will give the public the impression that this is the best compromise and there are no problems further down the line: this is Brexit done. Waking up and seeing that Britain is being hobbled and crippled in those negotiations would also disappoint voters and that would also be corrosive of our politics.

I resigned because I thought, “This is probably the biggest vote in which I will take part during my political career.” It is for each Member in the House to decide what to do but, for me, the national interest is not served by voting for the Government’s motion.

14:39:00

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), and I applaud his courage in resigning as a result of his concerns about the deal.

There is much I could say about the detail of this agreement: red lines breached, for example, and the Court of Justice of the European Union articles 87, 89, 158 and 174 and article 14 of the protocol in relation to Northern Ireland make it very clear that the Prime Minister has had to make some pretty major concessions on her red line on the Court of Justice. We have heard in the Chamber—and have now seen it clearly in writing in the legal advice—that as a matter of law we could be trapped in the Northern Ireland backstop permanently and unable to get out of it, as I sought to clarify with the Attorney General earlier this week. The Northern Ireland backstop also means that the catch of fishing vessels registered in Northern Ireland will have preferential treatment through tariff-free access to the market in a way that fishing vessels registered elsewhere in the UK, including Scotland, will not have. I look forward—but do not hold my breath—to hearing the Scottish Conservatives making a fuss about that.

Today and the next few days should be about the bigger picture. I am looking forward to having an in-depth debate about immigration in due course, if we ever do see that much-promised White Paper, but I do want to make a few remarks about it now before moving on to the bigger picture. As I said earlier, it is a matter of record, because Scotland voted to remain, that the Scots did not hold the same concerns about sovereignty or immigration as held elsewhere in these islands, yet the political declaration confirms the UK Government’s intention to end freedom of movement. That will see people across these islands, but in particular the Scots who did not vote for it, lose the rights they have as EU citizens.

This is a deal that will see us made poorer not just economically, but also, equally importantly, socially. Even the Migration Advisory Committee has acknowledged that inward migration has made an overwhelmingly positive contribution to the economy of these islands, and particularly Scotland. The MAC, while failing to acknowledge the need for regional and national variations in immigration policy across the UK, did knock on the head many of the myths about immigration that

drove the sort of xenophobia that led to the poster the Labour spokesperson, the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), described earlier.

Scotland in particular has benefited from inward migration because at the start of this century we had a dwindling population and that EU migration has built our population and brought many young and economically active people into Scotland. Any Scottish MP who holds regular surgeries will confirm that that is a fact. There are two major universities in my constituency and all the academics tell me it is a fact that the process of Brexit and the rhetoric around immigration in this country is discouraging people from coming to live and work and study in Scotland. Scots did not vote for that, and that is one of the many reasons why we will not be supporting this deal.

Freedom of movement has been vital to fill gaps in the employment market in Scotland, and indeed across the UK. We have a big crisis across the UK in how we look after our ageing population. A lot of the people who look after our ageing population at present come from elsewhere in the EU and it will be a real shame if we discourage them from coming here in the future.

Mr Nigel Evans

I agree with the hon. and learned Lady about students coming to the UK and that they should be able to work for a period as part of the payback; I think that is important. But does she accept that many people who voted for Brexit are not saying no to immigration? This is just about controlling immigration and that it should be this Parliament and the Government of this country that decide immigration levels.

Joanna Cherry

No one is saying we should not have an immigration policy; of course we must have an immigration policy. The point I am making is that the immigration policy should be evidence-based and take account of the needs of the economy and the different regions and nations of these islands, and this Government's policy does not do that. If the Government have such a great idea about future immigration policy across the UK, why is it taking them so long to publish the White Paper? And if they are so keen to throw their arms open to people from all across the world and have everyone come here on an equal basis, why does the Prime Minister—the Prime Minister of those on the Conservative Benches—persist in her ridiculous net migration target? It is just nonsense that the Conservatives want to throw the doors open; for so long as the Prime Minister is in place and that ridiculous migration target is in place, that simply will not happen.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)

The Government will try to ramp up the rhetoric around EU migrants, but the reality is that in order to get some of their trade deals through, they will have to bend the visa rules for India and elsewhere, so what they take with one hand they will give with the other anyway.

Joanna Cherry

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is crystal clear that if we ever get to the stage of being able to enter into third-party trade deals, which looks pretty unlikely at the moment, in return for access to the markets of countries outside the EU, those countries are going to want access to the UK for people who want to migrate from their country to here.

Wera Hobhouse

Does the hon. and learned Lady agree that it is the language around immigration that has been so toxic? I am a European migrant and I look around thinking, “Do they mean me?” That is exactly what other Europeans feel.

Joanna Cherry

I agree, and part of the reason why the language has been so toxic is because we have not been talking about the reality of the situation but about a perceived reality.

A Labour Member who is no longer in his place made a point earlier that I entirely agree with: the Conservatives have through their policies created a great deal of poverty across the UK. Wales and Scotland have to an extent been protected from that because we have had different devolved Governments, but I notice as I travel around provincial England that the infrastructure is not in as good condition as it is in Scotland. No social housing has been built here for years, too; in contrast we are building a lot of social housing in Scotland. Many working-class people in England have been led to believe that the cause of their woes, such as the fact that they cannot get a house or a well-paid job—they can get a job, but not a properly paid job—is the immigrants, when it is the fault of this toxic Conservative Government.

Under the withdrawal agreement, EU citizens who are already here will not continue to enjoy the same rights that they enjoy now; they will continue to enjoy some rights, but not the same rights. They will lose their lifelong right of return, they will not have the same family reunification rights, and they will get no protection from inadvertently becoming undocumented illegal citizens—and, my goodness, the Windrush scandal has taught us what happens to undocumented citizens who are lawful citizens in this country. God help EU citizens who find themselves undocumented illegal citizens. Do not take my word for it; take the word of the National Audit Office and reports of various Committees in this House. And in order to hang on to the rights they already have—not to get a passport, but to get the digital identity that means they can hang on to the rights they already have—fees will be imposed on EU citizens. In Scotland, the Scottish Government have said they will pay those fees for those working in the public sector, but now it appears that there might be a bit of a tax-catch in relation to that, and I am looking forward to the Conservative Government addressing that properly, and perhaps extending the same largesse that the Scottish Government have to people working in the public sector south of the border.

I am going to touch briefly on the security, justice and law enforcement issues. As other Members have said, it is simply impossible for us as a third country to have the same degree of security, justice and law co-operation that we previously had, and, in fairness, the Home Secretary recognised that. But one of the things that has concerned those of us who represent Scottish constituencies—or some of us, at least—and the Scottish Government and commentators in Scotland most about this process has been the abject failure of the British Government to recognise that Scotland has a separate civil and criminal justice system. This is not about devolution; this is about the Act of Union. Scotland has had a separate legal system forever, and it is protected by the Act of Union. Yet our separate criminal justice system, our separate civil law system, and our separate Law Officers have not been consulted properly on the impact of these matters on the Scottish legal system. As we know, there is no mention whatsoever of Scotland in the withdrawal agreement or the political declaration. A lot of other much smaller regions get a mention, but not Scotland. This is not fanciful; I know, because I used to work in the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, that co-operation across Europe has made a huge difference to law enforcement in Scotland, and if we lose that, we will be worse off as a result.

As I said earlier, today is a day for looking at the bigger picture. Speaking as someone who represents a Scottish constituency and as someone of Irish parentage, I see the bigger picture of the whole Brexit process as a tale of two Unions: the Union that is the United Kingdom and the Union that is the European Union. There are extremely stark differences between the ways in which the members of those Unions treat one another. So far as Ireland, north and south, is concerned, British politicians largely overlooked the threat that Brexit posed to the Good Friday agreement until after

the referendum, and even then, many of them—particularly on the Conservative Benches—were and still are unable to accept the reality of the legal obligations that the United Kingdom undertook in that agreement. That old anti-Irish xenophobia that people like my mother remember so well has raised its head again, even to the extent of some on the Conservative Benches talking about the Irish tail wagging the British dog, and other such insulting metaphors. However, because the EU27 got behind the Irish Government's legitimate concerns, they became central to the Brexit process. Conservative politicians—not all of them, but some—and indeed a few on the Benches behind me, waited in vain for the EU27 to crack and throw Ireland under the bus. That did not happen, and it is not going to happen.

I was at an event recently where the distinguished professor of modern history at University College Dublin, Mary Daly, remarked that the current situation in this House had uncanny echoes of what happened here 100 years ago when the electric politics of Ulster determined what happened at Westminster. It is quite ironic that that should be so, given that we are shortly to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the election of the first female MP to this Parliament. She was of course the distinguished Irish nationalist, the Countess Markievicz, who went on to be the first woman Cabinet Minister in western Europe. The truth is that the problems that arose as a result of partition have come back to haunt this House as a result of the Brexit process, but I believe that something that unites us all is that we want to see peace being kept in Northern Ireland.

Sammy Wilson

Does the hon. and learned Lady accept that the Republic of Ireland actually has been thrown under the bus but does not realise that the wheels are running over it? If this agreement goes through, a border down the Irish sea will affect not only Northern Ireland but the Republic of Ireland, whose main market is GB and which takes its goods across GB, using it as a land bridge. It will find checks not just at Holyhead but at Dover.

Joanna Cherry

No, I do not accept that. I speak regularly with politicians from all parties in the Republic of Ireland and that is certainly not how they see matters. In fact, politicians, businesses and the wider community in the Republic are broadly very happy with the way in which the European Union has dealt with this. It is sometimes conveniently forgotten in this House that Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union. It is forgotten partly because Northern Ireland has not had the democratic voice of its Assembly during this time. It is only the voice of the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) that has been heard here in relation to Northern Ireland, but his party, the Democratic Unionist party, does not represent the majority of people in Northern Ireland, who voted to remain. The Prime Minister has refused to meet the Greens, the Social Democratic and Labour party, Sinn Féin or the Alliance, which is quite disgraceful.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, the people voted to remain in the EU by an even more substantial margin than that of Northern Ireland. It was 62%, and polls show that if a vote were held tomorrow, the figure would be nearer to 70%. Despite that, the Scottish Government have concerns. They are a democratically elected Government, although I know that those on the Conservative Benches like to call them the SNP Government and pretend that they have no legitimacy. They were elected democratically, and their legitimate concerns, which are often supported by other parties in the Scottish Parliament—as they will be today when the Liberal Democrats, the Greens and Labour will vote with the SNP to try to protect Scotland from the consequences of Brexit—have been wholly ignored. We can only look on with envy as the concerns of the Irish Government are placed centre stage in Brussels. Unlike Northern Ireland, Scotland has had a strong and functioning Government and Parliament during this process that have been well able to express their views, but that has not

protected us. This Brexit process has highlighted the limits of devolved—as opposed to independent—government.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)

My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. We fully expect the Scottish Parliament this evening to endorse a cross-party motion rejecting the withdrawal agreement, just as the Welsh Assembly did last night. The Scottish Conservatives are describing that debate as needless. They suggest that Scotland does not need to talk about Brexit, that the big Parliament in Westminster will make that decision for us and that we should know our place. That exemplifies just how they want to undermine devolution and use Brexit to do so.

Joanna Cherry

Of course, of the Scottish Conservatives do not represent the majority of Scottish opinion in relation to anything, let alone Brexit. It is often forgotten, after the hullabaloo when they won seats here last year, that they are still very much in the minority in Scottish politics and the Scottish Parliament.

Let us look at what has happened to Scotland in the past two years. The UK Government cut the Scottish Government out of the Brexit negotiations completely. The Scottish Government put forward the idea for a differentiated deal or a compromise for the whole of the United Kingdom at an early stage, but that was completely ignored. The Scottish Parliament voted—with the cross-party support of everyone apart from the Tories and one Lib Dem—to withhold consent to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, but that, too, was ignored. When the Scottish Parliament tried to pass its own legal continuity Bill, it was challenged by the British Government in the UK Supreme Court, and we are still waiting for that decision. When amendments to the withdrawal Bill came back from the House of Lords to the Floor of this House, Scottish MPs got 19 minutes to debate the implications of those amendments, with the rest of the time being taken up by the Government Minister. Scotland is not mentioned in the withdrawal agreement or the political declaration, while little Gibraltar—important though it is—was afforded advance sight of the agreement. The Scottish Government saw it only when the rest of us did.

My point is that Scotland's marginalisation and its very weak bargaining position within the Union that is the United Kingdom have been very exposed by Brexit. After our failure in the independence referendum of 2014, 56 Scottish National party MPs were elected to this House, yet not one of our amendments to the Scotland Bill at that time got passed, despite the fact that we had 56 of the 59 seats in Scotland and 50% of the vote at that time. We were told that the wonderful Scotland Act was going to give us huge amounts of power and that we would have the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world. I would like to ask any fair-minded person in this Chamber, and anyone watching, whether they think the sequence of events I have just described really makes it sound as though we have the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world. Of course it does not, because devolution's constitutional fragility has been revealed by Westminster's assertion of control and attempts to repatriate powers here from Brussels, and by the disregard shown for Scotland's preferences in the negotiations in Brussels.

The Brexit process has told Scottish voters a lot about the reality of devolution. It has told them that power devolved is indeed power retained, and that the United Kingdom is not the Union of equals that we were told it was before 2014 but a unitary state where devolved power is retrieved to the centre when convenient and where no one but the Conservative party, which represents only a minority of voters in Scotland, gets a say on major decisions over trade and foreign policy.

The experience of Ireland and Scotland during the Brexit process shows a significant contrast between the way in which nations that are member states of the European Union and nations that

are members of this Union are treated. I heard the distinguished former Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, John Bruton, speak recently. When he was asked about this by a member of the audience, he said that Scotland's marginalisation within the United Kingdom would not happen in the European Union, and that if the European Union were taking a decision as drastic as Brexit and it had only four nations in it, all four nations would need to agree. In the UK, however, it does not matter what Scotland and Northern Ireland say. They can always be overridden by the English vote. That is not an anti-English comment; it is a comment on the constitution of the United Kingdom. If Scotland were a member state of the EU, even though we are a country of only 5.5 million people, we would have the same veto as Ireland over such a major decision, in the same way that the big countries have.

There is still a little bit of hope for Scotland, and it comes from the cross-party working that we have seen there, both in the Scottish Parliament today and from the group of politicians, of which I am proud to have been a member, who took a case to the Court of Justice of the European Union. We found out yesterday that the advocate-general says that proceedings under article 50 can be unilaterally revoked. I was interested to hear the Prime Minister acknowledge earlier today, in response to a question of mine, that it is highly likely that the grand chamber of the Court will follow the advocate-general's opinion. It seems that Scotland, Scottish politicians and the Scottish courts are throwing this Parliament a lifeline that would enable it to get out of the madness of Brexit.

Even if we do throw that lifeline, the United Kingdom Parliament takes it, there is a second referendum, and the whole UK is smart enough, having been put in possession of the full facts, to vote to remain part of the European Union, do not think that that will be the Scottish question closed, because the Brexit process has wholly revealed our inferior status within the Union, and people will not forget that. The last two years have shown us that across the United Kingdom, the leave vote was won on the back of promises that have proved undeliverable. Many people say that those promises were lies, but whether they were or not, they have proved undeliverable.

It is hard for me to be fair to the Prime Minister because of the scorn that she has shown for Scottish democracy, but I will try: I do not think that it is because the Prime Minister is a bad negotiator that the deal is bad. The truth is that there is no better deal than the one the United Kingdom currently enjoys from within the European Union.

The Prime Minister at least tried to negotiate a deal. Others who led the leave movement have totally and utterly abdicated their responsibility. I watched with interest yesterday while the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) attempted and struggled to explain what he wants. I was none the wiser at the end of his speech. Let us not forget his partner in crime in the leave movement, who has now left the Treasury Bench: the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Why did he not take the job of Brexit Secretary when it was offered to him a couple of weeks ago? If someone desires something so much, why not take responsibility for delivering it? I think we all know the answer to that question.

Then, of course, there is the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis). His insouciant appearances at the Exiting the European Union Committee were highly entertaining, but also deeply shocking. Now where is he? We have not seen him in the Chamber much in the last few days, but he is certainly not proposing any firm alternative to the deal.

The much maligned Court of Justice of the European Union, with the assistance of Scottish parliamentarians and the Scottish courts, has opened up new vistas of possibility for this Chamber. There is a chance of reversing the madness, but I accept that there will need to be a second vote. To

achieve that, we will have to work cross-party in this Chamber. There is a lot of that going on already. May I respectfully suggest that parliamentarians in this Chamber look north to what is happening in Edinburgh this afternoon? They would see that it is possible for at least the Scottish National party, the Labour party, the Lib Dems and the Greens to work together. We know from this House that it is also possible for those parties to work with some Members on the Government Benches.

I want to make something crystal clear. Make no mistake about what would happen if there was a second vote across the UK, and England, in possession of the full facts on the reality of Brexit, again voted to leave—I am quite sure that Scotland would vote to remain. Scotland would not stand for that, and there would have to be a second independence referendum. This time, we know that we would have a far more sympathetic ear in Europe, even from the Spanish, supposedly Scotland's great enemies. Their Foreign Minister said recently that if Scotland secedes from the UK constitutionally, he will not veto Scotland's membership of the European Union.

As I said yesterday, I very much hope that when an independent Scotland tries to seek membership of the European Union, it will be remembered that it was Scottish parliamentarians and the Scottish courts who attempted to give the UK Parliament an escape route from Brexit. Even if the United Kingdom takes that escape route, the Brexit process has shown that the United Kingdom in its present form is not a Union in which Scotland can continue to function properly.

James Heappey

Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

Joanna Cherry

No, I am coming to the end of my speech.

We have seen writ large during this process the difference between what it means to be a member of the United Kingdom and a member of the European Union. In the European Union, even small countries such as Ireland are equal partners with big countries such as Germany and France. In the United Kingdom, a small country such as Scotland is not an equal partner with England. A power devolved is a power retained, and Scottish democracy is always at the whim of the majority in this House. That is not tolerable.

Regardless of what happens with Brexit, which I very much hope is reversed for the whole United Kingdom, I hope that the Scots will soon take the opportunity to say that Scotland's position in the UK Union is not tolerable. We want to take our seat at the top table in the European Union, where I very much hope we will eventually be an equal partner with England, because I hope England stays, too.

Mr Speaker

Order. On account of the level of interest, an eight-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply.

15:05:00

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con)

I have always been a pragmatist on Europe and our membership of the EU, so my community and I wanted a practical way forward found following the referendum, but the Prime Minister's negotiated deal, which we are being asked to vote on, while well intentioned, is not a practical way forward for Britain. It means rules without say. Instead of us taking back control, it gives away

control. We will have less say over the rules that shape our lives. Worse, we will not be at the table when rules are set that will matter to Britain strategically—rules that might disadvantage the City or British industry if designed the wrong way. We are not taking back control; we are giving it away.

From my perspective, that sovereignty giveaway alone makes the deal unacceptable for Britain. In fact, I find it impossible to see any future Parliament ever updating fresh rules set at EU level that we have had to commit to, whether we liked them or not, so this deal will in the end be shown to be inoperable, most likely when we have a Government with a low or no majority, as at present. This fragile and unstable withdrawal agreement and political declaration will double up political instability, and translate it into economic instability, making things worse.

The PM's deal is inoperable. I might welcome the Government's assurances on EU workers—there are many in my community—but the detail is limited to the very short term. My constituents and people running businesses who come to my surgery want more than that; they want to know what happens beyond the so-called transition period. As others have said, it is disappointing that the Government have not yet set out their immigration plans for the House to take into consideration during today's debate and at next week's vote. This really matters to the very mixed community that I represent; it needs clarity.

On the Union, and Northern Ireland in particular, I am greatly concerned about the deal undermining the Good Friday agreement, and the Government's weak approach to the backstop. I am concerned about the prospects for the re-emergence of a hard border in Northern Ireland, and about that becoming more of a challenge the more we diverge on product standards and regulations. I am concerned about the prospects of a Northern Ireland that risks being increasingly decoupled from the United Kingdom, and about how that could undermine the Union that is at the heart of the United Kingdom.

I am sure that others will talk about the economic projections. The effect on our economy and jobs is also of huge concern. The open-ended and uncertain period covered by the withdrawal agreement leaves this country utterly exposed as a rule taker, at a time when we face global economic uncertainty and an increased push for protectionism. During this period, the EU can decide whether we are breaking rules on state aid or have complied with them, and whether and how much we can be fined. It will be judge and jury. That is what we are being asked to support in the withdrawal agreement, and I cannot accept it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) compellingly set out, the timescale covered is hugely likely to be extended.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)

The right hon. Lady is absolutely right about rule-taking and sovereignty. Does she agree that the reason we have got into this position is that the whole Brexit debate has defined sovereignty as being purely about immigration and the movement of people, and not at all about the rules that govern our economy?

Justine Greening

I think people are now much more familiar with the trade-offs involved in Brexit. I will come back to that point later.

This thing is called a transition period or an implementation period, but a transition to what? The bottom line is that all we have on our destination is 26 pages of something called a political agreement. It is not binding, there is no detail and there are no guarantees or timescales. For

anything that is comparable, such as a big infrastructure project, we would have a national policy statement, with perhaps 1,000 pages of detail for the House to consider. Here, we have just 26 pages.

A proposed deal on leaving the European Union is perhaps the ultimate national policy statement, yet we have virtually nothing. It is the political equivalent of being asked to jump out of a plane without knowing if your parachute is attached. It is like agreeing to move out of your house without knowing where you are going to live next, or not having agreed the sale price, but signing the contract anyway. None of us would do this in our own lives, yet the withdrawal agreement and political declaration ask us to do it on behalf of our country.

Overwhelmingly, my community does not support the deal. I will not, therefore, be able to back it. There are practical problems and there are problems of sovereignty, but there are democratic problems too, because this Brexit deal is not the Brexit that leave campaigners campaigned for or that leave voters voted for. It does not deliver on the result of the 2016 referendum. Leavers in my community reject it—I have had hundreds of emails and letters about that. Remainers reject it: they are left thinking, “What’s the point if leavers are not happy with the outcome of the referendum that they won? What is the point of leaving, simply to have all the same EU rules anyway?”

Forcing the Prime Minister’s deal through when it is universally unpopular will do nothing to heal the divisions in our country. In fact, it will be worse: it will kick the can down the road, which is exactly what the public expect politicians to do. It is a short-term political fix at the very time when we desperately need a long-term plan. People deserve better. That is why they are so frustrated.

Brexit has turned into a pantomime, it feels like groundhog day, and there is gridlock in Parliament. We have been talking about Brexit for years, and we all need to recognise that Ministers, Front Benchers and MPs will of course vote the way they think is right. I hope the Government do consider a free vote for Government Members, because we all represent very different communities with very different views. However, free vote or no free vote, I believe it is clear that there will be no majority in this House for any Brexit route forward—not for the Prime Minister’s deal; not for Labour’s ever-opaque deal, whatever it may be; not for no deal. There is no majority for anything, yet we have to bring this to a resolution. We cannot keep going round in circles forever. We have to solve Brexit so that we can get on to solving some of the issues that lie behind Brexit. Parliament now needs to take the steps that will allow us to get back on to a domestic agenda, which is what the public want.

Some Opposition Members might say, “Let’s have a general election,” but that would solve nothing, because Brexit is not about party politics. That is why the House has had so many challenges in grappling with Brexit-related legislation. This place is gridlocked. Giving a party political choice to people on a question that is not about party politics will not work. Labour is putting its own narrow party political interests ahead of the country’s vital need to resolve the path forward on Brexit.

I know that the route forward that is left might be unpalatable to many, including Labour and Conservative Front Benchers, but it may be the only viable route out of Parliament’s gridlock, and that is to do what we always end up doing in a democracy: ask the people. A referendum can be held in 22 weeks. We could hold one on 30 May.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)

My right hon. Friend spoke about the importance of healing divisions. Many of my constituents are very concerned that a second referendum would make those divisions worse. What does she say to them?

Justine Greening

I do not think we can heal divisions by pretending that they are not there. I certainly do not think that it is democratically justifiable for the Government to ram through a version of Brexit that is not what people who voted for Brexit want. That, we have to agree, cannot be acceptable. Combine that with the fact that this House will be gridlocked on all the options—that is just the practical reality—and it is clear that we have to find another route forward.

I, for one, argue that a referendum is one way in which we can enable millions of leave voters who do not think the Government are delivering on the verdict of the referendum to have their say, in a way that they do not think is happening in this Parliament. We now have some clear-cut practical choices, and we should put them on the table for the people to decide.

Mr Nigel Evans

Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Justine Greening

I will make some progress, given the time.

These are the options on offer for Britain: the Prime Minister's deal; staying in on our existing terms; and, of course, having a cleaner break and leaving on World Trade Organisation terms, but then having a free trade agreement afterwards. This House should have the confidence to put the clear practical options that we now face back to the people. That is why I believe we should have a people's vote.

This deal has united people in opposition to it. Nobody gets what they want. That is not compromise. Opposition to the Prime Minister's deal on all fronts is not a virtue; it is the opposite. It goes in exactly the wrong direction and it will take us back to square one. Given that this deal is irreversible if we vote it through, this House owes it to future generations to make sure that we do not just hope that we are taking the right route forward on Brexit, but we know we are taking the right route forward on Brexit, and that means asking people for their view.

15:17:00

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)

The Prime Minister's deal is not really a deal at all; it is a stopgap. Parliament is being asked today to vote with a massive blindfold around our heads. We know not what our immigration arrangements will be, because the Government have not published the White Paper; we know not what our trade arrangements will be, because the political declaration is unclear; and we know not what our security co-operation will be, because the declaration is just too vague.

Last month—only last month—the Prime Minister told us that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed. In fact, most things have not been agreed at all. The Prime Minister is asking us to walk out the door, slamming it behind us, without any idea where we are heading or even where we will rest our heads tonight. I think that that is irresponsible, because it is not just that we are blindfolded about where we are heading; as the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) said in a very thoughtful speech, it weakens our negotiating hand in sorting out the future and establishing where it is we will end up.

The chief executive of Haribo in my constituency said in response to the transition proposals:

“Two years is significant to our supply chain decisions so this would be very welcome, but the uncertainty would just be delayed... Everything that is an extension of the delay is only useful if it is clear what will happen at the end of the extension, so we can prepare for it.”

The problem with the political declaration is that, as paragraph 28 admits, there is a whole “spectrum” of checks and controls. Depending on which paragraph one reads, there could be rules of origin checks or alignment with the common tariff, and the hit to our national income could be as bad as 7%. Depending on which paragraph one reads, it could be nearly Norway, it could be back to Chequers, it could be off to Canada or it could be far beyond—we simply do not know.

On security, things are not much clearer. The continued access that is promised to the Prüm fingerprints database and to shared passenger name records is welcome, but the absence of any reference to the crucial Schengen Information System II European criminal database, which our Border Force and police currently check more than 500 million times a year, is deeply troubling, as is the absence of any reference to the European criminal records information system, or ECRIS. Those tools are used to catch criminals, stop terrorists, monitor sex offenders, find dangerous weapons and stop serious criminals entering the country. The police have been clear that our country is less safe without those measures, and I do not think that this House should be voting for things that could make our country less safe.

The Government also need to be clear with us about the impact of all that, because the EU’s resistance to committing to allowing us access to SIS II is frankly reprehensible. However, that is the EU’s current position, and I fear that this deal weakens our ability to sort this problem out in future and to get the commitment that we need, which will be in all our interests. The Home Secretary said, “Well, we didn’t have these measures a few years ago, so this won’t cause a huge problem,” but the truth is that the security and cross-border criminal threats that we face now are much greater than they were a few years ago, and our police and agencies are running to catch up. Our job here should be to support them in that work, not to make it harder for them or to hold them back.

Hilary Benn

Does my right hon. Friend know why SIS II and ECRIS are not referred to in the political declaration? Is it because the Government did not try to get them included, or is it that they asked and the EU refused? If the EU refused, does that not reinforce her point?

Yvette Cooper

That is right, because my understanding is that the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary did ask to have those measures included, because they understand how important they are, but the EU continues to resist. I think that that is wrong and irresponsible, but if we are going to have an ongoing negotiation on this, we should do that from a position of strength and not by weakening our position, which I am afraid that this deal does.

What are we going to say to victims of crime in the weeks after we lose access to the SIS II database if the police or Border Force fail to stop a dangerous offender who is on the SIS II database and known to other countries? What happens if we do not let the police have that information and then the offender commits another crime? Perhaps the most troubling thing of all is that there is no security backstop in this deal. Unlike for Northern Ireland and for trade, there is no backstop to continue security co-operation until a future security treaty or overarching treaty is

agreed. If the transition period runs out and we have not agreed such things, we will lose vital capabilities. Given how long it takes to negotiate complex arrangements around extradition and how long it will take to ratify a full treaty, that is another irresponsible decision for us to take.

On immigration, the proposals that we still need to see will affect not just EU citizens wanting to live and work here, but UK citizens wanting to live and work in the EU and, obviously, the arrangements for business recruitment. If the Home Office does genuinely have an immigration White Paper all ready to go that it is planning to publish later in December after the vote, it must realise what a signal of contempt denying Parliament the chance to see it before this vote would be. If the Home Office has that White Paper, it should publish it this week so that Members have time to see it before the vote.

I support amendment (c), in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), because it opposes not only the Prime Minister's deal, but no deal. I agreed with the Home Secretary when he said earlier that there are significant security risks from no deal. There are clearly economic risks. One local factory told me that the cost of its imports will double in price if we go to WTO tariffs and another said that its European parent company would be under pressure to move production to continental factories instead. On security, however, the threats are even greater, because the police and Border Force would immediately lose access to crucial information that they use to keep us safe, including legal agreements that underpin ongoing investigations and trials, all of which could immediately be put at risk, and the European arrest warrants that we have out on the Skripal suspects. Even if hon. Members do not care about stockpiling medicines or lorry parks on Kent's motorways or the Bank of England's warnings about recessions, I hope that they will take seriously the warnings from the National Crime Agency and the National Police Chiefs' Council about the risk that no deal will make us less safe.

The Prime Minister also has a responsibility to be ready if and when this vote goes down, given the strong views against it. She must be ready to take the opportunity to go immediately to Brussels and to request an extension of article 50 so that everyone has time to draw breath. I know that extending the process would be painful for all sides and that no one wants to be the person calling for it, but we must be honest that the process will carry on regardless. We have to start behaving like grownups and actually recognise the serious things that we are going to have to do.

We will need time to build a consensus around any possible way forward. I think that is possible to do, but I recognise the hugely different views in this place and across the country. This deal is flawed and makes us weaker, but we need to take the time to build a consensus on the way forward. In the end, that is why we are here. The Prime Minister has tried to find compromise, but she has done so without reaching out, without trying to build consensus, without trying to consult, and without even giving this House the chance to vote on what the objectives of the negotiations might be. We cannot do something this big and this hard with this many long-lasting consequences without building some consensus. That is the task for us now. It is going to be hard, but that is the test of our politics. I believe we are up to it, but we are going to have to prove it.

Mr Speaker

Order. On account of the level of interest and the fact of interventions taking time, the time limit will have to be reduced to seven minutes per Back Bencher immediately after the next speaker. Mr Shapps will be the last to have the opportunity of eight minutes.

15:26:00

Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Broadly speaking I believe in international co-operation—whether the United Nations, NATO or, indeed, the European Union—because a rules-based world is a safer world. However, I also recognise that being a member of a club has advantages and disadvantages, because members must compromise over some sovereignty and pool some resources. While in Cabinet, I led a number of trade missions to south-east Asia, including Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan, but it was in Hanoi that the compromise struck me most. Having negotiated over some communist paperwork preventing British beer being landed at the port, we then got down to the further 20 items on the agenda, and the only thing that I could say to the Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister was, “These are all very interesting issues, and I’ll take them back to the European Trade Commissioner,” from whom some Members may not be surprised to hear we never heard again.

When it came to the 2016 referendum, I could see both sides of the argument, and it took me right up to the ballot box itself to decide that I would vote remain, which I did. My decision is not dissimilar to that of many other citizens in our country—certainly my Welwyn Hatfield constituents—who also voted along national lines. The argument could be said almost to reveal the fact that the division was 52:48—half and half—with lots of people seeing both sides. That has led to the idea that we should leave the EU to honour the result but that we should perhaps not leave too much lest we fail to represent the 48% who were for remain. I fear that this Government’s anxiety to do just that is, in the end, in danger of pleasing no one—certainly not our fishermen, who face another two years in an EU-wide catch zone, nor our colleagues in Northern Ireland, who fear separate treatment, nor those in other parts of the UK, who either see what the Northern Ireland exemption is going to bring and want it or fear that the differences will help to carve up the country.

We have therefore agreed a backstop designed to protect against the construction of a physical border on the island of Ireland that nobody wants and nobody says that they will build. However, that backstop has become the real deal breaker for this withdrawal agreement, and I will explain why. As MPs, we understand that there is a simple principle that no Parliament can bind its successors. Unlike other countries, we have never attempted to codify our constitution in a single written document that is later nigh on impossible to change, so not for us an unbreakable second amendment made in 1791 that now means guns kill 33,000 people a year in the United States. I would argue that our unwritten constitution has served us well in providing flexibility, which occurs all the time. There is one exception, which arises when we sign international treaties.

Treaties have a special status. These are laws that, when we pass them, we essentially agree we will never change without first coming to an international agreement to do so. They tend to be about human rights or chemical weapons, so the United Kingdom does not usually have a way in which it can walk away unilaterally, but we will leave a series of treaties made with the EU next March. Even then, it will only be because another treaty, the Lisbon treaty, gives us permission to do so through article 50.

That brings us to the legally binding withdrawal agreement, which is, in effect, a new treaty, complete with a backstop lacking a unilateral exit clause. “But don’t worry,” some say, “we will never fall into that backstop.” My question is what happens if we do? Our history suggests that the chances of our unilaterally walking away are about on a level with America changing its second amendment, so the backstop is really something that we will never unilaterally leave.

Some people say, “But we will use best endeavours on both sides, and we will make sure that we never end up in that backstop in the first place.” Yet, as every businessperson knows, we should never sign a contract if we do not know what the termination clause will be. I find the issue troubling, so I have been mugging up on “best endeavours” over quite a few mugs of coffee, and I can tell the House that the phrase has an official meaning:

“‘Best endeavours’ places upon a party the obligation to use all efforts necessary to fulfil a contract. It is a stricter obligation than the lesser ‘reasonable endeavours.’”

That may sound promising but, alas, no, because best endeavours is by no means an absolute obligation. The concept of reasonableness still applies.

For example, satisfying best endeavours would not necessarily require the EU to put itself in a detrimental position. To take a real-life example, if a construction firm were asked to complete an office block by Christmas but things did not go to plan during the contract, it could do what was reasonable—it could even put more people on site—but if it could not reach the conclusion of building the office block before Christmas, it may none the less be said to have used all best endeavours, even though the outcome was not what anyone had expected.

In other words, we could end up in this backstop for ever, and that would be that. Our country’s entire trading future would instead be decided by five people—two from the EU, two from this country and one individual whom we do not know and whom we have never met. That individual, who certainly is not democratically elected to this place, would make the final decision, so our country’s future would be determined by that individual.

I find it difficult to support legislation that effectively removes power from this House and from this country, so for the first time as a Member of Parliament I find myself at odds with my own Government. With no sign of a solution, and certainly not in the Attorney General’s legal advice that was finally released today, I am afraid that I am left contemplating my vote on the withdrawal agreement next Tuesday. I am currently minded to vote against it.

Mr Speaker

Order. I am afraid that the time limit will now be seven minutes.

15:33:00

Mr Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) (Lab)

Sixty per cent. of people in my Blyth Valley constituency voted to leave Europe in the referendum. I have been voting against Europe for all of the 31 years I have been in this place, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner). We do not like the idea of Europe because it is not a socialist Europe as far as we are concerned, and of course it is bureaucratic and undemocratic. These commissioners are unelected and they have all the power, and we disagree with that. We also disagree with the united states of Europe, which would be disastrous for this country if it ever happened. My opinion on joining the euro goes without saying. Some on my side would join the euro, because Tony Blair said on television the other day that he may have wanted to join the euro. If not for Gordon Brown, perhaps we would now be in the euro.

This new treaty is now on our plate. We have heard this afternoon about immigration, and we have heard about the White Paper. It was supposed to be coming in March 2017, and then it was supposed to be coming later. It was supposed to be coming this week, before the vote. Now we are told that we might get it at the end of December. I have a funny feeling we will not see it at the end of this year, although we might see it at the beginning of next year.

All that immigration has been in this country is cheap labour. We have to be honest about that. People have been brought in, especially on the farms, as cheap labour. I remember, and my hon.

Friend the Member for Bolsover will remember, when the Poles came in and came down the pit just after the war.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab)

It was different. It is the only occasion I can remember in my life when people came from abroad and were not here to make money for their masters. When the Poles and Lithuanians—they were really called displaced persons—came over to Britain, a lot of them worked in the pits. We had 700 pits then, and they were up north as well as in Derbyshire and elsewhere.

The reason why it was different is because they were paid the same money as the miners who were indigenous to Clay Cross, Parkhouse and Glapwell, and all the rest. Not only that, they had to join the trade union, which is why it is different today. When Mike Ashley comes along and gets 300 Poles to work at his factory in Shirebrook, they are there to make money for Mike Ashley, and only him. That is the difference.

Mr Campbell

How can I follow that? That is exactly what I was going to say.

Coming back to reality, when I first saw this treaty I knew what I was going to do. I was going to vote against it, and obviously I have not changed my mind. A lot of people who were perhaps going to vote for it have changed their mind and are now not going to vote for it. We have a treaty here that the Government will try to pass on Tuesday—I do not think they will pass it—and they have all the negotiations to do afterwards. They have to negotiate on the fisheries, but I am not sure about the fisheries because we have sacked all the fishermen. We are going to get all this water, but we have no fishermen to fish it, because they have all gone. We have made them all redundant, and we have got rid of their boats.

As we have heard, it is imperative that we have a deal with the EU on the law and the security of this country. We have not got one, yet we are expected to vote on Tuesday. No wonder nobody is going to vote for this deal. What is going to happen after the deal? What will happen when we turn it down? Where will we go from there? I am not going to vote for a no deal, as it would be criminal if we came out of the EU without any sort of deal. There is no chance of me voting for a no deal if that comes on to the Floor of the House. So where do we go from there? What happens if this House cannot make its mind up and decide? I do not like referendums, because everybody then wants another one, as we have seen in Holland, France and Germany, and with the Scots. They all wanted another one. It is hard for me to say, “Well, if this House cannot agree and make a decision, we are going to have to ask the people.” I do not want a referendum, because I do not believe in them, but we did have one. There is something about referendums, because people did vote in this one—they voted to leave. Of course the Tories keep telling me that, and they are right to say that. What happens if we have a referendum and the result is the same percentage voting to remain after that? Do the leavers march the streets, with banners, and say, “We want another one”?

Mr Skinner

We have a best of three.

Mr Campbell

Best of three—is that what happens?

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab)

It is democracy—

Mr Campbell

We have had democracy, and democracy said that we were leaving. Yet again, it appears that democracy is only where we have two referendums, and that is just not on. We must take the result of the first referendum and stick by it.

Turning back to the treaty, which is not very good, we will be in the backstop for donkey's years. Do we think the EU is going to let us out of the backstop? Of course it will not. As for the negotiators in Europe on the matters that have not been negotiated, I would not trust them as far as I could throw them. If we did accept this deal on Tuesday, they would just throw it all away and say, "There you are. We've got 'em. Leave it the way it is." That is the situation Parliament is in. [Interruption.] Of course I want a general election, but I know that turkeys do not like an early Christmas, so we are not going to have one. We have to get two thirds and we will never get two thirds out of that side—we will get it from these Benches; we will get a two-thirds vote, but they will not, and so we will never get it. As I say, these are interesting times. One Prime Minister said that a week in politics is a long time, but two days is now a long time.

15:41:00

Sir Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con)

We would not be having this debate today if Parliament had not asserted, earlier this year, its right to express its views clearly on the deal that has been brought back to us. It does not, however, follow from that that Parliament should have to take on the responsibility of designing or redesigning the deal. I do not believe Parliament should overreach itself in that respect. What Parliament can do is set the boundaries for a deal and express its view on the deal, and I hope we will be able to do that on Tuesday.

Equally, because of the amendment that I supported yesterday, tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), it should be very clear what is not acceptable. In my view, no deal is not acceptable. It is my judgment that no deal would be highly irresponsible. Having no agreement on trade and security would be damaging to our business interests, and we must have a deal properly in place before we leave. So I do not support no deal. I also have to say to some of my hon. Friends that I am not convinced by the arguments for having another referendum. Of course referendums are divisive, but that is not the problem. The problem is that I do not see how a referendum could be decisive and could secure a sufficient consensus to put this issue to bed for a decent period of time.

If we are to respect the referendum that we did have, and if, as my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), said in an excellent and powerful speech, we are to surrender our vote, our voice and our veto straightaway and immediately pay over this huge sum of £39 billion, we need a deal that is worth all the risks of not knowing how it is going to work out. We do not have that at the moment. Instead, we are confronted with a completely vacuous political declaration. In my view, we need something much better and much firmer if we are to take that decisive step at the end of March.

John Redwood
rose—

Sir Michael Fallon

I hope my right hon. Friend will forgive me if I continue.

I would like to see the deal improved in four crucial and already well-known respects. First, on the backstop, a sovereign country cannot be placed in a position in which we are denied, in the end, a unilateral right of exit. That is all the more important because the protocol acknowledges that the backstop might remain under “alternative arrangements”, even in part. Others have already made the case as to why a backstop should remain, and I find that argument rather odd. We have been told this week that the European Union does not like the backstop any more than we do and that Ministers in other countries do not actually want the backstop to remain. If that is the case, why should they not agree that it is in everybody’s interests—theirs and ours—to set a date by which the backstop at least falls away? I am not encouraged by all this lawyerly talk of “good faith”, “best endeavours” and endless arbitration. If we are going to have a backstop, which I do not like, let us have a date and set the clock ticking.

Secondly, the absence in the political declaration of any commitment whatsoever to the frictionless trade that the Prime Minister promised us is not acceptable, unless we have some clearer idea of the extent to which some freedom of movement will be required and of the extent to which there will be areas beyond state aid and procurement where we will have to respect European Union competition policy. The Attorney General told us on Monday that this is one of the “outer boundaries” that will have to be considered, but he did not attempt to set those boundaries. We need to be much clearer about exactly what the European Union is likely to accept, in respect of both the skills cap that we are contemplating and the competition policy that we will have to accept.

Thirdly, on the extent to which we will be allowed an independent trade policy, the political declaration is at least clear on this point: our future economic relationship must

“be consistent with the Union’s principles, in particular with respect to the integrity of the Single Market and the Customs Union”.

That does not leave us any clarity on whether we will be allowed to reduce much or even part of our common external tariff. Indeed, the Attorney General told us that we cannot have an independent trade policy and belong to a conventional customs union. Again, that commits us to complying with one boundary set by the European Union without any clear understanding of where the other might be set.

Finally, there is Northern Ireland. If a different regulatory framework is to continue—there are currently some elements of difference—it is clear to me that, inside our own single market, that can be done only with the continuing consent of the Province itself, or in other words of the Executive and the Assembly. The agreement should have been explicit in that regard. There may well be further checks that would enhance the protection of the whole island, but they can be put in place only with the agreement of all communities in Northern Ireland.

Without those improvements, this so-called deal is a gamble: we put all our cards on the table and all our money, and we wait for another two years for the European Union to set the rules of the game. That is a risk too far.

15:48:00

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)

In this crisis, there are many temptations to find someone other than ourselves to blame, to say “I told you so”, to exploit the situation for personal ambition, or to cry betrayal. We need to resist those temptations. Indeed, we need to act in the national interest. We are on a short 100-day journey

to no deal, but there are turnings that we could take off this dangerous road, which would otherwise lead us to doing a Thelma and Louise on 29 March.

I admire the Prime Minister for many things. She and I coped well together as we toured the working men's clubs of North West Durham in 1992, on our way to being crushed by Baroness Hilary Armstrong. Then, as now, I was impressed by the Prime Minister's fortitude in the face of certain defeat. The one thing that I do not really admire her for is her attempt to hoodwink the British people into thinking that the only choice that we have in this vote is between a bad deal and no deal. She knows that that is not true, and to keep repeating it is beneath her.

We have six options. None of them is great, but some are better than others. First, we can accept the PM's deal, which kicks the can down the road and keeps us thinking and talking about Brexit for many years to come.

Wera Hobhouse

Does my hon. Friend not agree that no deal is absolutely off the table? It must be off the table.

Tim Farron

I totally agree with my hon. Friend. The damage that it would do to our economy would be utterly immense.

If the Prime Minister's deal is passed, it kicks the can down the road for a number of years, and we carry on talking about Brexit into the foreseeable future. It traps the UK into EU rules, but with no say over what those rules are. It is the absolute opposite, then, of taking back control. Millions of those who voted leave would feel that they had been betrayed. Meanwhile, the Northern Ireland backstop seriously threatens the future of the Union, and every family and every business in this country will be hit by our exit from the single market. If Members think that we should honour the wishes of the British people, they cannot vote for this deal. If they think that we should protect the interests of the British people, they cannot vote for this deal.

Option two, which we have already covered, is that we leave with no deal. The upside of that is that we would—to use the vernacular—take back control. We would not be bound by EU rules or judgments, but the hit to our economy would mean that what sovereignty we would regain from the EU, we would lose immediately to the international financial markets, with all the impact that that would have on my constituents and the constituents of every other Member. There are already 2,200 children living below the poverty line in my community. I will not vote for any course of action that puts even one more child or one more family, let alone thousands more, in poverty. That is why I will vote against no deal.

A third option is that the Prime Minister has the courage of her convictions and puts the deal to the country in a referendum. Let us not kid ourselves: like most referendums, a referendum on the deal—a people's vote—has the capacity to be divisive. However, I disagree with the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), as I believe that it would be decisive. Whichever option was chosen by the people would come into effect without further debate or delay.

Option four might be an early general election. There are 2,700 hours until Brexit. The country will not forgive us if we waste 1,000 of those hours on a self-indulgent general election. The same applies to option five, which is that the Prime Minister is sacked as the leader of her party. Again, that would be seen as the actions of the self-indulgent, the vain and the personally ambitious—the very antithesis of the national interest.

A sixth option is to withdraw article 50 and to renegotiate. As the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) said earlier, we leapt from the aircraft when we triggered article 50 without checking whether we had a parachute, and we are now within a few metres of hitting the ground with a great big splat. There is now a miraculous option to get back in the plane. We could withdraw article 50 and allow the Prime Minister to renegotiate a better deal, which she certainly could do if she changed her red lines. She could, for instance, seek membership of the single market, which is not dissimilar to the arrangement that Norway enjoys. The Prime Minister's decision to rule out the single market was an entirely arbitrary and self-imposed choice made not to reflect the will of the people, but to placate the European Research Group in her own party. It should now be crystal clear to her that those folks are unplacatable, so she should instead seek to find a consensus with people who might be a little more reasonable.

I am a reasonable man. I am no EU flag-waving federalist, no apologist for all that emanates from Brussels, I do not have "Ode to Joy" as my ringtone, I do not know a single word of Esperanto, and, in 2008, I resigned from the Front Bench over the Lisbon treaty, but I have never been more convinced that Britain's future must lie in Europe and that to leave would be a tragic, tragic mistake. I do not have time to go into all the reasons, but given that the focus of today's debate is security, let us remember that 11 of the countries in the European Union today were once behind the iron curtain. Six of those countries had nuclear weapons on their soil pointed right at this city. Just as the nations that fought two bloody wars in the 20th century sit together, so do those from either side of the cold war divide. If that was the only reason for staying in the European Union, that would do for me. How short must memory be to cast that away?

I spend a lot more time in Westmorland than I do in Westminster, so last night I listened to my constituents and did my sums to find out how people in my communities think we should vote in this debate. Here are the votes of the Westmorland jury: 3.5% want us to leave with no deal; 10% want us to leave with the Prime Minister's deal; 17% want us to remain in the EU without a people's vote; and 68% want a people's vote.

After taking the time to listen to people's motives, it is clear to me that many of those who want a people's vote hold a similar view to me—that referendums are poisonous and dangerous. If we did not see another referendum for the rest of our lives, it would be far too soon. Nevertheless, we cannot let what began with democracy end with a Whitehall-Westminster-Brussels stitch-up. If the people voted for our departure, they must also have the right to vote for our destination, and to choose a better destination than the one that the Prime Minister presents to them, if they consider it not to be good enough.

This deal fails all its own internal tests. It would mean that we were run by European rules but without any ability to have a say over them, which would make us poorer, weaker and less safe. It would divide our Union, so it would make us less British. I love my country, so I will reject any deal that harms it. I reject no deal and this bad deal. There are better options; the Prime Minister should take them.

15:56:00

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)

I am grateful to be called in this important and serious debate, ahead of what I think most people expect to be the defeat of the proposed EU withdrawal agreement next Tuesday night.

Like so many of my colleagues, I am currently receiving hundreds of emails from constituents urging us to vote down this deal, for all kinds of different and contradictory reasons: to kill Brexit

altogether; to get a second referendum; to get a softer Brexit through some kind of Norway-style deal; to get a harder Brexit or a real Brexit; to get a Canada-style deal or the WTO option; or to get rid of the Prime Minister and get somebody else in charge who genuinely believes in the Brexit project. There are so many different reasons to vote it down that we would cover all our bases by going through the No Lobby next Tuesday night. But the message I would like to give to the House, particularly to my colleagues, is that voting this deal down next Tuesday will resolve nothing at all. It might be the easiest thing to do. It might even be the smart political thing to do. But it will not take us further forward and it will resolve nothing at all.

One of the consistent themes of the negotiating process over the last 18 months has been how the sheer complexity and, at times, difficulty of the Brexit negotiations have increasingly jarred against the perfect theory and almost beautiful and optimistic simplicity of some of the leave campaign slogans that we heard during the referendum campaign in 2016. There was a beautiful and optimistic simplicity about the message of taking back control by being out rather than in. Yet as we have seen during these negotiations, the real world is much more complicated. One thing I have learned during the 14 months that I have been a member of the Exiting the European Union Committee is that there is nothing simple or straightforward about the business of withdrawing the UK from the EU after 40 years of membership.

The former New York governor Mario Cuomo used to like saying:

“You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose.”

That was not an acceptance of duplicity in politics, but a recognition that, when it comes to serious and responsible government, the outcomes are always less elegant and less attractive than some of the easy campaign slogans.

As the increasing realisation has set in that Brexit is a more challenging and difficult process than many would have liked to have believed at the start, so the blame game sets in. We hear people lashing out so easily against the Prime Minister, saying things like, “It’s all her fault. This is due to her personality. She’s not tough enough. She should have been stronger. She should have been a real believer and had real faith in Brexit.” And we hear accusations against Olly Robbins and the senior civil servants: “If only we had senior civil servants who weren’t part of the metropolitan elite and who shared the general views of the real British public, we would have a more perfect Brexit option on the table in front of us.”

The truth is that we have a less than perfect Brexit deal in front of us because that was always going to be the case. I say to my Conservative colleagues that the deal on the table is not the Prime Minister’s deal—it is our deal. It already has all of our names attached to it. That is because it has been shaped, fundamentally, not by the Prime Minister’s personality and not by Olly Robbins, but by decisions that we all took as a governing party. We all agreed to the timetable of the article 50 process with its hard deadline; we signed up to that. We all stood on a manifesto last year that included the contradictory red lines that perpetuated the complete fiction that we could have all the same benefits of membership of the single market and the customs union but none of the obligations that come from that. That manifesto embodied those red lines. We are responsible for the way that this deal has been shaped, so we will share in the responsibility for what happens next.

If this deal gets voted down next week, we know—it is already clear from the first day or so of debate that we have had—that no one is sure what happens next, other than a further period of political uncertainty and turmoil, and that cannot be in our nation’s interests.

I will wrap up by saying something about my own constituency, Preseli Pembrokeshire, which voted 55:45 to leave the European Union. On the night of the referendum result, I promised, even though I had been a remain campaigner, that I would respect the outcome of the referendum, and that I would campaign and work towards the outcome being implemented, but in a way that was responsible and that sought to protect key economic interests that affect the lives of the communities in my constituency. My constituency is one of the peripheral areas of the United Kingdom. We are closer to Ireland than we are to England. We have ferry ports that connect to Ireland. We have oil refining, gas imports, farming and fishing—so many economic interests—and how we leave the EU really matters to the livelihoods of people in those sectors.

One particular sector that I want to draw attention to is oil refining. The Valero oil refinery in Pembroke is probably our largest employer—it employs 1,000 people directly and indirectly through contractors. Having sat down with the general manager of that plant a few weeks ago, I can say to the House that there are very serious and specific reasons why a no deal outcome would be very bad news indeed for that major employer in my constituency. No serious Member of Parliament for Preseli Pembrokeshire could vote for something that could lead to a no deal outcome and look their constituents in the eye again. In my time as MP, I have been through one refinery closure four years ago when the Murco refinery closed, and it was horrible. I have friends who lost their jobs; I have staff members whose family members who lost their jobs. I do not want to see that again.

How we leave the EU really matters. Yes, this is an imperfect deal; it could have been so much better if we had used our time much better as a Government and a party over the past two years. But I am going to vote for it because I believe in doing Brexit in a responsible way that protects the interests of my constituents and abides by the outcome of the referendum in 2016.

16:02:00

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)

It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb). I agree with him on at least one thing—there is nothing simple or straightforward about what we are confronted with here.

I want to spend the time available to me talking about Brexit and Knowsley. People might say, “Why Knowsley?” Why do I have to talk about Knowsley in connection with Brexit? The reason is that in the 2016 referendum the people of Knowsley voted in exactly the same way as the rest of the United Kingdom—52:48—to leave the European Union, so, in a way, it is a microcosm of the rest of the United Kingdom. Why did the people of Knowsley vote in the way they did? When I was out on the street campaigning to remain, three reasons came up continually. The first was immigration; I will say a little more about that in a moment. The second was sovereignty, or taking back control. The third was that they wanted us to control our own finances properly. I want to deal with each of those in turn.

First, on immigration, some of it—not all of it—was xenophobic in nature, with people addressing it as, “We don’t want to be that country. We don’t like multiculturalism” and that kind of thing. People also gave other reasons, one of which was a feeling that immigration was putting too much pressure on public services. In Knowsley, we have the lowest level of immigration in the country, and although we have pressures on public services, immigration has nothing to do with those pressures. But that was one of the reasons they gave.

Another reason people gave—my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), as so often, touched on it—was a feeling that those coming from eastern Europe in particular were undercutting wages in some of the industries that operate in my constituency. Whether that is right or wrong, that is what people felt at the time. As it happens, I think we need to have a more intelligent debate about immigration than we have had so far, so that people really understand the nature of it, but we have not had that debate, and we certainly had not had it at that point.

Secondly, I will not labour the point on sovereignty, because it has been made repeatedly by others, but the reality is that we are ceding more control than we are gaining, so the deal does not meet that requirement. Thirdly, on the issue of repatriating the money we spend in Europe and economic control, frankly, all the evidence is that it will go in the opposite direction. The reality is that everything the people in my constituency voted for when they voted to leave is not going to happen with this deal. This deal does not meet the requirements they set, and I think most Members are conscious of that.

Before I conclude, I want to talk about what I know of opinion in my constituency at the moment. Like every other Member of this House, I have had hundreds of people contact me in the last few weeks, and they fall into three distinct categories. The first is people who, like me, voted to remain, and they want us to have a second referendum, so that they can have a go at determining a different outcome. The second category is people who voted to leave, are still convinced of that and are willing for us to come out at any cost, with no deal at all. The third category, which is really interesting, is people—some of them remainers, some of them leavers—who are saying, “We’ve already had a referendum. We should get on with it.” The Prime Minister has been using that mantra over the last few weeks. The problem, given that the deal does not represent any of the things that those people voted for, is that getting on with it means getting on with something that virtually everyone in the House concedes is an unsatisfactory outcome.

I think we would all concede that those who contact MPs to tell them what they think are not necessarily typical of opinion in any given constituency. Nevertheless, that is one signal I have to go by. I got another signal when I went to speak on this issue at the All Saints sixth-form in Kirkby in my constituency six weeks ago. In the middle of it, for some reason, I decided to take a straw poll. Although Kirkby is a traditional white working-class area, the students overwhelmingly voted to remain. They wanted some means by which they could remain in the European Union, and that highlights the generational difficulty we have.

I also attended an event over the summer that I organised with the help of the local chamber of commerce, for local businesses that trade with Europe. From big companies like Jaguar Land Rover, down to a small company that deals in precious metal, they wanted a deal that assured their future trading relationship with the European Union. I do not think this deal provides that.

I am left with the view that this can only be sorted in one of two ways. The first is a general election. That does not seem likely to happen, but it is one way of doing it. The second option is another referendum. I believe that one or both of those, or even a combination of the two, is the only way forward, because there is no majority in the House for anything else.

16:10:00

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)

One of the things we are seeking to do as we leave the European Union is to make sure that we do not have a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The way I think we

should solve that—I think this is the Government’s position—is to have a free trade agreement. The problem I have is the backstop in the withdrawal agreement.

The Prime Minister was clear that a backstop that treated Northern Ireland differently and put a border in the Irish sea was unacceptable and not something any British Prime Minister could sign off. I am afraid to say that she has done exactly that. I was not 100% convinced of that, based on my own analysis of the withdrawal agreement. I am just a humble accountant, not an expert lawyer. This morning, however, I read the legal advice—the letter from the Attorney General to the Prime Minister about the legal effect of the protocol. Paragraph 7 is plain and clear:

“NI remains in the EU’s Customs Union, and will apply the whole of the EU’s customs acquis, and the Commission and the CJEU will continue to have jurisdiction”

over it, and:

“Goods passing from GB to NI will be subject to a declaration process.”

That means that, if a company in my constituency wins an order with a business in Northern Ireland—in our own country—it will have to have the deal signed off by a British bureaucrat, and if our rules in Great Britain have deviated from those in Northern Ireland, it may be told that it cannot ship that order to a part of our own country. I do not find that acceptable. I think the Prime Minister was right when she said that no UK Prime Minister should sign off such a deal. I still stick to that, which is why I will not be able to support the withdrawal agreement as it is currently set out. This is the first time in my 13 years in this House that I will not be able to support my party. I regret that. I also regret being put in a position where, in order to hold to the promises that we made in our general election manifesto to the people of our country last year, I am forced to vote against a proposition put before this House by my Prime Minister. But I think it is important in politics that we keep our promises because that is how we maintain the trust of the British people. Breaking our promises is not something we should do.

Furthermore, the backstop is also of concern for those who may not be concerned about Northern Ireland because of the indefinite nature of it. The Attorney General set out earlier this week the indefinite nature of the customs union if the backstop is triggered. I fear that that will critically weaken our negotiating position as we negotiate the future trade relationship, which I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) is the thing that is really important. But if we cripple our negotiating position, we will end up with a very bad future relationship, which will stick with us not just for years, but potentially for decades.

The legal advice we have now seen—published this morning—is, again, clear. The Attorney General makes it clear that

“despite statements in the Protocol that it is not intended to be permanent, and the clear intention of the parties that it should be replaced by alternative, permanent arrangements, in international law the Protocol would endure indefinitely until a superseding agreement took its place”.

He also makes it clear that there is no mechanism that will enable us to leave the UK-wide customs union “without a subsequent agreement” and that

“remains the case even if parties are still negotiating many years later, and even if the parties believe that talks have...broken down and there is no prospect of a future relationship agreement.”

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)

If in this country somebody had a contract of employment where only one of the parties could end the agreement, or if they had a business contract where only one party could end the agreement, it would be indenture and would be struck down by the British courts, yet we are contemplating an international treaty where that is the case.

Mr Harper

I completely agree with my hon. Friend. That is not a contract I would be willing to sign and I am afraid that is why I cannot sign up to this withdrawal agreement. It is also the case that the withdrawal agreement will hand over about £39 billion in an unconditional way. I think that most people who carry out negotiations generally do not hand over all the money until they have a deal. We should make the money conditional on both getting a good deal and getting a good deal on a timely basis. If we were to do that, we would get a good deal on a timely basis.

There may be before the House amendments to the motions and extra words may be added to the political declaration, but what we are being asked to vote on is a legally binding treaty—the withdrawal agreement. Unless that is changed, words added to the political declaration and any extra words on the motions before this House are legally meaningless. I do not think they are capable of persuading colleagues who are concerned about the withdrawal agreement that they have significantly changed the position.

Stephen Crabb

My right hon. Friend is making a clear and compelling speech. Given that it has been pretty clear for 12 months that the withdrawal agreement would include a Northern Irish backstop and that that would have some teeth to it, and that there was no way that the EU or the Irish Government were going to agree to a backstop with an end date because then it would not be a backstop, how does he propose that we overcome that problem? What does voting down the deal next Tuesday do to make a solution to the problem he sets out any more likely?

Mr Harper

First, there were two aspects to the joint report that was signed. We have delivered one of them in the withdrawal agreement. The other one was about ensuring that unfettered access to the United Kingdom market remained in place. That may well be true for Northern Ireland businesses, but it is not true for businesses in Great Britain. So we have not delivered, according to the Attorney General's advice, on that joint report in this withdrawal agreement.

The Irish Government, the British Government and the EU have all said that they do not want to see a hard border or infrastructure—we are all committed to that and we are all supposed to be committed to reaching a deal on a future relationship—so I do not see any need to have the backstop in this deal. It is clear to me that, if the backstop remains in the deal, the Prime Minister will not be able to get it through the House. If the Cabinet's deal is defeated—this is the Cabinet's agreement, not just the Prime Minister's—the Prime Minister should go to the European Council at the end of next week and say that any deal with the backstop will not be passed by this House and that they should think again. I think they will reflect on the fact that, if the fifth largest economy in the world and a close defence and security partner is leaving the EU, they have a choice: do we leave with a good, positive relationship on which we can build in the months and years to come, or do we leave with a spirit of rancour and discord? That is something our European partners will have to reflect on. I hope that, if they reflect on that, they will reach a wise and sensible decision and we can reach a sensible agreement.

My final point is aimed more at my Conservative colleagues. Because of the importance of Northern Ireland, my colleagues need to reflect on the fact that, if the deal were voted through next week, it is my belief, having listened carefully to what they have said, that the relationship between our Democratic Unionist party allies and the Prime Minister would be fractured beyond repair and what we saw yesterday, when we were defeated three times in this House, will be a state of affairs repeated on a number of occasions day after day after day. I think we would be in office but unable to govern our country effectively. Colleagues need to think about that.

It is not too late for the Prime Minister to think again, to come before the House before the vote on Tuesday and to say that she is going to change the withdrawal agreement and deliver that message to our European partners. If she does that and the withdrawal agreement is changed, I for one will happily support the Government, and I believe that the majority of MPs in this House will do so. It will unify our party and bring our DUP allies back with us. If she does that, she will have my support. If she does not, I regret that, for the first time in my 13 years in Parliament, I will be unable to support the leader of my party and the Prime Minister of my country.

16:20:00

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab)

We are asked to approve the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. I will vote against them because they are not in our national interest. I do not believe that they represent the will of this House or the will of our country, which is why we have to give this issue back to the people with the option to keep our current deal—a far superior arrangement. Some will say that that is unsurprising; I represent the area that scored the highest remain vote in the country. It is almost as if what my constituents think does not count, because ever since 2016, there has been a deliberate attempt to dismiss areas such as mine that voted remain and to divide them off from areas that voted leave.

Despite the multifaceted nature of the result and the fact that it was evenly balanced—17.4 million to 16.1 million—areas such as mine are sometimes treated like a small minority and airily referred to as being liberal, metropolitan and elite. In Lambeth, we are proud to be metropolitan and we are proud of our liberal values, but we are anything but an elite. We are the eighth most deprived local authority area in England. One third of the children living in our borough live in poverty. We have higher rates of unemployment and we have more acute social problems than many of the areas that voted to leave, so my constituents have grievances, too. No one side of this debate has a monopoly on grievance. The only difference is that in Lambeth, we did not believe that leaving the European Union would do anything to help us or solve the problems that I just referred to, and nothing in the withdrawal agreement or the political declaration gives us any reason to think otherwise.

As for those who did vote to leave, what were they promised and have the withdrawal agreement and declaration delivered it? The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), who spoke before me, is absolutely right: it is important that these promises are kept. Vote Leave—I note that the Environment Secretary was the co-leader of that campaign—said that the Government would negotiate new trade deals that would immediately take effect on exit day. Where are those trade deals? I will give way to him if he wants to tell us where they are. We know that they are nowhere to be seen and that we will not see any of them in March 2019. [Interruption.] The right hon. Gentleman chunters from a sedentary position. Not one trade deal will be in place in March 2019. I am happy to give way to him if he wants to disabuse the House of that fact, but he knows that it is not going to happen.

Vote Leave also promised that trade with the EU would not be harmed. The Prime Minister acknowledged in her Mansion House speech that we will have less market access and trade will be harmed. The Government's own economic impact assessments are telling us that we will be poorer as a result. Then, of course, there was that ridiculous promise of the £350 million extra per week that we were told would go to the NHS—a straightforward lie, which I will not dignify with any further attention.

I want to address what is sometimes the elephant in the room: immigration. If one factor above all else was driving the vote, it was that and the issue of EU free movement. It was exploited in the most disgusting way. Remember Vote Leave's claim that millions of Turkish people would be coming to our country, bringing criminality and threatening our security—it was an absolute disgrace and those involved in making those claims should hang their heads in shame.

There is, of course, concern about the levels of EU immigration. Let us be honest: views are stronger in respect of non-EU immigration, and there are parallels between the discontent in some leave-voting areas about EU immigration and the discontent regarding the immigration that we have had in this country from the 1950s. There was, after all, a form of free movement from the Commonwealth up until 1971; my father was part of that. I do not deny that immigration poses economic and cultural challenges in parts of our country, but if we implement the right policies, it need not do so.

I turn then to the underlying causes of concern about immigration: not enough well-paid and decent jobs; not enough decent, affordable housing; a shortage of school places; an NHS in crisis. These problems will not disappear or be mitigated if we exit, be it with this withdrawal agreement and declaration or in any other way. As the Government's own Migration Advisory Committee has said, immigration has no or little impact on the overall employment conditions or outcomes of UK-born citizens; immigration is not a major determinant of the wages of UK-born workers; immigrants make up a small fraction of those in social housing; and, above all, EU immigrants contribute so much more to the health service and the provision of social care and financial resources, and through work, than they consume in services.

It is absolutely clear, therefore, that ending free movement will not solve the problems facing the country. We have to treat our constituents—everyone in this country—like adults and be honest. I am fed up with hearing people say, "People expressed concerns about immigration." Of course we should engage with that, but let us not lie and say that we agree that they are caused by all these EU immigrants that people refer to. Governments from both sides of the House have not delivered enough for people, and that is the problem, not immigration.

Where does that leave us? We have absolutely no idea because we do not know the proposed post-Brexit immigration arrangements or our future economic relationship with the EU; we just have this declaration of aspiration. This is the point. Beyond immigration and security, we do not know the final Brexit destination, and let us be honest about this too: the House cannot agree what that destination should be either. For all those reasons and more, I cannot see how we can resolve this issue if we do not refer it back to the people to determine. Let us have the people's vote we need.

16:26:00

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)

Almost two and a half years have now passed since the people spoke in that big democratic referendum. The people voted in very large numbers to take back control of our laws, our money and our borders, and to reclaim the lost sovereignty of the United Kingdom electorate, and they did

so in the teeth of enormous hostility and propaganda from many elements of the political and big business establishment.

The people were told they were too stupid to understand the arguments and that there were huge dangers if they dared to vote to leave the EU. They were told by both campaigns, and by the Government in a formal leaflet, that we would be leaving the single market and the customs union, because rightly we were told that the EU would not allow us to cherry-pick bits of the single market and customs union and that those were an integral part of the whole. They were given a set of entirely bogus and dishonest forecasts about what would happen in the short term after the vote, and practically every one of those forecasts was wildly too pessimistic, which has led to the distrust between the vote leave majority and the establishment that pushed out those forecasts.

I urge the House to move on from “Project Fear”, to move on from gloom and doom, and to understand that many millions of decent, honest voters made a careful and considered decision, and they do not believe those who tell them it will all go wrong, that it must be reversed or that they must be told to think again and vote again because they did not do their homework. It is deeply insulting to the electors, and I am sure that this Parliament is worthy of a much better performance than that.

The people were saying something wonderful for this Parliament. They were saying, “We believe in you, Parliament. We believe you can make wise laws. We believe you can make even wiser laws than the EU. We believe you can make better judgments about how to spend the taxes we send you than the EU, which spends so much of the money on our behalf in ways of which we do not approve. We believe, O Parliament, that if you help us to take back control of our laws and democracy, we will get better answers. Or, of course, Parliament, if you do not give us a better answer, we the people will have our sovereignty back, and we will dismiss you.”

One of the things that most annoys people about the EU among the leave-voting majority is that we cannot sack them. Whatever they do, however bad they are, however much money they waste, however irritating their laws, we have to put up with them. We cannot sack them; we cannot have a general election. [Interruption.] Scottish National party Members say that they feel the same about the Union of the United Kingdom, but we gave them the democratic opportunity, and their people say that they like our system of government, because this is their democracy too. [Interruption.] The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) should understand that her colleagues in Scotland, and her voters in Scotland, believe in UK democracy, and they have exactly the same rights of voice and vote and redress as all the rest of us.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)

I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. Ever since the referendum, the narrative has been to find explanations for why the people voted as they did—any explanation other than the fact that they wanted to leave the European Union. Does he consider that the majority in favour of the amendment in the name of our right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) shows that the game is up, and that there is now a majority in the House against leaving the European Union? The game for us must be to find some orderly way around that, irrespective of the majority who are now against us.

John Redwood

I do not prejudge the evil intents of other Members. I hope that all Members will agree that we must implement the referendum result. We had a general election in the summer of last year, and I remember that in that general election Labour and the Conservatives got rather more than 80% of the vote in Great Britain, the Democratic Unionist party did extremely well in Northern Ireland, and

all three parties said that they would faithfully implement the referendum decision of United Kingdom voters on leaving the European Union. I trust that they will want to operate in good faith in the votes that may be to come.

My advice to Ministers, as well as to the rest of the House, is that what we should now be doing is celebrating the opportunities and the advantages that we will gain after March, when we have left the European Union. We should be having debates about how we will spend all the extra money on improving our public services instead of giving it to the EU. We should be having a debate about all the tax cuts that we need to boost our economy, so that instead of growth slowing after we leave, we speed it up by deliberate acts of policy which we would be empowered in this place to take if only Members would lift their gloom and their obstinate denial of opportunity, and see that if we spent some more money and had some tax cuts, it would provide a very welcome boost to our economy in its current situation.

I want to see us publish a schedule of tariffs for trading with the whole world that are lower than the tariffs that the EU currently makes us impose on perfectly good exporters, particularly of food products, from elsewhere in the world. Why do we have to impose high tariffs on food that we cannot grow for ourselves? I want us to have a debate on urgently taking back control of our fishing industry so that we can land perhaps twice as many fish in the UK and not let them all be landed somewhere else, and build a much bigger fish processing industry on the back of domestic landings from our very rich fishing grounds.

I wish to see us get rid of VAT on, for instance, green products and domestic fuel, which we are not allowed to do because we are an impotent puppet Parliament that does not even control its own tax system for as long as we remain in the European Union. I wish to see us take back control of our borders, so that we can have a migration policy that is right for our economic needs and fair to people from wherever they may come all around the world, rather than having an inbuilt European Union preference. I wish us to be a global leader for world trade. Now that the United States of America has a President who says that he rather likes tariffs, there is a role for a leading great power and economic force in the world like the United Kingdom to provide global leadership for free trade.

We will do none of that if we sign this miserable agreement with which the Government have presented us, because we will be locked into their customs arrangements for many months or years. We will not be free to negotiate those free trade deals, let alone provide the international leadership which I yearn for us to provide. I want us to have our seat back at the high tables of the world in the big institutions like the World Trade Organisation, so that with vote and voice and purpose, we can offer something positive, and have a more liberal free-trading democratic world than the one that we currently have. That is something that we are not allowed to do for as long as we remain members of the European Union.

I say this to Members. Lift the gloom. Stop “Project Fear”. Stop selling the electors short. Stop treating the electors as if they were unable to make an adult decision. Understand that they made a great decision—a decision I am mightily proud of—to take back sovereign control to the people, to take back the delegated sovereign control to this Parliament. It is high time that this Parliament rose to the challenge, instead of falling at every opportunity, and high time we did something positive for our constituents, instead of moaning and grumbling and spending every day—groundhog day—complaining about the vote of the British people.

16:34:00

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)

Many hon. Members have spoken in this debate on one of the most important pieces of legislation that this House has considered, and I am grateful that we have as much time as we do to debate this nation's next steps. I do not believe it is hyperbole to say that we are charged with setting this nation's future.

I campaigned for our country to remain in the EU. I believe we are stronger when we work with our neighbours, not when we turn our backs on them. The majority of this House said that leaving the EU would be bad for business, strip protections from workers and leave us isolated in the world. We were not heeded. Many of us here counselled that article 50 should not have been triggered and that rushing to this momentous step was foolhardy. We were not heeded. We stood in this House and the Prime Minister paid lip service to the requests of hon. Members to negotiate to protect key sectors of the economy. We were not heeded.

The Prime Minister and her Government have carried on regardless, with the small clique running things the same way that they always have. In this country's greatest leap into the unknown, she has chosen not to bring people together, not to create consensus, and not to work openly. But she has used every scintilla of strategy and guile she could muster to block this place from scrutinising her deal. Now it is too late; I am sure other Members will respond to that later on. Behind her sits looming the largest rebellion of this century, because she thought she alone could design the deal this country needs. Leadership may take self-belief, but it needs self-awareness, too.

The deal that we will vote on is not a deal for growth, it is not a deal for an outward-looking Britain, and it certainly is not a deal for the future. We abandon allies and friends in Europe, and we put into question our own security, and so I do not vote against this deal lightly. If we vote this deal down, the risk only rises of a no deal Brexit—a no deal Brexit that will destroy jobs and livelihoods, drive teachers, doctors and nurses out of the UK, and create another generation scarred by a self-inflicted recession.

This country was built on immigration. I myself came here more than 50 years ago, made a family and a life here, served as a local councillor for over 25 years, and have become a Member of Parliament. But the Prime Minister's plan for Brexit will denude this nation of who it needs most, so I cannot in good faith vote for a deal that leaves my constituents, young and old, without a brighter looking future. Are my grandchildren and all their generation going to look back at this moment and at the Prime Minister's deal, and remember it as the moment we snuffed out their hope?

The misjudgment, the mishandling and the sheer incompetence of our so-called pivot to the world is staggering, I cannot believe this is what anyone voted for on 23 June 2016. We owe it to everyone in this country, from Ealing Southall to Edinburgh and across the Irish sea, to end this madness. This House should vote down the Prime Minister's deal, and the Government should take a stand for our country and withdraw our notice under article 50. They should show some leadership. If the Prime Minister cannot summon the courage even to hand the decision back to the people in a new referendum, then this is the appropriate time for her to stand aside and let others show some real leadership.

16:40:00

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), and I agree with him that we are stronger when we work with our neighbours. No one doubts the commitment of the

Prime Minister to try to deliver on the wishes of the 52%. The trouble is that no one really knows which version of Brexit she was mandated to deliver. There are so many possible alternatives, with everything from Norway, the European Economic Area, the European Free Trade Association and Norway plus a customs union through to a Canada-style free trade agreement and Canada plus plus plus. There are so many options, but after two years of hard slog, we now know what this looks like. We know what the withdrawal agreement looks like, for example. It is a legally binding agreement with more than 500 pages, but worryingly, it has only 26 pages describing what will actually happen after the transition period. That is nothing more than a wish list of asks and it is very sketchy. We are heading for a blindfold Brexit.

I also fear that we are being forced into a binary false choice in which we accept either a bad deal or something even worse: no deal. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has set down red lines all around herself for the various options. The one area in which she has not put down a red line is the worst deal of all, which is no deal. I am afraid that I do not agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) when he talks about “Project Fear”. I think that very shortly, possibly in as little as 114 days, we will be up against “Project Reality”. In the context of no deal, “Project Reality” would be very serious indeed for patients who use our national health service. We are talking about major interruptions in the supply chain of vital medicines and medical supplies. We are talking about insecurity in the supply of vital diagnostic test materials such as medical radioisotopes, which cannot be stockpiled. We are talking about supply chain issues for complex biological drugs, including those that we use to stop transplant rejection and to treat cancers.

We are also talking about products that cannot easily be switched from one brand to another in cases of shortage, such as medication for epilepsy. We are talking about difficulty in guaranteeing sufficient refrigeration capacity for stockpiling. Nobody voted in the referendum because they wanted to see the stockpiling of medicines and the extra costs involved, or the difficulties that the NHS and our care services will face in providing the workforce that we need. The truth is that there is no version of Brexit that would be positive for our NHS, for our care services, for science and research or for public health, and we need to be honest with people about that.

We also need to be honest and have a reality check about what is happening in this place. It seems to me that even the dogs in the street know that the Prime Minister’s deal is not going to pass this House next week. That is the truth of it. We should now be thinking about plan B, and we need to be honest about that. To my mind, plan B must not involve no deal. No responsible Government could inflict no deal on the United Kingdom in 114 days’ time. We are absolutely not prepared for that. So what is the alternative? There is no majority in this House for any of the other options, so the alternative is to look at going back to the British people and saying to them, “This is what Brexit looks like. This is the best that could be negotiated. Is this the Brexit you voted for, or do you want to stick with the deal that we have?” I would say that there was no consent to being dragged into Brexit without asking the people.

Before coming to this place, I was privileged to work in the health service for 24 years, and to teach junior doctors and medical students. In medicine, there is the really important principle of informed consent. We should apply it to Brexit, because Brexit is major constitutional, economic and social surgery. To give informed consent, one has to know what the operation involves. Two years ago, there were many possible versions of that operation, but now that we know what the surgery involves, it is time for proper discussion about the risks and benefits, and to allow people to weigh them up for themselves.

James Heappey

My hon. Friend knows that I respect her enormously. I agree that being very candid with the electorate is the right thing to do right now. Should we also be candid with them about the mechanism for delivering a second referendum—about the fact that it would require an Act of Parliament; about the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill taking 348 days to get through the Houses of Parliament; and about there being absolutely no expectation that a Bill as controversial as a second referendum Bill would be able to progress through this place any quicker?

Dr Wollaston

I ask my hon. Friend to have a look at the work of the Constitution Unit and others, who estimate that we could get a referendum Bill through the House in 22 weeks. We would first need to extend article 50. That is what I hope that the Prime Minister does. I hope that she looks at the reality of the situation, extends article 50, and asks the British people, “Is this the Brexit you voted for, or do you want to stay with the deal we have?”—the one that has served us well for decades. That question has to go back to the British people.

None of us in this House should be forced into a false choice—into choosing a bad deal because we are told that the only alternative is no deal. That is simply not the case, and I believe that the House will reject the deal. That is why I support the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) rejecting no deal, and urge colleagues to do the same. The House should ask to extend article 50, so that we have the time to consider where we go from here. Otherwise, in 114 days, we run out of road and fall off a cliff. What is needed now—this message is for the Opposition Front Benchers as well as ours—is a BFO: a blinding flash of the obvious. We need to think again. Delivering on a people’s vote will require the Opposition Front Benchers not to cling to the idea that they will force a general election; we know that will not happen, either.

We do not have any time to waste. We need Members on both Front Benches to give a free vote, or deliver support for a people’s vote. That is the way forward. This House would decide the exact question. I believe that the choice should be between this deal and remain; I know others feel that the question should be more complex. We do not have to decide that now—it is something that the House could decide later—but we must not run out of road; we must extend article 50.

16:48:00

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). I will vote against the withdrawal agreement, because I want to help and support my constituents in Motherwell and Wishaw, and because I believe the UN rapporteur and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation when they talk about increasing poverty; I have seen it in my constituency. I spent last Saturday helping a wonderful woman, Martine Nolan, with her great toy giveaway to children in my constituency and constituencies close by who will not have a Christmas because of the poverty that they are suffering. Those children’s parents are in work. In this country, being in work no longer means that someone earns enough to support their family adequately. I will not listen again to those Front Benchers who tell me that the only way out of poverty is work, when people in my constituency work in a gig economy, earn very little money and have no job security.

Within weeks of setting up my office in Motherwell, the people in my office helped me to establish the Poverty Action Network. I pay tribute to the members of that network, which include people from North Lanarkshire Council, organisations across Motherwell and Wishaw, and organisations right across North Lanarkshire. They want the best for people, I want the best for people, and this deal most certainly is not that.

As I said in my maiden speech, my constituency has always welcomed immigrants, starting with Lithuanians after the first world war. We have had Congolese refugees and Syrian refugees, and huge numbers of Polish people have contributed enormously to the culture, health and wealth of my constituency. I do not want to see barriers go up to prevent that.

At the moment, EU nationals are choosing not to come to Motherwell and Wishaw. For example, last month's Nursing and Midwifery Council figures showed that EEA applications for registration in this country were down 87% last year, and they are still dropping. The people who look after our most vulnerable mostly come from EU countries.

When my husband was dying, I was relieved that he would not need more radiotherapy, because I was so worried about what might happen if he had needed it and there were queues at Dover, we were no longer in Euratom and he could not get the vital services he needed. He was lucky that he did not have to wait, and he is out of that kind of pain now.

Turning to businesses in my constituency, small businesses rely on there being higher numbers of EU nationals in Scotland. That is especially true in the highlands and islands, but even the factory in my constituency that makes kilts for the UK Army employs EU nationals. It needs those people and the support they provide.

The UK chair of the Federation of Small Businesses said that if small businesses are

“lumbered with complex paperwork to bring in EU staff post-Brexit that will cause a significant drag on the billions they contribute to the economy each year.”

We cannot have that; it does not help our businesses. How will the economy grow when we do not have the right people in the right jobs because of paperwork?

The fact that Northern Ireland has secured a separate Brexit deal—and for very good reason—will affect competition between Scotland and Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, companies will start to move. It is just a short hop across the water from Stranraer—or, rather, below Stranraer—to Belfast.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)
Cairnryan.

Marion Fellows

Cairnryan—I thank the hon. Gentleman. It is only a short hop. That will affect Scotland's business community in a way that has not even been thought about.

I do not want people in my surgeries, whether they are EU nationals or others, to feel that they are not welcome in my country. I do not want immigrants to be treated differently from how they are treated now. I do not want them to have to pay any more. Thank goodness the Scottish Government are going to pay for the paperwork that may be necessary.

Workers in my constituency will suffer a loss in rights if this Government have anything to do with it. The Government have shown that they would prefer businesses to have rights than the workers who create their profits.

My constituents voted yes in the first independence referendum and remain in the 2016 referendum. I want them to continue to be members of the single market and the customs union, and I want to continue to welcome migrants to Scotland. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for

Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said, Scotland has seen how the United Kingdom Government treat its Parliament, its people and its industries.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)
With contempt.

Marion Fellows

With complete contempt. This Scotland will not put up with that much longer. In view of that, I have no faith in this Government, I do not want Scotland to remain part of the UK, and I am confident that my constituents will vote yes in the next independence referendum.

16:55:00

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). I rise to speak in a debate in the Chamber for the first time for some months, but this takes me back to my maiden speech during a debate on the European Union back in 2005, because the topic has continued to be discussed in the House every year since.

Those looking at this debate from outside—I am sure that other Members are getting the same evidence that I am receiving in my postbag and via email—are encouraging the House to settle the issue and to get on with it. Since the referendum, and while the Prime Minister has been seeking to negotiate a deal, we have been living with a degree of uncertainty that we cannot, in all conscience, allow the country to continue to endure for years to come. Many of the alternative options to the deal that is on the table that have been referenced by other Members in this debate today and yesterday all require actions to be taken by parties other than the people in this House. In almost every case, they require either a continuing negotiation with the EU on matters that it has already indicated it does not intend to engage with us on, or they require both Houses of Parliament to enact further legislation, as we just heard in response to the question to my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) regarding a second referendum. Each option would involve months, if not years, of continuing uncertainty with no certainty whatsoever about the outcome, so I hope that hon. Members will take that into account when voting next week.

I want to talk about a couple of specific aspects of the deal that is on the table to try to explain why I intend to support the Government. I am looking for a pragmatic Brexit. I am looking for a negotiated deal that allows for as frictionless trade to continue as is possible, and not because that would be in the best interests simply of big business. I find it extraordinary that colleagues across the House refer to “Project Fear” or scaremongering when any business raises its head and says, “This is going to be damaging for my business. This is going to lead to job losses in my sector.” I sit on the Environmental Audit Committee, which heard yesterday from the chemicals industry, and the reality is that many Members have heard evidence given to multiple Select Committees that the complexities of seeking to continue to trade in a no-deal environment are such that many businesses in the chemicals sector, the pharmaceutical industry, the automotive industry and the financial services industry—many of the sectors that we rely on for the large majority of jobs in this country—would come under significant pressure in the event that we crash out with no deal. That would happen whatever colleagues might think.

I am thinking in particular of the largest employers in my constituency that I know best. My constituency is in the west midlands, so many are heavily involved in the automotive and manufacturing sectors. Grainger & Worrall is the largest employer in Bridgnorth alongside Bridgnorth Aluminium. The McConnel agricultural machinery business is the largest employer in

Ludlow. Britpart, which is a motor manufacturer, is the largest employer in Craven Arms. There are companies engaged in food production and agri-products, such as Euro Quality Lambs in Craven Arms. All those companies are worried about what would happen to their business in the event of no deal and all are pressing us to negotiate a deal to allow frictionless trade.

In my time as a Minister, I was involved in two sectors in particular: defence and health. Some material has been put out regarding the impact of this deal on our defence relationships, and from the protocol I have seen for the future framework on security, there is nothing about which to be concerned in relation to the Government's intent on defence.

There is an opportunity for us to continue to have an associate relationship with, for example, the European Defence Agency, which has been characterised as a very damaging thing. We have been contributing the princely sum of £2 million a year to the European Defence Agency for the last 10 years, and we choose to take up very few opportunities to engage with its procurement arrangements because we think we can do it better on our own or through bilateral relations with many other countries across Europe. That is a canard, or a boil that needs to be lanced.

Similarly, we are not going to be engaged in a European army. In this country we rightly regard NATO as the foundation of our defence. If the European Union wishes to go ahead with a European army, we will have no part of it. On many occasions when operations take place around the world—some of those operations are EU initiatives—we choose whether we wish to participate. We should continue to be able to do that, but it will be our choice whether we participate.

On procurement, it has been suggested that we will lose the current exemption from article 346 and will therefore be bound by EU procurement arrangements for warlike stores. That is specifically ruled out by annex 2 of the protocol on the transition period, and it will undoubtedly be negotiated out of the eventual agreement.

On health, I am reassured that, in his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that he intends to provide the unilateral right of residency to EU citizens and their families for the future, and I look forward to seeing that in the migration policy. That should provide considerable reassurance to the EU citizens who work in our health service and in our social care sector that they will continue to be welcome here, which I know concerns my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee.

I am concerned about having continuing access to medicines, which can only be achieved in a straightforward way through a negotiated deal. That is another reason why I will support the deal next week.

17:02:00

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP)

It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), although I do not agree with his analysis of this agreement, nor will I be voting in the same manner as him next Tuesday. He talks about the importance of supporting this deal because we have to get on with delivering on the view of the people of the United Kingdom to leave the EU, but this deal does not do that. It does not deliver on the referendum result, nor does it deliver on the promises and the manifestos on which his party, my party and the Labour party stood at the last election, when people gave a second endorsement to the belief that we are better off out of the EU. This deal, because of its concentration on a mythical problem that will exist between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic

when we leave the EU, has tied the United Kingdom into a range of measures that will damage the economy and damage the Union.

Paul Girvan

I have just attended an event with a hand-picked group of businesses and organisations that the Secretary of State requested, and they told me to support this deal. Why are they so wrong?

Sammy Wilson

I will go through the reasons why they are wrong. This deal emphasises a mythical problem on the border—a problem that does not exist. The current practice means that trade can go across the Irish border, with taxes being collected, with goods being checked for conformity with regulations and with animal health being protected, yet we do not need a hard border. Indeed, all the parties to this agreement have said that they will not, in any circumstances, have a hard border. Only a couple of weeks ago, the EU and the Irish Government were assuring us that even if there is no deal, a hard border will not be imposed, because a hard border is not necessary. What we have in this withdrawal agreement, with the Northern Ireland protocol and the UK protocol, is designed to do only one thing: thwart the wishes of the people of the United Kingdom to leave the EU.

That is because we have only a number of options. The UK as a whole could stay in the single market and the customs union. If the Government wish to free themselves from that, Northern Ireland has to stay within the single market and the customs union. I defy any Member of this House to say that they could go back to their constituents, tell them what the Attorney General told the Cabinet was going to happen to their constituents and find that they would not be chased. First, their constituency would have to regard the rest of the UK as a third country, with the implication that they could not trade freely with the rest of the UK. They would have barriers placed between their part of the UK and the rest of it, and businessmen would face all the impediments. Indeed, the legal opinion makes it clear that there would be friction in trade—in other words, there would be additional costs, delays and barriers, and there would be distortions to trade, yet that is what this agreement entails for Northern Ireland.

We can get out of that only by doing one of two things. First, we could reach a future trade arrangement that the EU says is sufficient to allow us to be out of that arrangement completely. It could even insist that if we reach a free trade arrangement, we still have partly to stay within those restrictions, including more than 300 EU regulations which would be applied to Northern Ireland. Just in case the EU has missed any, it says, “Any future new ones that fall within the scope of this would also have to apply”, so we would have different laws from the rest of the UK.

James Heappey

The Northern Ireland national farmers union has made it clear that the Prime Minister’s deal is in the best interests of farmers in Northern Ireland—why is it wrong?

Sammy Wilson

This is a surprising thing. If the Ulster Farmers Union read this agreement, it would see that article 12 of the Northern Ireland protocol makes it clear that because state aid rules would apply to Northern Ireland, even if this UK Government decided to subsidise agriculture, the EU could cap any subsidy. The subsidy could apply differently in the rest of the UK from how it could apply in Northern Ireland. I could take Members through a range of other things in this agreement that the UFU conveniently has just dismissed but that will have an impact on its members. That is one reason why many farmers in my constituency are raging with the UFU.

One way of getting ourselves out of this is by having a free trade arrangement, which the EU may or may not deem as allowing us to get away from these shackles. The Attorney General makes it clear that although best endeavours to reach a free trade agreement are required, the EU could still argue, “We have done our best but it is still not in our interests.” Sixteen years later it could still be arguing, “We are doing our best” and still not be in breach of the obligations in this agreement. We know—Scottish Members should be aware of this—that the French Government have already said that they will use this as a cudgel to get further concessions from the UK Government on fishing, aviation and other things. Every other EU country will be doing the same and using the same tactic, so that is not an easy way out and we could still be negotiating this.

Significantly, the other method of getting out is for us to extend the transition period. There is great ambition shown in the withdrawal agreement about extending the transition period. Many people think that when we talk about extending the transition period we are talking about a few months. Well, according to the document it could be extended to “20XX”—we could still be at this in 100 years. This place could be refurbished, or even rebuilt, by the time we have got a free trade arrangement to replace the backstop.

The impact of this agreement on the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom is that Northern Ireland would be treated differently from other parts of the United Kingdom, which is something the Prime Minister promised would never happen. Northern Ireland industries are more export-orientated than any other region of the UK, because we have a small local market. We produce a third of the world’s aircraft seats. If someone has sat in row C or F, they have probably sat in a seat made in Kilkeel. We produce 40% of the world’s stone-crushing equipment. All that goes to markets mostly outside the EU, yet we would be excluded from participating in any trade deals that our Government might arrange with the rest of the world because we would be permanently part of the customs union unless the backstop were lifted. The backstop can be lifted only if and when the EU decides it is time to lift it.

I say to those on the Government Front Bench that we had an arrangement to keep the Government in power and working between now and the end of this fixed-term Parliament. Promises were made. In December, we sat with the Prime Minister in Downing Street and she said, “I will make sure that Northern Ireland has the final say in this because the Assembly will be the final arbiter as to whether or not these arrangements are put in place.” Those promises were taken out of the agreement. There has been bad faith. The agreement and understanding that we had has been broken. As the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) said in his speech, that has caused tensions. Going down this road will create tensions. We want to see our agreement honoured because we want to see the United Kingdom preserved.

17:12:00

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribbles Valley) (Con)

It is great to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) and his siren warnings about what could happen over the coming weeks and months if we do not listen. I understand that people are talking to the DUP; it is about time that people started listening to the DUP. There is a huge difference.

I am not one of the MPs who has stood up and waxed lyrical on this issue over the past two years, as some Members in this Chamber have done. Barely a debate has gone by without certain Members sharing what they believe is right. I have heard a lot of talk today about honesty, transparency and treating people like adults. That is a good idea, because in 2016 we had a people’s

vote. For anybody even to suggest that another referendum would be the people's vote because the last one was not is totally and wholly fraudulent. It is ridiculous.

A people's vote was held in 2016. We MPs in this Parliament allowed it to be held, and it was held. Surprise, surprise: it was not what people in the main thought was going to happen. I remember watching the result. There was no exit poll. The pound was up, shares were up, and Nigel Farage conceded defeat. Then, of course, the results started to come in. People who lived in the bubble of London could be forgiven for thinking that remain was going to win, but what happened was that there were swathes of people in the north-east, the north-west, and the south-west who felt as if nobody was listening to them—that they were the invisible people. Thanks to David Cameron, though, they were given a voice, they used that voice, and the voice said leave. Now, all of a sudden, those people are facing this Parliament, which is saying, “Not only don't we see you; we have now decided not to listen to you.” That is wholly dangerous indeed.

When we agree to a referendum, we really do need to respect the result. In 1997, when I was a shadow Minister, Wales had a referendum on devolution. The result was 50.3% in favour and 49.7% against, on a 50.1% turnout. What did we do? We conceded. The difference between yes and no was under 7,000, but we conceded that that was what should happen, and devolution was given to the people of Wales. It would have been wholly wrong had we not done that.

Tim Loughton

Does my hon. Friend not agree that one of the reasons why people voted to leave is that, when a country has a referendum and comes up with a result that the EU does not like, it is the practice of the EU to pat it on the head patronisingly and to tell it to go away and come up with a different result—one that the EU agrees with. Is that not what certain people are now telling us that we should be doing, which is why we wanted to get out of the EU in the first place?

Mr Evans

It is worse than that. Again, it is this idea of let us go for honesty and treat people like adults. I am talking about the people's vote—because we did not have one last time when 35 million people voted. What should be the options? “Oh”, says my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), “there should be three options.” The first is vote for the Government's deal, which hardly anyone I speak to thinks is any good; then there is the cliff edge, which most people believe can be avoided and is an option that people really do not want; or there is stay in the European Union, which people rejected in 2016. That is not fair. Let us be honest: we are told that, in this Parliament, we cannot reach a decision with which everyone will agree. We must accept that, during the referendum, the vast majority of Members of Parliament voted and campaigned for remain. We are in a remain Parliament, which happens to reside in a leave country. It is wholly dangerous for us to turn to the people now and say, “You let us down. You got it wrong.” What else is said about people who voted leave? It is that they are a bit thick and that they did not know what they were voting for. We have also had intimations that perhaps they were racist. Well, no, they were not. They were not racist. Immigration was only part of it. It was all about the sovereignty of making decisions in this Parliament, with immigration being part of that.

Catherine West

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, following the Welsh devolution debate, there was no requirement for a public inquiry into the funding of the various campaigns? A number of years have elapsed since that vote. There was not, at that time, the technological advances and the questionable use of Facebook and other social media, so it is not really comparing apples with apples.

Mr Nigel Evans

Well, it is apples and apples. It is simply because there are people here who are now using any excuse to try to ignore the result—to try to turn it over because they did not like the campaign. They think that people lied on one side or the other. In fact, those accusations were levelled at both campaigns. We should not forget that, on top of that, the Government spent £9.3 million on a brochure that they sent to every household in this country, using taxpayers' money. It was propaganda to try to convince them to vote remain. I objected to the pamphlet at the beginning. On the back of it, David Cameron put one paragraph that said, "We will accept the verdict of the British people." I urge Members in this Chamber to be careful about what they wish for. The electorate will be incredibly angry if we try to ignore the result. In Lancashire, whether in Labour seats or Conservative seats, every constituency voted to leave the European Union, and we want our voices to be heard.

Let me move on to the problem that we have with the Attorney General's advice. I have specific problems with the backstop. The more that I read this advice the more I dislike it. I did not like it before, but now I like it even less. I love the mentions of "good faith" and "best endeavours". The last time I heard "best endeavours", I was a boy cub. Really, is that the best we can try for? I did hear the Prime Minister say that we will not have any borders down the Irish sea when, explicitly, that is what will now happen. I am very, very unhappy with that, although I listened to the Prime Minister at Question Time today and I got some sort of hope from her response to a question about what would happen on Tuesday if the deal was voted down. Now, we all know that I have more chance of winning "The Great British Bake Off" than the Prime Minister has of getting this through—[Interruption.] "Strictly"? No—I cannot cook and I cannot dance. That does not stop the Prime Minister—[Hon. Members: "Ooh!"]—but it would certainly stop me. That was a joke. [Interruption.] My career stopped a long time ago, I can assure hon. Members.

The Prime Minister did say that she was going to look at the backstop, which is clearly a problem that needs to be looked at for a number of reasons. We need to be able unilaterally to leave the European Union, because that is what the vote said in 2016. At the moment, we can do so. If we were to sign the withdrawal agreement, funnily enough we would be handing over that power. All of a sudden we would be unable unilaterally to leave the European Union, and that is not what the people voted for. They voted to take back control, not to give it away. This is a real issue.

The agreement is dripping with problems, as has been intimated by our friends from the DUP. If a miracle happens on 34th Street and we get this deal through, it will be the last thing we get through for a long while because we have lost the support of the people who are keeping us in power. Let us think long and hard about that. Right at the end of the legal advice, the conclusion states:

"In the absence of a right of termination, there is a legal risk that the United Kingdom might become subject to protracted and repeating rounds of negotiations."

Think about that. Not only are we treating Northern Ireland differently; we simply do not know how long the backstop is going to last. Is that where we want to be? Is that what the British people voted for in 2016? I do not think so.

I have heard a rumour that the Prime Minister is thinking about a change, by saying that Parliament should be able to vote on putting us into the backstop, and giving Parliament that power. I do not want that power. Getting into the backstop is not the problem; it is getting out that is the problem. That is where this Parliament needs to be able to make a decision—the decision to say, "Thank you. We're leaving."

Harold Wilson said that politics is the art of the possible—[Interruption]. And Rab Butler as well. Well, he probably paraphrased him. All I can say is: over to you, Prime Minister. Let us see where the art of the possible takes us on Tuesday but, for goodness' sake, don't take this to defeat.

17:21:00

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab)

At the outset, I really want to congratulate the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) on a very powerful speech that was rooted in reality, and the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) on the successful passage of his amendment yesterday. He has been truly outstanding through all these Brexit debates.

For very good reason, I want to use this occasion to say a fond farewell to my German teacher, Keith Walker, from my old school of Wolstanton in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Keith passed away a fortnight ago and his funeral is on Friday. Mr Walker, as we called him back then, was instrumental in helping to form my views on Britain's right and proper place at the heart of Europe. His wonderful teaching made sure that I got a place to study German at Oxford, and it was because of Keith that I first took part in—and then for six years helped to organise—international youth exchanges in Berlin with the German War Graves Commission, when the wall was the starkest reminder of the outcome of the second world war and of the cold war that followed.

In the trading of facts and fictions during the disastrous 2016 referendum, the historical perspective very much got completely lost. Yes, the European Union could be frustrating. It was not perfect, like everything, but from its origins after the war as the European Coal and Steel Community through to the Common Market, it has been very much part of the architecture of peace, trade, dialogue and prosperity in our times. Could we ever imagine that the states of the former Yugoslavia would have engaged in such shameful blood-letting had they been part of the European Community, to which we have belonged for 45 years and membership of which was confirmed by 67% of our people at the first referendum in 1975?

Now fast-forward to the debacle of 2016. My constituency and home town of Newcastle-under-Lyme voted around 60:40 to leave, and it is hardly a secret that I profoundly disagree with that verdict. Aside from matters of economy and trade, history shows that when Britain has been disengaged from European affairs, it has harmed not only our national interests but the national interests of countries on the continent as well. We have had, and still have, very much to offer.

When the subject of Brexit came up on the doorstep last year, I politely—I hope—disagreed with people of a leave persuasion, and then we moved on to discussing the state of our local hospital and the potholes in the road. For all the heat that we feel at Westminster, most people were simply not obsessed about Europe. The great, reasonable majority want us to get this right in the national interest—and, for all the reasons that most Members have outlined today, the Prime Minister's deal does not serve that national interest.

In Newcastle, we campaigned as passionately in the referendum as at any general election. At the start, it was possible to have a fairly reasonable debate. Quite a number of people I had known for many years, and would have sworn were leavers, said that their heart was with “out”, but their head said “stay in” for jobs, investment, kids and opportunities for the future. So it was possible to have a decent discussion—until about a fortnight before voting day, that is. Then, at the entrance to my town, like many others up and down the land, the big red banner posters went up saying, “Turkey, population 76 million, is joining the EU—vote leave”. Photographs of queues of refugees were mingled, to great effect, with an old-fashioned blue British passport. It was of course an outright lie,

but it was impossible to get that through to people, because their immediate response, time and again, was “What are you going to do about the Turks?”

What I did not know at the time was that that message was not only being shouted out from old-fashioned billboards but was reverberating exaggeratedly around social media in targeted dark ads that remainers like me would never see. That has only become clear since our Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee inquiry into fake news, involving Facebook in particular. Of course, that inquiry has followed up on breaches of the law and spending limits by both main leave campaigns.

But two years on, I do not want to cry over spilt milk. I think that the past two years have shown that people are now much better informed about the consequences of exactly how we leave—if indeed we do. If the Prime Minister loses next week’s vote, we are in interesting territory, to say the least, but one thing must be certain: no matter how much she tries to cling on in the hope of making amends for her disastrous election performance last year, the Prime Minister really has to go, like her predecessor did after the referendum result. Then the question for us will be whether the House can form a majority to chart the way forward, or whether this can only be settled by a general election or a referendum.

I view the prospect of another people’s vote with more than trepidation. I do not know how it is going to be possible to have a reasonable debate when the poll will be framed by shrieks of betrayal from most of our printed press, reinforced by deep pockets using and abusing the echo chamber of social media. But if that is the only road ahead, we should not shirk from holding that vote. Come an election or a referendum, I will be making the same arguments again. I firmly believe that it is in Britain’s national interest to remain within the European Union with a seat at the table, a vote and sometimes a veto—to reform, where needed, from within, not just to shout from the sidelines without, or, under this deal, to go cap in hand begging for favours in future.

17:27:00

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly).

In many respects, this is the classic issue for MPs—what are their priorities? Are they based on their personal view, their constituency’s view, or the view of the party that they should perhaps be following? Then, ultimately, how do they make their decision in the national interest? Generally speaking, that issue does not really crop up, but we live in unusual circumstances. We have to acknowledge that parties are fundamentally split. MPs’ views can be very much at variance with those in their own constituency. The dilemma for each and every one of us is what we, as individual MPs, believe is in the national interest.

When I look back over the past two and a half years—I appreciate that hindsight is a wonderful thing—I see some key mistakes that have been made. There were the red lines that the Prime Minister set out. In many respects, when you go into a negotiation, you do not lay down what your views are before you enter into it. Then there was the early calling of the election when we actually had a working majority, and of course the triggering of article 50. Looking back, we should have prepared all the legislative requirements and Bills to get them passed before we even thought about triggering article 50. Indeed, we should also have had a national debate about exactly what our long-term relationship with the EU should be.

But at the end of the day, we are where we are, and the Government are suggesting that there are now three alternatives: no deal, remain/second referendum, or their own proposal. I fully accept that we voted in 2016 to leave EU institutions, and we definitely have to respect that, but the nature of our future relationship still has to be decided, and that is a decision for Parliament. Of the three options that the Government have effectively set out, I do not support a second referendum. It would be unnecessary and divisive, and I wonder what it would achieve. I cannot see how remaining in the EU would be sensible, because it would undoubtedly be a changed relationship with our EU partners. As for no deal, I find that equally unpalatable. It is not in our country's interests. I think it would lead to a recession and make us a poorer country. It is not in the interests of our national economy and certainly not in the interests of my constituents.

The Government therefore have to argue that the only real option is to support their position—that is, the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. I, like many others, have concerns about the withdrawal agreement. I do not feel a need to go into those, because they have been well expressed by other Members. I also have concerns about the political declaration, many of which have been raised. We would have two years of negotiations before we even got a deal, if we did in fact get one. I question whether the unity of the EU would hold, because its members would have competing national interests. I wonder where we would end up with those negotiations. We have to await the decision of Parliament next Tuesday to know whether that is the course we will take.

I believe there is an alternative—a fourth option—that is acceptable to the EU and fully understood by all, and that is EFTA-EEA. Simply put, that would allow us to have an independent agricultural policy and an independent fisheries policy. We would not be part of the ECJ; the EFTA court would determine decisions. There would be no payments to the EU, and we would be a member of the single market. I have never quite understood why people are so hostile to membership of the single market. We are proposing to enter into a free trade agreement. What is a free trade agreement? It is an attempt to get rid of tariffs and regulatory differences between economies. I genuinely believe that staying in the single market is in this country's interests. I accept that there is the issue of free movement, but we have the emergency brake under article 112 of the EEA agreement, and the reality is that more immigration comes from outwith the EU than within it, and we have absolute control over that.

I think that proposal would have widespread support from Members on both sides of the House. It would ensure that we were actually out of the EU—out of the political project and out of any sort of union—but back to the common market ideals of old, which the people of this country have always supported.

I remind the House that relationships change. The EU will change with our departure and will continue to change in other ways that we have not thought of. EFTA would also develop. The arrival of a large economy would change its dynamics, and it would become a much more significant player. The relationship between the EU and EFTA would change because of the arrival of a large economy, and EFTA's importance would increase significantly.

I make those comments on EFTA to remind the House that there is a potential alternative should the Government lose the vote next week, and it is one that I would certainly support. On Tuesday, we will have to weigh up what we as individual MPs believe is in the national interest. I certainly believe that no deal and remain are not sensible alternatives. Whether the political declaration offers us a route to a sensible future relationship with the EU is a judgment that we will all have to make on Tuesday, but should the Government's proposal be defeated, I believe there is a genuine and real alternative.

17:33:00

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind)

I agree with the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) on membership of EFTA and the EEA, and I will come on to that later in my speech.

It has fallen to this generation of politicians to make one of the most profound decisions outside of war that this country has ever had to make. The referendum result exposed a deeply divided country, with many voters wanting to send a strong message to elites, whether political or business, that government and the economy, whether national or European, are not delivering for them, with wage stagnation and rapid migration fuelling alienation and resentment.

The Prime Minister is fond of talking about the national interest, but the whole Brexit shambles is a consequence of the eternal European fault line in the Conservative party. This shambles of a negotiation, which has left our country a laughing stock, has been caused by red lines that may as well have been written in invisible ink and by the dogma of some hard Brexiteers who prefer a scorched earth Brexit. They can afford years of poor growth, unlike my constituents, whose jobs and living standards are on the line.

The problem with our negotiating position from the beginning has been that the starting point was not the national interest but an ill-fated attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable factions in the Cabinet and the parliamentary Conservative party, and we have ended up with a worst-of-all-worlds deal. The deal has united the Leader of the Opposition and the Democratic Unionist party—that takes some doing—and united leavers and remainers in opposition to it.

I want to turn to the notion of a people's vote, about which I am extremely sceptical. I recall that many who now advocate a people's vote were the biggest critics of David Cameron for holding the first referendum. In the internal debate that took place in the Labour party, good and hon. Friends now supporting a second vote were the most vociferous persuaders in ensuring that an EU referendum was not in our election manifesto. If determining our future in the EU by referendum was wrong in principle in 2015, 2016 and 2017, why is it right now?

Of course I deplore the untruths promoted by the leave campaign, including false promises, but if that is a justification for a second vote, I suggest that many general election results through history would be null and void. The only certainty about the result of a second referendum is that it would once again expose the fact that we remain deeply divided as a nation. Worse than that, even if it resulted in a decision to remain, it would fuel support for nationalism and hard-right politics and politicians like never before. It would be the elite telling the people they got it wrong and we know best. Have we learned nothing from political earthquakes erupting around the world?

I say to my Labour friends that even if a second vote results in a victory for remain, it may turn out to be a pyrrhic victory. We were in the EU when, for 18 years, Thatcherism destroyed the fabric of communities in our society. We have been in the EU since 2010, while we have seen the poorest suffering the most as a consequence of austerity. There is nothing more likely to perpetuate right-wing Governments than a backlash against a second vote supported and promoted by progressives. Of course it is right to ask whether we will be worse off if we leave the EU, but it is also right to ask who will suffer the most if, through apparent contempt for half the population, we consign our country to long-term right-wing Governments.

It is incumbent on all of us not simply to oppose this bad deal and to oppose no deal, but to present an alternative, as the hon. Member for Carlisle did. I have come to the conclusion that the best, if

far from perfect, option—crucially, it could secure a majority in this place—is so-called Norway plus. I accept that will become possible only when hon. Members' first preferences are defeated, but I believe a significant majority in this House will act in the way envisaged in the amendment of the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), which we passed last night, and unite around that option as the best and only viable alternative to no deal. It is not perfect, but it respects the referendum result while providing the stability to ensure a relatively smooth economic transition.

Since the referendum, the Government have let the people of this country down very badly. They failed to seek cross-party consensus when that was possible and indeed was required by such a close result. Instead, they have allowed the dysfunctional Tory family on Europe to create a dysfunctional country that is much diminished in the world. The Prime Minister has not listened, and in the case of Northern Ireland has clearly breached trust. That is a question of substance, and not just for the politicians representing Northern Ireland in this House; it is about a sense of being told untruths.

That is why Members of good will on both sides must make the best use of yesterday's amendment, assert the authority of Parliament and show what acting in the national interest truly means. Only then will we put the country on a path to a better future, and maybe even regain some public confidence and respect. Hon. Members need to reflect on the public's contempt: they asked this group of politicians to make the decision on Brexit in the national interest, yet all they see is a disastrous situation where the Government have negotiated a shoddy deal and Parliament seems absolutely incapable of coming together and working together in the national interest. If, as we suspect, the amendments and the substantive motion are defeated next week, it is incumbent on all of us in this House to unite not around the ideal, but around a solution that is pragmatic and actually represents the best interests of this country. I urge people to give serious consideration to Norway plus in that context.

17:40:00

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis). There is a better plan and a better future than this friendless withdrawal agreement, one free of fear. The way to unify, as he said, is to lead and to show what that alternative is. It is not, however, Norway plus a customs union. That would make us a rule taker with no autonomy. It would be against the referendum result and our manifesto pledges. We would continue to pay money and there would continue to be freedom of movement. It would still require a withdrawal agreement, which we all hate, and it would not settle the issue. It would just create more uncertainty for business and for the people in this country.

We need to go for an advanced free trade agreement and replace the protocol on Northern Ireland with something that will still give confidence to communities on the island of Ireland. We can provisionally apply such an agreement if a plan and a schedule are agreed for zero tariffs, so that that can persist after the end of March. It can have efficient cheap processes for all our borders, which business can deal with, and free trade rules that cumulate, so that supply chains do not suffer dislocation. It is a future that we can have, but we need to ask for it and not give in.

That does not mean that we have to leave in a disorderly way. We can continue to talk constructively about how we can be friends and allies, and what the best arrangements are for that. For me, money can remain on the table—that is fair enough; give and take and compromise are okay by me—but we must do this as separate, sovereign jurisdictions. Both sides must now prepare. When the EU hear that, I think there will be relief on their side. They will know what they are

dealing with. They will have interlocutors with whom they can have frank and constructive dealings, knowing that there are limits. The EU are not bullies—that disrespects them—but they are what they are, which is a bureaucracy whose natural imperative is to push limits. If we do not show them where those limits are, they will have no reference point for where to stop. We have to stand strong at this point.

The truth is that the withdrawal agreement is not a compromise, but a capitulation made out of misunderstanding and fear, and out of letting the EU make the running by letting it set the schedules, agendas and the texts. This, sadly, is what has led our country and our democracy to the chopping block, trussed up for the EU's feast. It is a tragic misconception of the economics and the practicalities by those who I think have never really properly applied themselves. Yes, I have been very critical of the Cabinet and those on the Government Front Bench. I think that that is justified and I am not afraid to say why.

There is certainly a better way to do this. The forecasting has been wrong. The countries that have offered us free trade have been rebuffed, and experience and knowledge within Government Departments and the civil service have simply been ignored. That makes me wonder why. Is it because we have a Government full of EU ideologues, or are they just afraid because they do not understand how trade can be really efficient and how cross-border supply chains can sit well in a trade agreement framework outside the EU? It is not really a case of whether the perfect is the enemy of the good. The point is that there is a better plan and I am afraid that the Prime Minister's deal is in no sense good. It really is a very bad agreement. It is not something that the Government have modelled because I do not think that they dare.

We have heard about a lot of things in the backstop element of the withdrawal agreement that are not good. The joint decision that is required in the Joint Committee, unless there is a superseding agreement, pretty much guarantees pain for this country. In the backstop, our interlocutors will have massive leverage and they will have hostages to fortune. They will have us where they want us and we would be just wrong to say that it will be uncomfortable for them. I believe that is naive, delusional or worse. It would put us as a captive into a customs union with antiquated procedures. There would be wet stamps, for goodness' sake, on physical pieces of paper—Toyota will not like that one bit. The Government should be embarrassed by the deal, because it really is that bad. Has the Treasury modelled what it would cost industry to do this wet-stamping process? When we look at third country trade on current EU rules, the cost is only about 0.3% of the value of consignments, but the Treasury is forecasting 11% for the car industry. It must have wet stamps in mind, because in modern customs, it ain't that expensive, or anything like.

This really is a matter of trying to see what we can do now. There are other hostages—I have mentioned before that I have discovered that state aid would apply to our defence industry in the backstop. That is an outrageous change and it gives our sovereign ability in defence wholly to the EU to decide how competitive that is. I have asked five Cabinet members now whether they know about this. None of them does, and I think that people need to read the agreement properly. I will be circulating a note about this later tonight so that Members can make up their own minds, but this concerns 123,000 jobs all over our country, in Labour constituencies, SNP constituencies—it affects all of us. This is just not an acceptable state of affairs for our national Government to be putting us into.

I implore colleagues to say no to this humiliating servitude that has been served up for us. It would be the cause of shame for generations to come. There is a better way to do this.

17:47:00

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab)

This is probably one of the most important debates that I have ever taken part in in this House, and we have had quite a few important debates. Certainly for my constituency and probably for other constituencies up and down the country, we are talking about our young people's future just as much as we are talking about our constituents today and their interests today.

If we look at the effect on the economy and GDP, the Treasury's analysis suggests that this deal would leave the economy 3.9% smaller after 15 years than if we stayed in the EU. Unsurprisingly, it also shows that any form of Brexit would leave us facing a huge economic loss. Of course, the worst-case scenario is a no-deal Brexit, which would leave us 9.3% worse off over that 15-year period. We did not need that analysis to tell us that a no-deal Brexit is a significant threat to this country, but the choice facing us today is not between a bad deal or no deal. There are strong economic grounds for us to vote down this deal and to seek a different Brexit with the EU, or to remain as we are.

Coventry has a long history of manufacturing, and 11,000 people in my constituency work in the manufacturing industry, just as I did. Because of that, I have had regular meetings with some of the biggest manufacturers in Coventry, including Jaguar Land Rover, Meggitt and the London Electric Vehicle Company. Throughout the Brexit negotiations, they have been concerned about what Brexit will mean for future business in the EU. Anybody who knows anything about manufacturing knows that manufacturers need at least some stability to look forward four or five years—sometimes it is a lot longer in the aircraft industry—but this deal does not give them that.

The Government have responded to some concerns, but they have not provided enough information for businesses to plan long term, as I have already indicated. Their failure to convince business is shown most of all by the leaked CBI email revealing its true opinion, which is that this is not a good deal. All businesses need stability to plan ahead and to protect the jobs of our constituents. This deal offers no stability and is a stab in the dark that puts the jobs of my constituents at risk. I will therefore not be joining the CBI in backing the deal, which I, and the CBI, have great reservations about. If the deal is defeated on Tuesday, it will set us on a path to a different Brexit—one that puts the jobs of my constituents before the ideology of some of the Prime Minister's Back Benchers.

I am lucky to represent a constituency with not only skills and success in manufacturing, but two world-class universities, Coventry and Warwick—incidentally, research and development is as important to them as to the manufacturing sector and companies such as Jaguar Land Rover. Those universities bring huge benefits to the local economy and to the UK as a result of their cutting-edge research, which contributes £1.8 billion in GDP annually. They are a crucial part of our community and economy, just as other universities are across the country.

I have been in touch with both universities to see what the deal would mean for them. Unsurprisingly, they are not willing to back a deal that does not mention the word "university" once in its entire 585 pages. Since 2010, they have received close to £100 million in EU funding. There is no mention in the agreement of replacing that. Considering that the previous Universities Minister resigned over the deal, it is clear that it does not deliver for students or universities. Both universities are outward-looking institutions with strong links to Europe, as shown by the fact that about 10% of both students and staff in Coventry come from the EU. The Government say they want diversity to continue, but that is not backed up—the deal fails to mention the Erasmus scheme.

The EU contributes a huge amount to Coventry through funding beyond that given to universities, but this funding has yet to be protected and guaranteed for the long term after Brexit. According to

the House of Commons Library, Coventry has received over £400 million in funding from the EU since 2014. This money is a crucial part of the local economy and keeps thousands of people employed. Unfortunately, we all know there is no chance of the Government maintaining this funding as well as increasing funding for the NHS.

The Prime Minister may pretend there will be a Brexit bonanza, but her Brexit will not fill the gap left by EU funding, and that will leave Coventry worse off. She has made numerous vague promises of extra funding for the NHS after Brexit, but this relies entirely upon us starting new trade deals immediately after the transition period, and these deals will not be that easy, despite promises to have 40 of them ready by next March. Without any definitive evidence of extra funding, her warm words on the NHS may as well be written on the side of a bus.

As well as threatening the jobs of my constituents and their public services, the deal threatens their rights at work. Any new workers' rights protections from the EU enacted after the transition period would not apply to the UK, and if we fell into the backstop—an agreement that we cannot leave unilaterally—workers' rights would be frozen. It would leave UK workers and trade unions unable to take complaints to the European Court of Justice, despite the Court's responsibility for this. The Tory right want to cut back on workers' rights in their ideological vision of Brexit Britain. This deal makes it far too easy for that to happen.

17:54:00

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)

I approach this debate with a sense of disappointment, the same disappointment that I felt when I decided to campaign for, and vote for, Brexit. I did so not because I had an ideological phobia of the EU, but because I believed that the EU was going backwards, that the UK's interests were diverging from it, and that without reform it was doomed to steady but terminal decline. That reform was not forthcoming. However, I do not want to repeat what was said in the debates in the run-up to the referendum, as, I fear, many Members have in recent weeks and, indeed, today. This debate is about the deal that is now before us. The country voted to leave on 23 June 2016, as did my constituency. The Government pledged to implement “what you decide” in their little booklet costing £9.3 million. At the time of the 2017 election the two main parties secured 82% of the vote, and both pledged to implement the referendum result. The people have given us no alternative instruction since then, and manifestos have not been rewritten.

The campaign to sideline the referendum result has been marked by two, I think, disingenuous approaches. The first is that it has all become a bit too complicated, so should we not just call the whole thing off? The second is a constant embellishment of the horrors of post-Brexit economic forecasts, which have dually encouraged remain voters to believe that the result could be reversed and encouraged EU negotiators to believe the same, which makes any terms for our departure doubly unpalatable.

I have discussed my view with my constituents, and more than 1,000 have written to me urging me to vote against this deal. In contrast, only a few dozen have urged me to support it. Today I should be welcoming a meaningful vote for a proposal that delivers the Brexit for which I campaigned and for which my constituents and the country voted, but alas, I cannot do that, because this proposal does not deliver Brexit. Its unprecedented terms have the potential to undermine our sovereignty and the Union of the United Kingdom like nothing before, and I am deeply worried for the future of Brexit after the shambolic way in which the whole issue has been handled by the Government in recent days.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)

I have a simple question for my hon. Friend, and for others who have difficulty in voting for the deal. If we do not vote for it, what will happen to the rights of United Kingdom nationals living in the EU27 after 29 March?

Tim Loughton

That is up to the Government to negotiate. They have failed to produce the immigration White Paper for which we have been waiting for some time, and they really need get on with answering questions like my hon. Friend's and providing some certainty.

Many Members have used metaphors for our present predicament. Let me add another to the mix. It is like buying a house that you have only seen from the outside. You hand over the full asking price at the outset, upfront. You sign all the legal transaction documents without even agreeing on the fixtures, fittings and completion date, or indeed knowing whether the immigration status of your family allows you to live there. Only after that do you commission a survey, the results of which you do not share with your family despite eventually finding out that the neighbours have an unlimited right of way across your garden and unfettered access to your garden pond—and you have no indication of when you will be able to move in. Who in their right mind would agree to such a deal on buying a house, let alone on such an important issue as the future constitutional basis of our whole country?

My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), in an excellent speech—he is welcome to the Back Benches if he is going to make more speeches like that—described this as a deal in name only, and said that it was another case of difficult decisions being kicked into the long grass. Above all, what we need now, and have needed for some time, is certainty: certainty for our citizens, certainty for our businesses and investors, certainty for our fishermen, our farmers and many more. Yet the political agreement that accompanies this document—which sounds good—is littered with conditional phrases such as “agree to develop”, “intend to consider”, “will explore the possibility”, and “best endeavours”. That is not concrete enough for me to feel that I can sign up to it. My biggest fear is that this deal only extends the uncertainty—now confirmed by the Attorney General's advice—over how long we will continue to be rule takers for our tariffs, our regulations, our alignment requirements, our competition laws and our trade deals, and the uncertainty over the integrity of our whole United Kingdom and our sovereignty.

As for Northern Ireland, the EU has spent the last two years declining to agree a practical arrangement for the border, despite facing the real and present danger of that ending in a no-deal Brexit that would see no handover of £39 billion, and the serious disorder that a no deal could bring in the short term at least. What I do not understand is why on earth the Prime Minister thinks the EU will agree to a solution to this, I think, much overhyped and largely fabricated problem of Northern Ireland in the next two years when the cheque will have been signed and a legally binding framework deal agreed. What leverage will we have left to secure mutually beneficial terms in all the outstanding issues to be resolved to avoid an interminable backstop—and there are many issues still to be resolved? It is unthinkable that we should sign a deal that compromises our sovereignty and the ability of this House and this Government, answerable to our peoples, indefinitely to set our own laws.

Justine Greening

My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Does he agree that the perverseness of this is that it is putting us in a worse position than the status quo?

Tim Loughton

I am afraid that my right hon. Friend is right. There are some advantages to the position we are in now that we sign away in this never-ending backstop, transition, waiting-room phase that we are going to be stuck in. For all those reasons, I cannot support a deal that has an open-ended backstop at its heart. We need a clean, global Brexit on terms on which both partners can confidently plot their future beyond 2020 to our mutual benefit—no more kicking into the long grass; no more avoiding taking difficult decisions. It does not make that decision any easier by having endless transitions and further discussions and negotiations lasting years and years. We have to grasp the reality.

Where is a crack team of the best brains across the UK and EU working on credible, practical, technology-based solutions for the Northern Ireland-Irish border, for example? Surely that should have been our biggest priority for some time if the backstop hinged on it, but I do not think I am alone in looking in vain for any sense of urgency here.

Those who have come up with no practical solutions for a workable Brexit deal, despite having stood on a Conservative or Labour manifesto at the last election that pledged to deliver Brexit, should stop kidding themselves and stop conning the British public that everything will be magically resolved by a second referendum. If it were to come up with a different result from the first referendum, why should 17.4 million people who voted in good faith, many for the first time ever, accept the result? If it were to come up with the same result, how much more time will be wasted, how many more resources will be wasted and how many further damaging delays will be caused? And given the huge divisions resulting from the first referendum, how does repeating that bruising experience do anything to help to bring the country back together again? Surely our current travails would be exacerbated even further, if that were possible.

So for me there is only one alternative—to resoundingly reject this framework deal in the House when we vote next Tuesday. It will send out a strong message to the EU that, while there is much in the agreement we can sign up to, and much that can be negotiated in subsequent negotiations, an unbridled, non-time-limited backstop makes it completely unworkable. If the EU is serious about achieving a mutually beneficial relationship, it must acknowledge that, re-engage accordingly and come up with more realistic terms that this House then can show a lead in agreeing to in determining our future and bringing back some degree of the certainty that everyone is screaming out for.

18:03:00

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)

In June 2016, the country voted by a narrow majority to leave the European Union. The Prime Minister is offering us a deal and says we should vote for it because it delivers the will of the narrow majority. She also threatens us with the prospect of a no-deal Brexit, with all the truly damaging consequences for our economy and for people's livelihoods. So what is my duty as an MP to resolve this matter in the light of the 2016 referendum? Do I have to vote for any Brexit that is put in front of me? The duty of an MP in our representative democracy is to listen to the people and respect their views, and to use our own judgment as to what is best for our constituents and the country. Keeping this balance is at the heart of the matter before us.

Nobody can deny that the referendum happened or the result it produced. In the past two years, we have been confronted by many worrying reports of how the leave campaign manipulated the campaign in an improper way, and we should be deeply concerned about the threat to our democracy that such manipulation poses. However, the result has not been nullified and the Government had a duty to find a Brexit that was good for the country, so I have looked at the deal

in front of us and asked two questions. Does the deal result in us leaving the EU? It does. Does it protect the long-term interests of our country? It does not. Why should I vote for it if I truly believe that it is not in the interests of my constituents or the country?

James Heappey

I am grateful to the hon. Lady, my near neighbour, for giving way. If we are to leave the European Union, does she believe that the Liberal Democrats should campaign thereafter to rejoin it?

Wera Hobhouse

A deal has been put in front of us, and I am looking to see whether it is in the best interests of the country.

The Prime Minister has refused to work with Parliament to find a consensus. She rushed off and drew up her red lines, which made it impossible to find reasonable alternatives, and she is now trying to bully Parliament into forgetting what is good for the country. She tries to make us think that our only duty is to vote for her deal and deliver a Brexit of any form. If the Government had won the argument, and if a good Brexit were possible, this would be a very different debate. However, if no particular deal put before Parliament is a good deal compared with EU membership, what should Parliament do? Should we vote for this deal just because it is here, and because it is not as bad as crashing out? No, we should not. To do so would be to violate a deep principle and a duty that no MP can escape from, which is to use our own informed judgment. I encourage my colleagues across the House to look into their hearts and ask themselves whether this is the deal that is best for the country.

The Prime Minister is using a different argument. She says that we have to leave the EU even if it is bad for the country, because the people voted for it. She suggests that the dutiful thing for MPs to do, in the light of the referendum, is to vote for something even if we believe it is not good for the country, but that would make a nonsense of our representative democracy. I have been elected as an MP to employ my own informed judgment when voting. I have never yet seen a proposal for a good Brexit. In every aspect, it has become plain to see that leaving the EU is making us economically poorer, less influential and less able to control our own destiny.

Even the Government have given up telling us that this deal offers anything better than EU membership. All they do is reiterate that it delivers the will of the people, but no MP should be obliged to vote for something that they believe not to be good, or no worse than what we already have. On the contrary, we have a duty to do the opposite. Does this mean that we should defy the will of the people? No. We can legitimately reject any particular Brexit deal in accordance with our own informed judgment, but Parliament cannot move from there and cancel Brexit. This House cannot call off Brexit. Only the people can do that, and that is the true meaning of the referendum result in 2016.

When Parliament decides that no Brexit deal is good enough, Parliament is stuck. At this point, the decision has to go back to the people. That is how our democracy works. It balances our representative democracy with the fact that we have had a referendum. Our representative democracy does not demand that MPs surrender their judgment. This Parliament has spent the last two years trying to find a Brexit that is good for the country. If no such Brexit can be found that commands a majority in this House, MPs must agree to go back to the people. In my judgment, this deal is not good for the country. It would be a catastrophic mistake, and I will vote against it. As I have said many times before in this place, I believe that the only way forward is a people's vote.

18:09:00

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)

This country voted for Brexit, and it is incumbent on the House and the Government to deliver just that. The people who voted for Brexit did not vote for something that they did not understand. They voted for a land of opportunity and for freedom: freedom over our laws and borders, and the ability to trade freely, which we cannot do as members of the EU.

Today and over the next couple of days, we are asked to consider a withdrawal agreement and a political declaration. Amazingly, the withdrawal agreement has everything the EU wants in it, and would be binding. The political declaration, which looks at our future trading agreements and relationship, is what we in the UK want, and guess what? That is not binding.

In the west country, the impact on the fishing industry would be devastating. A clear link is intended between our ability to fish and reaching some form of economic deal. Voting for the deal would be damaging not only to my fishermen but to the country as a whole. Most importantly, it would not, in any shape, size or form, deliver Brexit. The motion is a triumph of hope over experience. Our experience of the EU is generally, "This is what we want. You can have as many goes at it as you like, but it is that and nothing else. We will not move."

If we vote for this agreement, we will remain a rule taker from the European Court of Justice on environmental and employment matters; even the withdrawal agreement will ultimately, if there is a dispute, be determined by the ECJ. As has been discussed, we will have no right to leave unilaterally. We have all now seen the Attorney General's advice; I do not really need to say more, do I?

We will be unable to pursue independent trade deals. The agreement does not say that we cannot, but because we are bound to strict equivalence with the EU in many areas of legislation, we are very unattractive, as the Americans have already said. If we stick to the EU's rulebook, we cannot do what one normally does in a trade deal: agree tariffs and the methods of rule and regulation to ensure an equivalent outcome in both countries.

As we have heard said very emotionally, the backstop threatens the integrity of the UK, and would potentially put a border down the Irish sea. That is not acceptable; it breaks the Union. The extension period will continue the uncertainty for business, not bring it to an end, as many seem to think.

Quite a number of amendments have been tabled. They will not improve matters. What do they do? They have a go at sorting out the backstop by removing or time-limiting it, but the backstop is not the only problem with the agreement, so that will not work. There is also an amendment requiring another referendum. I am afraid that I have to disagree with the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse); the people have spoken, and we must accept that. It is not for us to say to the people, "Try again, and get a result that the EU wants." That is simply not acceptable.

The Opposition's amendment would keep us in the customs union, which would absolutely disempower us from doing any trade deals. Worst of all, none of the amendments would stop us paying £39 billion—and according to the Office for National Statistics, it is no longer that but £46 billion. If we extend our relationship, which we could do for a very long time, we continue making annual payments.

Next Tuesday, we will be asked to take a meaningful vote. Those who think that supporting the agreement is the only thing they can do to deliver Brexit should think again. That is absolutely not

right. There is another option—I wish there were others, too, but there is no more time; 29 March is almost upon us.

Alberto Costa

My hon. Friend says that there is simply not enough time. I pose the same question that I asked my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton): on what rights will UK nationals—1 million of whom reside in EU27 countries—rely on 29 March 2019?

Anne Marie Morris

My hon. Friend has asked a very sensible question, to which I will give an answer.

I am afraid that I reject the description of what will happen as crashing out or as falling over the precipice. We will go out on a World Trade Organisation deal, and that will be very much to our benefit. We do 98% of our trade on WTO arrangements. I do not agree that the Government are not prepared, because they are. I have listened to proposals from most Government Departments, and I do not agree that suddenly there will be chaos. I do not dispute that there will be a bumpy ride, but we are prepared. I can also tell hon. Members that, from the evidence I have seen on the Public Accounts Committee, those on the other side in Calais are no more in favour of chaos than we are in Dover, so please—

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con)

Will my hon. Friend give way?

Anne Marie Morris

No, I will not.

Mr Grieve

Why not? You get another minute. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way.

I have just two points. First, my hon. Friend talks about the WTO. If I understand her correctly, she therefore expects to get a whole series of deals from the EU around the WTO arrangements. Otherwise, she has not answered the question of our hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa). Secondly, I assume she also believes that the Belfast agreement should simply be ripped up, disregarded and reneged upon by the UK Government.

Anne Marie Morris

As one lawyer to another, I say to my right hon. and learned Friend that he has misrepresented the way the WTO works. It does not require lots of other deals. It takes us out and enables us to look at all sorts of options—we could move into a Canada-style free trade agreement. There are many things that we could do.

I take issue with the amendment my right hon. and learned Friend tabled yesterday. Many people think that, at the end of the day, it will empower us to say, “Okay, if you don’t like this withdrawal agreement, this House has the power to stop us going out”—as he would say—“with no deal.” As I have said, there is no such thing as no deal. As a matter of law, as I understand it—from lawyer to lawyer—the power of such a motion cannot bind this House and cannot stop article 50 triggering on 29 March.

I say to those who are thinking of supporting the arrangement put forward by the Prime Minister because it is the only way: “Think again. That is not Brexit. There is another way.” Rather than

buying time and extending the uncertainty, we should go out on WTO arrangements. We will then be free to trade and free to get the sort of deal that this country absolutely needs and deserves.

18:17:00

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)

I was not elected to this place to make my constituents poorer or less safe. I do not believe that anyone from any party came into politics to do that, but if we vote for this deal we will be doing just that. The evidence is clear: leaving the European Union will make us poorer as an economy, as a country and as a society. It will put people's livelihoods at risk and the future of our children in jeopardy. I will vote against this deal.

For me, this is deeply personal. I have studied in France and Spain; I have worked in Brussels and Madrid; I speak French and Spanish; and I call myself a citizen of both Wales and Europe. I am proud of the European Union for bringing countries together in unity and peace. Members may disagree with me, and that is their right, but anyone who says that we must leave the EU because of a vote that was taken two and a half years ago is mistaken.

The splits and divisions that we see across society are not going away. Extremists are waiting to expose the differences we see in our politics today, and our actions and words will scar Britain for decades to come. Now is the time for leadership, to be brave and to stand up for what is right, not to blindly follow the path set out by previous Governments and Administrations. We were elected to do the right thing by our constituents—those hard-working families and people who depend on the jobs that a stable and flourishing economy provides; on well-run and efficient public services; and on high performing schools, universities and hospitals. Being a full EU member keeps us safe from terrorism and international crime. It keeps us in the crucial networks that our Prime Minister fought to keep us a part of when she was Home Secretary—access that she cannot now guarantee.

We have heard a lot of nonsense, repetition and bluster in this House. Many Conservative Members, such as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) have been using the issue for their own ends. They are ego-driven, nostalgic for a past empire and an imperial nation, which is a dangerous attitude from Members ignorant of this nation's history. Brexit has dominated everything here. It is the single biggest issue facing us since the second world war, it will have repercussions for many years to come and we know that other important business is being sidelined as a result. This week and next, world leaders are coming together in Katowice in Poland to decide how to tackle climate change. It is the single biggest issue facing the world and our future place in it, but one would not know it here. This place is embroiled in an act of immense self-harm: Brexit. The UK should be leading the way on climate action. Instead, it has tangled itself up in untruths and falsehoods about Brexit.

We have heard many of those untruths over the past two years. We have heard that getting a good deal would be the easiest thing ever, that we hold all the cards in the negotiations, and that there will be £350 million a week for the NHS. We are now hearing another lie: that we should back the Prime Minister's blindfold, lose-lose deal or plummet off a cliff edge with a no-deal Brexit. We know that that is a false choice. This blindfold Brexit deal is a fantasy. Major decisions are being postponed, leaving us forever negotiating our future relationship with the EU. We also know that there is no Brexit deal that can meet all the promises that have been made. The real choice now is whether to go ahead with this blindfold fantasy or stick with the best deal, which we already have as a member of the EU.

There is still time to change course and do the right thing. Many people come up to me in my Cardiff North constituency and ask me to put a stop to the madness. Many of them actually voted leave two years ago, but they are changing their minds. Businesses and people are frantic with worry. The only reason why the Prime Minister has received half-hearted support for the deal from business is that it provides a few years of transition for businesses to plan their move out of this country. The real risk with this so-called deal is that it leaves absolutely everything unresolved—indefinite uncertainty. That is not what people want. Democracy means that only the people can sort this out, which is why we must ask them in a people's vote on the final deal.

18:23:00

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con)

It is often said and has been said today, particularly by strong remainers, that we cannot possibly know why each of the 17.4 million or so people voted for Brexit. That is obvious, because there are any number of reasons why people voted leave, but we can be confident that few of them did so in the hope that we would end up with a deal like the one we are debating today. In a legalistic sense, the withdrawal agreement removes us from the EU, but for all intents and purposes its effect is to bind us to the rules of the EU while removing our ability to influence those rules.

I will not focus specifically on the transition period today, although it is certainly true that the EU is given vast, possibly unprecedented, powers over the UK during that time, and that is uncomfortable, but it could well be necessary. The issue is with what happens afterwards. It is also possible that, during the transition period, we will be able to agree a comprehensive free trade agreement with the EU and, as a consequence, we may be able to avoid the backstop, but that seems incredibly unlikely. The backstop effectively keeps us in the customs union and it subjects us to EU rules, with no UK say at all in framing those rules.

We have heard today from numerous speakers that the backstop would divide Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK and would prevent us from striking meaningful new free trade agreements with other countries. The Attorney General gave a magnificent performance in Parliament a couple of days ago, in which he described the backstop in three words: undesirable, unattractive and unsatisfactory.

But the biggest concern about the backstop is that we cannot leave it without the permission of the EU, which is not disputed. The question, then, is what incentive there is for the EU to negotiate in good faith. What would stop the backstop becoming a trap, by becoming the long-term basis for the UK-EU relationship? Given that any EU country could veto our departure from the backstop, the likelihood of being stuck in the backstop is surely very high indeed. We would have to wait until each and every EU country had its fill before agreeing finally to let us out. Yes, we could leave the backstop, as we have heard again and again, if we could prove that the EU is not acting in good faith, but what on earth does that even mean in practical terms?

The withdrawal agreement has united leavers and remainers in an extraordinary manner. I shared a platform a few weeks ago with the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable), my constituency neighbour, and it was the first time in two years that we have agreed on something relating to the EU.

We have known for some time that this deal has virtually no chance of making it through Parliament. We know that it jeopardises the Conservative party's relationship with the DUP, which is critical to keeping the Government going. So it is odd that the Government continue so vehemently to flog what is so obviously a dead horse.

I do not agree that the choice is between this deal, no deal and no Brexit, and I do not agree with those people who gleefully hold up this deal as proof somehow that Brexit is impossible or a fantasy. All it really proves is that those in charge of conducting the negotiations have not succeeded. Mostly they have not succeeded because they are miserable about the referendum result and have treated the exercise as disaster management. They set out to look at all the risks of Brexit—of course there are risks in such a transition—but they have failed to look for the opportunities as well.

We are one of the biggest economies in the world. We are geographically well placed to continue playing a big role in world affairs. Our language is the global language. Our judiciary is trusted. Despite all the rubbish that is happening at the moment, our democracy remains the envy of the world. Our legal system provides more certainty and clarity than pretty much anywhere else in the world. And people want to live, work and raise families here.

Had we never joined the EU in the first place, does anyone honestly believe that it would not be biting off our hand to agree a comprehensive free trade agreement today? Of course it would. There is still time to pursue the option that Brussels was always expecting, and that makes the most sense for the world's fifth largest economy: the foundation of a comprehensive free trade agreement based on mutual respect and mutual recognition.

There are many in this House who share my views about the deal but whose answer is to press for a second referendum, which would be madness. There was a consensus at the time of the referendum that the outcome would be honoured. Solemn promises from the Prime Minister were echoed on both sides of the House.

We all remember some people brashly saying that it did not matter how people voted because the EU would never let us out anyway. I remember those people being dismissed as if they were lunatics, but that did happen in Denmark, France and the Netherlands, and I think it happened twice in Ireland. I was one of the people who dismissed those concerns as conspiracy theories. How extraordinary and how depressing that there is now a real chance those people could have been right all along.

I understand that some people remain mortified by the outcome of the vote, and of course this place is filled with extremely clever people who could potentially find a clever way of stopping Brexit one way or another, but it would demonstrate a remarkable lack of wisdom. A failure to honour the referendum would surely cause an irreparable breakdown in the relationship between the people and the authorities. It would usher in a new era of extreme politics.

There is no reason why the UK should be immune to the trends that are plaguing almost every other country in Europe: in France, where Le Pen leads in the polls; in Germany, where the Alternative für Deutschland, founded in only 2013, is now the second biggest party; in Austria, where the Freedom party is part of the Government; and in Italy, Spain, Sweden, Greece and so on.

If the gut fear that so many people have, the feeling that the political elite simply cannot be trusted, is utterly and completely confirmed, where will those mainstream voters go? It is madness. It could possibly, potentially, perhaps be justified if something truly seismic had happened, but it has not. Millions of pounds have been poured into a campaign to undermine the referendum and make people fear every aspect of Brexit, but the polls have barely moved; they are still within the margin of error. I believe the Government are going to lose this vote next week, and I am afraid to say that I

hope they lose it. Then, either this Prime Minister or, if she will not do it, another Prime Minister must take this deal back to the EU and change it.

18:29:00

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), who I know prizes the environment highly, although he did not mention it in his speech, perhaps because it might not have gone along with his argument today, as he is a leaver.

Zac Goldsmith

I thank the hon. Lady for her kind words. She is right to say that I did not mention it, but I have given three lengthy speeches about why Brexit, if done properly, would be a boon—a great thing—for the environment.

Catherine West

I beg to disagree, but I will mention the environment later in my short speech, and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Gentleman.

I wanted to start by talking about the language we have been using in recent days. The particular term that has caused a lot of concern in my constituency is “queue jumpers”, and I was pleased to hear that the Prime Minister apologised for that in the House the day before yesterday. We know that so many EU citizens in my constituency have been worried by that term. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and I share the London Borough of Haringey, where 42,000 EU citizens are resident. They are friends, colleagues, NHS workers and neighbours, and they are a valued part of our diverse community. It is important that we in this House do not forget the importance of having that respectful debate, despite our differences of opinion and views.

Obviously, the economy has to be mentioned in relation to this deal, because many have warned about the danger of this deal. In particular, we know that the Governor of the Bank of England has said that all of the assessments identify significant negative outcomes for the economy, resulting in hard-working families facing food price hikes of 10%, businesses facing increased friction when trading and the country as a whole facing yet another recession. I find it difficult to believe that anybody could vote for a deal that could lead to another recession, given that we have not really recovered from the one in 2008, following the global financial crash.

Equally, we have no firm or clear commitments on participation in Europol and Eurojust, and several concerns about security arrangements, which have been highlighted by not only my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), but others. We know that human trafficking, international crime, drug smuggling, terrorism and illegal immigration are all issues that are tackled most effectively through deep and integrated international co-operation, which is, logically, done in particular with our closest neighbours.

On geopolitics, just a few weeks ago we marked the centenary of the armistice. It is not stretching things too far to bring that into this debate and say just how moving it was to see the German President lay a wreath at the Cenotaph. It was a reminder of the importance of internationalism, and the specific role the EU has played in maintaining peace across the continent and promoting that ideal worldwide. We speak about NATO, defence and security over and over again in this Chamber, but we all know that it is the people-to-people contact, the country-to-country contact, the Erasmus students and the internationalism that underpins that security and makes that relationship meaningful. At a time when the liberal order is once again under threat, with the rise of an

expansionist Russia, a volatile American foreign policy and the far right once again on the march on the streets of Europe, as the hon. Member for Richmond Park mentioned, now is not the time to distance ourselves from our European friends.

It is abundantly clear that this deal cannot command a majority in this House, for the reasons I have set out, as well as others. Likewise, we all know that the destination of no deal will not be accepted by a majority of hon. Members. It is pleasing to see so many Members, regardless of which side of the EU referendum debate they are on, say today that no deal would be an act of vandalism. So where does that leave us? Like many Members from both sides of the House, I have continued to make the case for a second vote. The hon. Member for Richmond Park is quite right to say that we must respect the referendum result and must not be patronising about why people voted the way they did. In the same way, once the democracy switch is flicked, the only way to unflick it is to flick it off.

Earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) made a valuable contribution. If someone needs a hip replacement, they go to see the surgeon, and in consenting to the operation they know exactly what they are getting. A second meaningful vote for people would really help us Members of Parliament to make the decision. It would be completely different if we had a Parliament in which there was an overwhelming majority and it was clear as a bell, but given that the result was so close in June 2016 and that we are living through such unusual times in the House of Commons, it is important that the people assist us to make this crucial decision.

I welcome the fact that the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), and the shadow Brexit Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), have said that a second vote has not been taken off the table. I look forward to progress on that position.

On multiple occasions, the Prime Minister has refused to consider the option of a second referendum, on the basis that the decision was made in 2016, but nothing ever stands still in politics. As we go forward and see that each week we are losing £500 million from our economy, it is important to be a little more decisive and provide the opportunity, quite quickly, to have a second vote. We can then put the issue to bed and focus on other key issues, including the NHS, schools funding and universal credit—all the things that we know our constituents want us to get a wriggle on with.

I recognise the result of the referendum. As mentioned in my intervention on the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), I have serious concerns about the way Vote Leave ran the campaign. I should emphasise that the illegitimate use of social media, which the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee is now looking into, along with the questionable use of political donations and the question marks over whether some of the funds used may have come from abroad, are all crucial to our democracy. Each time we have a democratic exercise, we learn more from it. It is crucial that if we ask the public a further question on this issue, we get it right, maintain a positive tone and ensure that we have the best standards of democracy. I look forward to hearing other contributions and hope that we eventually get that second vote.

18:37:00

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)

This will surprise you, Mr Speaker: I am old enough to have voted in the 1975 referendum, and I voted yes to stay in the common market. But what I voted for then changed rather substantially over the years, and I became somewhat concerned about the way the EU had developed. When it came to

the last referendum, I was for leave—on balance, but I think that was the right decision. The truth of the matter is that it was not to do with what was on the side of a bus, but that most of our citizens have had to live with the EU over several decades. There was just that general feeling that the EU was not very responsive to their needs. The British people have a certain native common sense that tells us that we could do better on our own. Compared with the 1970s, when Britain was a rather depressing place, Britain is doing really well in the world, and it has been doing over the past 20 years. The reality is that it was a vote of confidence in this country from the British people. We can do a lot better. We can be an open, flexible, dynamic economy in the world.

Leaving the EU was always going to be a messy business, because any kind of divorce is, and there are compromises to be made. I pay credit to the Prime Minister for the work that she and the negotiators have done. It is a difficult job and probably a thankless one, and it will be even more thankless next Tuesday when we get the House's decision. There are some good things in the agreement and I could agree with a lot of it as a compromise to see us out of the EU, but as a Conservative Unionist, I find the Irish backstop very difficult to deal with.

I do not want to treat any area of the United Kingdom differently from my own constituency. There is a danger of our getting hung up in that arrangement. The advice of the Attorney General is very clear. The Prime Minister needs to go back to the EU and say, "Deal on providing that we have a date to the backstop." If there is a date, many people's fears about our getting hung up in the arrangement and not being able to do deals would disappear. We have already heard that there is no intent either north or south of the border to establish a hard border. My fear is that the backstop will be used as a device during the negotiations over trade and over fish—as President Macron has already said—to screw the British down and give us a bad deal.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con)

I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Given that he supported the Common Market, does he accept that there may be an alternative, such as an EEA-EFTA style deal, that would give us back the fisheries, remove the need for the backstop and provide the kind of reassurance that he seeks?

Sir Robert Syms

It would not be my favourite choice, but it may well be a choice that the House will have to consider depending on how we end up next year.

The reality is that I hope we can finesse the current agreement. Ultimately, the EU must accept that the backstop is unacceptable to Parliament. If it accepts that, there is a fairly good chance that the deal will go through. The deal, without the backstop, might be rather better than the EFTA proposals. We will have to see how the Prime Minister does. When there has been to-ing and fro-ing between member Governments of the EU, referendums and agreements, it is not unheard of for Governments to go back to the EU and say, "Our people will not wear it, think again." It would take only some very modest changes to get the deal done. I hope that the Prime Minister listens to what the House says next Tuesday. I am afraid that I will be voting against the deal in its current form, but I will be receptive to modification of the backstop and then I hope that we will be in a position in which we can move on.

I am unhappy about voting against my Government. I have been a Member of Parliament for more than 20 years. Since coming into government in 2010, I have voted against the Government only once. This will be the second time. I hope that I never have to do it again because I believe that politics is a team game and I want my team to win and I want the Prime Minister to do the best for

our nation. Unfortunately, though, I am a Conservative and Unionist and the backstop is something that I cannot accept.

18:42:00

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)

There can be no doubt that this is a defining moment in our history. Our global economic and political success is at stake. I represent a constituency that voted overwhelmingly to remain part of the European Union and I stand here today to make this speech on their behalf. Although the European Union is not perfect, it is a union that has helped to bring so much peace and prosperity to our nation and to our continent. To dismiss our 45 years of membership diminishes what we have collectively achieved and what is possible.

Turning to the theme of today's debate, we should not forget the benefits that EU membership has brought to the country through immigration. Could our economy or our NHS thrive without it? Of course not. In England, 63,000 NHS staff are EU nationals—one third of these staff work in London. Across the capital, almost half of the home-building workforce is from the EU, yet over the course of the referendum and subsequent negotiations, I have frequently been saddened by the fact that freedom of movement has become a political football spoken of only in negative terms.

A few weeks ago, when I was speaking at a public meeting in my constituency, a constituent, an EU national, stood up and told me that she had made her life here and now feared that she was no longer welcome in this country. I assured her that she was welcome. Like many others, I am immensely proud of our multicultural community in south-east London, but the Government have provided nothing but uncertainty on this issue. It is irrefutable that immigration has aided our nation and our continent. We should be proud of what it has contributed and what it has helped us to achieve.

Let me now speak of my personal experience. As a teenager, I was given the opportunity to live and study in Italy through the European Union's Leonardo da Vinci programme. Growing up in south-east London and attending my local school, the idea of being offered, at the age of 18, the chance to temporarily move to Italy was almost incomprehensible. It was a completely life-changing experience, and I consider myself to be a citizen of the European Union. I want my son and all young people to have the same opportunities that I have had to live, work and travel freely within the EU. Instead, young people will be denied the chances of upward social mobility and co-existing with our European partners, compounded by an uncertain future of potential economic gloom as a result of this poorly negotiated deal.

When the withdrawal Bill was before the House this time last year, I tabled an amendment highlighting the work that Europe had done on family-friendly employment rights and gender equality. If my amendment, which lost by 14 votes, had passed, it would have ensured that Parliament was kept informed of changes in European law, making sure that we kept pace and did not fall behind on the equalities agenda. Rights in the workplace have been fought for long and hard, and a large number of employment rights on our statute book come from Europe, including rules on paid holiday, working hours, pregnancy and maternity rights, TUPE and age discrimination, to name but a few. Sadly, some Conservative Members would not think twice about tearing them up, and the workplace risks becoming even more precarious and insecure without EU safeguards.

I respect the outcome of the 2016 referendum, but nobody in the House could argue that things have not changed in that time. The political landscape has changed. The economic landscape has

changed. Public opinion has changed. All the while, the Government are trying to force through answers to questions that were not on the ballot paper in 2016, and expect constituents to follow blindly.

When I was elected to Parliament, I vowed to my constituents that I would not support any form of Brexit that would be detrimental to them. London voted overwhelmingly to remain part of the European Union, and by a factor of two to one in Lewisham West and Penge. As my constituents' representative and voice in this place, it is primarily their future that I consider when casting my vote on this motion.

This terrible deal would result in a miserable Brexit for the UK, threatening business confidence, jobs, our NHS and the future of young people. The biggest issues will remain unresolved while we follow rules over which will no longer have any influence. I say to those on the Government Benches that these negotiations have been flawed from start to finish, and the results of this catastrophic approach are apparent for all to see. With time still left before the end of March, this does not have to be a binary choice between the Government's deal and no deal.

I do not believe that anyone voted in the referendum to be worse off or less secure. The people should be given a voice again. They should be empowered to decide whether they want their future to be carved out by the Prime Minister's deal, on which even her own MPs cannot unite, or whether they want an alternative. Given the shambles of the deal now before us, surely it is now time for the decision to go back to the public, with a people's vote with an option to remain in the EU. With so much at stake—our prosperity, our success and our security—it is only right that we return the decision to the people and give them their say once more.

18:47:00

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)

It is a great privilege to speak in this very important debate, and it is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves). Although we come at this from very different perspectives, I respect her passion in speaking up for her constituency.

The people of Cornwall have a long history of being a little bit awkward, a little bit independently minded and occasionally even a little bit rebellious. There was the famous time when 20,000 Cornishmen marched on this place because the King had put one of our bishops in the Tower of London. Even since way back then, the Cornish have had a slightly awkward relationship with authority, so it was no surprise whatever to me that Cornwall voted to leave the EU in 2016.

St Austell and Newquay—the constituency that I have the privilege to represent—actually had the biggest leave vote in the whole of Cornwall. However, it is important that we recognise that the vote was not just about our relationship with the European Union. It was about much more than that. Much of it was about people who felt disconnected, neglected and often ignored by what we might call the establishment. Thousands who had never before voted in any election voted to leave. Despite “Project Fear” and their being told continuously that this decision would be terrible for them, they voted courageously for us to leave the European Union because they wanted their voice to be heard and they wanted to know that their vote mattered.

That is part of the challenge before this House today and in the coming weeks. This is no longer just about Brexit; it is about the heart of our democracy. It is about who runs this country, whether we are truly a democracy where the will of the people prevails, and whether we in the House listen to those who have voted for us and sent us here to implement the decision that they have made.

Yesterday, a constituent of mine pointed out that on 22 June 2016 he wrote this and posted it on Facebook:

“The day has finally come, tomorrow is EU referendum Day where we all get to vote on a once in a lifetime opportunity to decide whether we are in or out of the EU. I’m not going to persuade anyone either way I don’t think it will make a difference what the result is. We aren’t leaving Europe ever and no vote by the people is going to change that. There are far too many higher powers with vested interests in the status quo to let a silly little thing like democracy get in the way.”

He went on to say that if the vote was to leave,

“higher powers will set into motion a series of events that will prevent leaving ever happening. Because it has to be approved through Parliament. There will have to be White Papers, debates, amendments, more debates, more amendments, and plenty more political posturing from both sides of the argument. It won’t be settled in the next 3 years and will then become an issue for the next general election. And by then we will have served another 4 years under Europe anyway and so why would we want to leave now?”

I do not know if he was Mystic Meg or a prophet, but there is a great fear among many, many people that what he described all that time ago is exactly what is happening. There is a sense outside this place that we are in the middle of an establishment stitch-up that is trying to prevent what the people of this country voted for from happening.

When the amendment that some of my colleagues voted for was passed last night, a cheer went up with the sense that somehow a victory had been won over those on this side of the House who want to see a true and proper Brexit. That victory was not against people like me—it was against the 17.4 million people in this country who voted for leave, and believed in this place, and put their faith and trust in us to deliver what they voted for.

I do not support the Prime Minister’s withdrawal agreement because I do not believe that it delivers what we have promised time and again as a party. It does not deliver what we put in our manifesto last year when we said that we would respect the result of the referendum. It puts this country in a worse place in terms of negotiating than we are now. I do not understand those who say that what we failed to achieve in the past two years when we have had cards to play will somehow will be better achieved when we have removed all our cards. We have had the £39 billion to bargain with. We have had the ability to walk away from the table to bargain with. How we think we are going to get a better deal from the EU once we no longer have those cards to play, I fail to understand.

People will say, “What is the alternative if we vote this deal down?” That is a very good question that I have considered very, very seriously, but I will not be pushed out of fear into voting for something I do not believe is right for this country simply because people tell me that the consequences could be serious. We have to face that. I do not want no deal. I want the Prime Minister to go back to the EU and say that there are elements in the withdrawal agreement that are not acceptable to the House and need to be removed in order for the House to support it. Obviously, that is primarily around the backstop. If the EU will not do that, under the legislation, no deal is the default position. Those in the House who say that no deal should never, ever be considered are effectively saying that we can never leave the EU until the EU agrees terms with us. That is admitting defeat. That is saying that we are effectively a colony of the EU and we can never leave

of our own volition, but only when it agrees terms with us. I do not believe that that is right. It is not what the future of this nation is about.

When we vote against the deal next week, I hope that the Prime Minister will listen to the genuine concerns of many of us across the House who believe that this deal does not deliver what we promised the people of this country, and that she will go back to the EU with a positive message. We need to believe in the future of our country—not just our right to be free and independent of the EU, but our ability to deliver a proper Brexit and enable this country to flourish outside the EU.

18:54:00

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)

I voted in favour of triggering article 50, so that negotiations could begin on Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, but having read the result of the Prime Minister's negotiations—the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration—I will vote against what has been negotiated. The majority of my constituents voted to leave the EU, but I do not believe that they voted to make themselves poorer or to jeopardise their safety. I am not taking this decision lightly. I believe that it would be enormously damaging for the people of this country, and in particular my constituents, if Britain were to leave the EU on the basis of what the Prime Minister has negotiated.

Fundamental to my concern is the fact that the withdrawal agreement deals only with the process of Britain's departure from the European Union. After December 2020, the only thing that has been agreed is a political declaration of a mere 26 pages that is extremely vague. In other words, if Parliament accepts the Prime Minister's package, we have no real idea of what this country's relationship with the EU will be like in the long term. It will be a blind exit and a step into the dark. We will be leaving the European Union on a wing and a prayer. The real negotiations on our long-term relationship will only begin in earnest once we have left the EU, during the transition process, and Britain will be in a weak bargaining position as a consequence. I am passionately concerned about that.

I am very concerned about the number of young people in my constituency who have expressed concern about the situation in which this country finds itself. They are concerned about their inability to travel around the EU and the reduction of opportunities if travel is restricted. They are concerned about the creation of a constantly inward-looking country, while their instincts teach them that they must be looking outwards to Europe and the world.

There is also concern in my constituency about the employment consequences of this deal. That is extremely important, because much of my constituency's prosperity and the employment prospects of a large number of people depend on Britain having a positive relationship with our largest and nearest trading market—the European Union. This deal does not offer the prospect of such a positive relationship.

There are huge problems with the short-term withdrawal agreement, not least the weak commitments to workers' rights, which have been highlighted by the TUC, and the prospect of weak environmental standards. There is also concern, as has been highlighted in the debate, about the security implications of the transitional agreement and beyond. Let us not forget that last year, the European arrest warrant resulted in 183 individuals being brought back from other European countries to face justice in this country. Because of the European arrest warrant, we have seen an increase in security and justice internationally.

My concern is that once we leave the EU and go beyond the transition period after December 2020, we are by no means certain what arrangements will be in place and what will be negotiated. It is quite possible that we will have to fall back on the kind of extradition agreements that we had in the past. Let us not forget the problem we have there, which is that France and Germany's constitutions prevent them from entering into such extradition agreements. There is real concern about security and the rule of law, which have huge implications for our future.

In essence, that is why I will vote against the Prime Minister's deal on 11 December, but I want to make the point that I am also strongly against any attempt to take Britain out of the European Union without an agreement. A no-deal Brexit would be disastrous for the people of my constituency, and the Prime Minister should not even contemplate such a course of action under any circumstance.

It is small wonder I have been approached by a constituent who is diabetic and insulin-dependent, and who is genuinely concerned about what will happen to his health if we leave the European Union without a deal and he cannot get his insulin. That concern can be replicated throughout the country time and again, and it is completely wrong that the Prime Minister is holding this sword of Damocles above the House of Commons.

This is an important decision that we will face next Tuesday. We should not underestimate the significance of the meaningful vote, but I honestly believe that this agreement is against the best interests of the people of this country and against the best interests of the people in my constituency. Therefore, I have no doubt in my mind that the best, correct and proper thing to do is to vote against the agreement.

19:00:00

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)

It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David).

Since the EU referendum result in 2016, we have all been grappling with the result and what it means for our constituents and our country, and with how we should best respond in the interests of our country. I believe the public, rightly, are tired of Brexit. For many, it has become an issue that is far too abstract, legalistic and confusing. Frankly, they want us to get on with it, but our constituents are relying on us to get it right. This debate and vote may be one of the most important that right hon. and hon. Members in this place will have to make a decision on. Probably it is one of the most important votes, if not the most important vote, that we will cast in our parliamentary careers.

Almost everyone I have spoken to, whether or not they support this deal, has a huge amount of respect for the Prime Minister and admiration for the job that she is doing. Negotiating a Brexit deal with the European Union was an almost impossible job. I have never doubted the Prime Minister's desire to achieve the best for our country, and she has poured her heart and soul into every aspect of these negotiations. My admiration for our Prime Minister is making this decision for me all the more difficult. It goes without saying that I am loyal to this Government and to this Prime Minister. Our country is undoubtedly better served by this Government than by any alternative. After 10 years in the Scottish Parliament and 18 months here, I understand the significance of even contemplating voting against my Government and colleagues. However, my job here is also to consider the national interests and those of my constituents. That is why I am listening carefully to contributions from all parts of the House during the course of this debate, and particularly those of Ministers in reaction to some of the concerns that colleagues, especially those on the Conservative Benches, have raised.

Part of my decision-making process has been considering what happens if Parliament rejects this agreement. We have been told it is this deal, no deal or Brexit could be stopped. The default position for this process is clear: we leave the EU at 11 pm on 29 March next year with no deal. That is due to both the EU treaty and the European Union (Withdrawal) Act which, when it was passed earlier this year, was amended to include the date and time of exit. In my view, it is regrettable that there has not been greater clarity from the Government about what will happen in the event, as seems increasingly likely, that this place does not give its support to the withdrawal agreement. We are being asked to support this agreement without any proper understanding of the alternatives. We are in effect balancing risks as part of our decision-making process—the risks associated with this agreement as opposed to the risks of the unknown.

Turning to the withdrawal agreement itself, the fishing industry along the Berwickshire coast in my constituency has been decimated in recent years. I know that many of my local fishermen and women are looking forward to a life outside the common fisheries policy. While I have been reassured by the words from the Prime Minister, I am less comforted by the views expressed by other European leaders, notwithstanding the fact that fishing could still be sacrificed as part of the trade deal negotiations. I am happy to accept the words of our Prime Minister and her commitment to Scotland's fisheries, but my fear is that the precise arrangements will be decided at some point in the future. No Government can bind their successors, so no promise now will necessarily have any effect in the future.

As a Unionist, I also have serious concerns about the provisions for Northern Ireland, given that there will be at least a risk of Northern Ireland being treated substantially differently from the rest of the United Kingdom. That would certainly be contrary to the articles of Union, as I understand them. The main nationalist parties in Northern Ireland have signed up to the agreement. However, both the Ulster Unionist party and the Democratic Unionist party have said that they are completely opposed to it. That causes me a serious problem. Given the troubled history in Ireland, any constitutional change needs to have the support of both communities in Northern Ireland. Some say that the Unionists in Northern Ireland need to take a pragmatic approach and that they need to compromise. I would suggest that that fundamentally misunderstands Unionism in Northern Ireland. I have every sympathy with those in this place who represent Unionism in Northern Ireland, who have expressed concerns about the potential impact of the agreement on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

My fundamental concern is that so much of the EU withdrawal agreement is an agreement to agree something further down the line. The can is being kicked further down the road. As someone who studied law at Glasgow University and trained and worked at Freshfields along the road from here, one of my lasting memories from law school and from those teaching me how to draft legal documents is the danger of drafting something that could be construed as an agreement to agree. Why is that a problem? My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) touched on some of the political aspects, but the consequence is that agreements to agree lack sufficient certainty to constitute a legally enforceable commitment.

There have been many reassuring words about the high standard imposed by the “best endeavours” commitment in the withdrawal agreement, but the reality is that it is meaningless if the obligation itself lacks certainty. The withdrawal agreement was supposed to be a bridge to a permanent relationship with the EU, but the danger is that it will become the norm. We are putting off so many of the outstanding decisions for a later date.

I have wrestled with this for many hours and have lost much sleep over the past few weeks. I have spoken to many businesses and residents in my constituency. I am here to represent their views as

their Member of Parliament. I am trying to reconcile my deep misgivings about the agreement with my loyalty to the Prime Minister and the Government. It is not easy. In fact, it is proving to be probably the hardest decision of my political life. I have until Tuesday to decide what I am going to do, and I am going to carefully judge what—[Interruption.] Perhaps SNP Members could show me some respect rather than mocking my decision-making process—I am wrestling with a very difficult decision on behalf of my constituents and my country.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

We have heard so much from the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues about threatening to resign if Northern Ireland is treated any differently from anywhere else in the United Kingdom. His own Attorney General's legal advice said it will be treated as a third country, but and he is still wrestling with it. It is patently clear. Have the courage of your convictions and vote this down. It is bad for Scotland, and it will be bad for the rest of the UK.

John Lamont

I have not threatened to resign from anything. I have just reinforced the point that I am here to represent my constituents, many of whom have concerns about the withdrawal agreement. I am here, as somebody sitting on the Government Benches, to express such concerns and misgivings, and to try as honestly as I possibly can to articulate to the House, and hopefully to my constituents, the thought process I am going through. That will take as long as I need. I will certainly not be intimidated or bullied by SNP Members to make that decision any more quickly. I will take my time, and on Tuesday I will cast my vote for what I think is in the national interest and in the interests of my constituents.

19:08:00

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC)

May I start by paying tribute to you, Mr Speaker, for your longevity in sitting through the business today and last night? I think your presence throughout the whole debate shows the importance of these deliberations. As many Members have already said, these are perhaps the most important votes we will ever face in our political career. I think we can safely say, Mr Speaker, that your bladder is considerably stronger than mine.

There is little doubt that people were misled during the referendum by those purporting to suggest that a land of milk and honey awaited if leave won. Two years later, reality bites and the British Government have been forced into signing a humiliating agreement and a political declaration that means that the British state, due to the intransigent policy pursued by the Prime Minister, will leave the European Union with absolutely no idea what the future trade arrangements with its largest trading partner will be after the transition phase.

At every step, the British Government have been outwitted by the European Commission. Its priorities were threefold: first, get the British Government to commit to paying their outstanding liabilities; secondly, preserve the Good Friday agreement, leading to the backstop; and thirdly, negotiate formally only the divorce proceedings before the end of the article 50 period. The British Government, on the other hand, seemed to think that they would be able to negotiate the terms of the final relationship and settle Brexit before the end of the article 50 period. The withdrawal agreement and the accompanying political declaration indicate that what the British Government are claiming as a diplomatic coup is nothing of the sort—it is a capitulation.

All this does not bode well for the detailed negotiations that will happen from March if the current policy is adopted. During those negotiations, the British Government will be a third country, outside

the European Union and in a far more vulnerable position. I am not a professional trade negotiator, but it is crystal clear that in those circumstances, the larger participant in the negotiations—the European Union—will be able to squeeze the smaller participant. International trade is a brutal business, where the size and wealth of the market matters. Brexiteers point out that under current arrangements, EU countries collectively export more to the UK than the UK exports to the EU. That shows a gross misunderstanding of how international trade negotiations work. During the negotiations, the European Union's objective will be to increase that disparity in its favour at the expense of UK producers.

Despite the stark economic reality, we face a Brexit policy being driven by the British Government and the Labour Opposition on the basis of scrapping freedom of movement, regardless of the fact that it is a reciprocal right that works both ways. British subjects will lose the right to work and live in 27 European states. In her obsession with curbing immigration, the Prime Minister set out red lines in her Mansion House speech that made the current shambles inevitable. Because of that, my colleagues and I voted against triggering article 50. From the very start, the Prime Minister has prioritised party management above the greater good. Like a salmon poacher, the approach of the British Government has been to massage the fantasies of Brexiteers, as opposed to being straight with the people of the UK that they were sold a false prospectus and that if Brexit was to be delivered, it would mean making people far poorer, with the poorest and most vulnerable hit worst.

In the September withdrawal agreement debate, I warned the British Government to take no deal off the political table. It served no purpose as a negotiating tactic with the European Union, which knew that the British state would never be willing to accept the economic damage of no deal or able to get itself ready for the eventualities of no deal by March. I also warned that threatening no deal would not bribe MPs into supporting the Prime Minister. We will wait to see whether my prophecy was correct on Tuesday evening next week. The House's support for the amendment tabled by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) last night effectively takes no deal off the political table in any case.

Right hon. and hon. Members and our constituents should be aware of the ruling of the advocate general in the European Court of Justice yesterday recommending that article 50 is revocable unilaterally by the British state. If that recommendation is adopted by the Court, it will clearly indicate that the Prime Minister put forward a false argument that it is a choice of her deal or no deal. This House or the British Government have the power to stop no deal at any time of their choosing. Considering the dire warnings of the British Government over recent weeks, the game of chicken that they have been playing with Members of the House now rebounds on them.

If the British Government's policy is implemented, it will effectively mean leaving the European Union with absolutely no idea what the long-term future relationship will be following the end of the transition phase. The British Government have utilised the vagueness of the political declaration to try to appeal to kamikaze Brexiteers who favour the WTO option and more sensible politicians who seek a more formalised association-type agreement by saying that everything will be up for grabs during the transition phase. I have outlined the vulnerability of the negotiating position of the British state in those circumstances. The negotiations will be far more complex than the withdrawal agreement, with far more at stake.

Writing in the *Western Mail* last month, I described the events of the last two years as a tickle fight compared with what would await us if the British Government's policy was carried. Labour's policy of trying to use the crisis to force a general election is a complete distraction. I will not waste my time eviscerating their position, but two words come to mind: incoherence and cynicism. With the House of Commons effectively in control of Brexit policy, the Labour party must decide what it

wants, a softer Brexit or a people's vote. Those are the only two options facing us that are palatable to me and many others.

Should we aim for a people's vote on the British Government's policy, or the status quo? If the House of Commons cannot agree a way forward, the people must be asked once again to cast their verdict. The only other solution I can see is to support moves towards a formalised association status with the European Union by staying within the economic frameworks—namely, the single market and the customs union. For Wales, that would end the cynical power grab of our powers by the British Government, except in policy fields not within the EEA-EFTA agreement, such as agricultural measures.

The vision that I and my colleagues have for Wales has no time for the narrow-minded British nationalism at the heart of the Brexit project. Ultimately, as we emerge from the current wreckage, the people of my country need to start asking ourselves serious questions about where our best interests lie and what future we seek for our people—the splendid isolationism of British nationalism, or an outward-looking Wales playing its full part in the world. I know which future I choose.

19:15:00

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)

It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), though I do not agree with all his ideas, and my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), who made a characteristically thoughtful speech.

Many ideas have been put forward today, but, as lawyers are fond of saying, we are where we are. I urge hon. Members putting forward ideas—650 different ideas, possibly, if you can fit everyone into this enormous debate, Mr Speaker—to look down the corridor, where there is another debate going on that is possibly even more thoughtful and perhaps a little less political than the one in this Chamber. I was made to stop and think when I read the speech of the Archbishop of Canterbury earlier today. I encourage all Members to have a little look at what is going on down the corridor.

In the 2016 referendum, the result in the Banbury constituency was the closest in the country. By 500, we voted to leave. I have seen no evidence, talking to people or in my postbag, that significant numbers on either side have changed their minds, though there have been a few. It is really important, given that we are where we are, that we now be sensible and practical. This is a fair deal—in fact, it is growing on me more and more as I read it and listen to debates such as this. There are two main reasons why I think that.

We have in the deal the beginnings of certainty on the status of EU nationals and an inkling of where our immigration policy is going. We know a fair bit about immigration in north Oxfordshire. Poles make up 10% of the population of Banbury. We also have another significant minority in the Kashmiris, who have been with us, in some cases, for four generations. The Poles and Romanians living locally are well integrated, and we value their contribution to our workforce and all aspects of public life.

I am concerned that we put flesh on the bones of the withdrawal agreement, and I look forward to engaging in detail with the White Paper so that my constituents might get practical solutions to problems such as, “Will granny be able to join me when she needs care in her old age?”. The deal is going in the right direction, which is one reason why I am inclined to vote for it, but I am also

persuaded by the almost frictionless trade ideas set out in it. Of course, the future agreement needs more work, but we are going in the right direction.

In Banbury, we are lucky to have almost full employment. We have a wide selection of middle-sized family manufacturing firms—in the food and automotive industries, for example—that are a part of the critical just-in-time European-wide system. When I was hoping to speak in this debate, I thought I would ask my local business leaders what they would like me to say. I asked a wide selection, but I have chosen to read out the comments of two in particular. One is a great local entrepreneur. He was a Brexiteer, which is unusual among my local business leaders, and he now runs a company that is a leading distributor of health and beauty and household brands. He said:

“The deal on the table sorts several of the big Brexit issues—immigration being one. It also protects trade. Smooth trade through ports and ferry terminals is vital to the UK. So much of everything we eat and use comes from Europe. Likewise our exports are crucial to many UK businesses—especially automotive.

My view is we should sign it. I have not seen any credible alternative proposals from others...The Irish situation was always going to be difficult. It should not become a deal breaker. No deal would be a disaster.”

Let me also quote what was said by a representative of a company that manufactures high-end tools. This lady was a passionate remainer, and I am particularly fond of both her and her business—as, indeed, was my predecessor. The company is a great local employer. It is notable that those who visit its factory meet people who have worked there for 35 years, and successive generations of whose families have worked there. She said:

“The deal that is now on the table I believe is the best we could get. It isn’t as good as staying in for obvious reasons—you don’t get a better deal being out of the club than you get by being in it. But, it is a deal that an export company like ours can work with and while trade with the EU will cease to be frictionless we will have until 2021 to get things in place to deal with that. If I do my best to be positive about the situation, there may also be benefits for trade outside the EU post transition—although I sincerely hope not at the cost of lower standards for products, employee protection, the environment or animal welfare.”

I could not have put it better myself.

It could be said that Banbury was the most divided constituency on 23 June 2016, but I have seen plenty of evidence locally that we are prepared to come together, work together, and have a bright future with the deal that is on the table.

19:22:00

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)

Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker. I appreciate your forbearance and patience, because it has been a long afternoon.

Along with every other area in Scotland, my constituency voted to remain, yet Scotland has been repeatedly ignored. Because my time is limited, I will focus on three main points. I believe that this deal is bad for young people, bad for women and bad for the economy. The Scottish National party has repeatedly argued that it would be best for jobs, the economy and living standards to remain in the single market. We have refused to be dragged by those on the right into a self-defeating

argument about immigration. Instead, at every opportunity, we have focused on the positives, such as free movement and the ability to live, work and travel across 27 countries, as well as the rich economic, cultural and societal benefits that migrants have brought to our country.

Since 2016, I have met many EU citizens and their families—French-born and German-born, teachers and nurses. People who have raised their families in Scotland and have spent the vast majority of their lives there are concerned about their ability to continue to live in the Scotland that they call home. That is just one instance where there is still a lack of certainty. There is also uncertainty for young people. It was my predecessor, Winnie Ewing—“Madame Écosse”—who championed the Erasmus programme. We should not deny future generations of young people the opportunity to learn, to travel and to broaden their horizons but, if anything, sadly, Brexit will only serve to do the opposite.

For all those reasons and more, the Scottish National party has repeatedly argued in favour of remaining in the EU, and, short of that, remaining in the single market and the customs union. Otherwise, free trade arrangements will introduce barriers to trade that will damage jobs, investment, productivity and earnings.

Women will be particularly affected, and the most disadvantaged and the most vulnerable will be hardest hit. When the Women’s Budget Group and the Fawcett Society examined the economic impact of Brexit, they found that there are serious implications for women, predominantly those who are workers, consumers and use public services. The cuts that this Government have placed on those services already have a disproportionate impact on women. A failure to prioritise gender equality has led to an increase in economic insecurity and inequality for these women.

This debate has served to do nothing except highlight how much Brexit has taken over the agenda. I should have been in Westminster Hall this afternoon condemning the Government on their record on gender inequality. Instead I am here debating this. That is of course where we are at and I would not choose to be anywhere else on this day but debating this important subject, but there are so many other important subjects that have been completely neglected.

In most scenarios, real wages for low-paid workers will reduce, prices will increase, and inevitably increase further, and levels of productivity will reduce as well. The UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty outlined that it was clear that the impact of Brexit was an afterthought. That is the point here. So I wish to focus on those who have already been forgotten in this debate: the vulnerable in my constituency, the one in four children who grow up in poverty, and that is only expected to increase. People will ultimately be worse off. We know that for a fact. Is that not sufficient reason in itself for the Government to reconsider their actions and to prioritise protecting the interests of those who need protecting most and are most at risk of the harsh impact of Brexit? Instead they are freezing their benefits and hitting them with five-week delays in universal credit. We are fully acknowledging by visiting food banks that there is an issue here and that we need to do more to support food banks. It is a scandal that these people are an afterthought—frankly, that is how this comes across. While we stand here discussing Brexit, people will go hungry at Christmas—people will go without food, children will go without gifts, and that is the least of many families’ problems.

My constituency is home to many multinational companies that rely on trade with Europe. In fact, Europe is eight times the size of the UK market, so our relationship with Europe could not be more important. DFDS, the largest employer in Larkhall that daily delivers to all major fish markets and distribution centres; Tunnock’s in Uddingston, which sells its famous teacakes and caramel wafers across Europe and beyond; and Borders Biscuits, based in Lanark with customers across the EU, all

not only trade across Europe but are employers in my constituency. Their trade and the trade of many others rely on a good deal with Europe. In my opinion this withdrawal deal fails to deliver that. It offers no guarantees of frictionless access to the single market. It places Scotland at a serious competitive disadvantage to Northern Ireland—and, frankly, to the Union, which Members are so keen to keep. It is no certainty versus stability for the UK's economy and relationship with the EU in the long term—[Interruption.] I thank hon. Members for chuntering from a sedentary position. Let us remember that in 2014 the people were told that the only way to remain in the EU was to remain part of the UK. Please tell me how that is working out for us. Tonight, too, there has been cross-party support in the Scottish Parliament from four of the five main parties rejecting this deal.

For all those reasons and more, I will be voting against the withdrawal agreement and supporting the amendments to protect businesses and jobs and, most importantly, the most vulnerable in my constituency. I cannot honestly in good conscience vote for a bad deal. The bottom line is: the Tories and everyone else across here protected the Union by telling people they could stay in the EU and then pulled the rug from under them the minute people voted to remain part of the UK. What kind of deal is that for Scotland? So of course Scotland is going to vote for independence.

19:28:00

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)

There has been much talk about the backstop and about the deal in general—so much talk that, if there is a single word that should be deleted from the English language at the earliest opportunity, it is “deal.” This is not about shopping around for a second-hand car or a better mobile phone tariff. It is about our relationship with our nearest neighbours. If there is one thing we probably could all agree on, it is that relationships between states in the modern world are complicated, very complicated. They cannot just be reduced to deal or no deal. Yet after two and a half years, that is how the argument is all too often presented.

Given that the political declaration is so vague and thin, let me try to characterise in stark terms where we have got to. Many have talked about cliff edges. To me it looks as though we have reached the edge and jumped. That is the withdrawal agreement bit. We will have a two-year transition period in which to sort out what happens before we hit the ground—it is quite a high cliff—and the political declaration is the rope by which we are dangling. But while we are dangling from that rope, the clock is ticking. We will hit the ground, and because that ground is the backstop from which we will have no exit, we will effectively have handed the scissors to the people at the top of the cliff. They might let us land gently, but they do not have to do so. Frankly, as negotiating positions go—with the clock ticking and with us heading towards somewhere we really do not want to be—this is really not a very good place.

There is also the simple fact of geography. We are part of Europe, just as Ireland is one island. Nothing can change either of those facts, so we will have a relationship. It is just a question of what kind it will be. And I have news for those who feel that they have had enough of all this Brexit stuff. Frankly, we are only just at the beginning of all these negotiations. The great irony is that the EU is actually the place where negotiations are done, so coming out will not end the need for reaching agreements with others or for following standards that much bigger trading partners will decide; it will just make it all harder.

That point has been well made by someone I would not normally find myself in agreement with: the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid). In February 2016, he wrote in *The Mail on Sunday*:

“When a deal is reached, it may require us to accept the same blizzard of regulations that’s imposed by Brussels not just on member states, but on countries like Norway and Switzerland that need access to European markets. And, like them, it’s possible we would have no say over what those regulations contained, while still potentially paying an access fee.”

I would not have used that exact language, but I rather agree with the right hon. Gentleman, who is now the Home Secretary. It is no surprise that this proposed agreement, despite the hard work of officials over many months, cannot deliver what was promised by the leave campaign. It is no surprise because what was promised was just not deliverable. The political declaration is, unsurprisingly, just a wish list that kicks decisions down the road for future discussion while leaving a vacuum of uncertainty.

Moving specifically to today’s debate topic of immigration and free movement, I can tell the House that this has been a cause of intense distress and uncertainty in Cambridge since the referendum, not just for the thousands of non-UK EU nationals who are anxious about the future but for their friends, neighbours and workmates, who never expected to see their friends suddenly facing such divisions. In recent months, I have worked with my neighbour, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen), and the business group Cambridge Ahead on surveying businesses, universities and research institutes across our constituencies. Their responses have been consistent in stating that a third-country-style immigration process for EEA nationals would add more bureaucracy, time and cost to their recruitment. That recruitment is essential, due to skills shortages in the UK labour force and the global market in research specialisms. The tier 2 visa system and the £30,000 salary cap are already not working for non-EEA migration, and extending them to EEA movement would be a major own goal for our country.

Detailed evidence has been submitted to our inquiry from the University of Cambridge, and I will quote part of it:

“The postdoctoral research community serves as the engine room for much of the research that underpins Cambridge’s world-leading reputation, and provides a source of the ideas, innovation, business generation and disruptive technology that enables the UK to compete as a high-tech economy. Any barriers or disincentives to such recruitment, such as visa costs, could therefore have a significant impact on the University’s research and education operations”.

It went on to state:

“Extending the Tier 2 visa route to EEA nationals, as suggested in the MAC report, would significantly harm the UK’s competitiveness”.

I want to underline the fact that the university believes that that would significantly harm the UK’s competitiveness.

We are having this debate in the absence of any policy direction from a Government who cannot even agree a White Paper, but I hope that the view from Cambridge goes some way to exposing the risks that we would be taking if we continued with a backward-looking, numbers-only focus approach to immigration as the nature of our relationship with the European Union changes. We should of course be celebrating the benefits of movement between countries, not cowering in fear. We are at the global forefront of research, science and medicine, and we should not be risking throwing that away.

The agreement gives us no certainty about future mobility, for research or for any other sector or individual. This is not just about those who are traditionally termed the highly skilled; we also need the cooks, cleaners, bus drivers and builders, because our policy should be based on the needs of our economy, not on fear of being part of a rapidly changing world.

The deal fails on other fronts, too. The Prime Minister has gone from high aims—aiming to be part of the European Medicines Agency and of the European Research Council's programmes—to what we now have: a hope of some form of co-operation. With such weak, limited ambition, the future for research and innovation—the shining star in the UK economy—looks much less bright.

In conclusion, there is a very good deal on offer—the one we currently have as members of the European Union. However, if we are to remain, it must be remain and reform. The EU has to respond to the unhappiness expressed in so many countries across Europe. Business as usual just will not cut it. That is the debate we really should be having. It is inescapable that we live in Europe. But what kind of Europe do we want it to be? I do not think that the Government are capable of facilitating that kind of discussion with the public. The only way out of the impasse we appear to be heading for is an election or a people's vote.

19:35:00

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab)

It is a privilege to speak in the debate. I was reflecting, as I think the country is, on how we arrived at this point. It seems that a catastrophic failure of leadership has brought us to within a few weeks of when we are supposed to leave the European Union without us having any clear plan for what that should look like. There is no clear consensus in Parliament, or indeed our country. When the history books are written, they will see the way that the Government have run things since the referendum as absolutely catastrophic. History will also write that, at this time, particularly yesterday, Parliament recognised the importance of reasserting its authority to try to ensure some sort of reason was brought to the chaos all around us.

How can a Government be held in contempt by the Parliament that they are supposed to control? That has never happened in our history. It is simply astonishing that that just seems to have been swept away. So I say with sorrow that we are in a situation now where as a Parliament we are looking to say what sort of future we want for our country and how we try to resolve this. Parliament is about trying to say that we need to re-establish and rebuild consensus. There will be a variety of views on how that is done but let us be clear: Parliament—virtually everyone who has spoken—has said that there is not a binary choice between what the Prime Minister has put before us and no deal. That is not the choice that faces all parts of the United Kingdom; it is a false choice. It does the Prime Minister—and, moreover, the country—no good at all to have that presented as the choice.

Parliament's decision yesterday that we will not allow no deal should reassure the country, but it is unclear what happens after Tuesday if the deal, as we all expect, is voted down, as it should be. I for one will join my colleagues in happily marching through the Lobby to vote against the deal, in the belief that Parliament will ensure a better deal for all people of the United Kingdom as a result of our standing up and saying, "We will not be bullied by the Executive."

So what does that actually mean? It may be that we have to extend article 50. It may be that we have to go back to the European Union. It may be that there will be a general election. It may even be that there will be a second referendum. All those things are unknown, but step by step and bit by

bit, this Parliament will look at the facts and govern in the interests of the country. That is what is important, and that is why what happened yesterday was significant.

Let us also say in this debate that we can, as a Parliament, start to reassert some of the values that perhaps should have been spoken about more loudly during the referendum campaign. Let me start with immigration. I think immigration has been good for this country. I think it has benefited this country. That should be said loudly and clearly, time and again, because it is something that virtually every Member—sorry, I shall correct myself and say every Member—in this Parliament would agree with. Why do we not shout it out? Why do we not take on the bigots and the racists much more assertively? I say this about migration, not just immigration. There have been problems with migration, but migration overall has been good for this country as well. That is not to say that there are not problems with it, and of course those need to be dealt with, but as soon as we give ground on these things, into that space flows populism and all the anti-establishment rhetoric that we hear. That was a failure in the referendum campaign.

It does no good for the Government—the Executive—to pretend that this deal sorts anything out. If we do leave at the end of March 2019, what will be important is the fact that nothing is decided. My constituents and many constituents around the country thought—to be honest, until a few weeks ago I thought this as well—that, on leaving the European Union, large numbers of things would have been sorted out, such as trade and security. However, when I read the political declaration, not much has been decided, other than that we are going to leave—if that happens. What does the political declaration say about what happens after that? It says, “We will consider”, “Our aspiration is”, “We look to”, “We hope that”. My goodness me, Mr Speaker—is that what we are asking the British people to accept as a result of our withdrawal from the European Union?

I do not quite know where we will go, but I do know this: the fact that this Parliament has reasserted its authority means that we will be able to stand up, in whatever way we feel is correct, in the interests of the British people and that we will put them first, whatever part of the United Kingdom we represent.

19:42:00

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

It is an honour and, indeed, a challenge to follow the excellent contribution of the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker).

It will surprise no one when I say that I, along with every one of my SNP colleagues, will vote against the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement when the House divides on Tuesday. I will vote against it because it is a very bad deal for Scotland, but also because it is a potentially catastrophic deal for the people of my constituency. What we in Argyll and Bute are being asked to do by the Prime Minister is to support a deal that by every analysis will make us poorer and that will put us at a competitive disadvantage to our near neighbours in Northern Ireland, just a few miles across the water from the Mull of Kintyre. It would be a dereliction of duty if I were to back the deal, because I would not be acting in the best interests of my constituents, my country or, indeed, the rest of the United Kingdom if I were to support a deal that I believe would be harmful to the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of the people of Argyll and Bute.

For the past two years, the Prime Minister has told us repeatedly that no deal is better than a bad deal. We were assured that there were no circumstances in which she would sign up to a bad deal, yet what we are being asked to vote for next week is exactly that: a bad deal—a very bad deal. Any deal that puts Scotland at a competitive disadvantage can only be a bad deal. Any deal that prevents

us from attracting people from right across Europe to Argyll and Bute to live, work, invest or raise a family in order to reverse a decades-long stream of depopulation is a very bad deal. I commend and 100% endorse the remarks made last night by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) when he said to the EU nationals who have chosen to make Scotland their home, “You are welcome.” We thank them for choosing to live in Scotland and welcome the contribution they make to our lives and our economy. Their presence enriches our culture.

That point was forcibly made to me last night by a constituent, Mr Graeme Lyon, who wants to know how the Prime Minister can justify causing such economic and social harm by ending the freedom of movement that has enriched everyone in this country. How could I possibly support an agreement that will have such disastrous consequences for our inshore fisheries fleet and our world-famous shellfish and fin-fish industries, that fails to protect our fragile west coast hill-farming sector, and that denies our vital tourism industry access to the continent-wide pool of labour it so desperately needs? I cannot and will not support the deal.

Of course, none of that should come as a surprise to the Prime Minister, because she came to Scotland last week to meet the people and to listen to their concerns—aye, right, so she did. Meeting and listening to the people of Scotland does not mean arriving at Glasgow airport at 3 o’clock and driving 12 minutes to a factory in Bridge of Weir, where a hand-picked group of journalists were waiting while the rest stood outside in the rain. It is not about firing out that old cliché about “our precious Union” before jumping back in the car for the 12-minute drive back to Glasgow airport to be in the back in the air and out the country by 6 o’clock that evening. That is nobody’s definition of meeting or listening to the people. In fact, it is an insult to the people of Scotland.

If the Prime Minister really wanted to hear the voice of Scotland, she should have a listen to the CNN report by Erin McLaughlin from Glasgow on the same day that the PM flew into Bridge of Weir. The report showed that the people of Scotland were insulted by the contempt shown by the Prime Minister and this sham of a PR stunt. It also showed that the people of Scotland do not want to be dragged out of European Union against their will. Indeed, one young Glaswegian gentleman was so incensed that he, inadvertently perhaps, used a form of industrial language rarely heard on the streets of the “dear green place”.

The CNN report also showed that the people of Glasgow and of Scotland are moving from no to yes on the question of Scottish independence. This is not the future Scotland was promised back in 2014 when we were told that only by voting no in the independence referendum would we be able to retain our EU citizenship. No one was told when they voted no back in 2014 that not only would they be giving the green light to Scotland being dragged out of the European Union, but that Scotland would become poorer and that we would be put quite deliberately at a competitive disadvantage compared with other parts of the UK.

Another of the hollow promises made by those advocating a no vote in 2014 was that the Scottish Parliament would be the world’s most powerfully devolved Parliament. However, from that day to this, the Scottish Parliament has been ignored, sidelined and disregarded. Tonight, that Parliament rejected the Prime Minister’s withdrawal deal by 92 to 29. I wonder what cognisance this Government will take of the opinion of the world’s most powerfully devolved Parliament. I suspect we already know the answer to that, but I sincerely urge the Government to take on board what the Scottish Parliament has said, because it is absolutely right. An escape route is being offered, and I urge the Government to take it. Despite the Prime Minister’s bluster, this is not a take it or leave it situation.

This whole Brexit process has been an embarrassing fiasco. Over the past two years, we have heard about a hard Brexit, a soft Brexit, and a blind Brexit. Well, after yesterday we are now in the realms of a burst-ba' Brexit. Regardless of how the fiasco is resolved, Scotland needs the full powers of an independent Parliament not just to stop and reverse this Brexit chaos, but to ensure that Scotland will never again be reduced to a passive bystander while things are done to it and for it by Governments and Prime Ministers whom the people of Scotland have overwhelmingly and consistently rejected.

19:49:00

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara).

I rise as one of the Brexit generation of politicians elected to this place because of the causes and consequences of Brexit. I now find myself, as a Member of this House, faced with a divided Parliament and a divided country embroiled in a constitutional crisis not previously seen in our history, and I am being asked to use my vote on behalf of my constituents to make this great country of ours poorer and weaker in the world. Understandably, in that context, many people look to us with bemusement, questioning our ability as elected politicians to lead and to serve.

Regardless of whether one voted to leave or stay in the European Union, we do not have what we were promised. The Prime Minister's proposals are worse than our current position, and they mean that Brexit will dominate the political agenda for many years to come. Leave voters were promised £350 million a week for the NHS. Instead, we have European doctors and nurses leaving us and Government risk assessments resulting in the stockpiling of medicines. Leave voters were promised that the UK could go it alone, with new trade deals around the world. Instead, we have heard the United States say it is not that interested, and we have the prospect of a transition period—which we may never get out of—that will make us unable to conclude trade deals until 2021 at the earliest.

Leave voters were promised that we would take back control of our laws. Instead, the Prime Minister's proposals lock us into European regulations without the UK having a meaningful say. Unsurprisingly, this confirms that we have more power and more influence as a member of the European Union. We do not have what we were promised. Our current position is far better, and we will be locked into a debate on Brexit for the next decade.

Britain is a powerful nation. We are one of the largest and most sophisticated economies in the world, and we should be proud of our status and of the benefits it brings to the British people. In contrast, the Prime Minister's proposals are a humiliation.

The majority of my constituents in Bristol North West voted to remain and, based on my extensive engagement with them, I know they continue to want to do so. Whether for advanced manufacturing jobs in aerospace and automotive industry across north Bristol, for NHS jobs at Southmead Hospital, for research jobs at our two universities or for warehousing and logistics jobs reliant on import and export in and around the port at Avonmouth, our current position as a member of the European Union is far stronger than any other option on the table.

I did not stand to be the Member of Parliament for my home constituency, where I was born and raised, only to come here to vote to make my constituents poorer. Whether I am an MP for a short time or for a long time, as a millennial and as the father of a daughter who turns one today, I will be left to deal with the mess left behind by this incompetent Government long after they leave the Treasury Bench.

In the face of the inevitable rejection of the Prime Minister's proposals, I support the call for a people's vote. All of us, regardless of whether we voted to stay or to leave, now know what leaving the EU means. I did not know when I voted to remain, and nor did people who voted to leave. New facts have emerged. It is not patronising to say to people that they have the right to change their mind now they know what leaving the EU means—a basis for the rules on which we leave and a wish list for the future. It is not undemocratic to provide more democracy by going back to the people. It is the right of the British people to have the final say on whether we leave on the Prime Minister's proposed basis or stay in the European Union.

Securing a people's vote is not the end, regardless of whether the outcome is to leave or stay. We now know loud and clear that the country is divided, driven apart by an increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots, between the cities and the towns, between the south and the north, between the old and the young and between the rich and the poor and struggling, characterised by differences in access to education, in the ability to rent or own a secure home, in the reliance on struggling public services and in the despair that comes from flatlining wages and a fear that our children are being raised in a country in decline.

Leaving the European Union will not fix these woes, and neither will remaining, unless we reform both the EU and Britain. As politicians, it is our job to step up to meet that cry for change and put forward a radical programme of reforms that shows we can be on the up once again. As politicians, we must not pander to the politics of the easy answer, as we have seen in this Brexit campaign. Instead we must be honest about the significant challenges facing our country in a fast-changing world. We must embrace the opportunity and the power of patriotism to drive our great nation forward, and discard the destructive desire of national populism to secure power for power's sake.

This country of ours feels as though it is coming to the end of its current chapter. In a proudly sovereign Parliament, at the centre of a strong and successful United Kingdom, we have a choice to make about what comes next. We are a proudly sovereign Parliament, with our sovereignty derived from the British people, which gives us the right to go back to them to check and ask for further instruction. I truly hope that from the ashes of Brexit, whatever that will mean, we choose a future of hope and possibility, anchored in the reality of the world that we find ourselves in, and not another chapter of self-inflicted, populist decline.

19:56:00

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate and it is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones). Like other hon. Members here tonight, I am very concerned about the Government's proposals, and the serious implications for our country and for the local community in my constituency. The negotiations have produced a deeply flawed draft agreement, and I am very concerned about how our relationship with other European countries could develop. I firmly believe the proposals are against the national interest, and could damage our economy and harm local communities across this country.

Other Members have made clear and telling points about the weakness of the UK's position should these proposals be agreed. I want to associate myself with the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), and I commend the speeches made by the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker). I do not accept the Government's assertion that we either have to accept the proposed deal or have no deal, and I am pressing for a much closer and more sensible relationship

with the EU. The United Kingdom would simply be in a dreadful position if it were to sign up to the Government's Brexit deal, yet, they are still seeking to foist this deal on our country. That cannot be right, which is why I will vote against the deal, and I urge other Members here tonight to do the same.

I turn now to the substance of today's debate, as I want to speak about the serious impact of the Government's proposals on my constituency, particularly with regard to immigration. Families are suffering real stress and hardship because of the Government's policy. Thousands of local residents are from the EU and many families in our area include both British and EU citizens. Imagine the worry and the stress they have suffered during the past two years and let us consider what they are suffering now. The Government's failed negotiation and lack of a plan for the future have led to families facing enormous uncertainty. Ministers have refused to accept Labour's alternative, which would offer clarity and certainty to both EU residents in the UK and British citizens in Europe, who are sometimes forgotten.

Businesses and public services also need clarity and certainty, and they have been badly let down by the Government. My constituents in Reading and Woodley are at risk of being badly affected by a shortage of skilled workers caused by the failure of this Government's policies. The risk to our NHS, in particular, is clear. GPs, our hospital and other services are already under severe pressure: they face increased demand from a growing and ageing population, insufficient funding and the additional problems of high housing costs, which make it harder for medical staff to afford to live in our area. Our local NHS is particularly vulnerable to a loss of staff from the EU, as a large number of EU citizens work in the local health service. EU staff make up just 5% of the total NHS workforce, but the proportion is much higher in my constituency: as many as 12.8% of employees at the Royal Berkshire Hospital are from the EU—two and a half times the proportion in the NHS as a whole.

The deal also risks inflicting serious damage on our local economy. As many may know, Reading is home to a number of IT and telecoms businesses. These international firms are major employers that create a significant benefit to our local economy and, indeed, to the wider area across the south of England and west London. Many have their Europe, middle east and Africa head offices in the Thames valley, and they are there partly because of the access to the EU and the wider pool of skilled staff. Many of these businesses hire skilled staff from the EU precisely because the two-tier visa system for non-EU staff is too expensive and complicated to navigate. There are real concerns that if they cannot bring teams together quickly because of immigration rules or cannot move staff immediately because of visa requirements, there is a serious risk that businesses could away from the UK.

Reading is also home to a number of tech start-ups. These small and medium-sized enterprises drive innovation and add immense value to the local and national economy. Many such small companies are run or were started by EU nationals, as well as by UK nationals. They may well have come to our area precisely because of that international outlook. They contribute their knowledge, entrepreneurship and hard work, and they are deeply concerned about the uncertainty over Brexit, which exposes their businesses to significant and unnecessary risk. Yet despite all the evidence from my area and throughout the country, the Government have quite simply failed to set out sensible plans for immigration.

The Home Secretary told the Home Affairs Committee that the White Paper on immigration would be published in December. We heard Members asking earlier which December that would be. He now says that it will be published "soon" and that it is "unlikely" that Members will see it before the meaningful vote next week. On top of that, the political declaration includes less than a page on

the future immigration policy. It commits the Government to ending free movement but fails to include a plan for what will replace it. The Government have quite simply failed to deliver on their promises on immigration. They have failed on immigration, just as they have failed to deliver a Brexit deal that protects jobs, workplace rights and frictionless trade for UK businesses. This simply is not acceptable. Members from all parties have a right to know what the new immigration system will look like before we cast our votes next week.

I have never accepted that it is a choice between the Prime Minister's failed deal and no deal. No Government have the right to plunge the country into chaos as a result of their own failure.

20:02:00

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)

It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda), who spoke so eloquently about the fears and worries of his constituents. Many of my constituents have told me of the same challenges and fears that they will face if Brexit goes ahead.

I campaigned to remain in the EU and my constituency voted to remain. I voted against triggering article 50, because I felt that there was so much work to be done to establish exactly what Brexit would mean to this country, knowing that the promises given to leave voters were untruths and, as we well know, are undeliverable. There was no mention by leave campaigners of the conflict between Brexit and retaining the Good Friday agreement, and there was nothing about the impact of leaving the EU on our rights at work or on environmental and consumer standards. Nor was there anything about the impact of losing the significant benefits from the UK's full membership of and influence in bodies such as the European Medicines Agency, the European Aviation Safety Agency and so many more.

Twenty-eight months later, we have got no further than documents containing broad principles with massive gaps. It is not a deal, just a framework. I will not vote for such a pile of vagueness, and I certainly will not vote for no deal, either.

The lack of the long-awaited immigration white paper is just one of many legislative gaps among the issues on which we are expected to vote next Tuesday. EU migrants are integral members of our society and are vital to our economy. For those here now and for those who may wish to come to the UK in future, the Prime Minister's deal offers nothing concrete on which they can plan their future lives. Thousands of my constituents are citizens of other EU countries. They work as carers and construction workers; they work for the NHS, and for the massive hospitality sector and many other bodies across both the public and the private sectors.

This morning, I met my constituent, Anette, a German national, who has been here for 30 years. She is not only married to a UK national, but a mother of UK nationals. She is apoplectic about being accused of jumping the queue, especially given what she has contributed to the UK not only in taxes, as a higher rate taxpayer, but as someone who has spent her professional working life in teams of highly skilled nationals of many EU countries, improving services, providing millions of pounds of benefits and international prestige to our public and private sectors.

What about those whose future plans are based on freedom of movement? There are many reasons why young people voted so strongly for remain, and they include the freedom to work, study, live and love anywhere in Europe. For young people, whether or not they choose to travel, remaining in the EU is the key to prosperity in their future. Given the rising costs and lower wages that my children's generation already face, I am not prepared to commit their future to the recession that the

Government's own analysis clearly predicts. Furthermore, if another referendum were held now, another 1.8 million young people—and that is the figure as of today—have now reached voting age and they want a say in their future. I have no doubt that they will follow the voting preference of the 18-year-olds in June 2016.

On the economy and jobs, there is not a business or a sector that will not be worse off if the UK leaves the EU, and at least the Government now have the grace to accept that. Many of my constituents work in the broadcasting and audio-visual sector across west London. The UK is Europe's leading international broadcasting hub, home to more cross-border channels than any other EU country. West London has grown as a hub for international broadcasting, taking advantage not only of the skills base, but of the unique range of languages spoken in London, which has come about partly through the EU's freedom of movement.

The EU is setting up a digital single market because of the importance of frictionless movement, trade and similar regulations, but the country of origin rule means that, to broadcast into EU countries, a broadcaster needs to be based in an EU country. Brexit means that the growth in the sector will be killed stone dead and that the UK's competitive edge will be lost. Companies such as Discovery, which is based in my constituency, have already announced plans to leave the UK. They cannot wait for the uncertainty of the next two years, and, like other companies, are gradually moving investment, and staff. There is nothing in either the withdrawal agreement or the political declaration to give any comfort to this major and growing sector and, as other Members have said in this Chamber yesterday and today and will continue to say over the next few days, the same is true for many other sectors, which are important to all our constituents.

In closing, what was promised in 2016 by the leave campaign cannot be delivered, and even Cabinet Ministers now admit that. This deal is much, much worse than the deal that we already have, which is in the EU as a full voting and influential member of all the many European arrangements and organisations that make for stability, and with the benefit of being a full player in the largest economic bloc in the world. With no majority in this House for the Prime Minister's deal, or for no deal, the only option is to put the vote back to the people with all the implications of each option clearly set out.

20:26:00

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op)

Although I have spoken in more than 100 debates since I entered this House, none has been as important as this one, which will guide the future of this country for generations to come.

Many hon. Members have covered the security implications, but it is worth reflecting on the fact that the agreement makes no mention of Europol and says that the UK would be locked out of EU tools, including the Schengen Information System, European Arrest Warrant and the European Criminal Records Information System when the transition period ends.

The Police Federation, which represents 120,000 rank-and-file officers, said it has “no idea what the policing landscape will look like post 29 March 2019.”

This in and of itself is enough to reject the agreement as presented to us.

The Prime Minister's deal merely pushes back decisions into the transition and does not even answer what sort of Brexit we will get, and the security arrangements are merely the tip of a Titanic iceberg.

After the Prime Minister gave her statement to the House on 22 November, she said that the post-transition options for the future relationship with the EU were a spectrum. I asked the Prime Minister what her spectrum was and her response was,

“there is a balance between checks and controls and the acceptance of rules and regulations.”

Are any of us any clearer on the Prime Minister’s spectrum? No, I can see that we are not.

I believe we have five basic options: a no-deal Brexit; the Prime Minister’s withdrawal agreement; a renegotiation of the withdrawal deal; membership of the European Free Trade Association and the customs union, or the so-called Norway-plus arrangement; and remaining in the EU.

Everyone understands no deal, in that we leave over 70 international trade deals and the all-Ireland electricity market ceases, with the potential to completely disrupt Northern Ireland’s power supply. The chaos around customs checks puts all goods coming into the country at risk, including food, medicines, fuel and machine parts. The Government’s technical notices make for grim reading, but after passing the amendment of the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve)—my former MP, in fact—last night, we are on the road to asserting the will of the House and avoiding a no-deal Brexit.

The Prime Minister’s deal means no immediate cliff edge. Instead, we would leave the EU into a transition period of at least 21 months when we stay would within and would need to update all EU rights and regulations. But what then? Well, the Prime Minister’s non-answer tells us all we need to know. The Government would negotiate a free trade deal that is

“a balance between checks and controls and the acceptance of rules and regulations.”—[Official Report, 22 November 2018; Vol. 649, c. 1131.]

Considering this is all the Government have managed in the last 20 months, I cannot write them a blank cheque. It might not even be a cheque made out to the current Prime Minister, so I cannot and will not support the EU withdrawal agreement when it comes before Parliament next Tuesday.

I have consistently said that I cannot support any option that does not protect jobs by preserving tariff-free, barrier-free, frictionless trade with the rest of Europe. Any option should retain current employment and consumer rights and environmental standards, and at least keep pace with Europe in the future. There should also be no hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, Gibraltar and Spain, and our sovereign territory on Cyprus and the Republic of Cyprus. Let us remember that the single market accounts for 25% of global GDP and represents Britain’s biggest trading partner. I believe that only the latter three options I outlined earlier can achieve this.

Yesterday we saw the Government lose three votes including, historically, on the contempt motion. The confidence is visibly draining from the Government, whose majority has always been built on a billion promises. If the Prime Minister cannot pass this “take it or leave it” deal, this House will call time on her. There is an opportunity for another Government to negotiate a deal built on adopting higher regulatory, environmental and labour standards. If we have higher standards and regulatory alignment, our deal will look totally different from the second-rate agreement that we have been asked to vote on.

For us to enjoy the same access rights and benefits of the European single market without having to negotiate a whole new treaty, we could apply for membership of the European Free Trade

Association and be part of the European economic area. This could be completed in a fairly short space time. However, there is no customs union for EFTA members. If we wanted seamless trade and no tariffs for goods originating outside the UK but being sold into the EU, we would need a new customs union. Given that it is not possible to be both in EFTA and the customs union, we would secure a derogation from the EFTA convention in order to facilitate the new EU-UK customs union. This honours the question in the referendum, which simply said:

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”

Well, we will not be a member of the European Union if we are a member of EFTA.

Finally, we could simply remain in the EU. Consider all that we have learnt since 24 June 2016. We have learnt that negotiating a deal that is better than the one we have now is effectively impossible; that the queue of countries in Whitehall to ask for trade deals has been oddly missing; and that Vote Leave broke electoral law, overspending by hundreds of thousands of pounds, with Cambridge Analytica employees admitting they used illegal data harvesting techniques. Considering all that, should not people be given the chance to think again?

If there was another vote on whether to stay or leave, I would vote to remain, just as I did in 2016, because there is no better deal for the United Kingdom. I will vote to reject this agreement. If there is an opportunity to vote to renegotiate, join EFTA or have another vote on EU membership in the parliamentary procedures that we are going to undertake after we inevitably vote down the Prime Minister’s withdrawal agreement, I will vote for any and all of these. I will not vote for the Prime Minister’s blank cheque withdrawal agreement, and I will oppose a no-deal Brexit with every fibre of my being.

20:13:00

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)

During the referendum, I was a reluctant remainderer. I appreciated that our relationship with the EU was not perfect. I acknowledged that many of us would like to see changes. Like so many people, I felt that the EU was often a remote and arrogant bureaucracy.

But there is no doubt in my mind that the deal brought back by the Prime Minister is not what was promised to those who voted to leave. It means not taking back sovereignty but giving more of it away, desperately accepting rules that we have no control over in order to cling on to access to our largest trading partner for goods, and to keep our countries together, while completely ignoring services, which make up 80% of our capital’s economy. Why should someone in Liverpool, Newcastle or Sunderland care about London’s economy? Because right now, London and the south-east are the only regions that generate more taxes than they spend, so if London gets hit, so do the hospitals, schools and services of our other great cities. Perhaps it should not be that way, but it is.

The idea that we can make ourselves smaller as globalisation becomes faster and stronger, while comforting, is unlikely to be successful. As a block of 28 nation states standing together against the likes of Google, Facebook and Amazon, we are a far more effective bulwark against the worst excesses of these amazing global companies who can have extraordinarily negative impacts on some of the most vulnerable towns and people. I have been amazed by the politicians and commentators who blithely suggest that our economy taking a hit would be a price worth paying. We all know that the people who get hit first are always the poorest. I do not believe that anybody voted to make us poorer, I do not believe that anybody voted for us to debate for two and a half

years and choose a worse deal than the one that we currently have, and I certainly do not believe that anybody voted to see our country opt for a monumental act of self-harm.

We have thousands of people sleeping rough on our streets—the number is higher now than at any point under this Government. We have over 130,000 children who will wake up trapped in unsuitable temporary accommodation on Christmas morning. At my local A&E, we already have patients queuing out of the door, indicating that last year's winter crisis will be but a preface to the problems that lie ahead this year. Yet, meanwhile, here we are still debating the level of uncertainty and destruction that we should plunge our economy and our country into. Take the plans to reopen the Wilson Hospital in my constituency, halted after the funders pulled out due to Brexit's economic uncertainty. Why would we choose to give ourselves self-inflicted wounds costing billions of pounds when we still have the chance to say no?

So what is the alternative? Looking back to 2016, I know so much more about the impact of leaving the European Union than I did then. I suspect that is true for all of us. We gave the responsibility for deciding on whether we should leave the EU to the people of this country, and now we know the terms of the deal on the table, those same people deserve to have their say. Now that the practical consequences of Brexit are there for all to see, almost two thirds of my constituents support a vote on the deal. The costs and complexities are clearer now than at any stage during the referendum, and it is evident that there is no majority in Parliament for this deal, because the one thing that unites both sides of the debate is that nobody voted for the deal that is on the table. Parliament is in gridlock, but there is a clear solution: let the people decide.

20:18:00

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)

I like to think, Mr Speaker, that you have been employing the Emery effect tonight by keeping me on the bench so that I can come on and make a late impact. Thank you for that.

It is not often that I see one of the Scots Tories speaking and think of an American President, but I did tonight, as I was reminded during the rather tortured contribution by the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), who is no longer in his place, of the quote by George Bush, who said:

“I have my opinions, strong opinions, but I don't always agree with them.”

I think I am justified in saying that it would be right to be greatly concerned by the deal that is on offer. It is a democratic outrage that Scotland is being dragged out of the EU against the people's vote in Scotland, where 62% of people, in all 32 local authority areas, voted to remain. As we have heard, all the parties in the Scottish Parliament, with the exception of the Tories, voted 92 to 29 tonight to reject the deal on offer.

I am greatly concerned by what my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) described as “economic illiteracy”. He pointed out that this is already costing £600 per person per year. Scottish Government analysis shows that the deal will make Scotland £9 billion worse off by 2030. That is £1,600 per person per year. Even the Chancellor has admitted that that will make our economy smaller.

I am right to be concerned by those things, but the thing that worries me most is what we are becoming and, as we have heard from many Members tonight, the message that is sent out about what we feel about people in other countries. I have had the great honour of performing an unpaid

role as honorary consul to Romania since 2011, both unofficially and officially. The Romanians who come to work in the highlands and islands are fantastic people. They have all made a genuine contribution to our communities and have slotted in as friends and neighbours and are part of the fabric of our communities. I can say the same for the Poles, the French, the Germans, and all the EU nationals who have contributed to the highland economy.

Brexit does not only have consequences for business, the economy and communities. It affects each of us as individuals and our very identities. The Scottish Government's national outcomes state:

“Scotland's national and cultural identity is defined by our sense of place, sense of history and sense of self. It is defined by what it means to be Scottish; to live in a modern Scotland; to have an affinity to Scotland; and to be able to participate in Scottish society. A flourishing economy and society depend on ambition and self-confidence in Scotland and on Scotland's effective integration into the European and global economy. Our international reputation will influence the extent to which people see Scotland as a great place in which to live, learn, visit, work, do business and invest. A good quality of life and a strong, fair and inclusive national identity are important if Scotland is to prosper and if we are to achieve sustainable economic growth.”

That is the kind of Scotland I want to live in.

Our European identity and shared EU values are at the heart of this. Despite the overwhelming vote to remain in Scotland, European Scots face not only the economic and social impacts of Brexit, but they face losing their European identity. There was a nice piece in the Sunday Herald in 2016 that said:

“Scotland has been an outward looking European nation since the late middle ages. From the 16th century, Scots merchants, academics and soldiers spread far and wide in the continent establishing communities in countries like Poland, Sweden and the Low Countries.”

Our bond and connection with European nations is deep, strong and long-lasting.

In the highlands, we have long had a problem with emigration, not immigration. Our deepened relationship with the EU has presented an opportunity for us to welcome EU nationals to our region, a great many of whom have settled in the area and contributed to our economy. The UK Government's obsession with unrealistic and counterproductive one-size-fits-all net migration targets overlooks the incredible value of migrant people to our isles and the different economic needs of the highlands and islands, as well as those of Scotland as a whole. Over the next 10 years, 90% of Scotland's population growth is projected to come from migration, which is especially vital for the highlands.

I do not have as much time as I would like to explain in depth the importance of EU nationals to the highland economy and of our people who go across to other EU nations to live, work and contribute. It is, quite simply, the fabric of what we do, and this deal or any no-deal scenario that might be proffered by the Prime Minister will do nothing—absolutely nothing—for the people of Scotland, wherever they have come from. I will be absolutely proud to be with my colleagues in voting down such a deal when it comes before this House. I will say, finally, that the actions of this UK Government in, once again, ignoring Scotland, ignoring its people and ignoring its Parliament only make the case for the independence of Scotland much stronger.

20:25:00

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)

One of the saddest things to have come out of the Brexit referendum vote on 23 June 2016 has been the rise in racism, and the fear and uncertainty felt by EU citizens living in the UK and also by those from non-EU countries living here. I have heard from my constituents in Enfield, Southgate who are EU nationals, married to UK citizens, working in UK institutions, paying taxes in the UK and making a positive contribution to our society that they are now seriously worried about their future, fearing that their family will be torn apart by the confusion caused by the Government's position on EU citizens living and working in the UK.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op)

Does my hon. Friend agree that this is also having a huge impact on children? I recently met such children at a primary school, and their parents are unsure about their future, let alone about where their children will be going to school.

Bambos Charalambous

My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. That is something I have noticed from speaking to children—I am a governor of two schools—and that factor has also been raised with me.

Although the Government's proposed settlement scheme may help some of my EU constituents living in Enfield, Southgate, the withdrawal agreement does not guarantee that the rights of EU citizens living in the UK and of UK citizens living in EU countries will be protected. If my previous and current experience of the Home Office is anything to go by, I have no confidence that the Home Office will be able to cope with the 5 million or so settled status applications that it will have to process. The Home Office is struggling even to cope with some of the Windrush claims, so how it will cope with settled status applications is anyone's guess.

It is a shame that the Government have not produced their immigration White Paper yet. We are being asked to approve this deal blindly, when immigration was one of the reasons why people voted to leave. The truth is that for years the Government have been trying to show that they are tough on immigration. However, rather than have an honest debate about it, they have decided, just to look good, to kowtow to every knee-jerk reaction to every negative news story about immigration.

The latest net migration statistics, out last week, show that the number of EU migrants coming to the UK was 74,000, whereas the number of non-EU migrants was 248,000. It seems that the Government have been unable to control migration since they promised to do so when they came into power in 2010.

We need a sensible debate about migration to this country. This country needs migrants. On 1 January 2018, the UK was ranked 153rd in the world for percentage population growth, with a rate of just 0.52%. Considering that we are all living longer and that population growth in the UK is stagnating, we need migrants to keep the NHS running, work in our care industry, work in the hospitality sector, collect the crops and package the produce from our farms.

We live in a global world where collaboration is part of everyday working life. In May, I visited the Institute of Cancer Research, where I met scientists, researchers and doctors from all over the world who are all working together to help develop a cure for different types of cancer, trying to discover the relationship between lifestyle choices and causes, and looking at genetic cell mutations and how they can be prevented. All this collaboration is done for our benefit, and the idea that barriers would be put up to restrict this good work is just madness.

Collaboration on a global level takes place in virtually every sector, whether it is finance, advertising, creative industries, the nuclear sector or even the creative industries. Many orchestras, artists and performers work with international colleagues, and they need to be able to do so if they are to ensure that we have the very best cultural enrichment and that it is shared across the world.

My parents were immigrants. They came to the UK from Cyprus in the 1960s. They worked hard and made a positive contribution. A significant number of hon. Members who have a claim to immigrant heritage have similar stories to tell. We should celebrate the contribution of immigrants to UK life. It makes us all the richer, as I have outlined above.

I have heard stories of non-UK workers being picked up in vans on street corners to go to work on building sites and being paid a fraction of the minimum wage, thus undercutting what UK workers would be paid. Let us go after those using such sharp employment practices, and make sure that no one can be paid less than the minimum wage, and that people's employment rights and health and safety at work are protected.

The Prime Minister described the withdrawal agreement as taking back control of our borders. Well, the current immigration figures show that nothing of the sort is happening right now. The Prime Minister also said that the UK's immigration policy will be based on the skills and talents that someone has to offer. That fails to take account of the EU workers who provide seasonal unskilled labour in the agriculture and hospitality sectors, to name but two. Worse, we have yet to see the draft immigration White Paper. The withdrawal agreement makes us worse off. It is not good for jobs and the economy. I will vote to reject the deal on Tuesday.

20:30:00

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)

This has been an excellent debate covering a range of vital and urgent issues. I am not going to repeat the many compelling points made by the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) in her speech. I cannot do adequate justice to all the other 48 contributions that have been made, some of which I missed. I am told, however, that there was a typically brilliant speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David).

In the time I have available, let me highlight those contributions which I believe best sum up why the Prime Minister's proposed Brexit deal would leave us less secure as a country and would not deliver the fair rules for migration that we need—two out of Labour's six tests failed in one debate. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, said, we are being asked to make this decision without even seeing the immigration White Paper we were promised. We therefore have no detailed idea of what the new migration rules will say or how they will work in practice. She also said that we are being asked to support a political agreement that is entirely silent on our future access to the SIS II database and will leave our police and security services less well able to protect the public than they are at present. As the former universities Minister, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), pointed out, if we are being cut out of the Galileo database even while the agreement is being discussed, what hope do we have of negotiating access to other vital databases once the agreement has been signed?

We also heard an important contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), who talked about his German lessons at school and the lessons from history that show that our place in the world is not strengthened but diminished when we cut ourselves off

from Europe—a point also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma). From the Chair of the Health Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), we heard about the grave consequences of the dangers of this deal, and even worse of no deal, for the national health service, both for medical supplies and for medical staff. That is something that the Foreign Secretary should understand better than anyone, because that is what he used to say when campaigning for remain.

We were reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) not just that EU co-operation and networks help to keep our country safe from crime and terrorism, but that the Prime Minister personally fought to keep our part in them when she was Home Secretary. Now, however, she cannot guarantee that they will continue. My hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff North and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) both rightly said—I agree with them—that far from helping to maintain Europe’s leadership on climate change, which is the single biggest threat to the world’s long-term security, this political agreement cannot even guarantee that we will continue to agree a common position in future international negotiations. Indeed, let us note that it used to be one of the warnings against a no-deal Brexit that Britain could lose access to the EU emissions trading scheme. However, even this supposed deal does not guarantee that continued access, and says only that the parties should “consider” co-operation—just one of many foreign policy sections of the document where clear, existing agreements on co-operation have been replaced by vague, loose aspirations.

What this debate and all the many contributions have laid bare is that on the first duty of every Government—the duty to protect the safety and security of their citizens—the Prime Minister’s deal fails. I hope that when the Foreign Secretary speaks in a moment, he will address the points that I have mentioned: access to vital security databases—

John Redwood

Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Emily Thornberry

No, I have been asked not to take interventions at this stage of the evening.

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan)

By whom?

Emily Thornberry

We have had an opportunity over the last eight hours for everyone to have—[Interruption.] Mr Duncan, please calm down. I have been asked not to take interventions at this stage and I am not going to—

Sir Alan Duncan

By whom?

Emily Thornberry

When the right hon. Gentleman has had a chance to calm down, perhaps I can continue. What this debate and all the many contributions have laid bare is that on the first duty of every Government—the duty to protect the safety and security of their citizens—the Prime Minister’s deal fails. I hope that when the Foreign Secretary speaks in a moment, he will address those points that I have mentioned: access to vital security databases; our future international co-operation with the EU; our

ability to tackle terrorism and organised crime; our place in the world; our shared fight against climate change; and even the future of our NHS.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will answer one other very specific question that goes to the heart of his responsibilities as Foreign Secretary. He was proud to announce yesterday the new embassy that his Department is opening in the Maldives, one of 12 new posts due to be opened by the Government over the next two years. However, even after those new openings, there will still be 16 other countries around the world where Britain has no direct consular representation but where other EU countries do. These countries have a combined population of 72 million people, spread across Asia, Latin America and Africa, including 10 past and present members of the UN Security Council. These are countries where up until this point, thanks to the common foreign and security policy, any British citizen visiting, working or living there who found themselves in difficulty and could not look to a British embassy for help had the right to go to other EU embassies based there and ask for consular support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) asked the Government last week what provision was being made in the Prime Minister's proposed deal to continue those arrangements after we leave the EU. The answer was none. In fact, it is worse than that—the answer was that British citizens who are arrested in those countries or who are affected by a hurricane or an earthquake could no longer ask the French or Spanish embassies to help, but they could “phone the Foreign Office switchboard.” If we needed any more evidence of how half-baked, hurried through and totally botched the Prime Minister's deal is and how reliant it is on vague future aspirations of co-operation, it is the fact that the Government have not even bothered to think about what it means for British citizens being left without consular support in dangerous situations. It is the very definition of making the British people, whom it is our first duty to protect, less safe and less secure.

That is not the only loss of security that I hope the Foreign Secretary will address in his closing speech. If the first duty of the Government is to protect the physical security of their citizens, their second duty is surely to protect the economic security of the nation, which was a point well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham). What we have learned with this Foreign Secretary is that he is very willing, quite often, to say one thing about the economic impact of Brexit behind the closed doors of Downing Street and another when he is in the television studios or standing at the Dispatch Box. When he is trying to sell this deal to Parliament tonight, I hope that he will clear up some of the disparities between what he says publicly and what he says privately.

I have three questions for him to that end. In the television studios, he says that this is the best deal for Britain and we can look forward to a glorious era, where

“we become an independent sovereign power, negotiating our own trade deals”

around the world. Around the Cabinet table, presumably informed by the Attorney General's advice, he says the opposite—that this deal will leave us in what he calls a “Turkey trap”, stuck in an exclusive trading agreement with the EU, but unable to influence any of its decisions and unable to negotiate our own deals. Will he tell us tonight what he really thinks? ?

Secondly, in the television studios, when asked to talk about the backstop, the Foreign Secretary says it simply will not happen. He says:

“Britain will be an independent nation...it is in black and white. That is the intention of the EU”.

But round the Cabinet table, he says the opposite. The backstop will become a “frontstop”, he says. “As soon as the deal is signed,” he says, “the EU will have what they want”. “They will block any progress,” he says, “on the final new trading agreement, and will turn the backstop into the only available outcome.” Will he tell us tonight what he really thinks?

Thirdly and finally, in the television studios, the Foreign Secretary says:

“We will not be significantly worse off”

as a result the Prime Minister’s deal, but did he not used to say the exact opposite around the Cabinet table, especially about the impact on the NHS, when he warned of the need to avoid a hard Brexit?

I hate to say it, but I have to agree with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury’s remarks over lunch on Monday. She said that the Foreign Secretary was “so charming” but that there was “no consistency”, and she was absolutely right. Even more damning, however, was her explanation for the inconsistency. Excuse me, Mr Speaker, for using the Foreign Secretary’s name, but I am quoting his Cabinet colleague. “Hunt”, she says, “is all about the game-playing”. Doesn’t that sum it all up?

We have a Tory Cabinet obsessed with their own internal power games and fighting like ferrets in a sack to succeed their lame duck leader, with a Foreign Secretary who, according to his own Cabinet colleague and the evidence of this debate, has been more interested in playing leadership games than in making sure that this political agreement can maintain our future foreign policy co-operation with the EU and protect the security of British citizens, whether at home or abroad. That is the kind of Front Bench we see before us today. In the light of their complete failure of leadership and their total—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker

Order. No, it’s not boring to me. Sir Alan, you are normally a figure of dignity in one way or another. You are a little over-excitable. Calm yourself. You really need to get a grip. You are not only a knight, but a KCMG and a figure of enormous celebrity in the life of the nation. I know that you do not underestimate all that, so a tad of dignity would be greatly appreciated.

Emily Thornberry

That is the kind of Front Bench we see before us, and in the light of their complete failure of leadership and their total failure to deliver a new set of fair rules on immigration and to protect our country’s security, it is absolutely no wonder that this House is only a week away from rejecting their dismal Brexit deal and already holds this dismal Government in total and utter contempt.

20:43:00

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt)

I have seen off four shadow Health Secretaries and several shadow Culture Secretaries in my time, but I have to say that tonight, when I was called charming by the shadow Foreign Secretary, I nearly blushed. I thank her for the compliment, and I will assume that she could not possibly have meant the other less gracious things she said about me. I thank her for this one happy moment in my Dispatch Box career.

We have had a good debate today on the implications of the Brexit deal. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. Unfortunately, I did not hear the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), but I heard that he made a particularly thoughtful speech about the dilemmas in everyone's mind and the conflicts of loyalty—to party, to Government, to country and, particularly, to voters who voted to leave the EU. We should not pretend that this is an easy decision for anyone.

I commend hon. Members in all parts of the House who emphasised the obligation that collectively rests upon all of us to fulfil the mandate of the referendum and take Britain out of the EU. I cannot mention every Member who spoke this afternoon, but I do want to mention my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) and my hon. Friends the Members for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), for Carlisle (John Stevenson), for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), for Poole (Sir Robert Syms) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), all of whom spoke with passion about how those who voted to leave the EU deserved respect for their views rather than indignation. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley spoke with particular passion about leave voters who felt that no one was listening to them. He said that if Parliament decided not to listen to them, that would be wholly dangerous.

Those sentiments were expressed not just by Conservative Members but by the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr Campbell), the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) and the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), who reminded us that their constituents voted by clear margins to leave the EU. There was common ground even with the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott)—I do not always say that—who said that we must honour and respect the referendum result. Let me emphasise that the fundamental aim of the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration is to make good the verdict of the referendum. That is why they have been painstakingly negotiated for the last two years.

We heard some passionate arguments for a second referendum from the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) and my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), among others. I sat in the Cabinet with my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney, and I always listened carefully to her many excellent contributions. In my last role, I learned also to listen carefully to the excellent contributions of my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes.

However, on this rare occasion, I found myself agreeing more with comments such as those of the hon. Member for Blyth Valley, who said that if we held a second referendum, his constituents would ask why we did not then hold a third and a fourth. They would do that for a simple reason. If we did hold another referendum and the result were reversed—if 48% of the country voted to leave and 52% voted to remain—there would be 48% who had voted twice in a row to leave the EU, and they would be incredibly angry. That is why my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon) was right to say that a second referendum would not settle the issue.

Anna McMorrin

What the Secretary of State is saying is not correct. It is not a question of rerunning the referendum that took place two years ago; it is a question of giving the decision back to the people, two years on, so that they can ask themselves, “Is this what we really want, now that the evidence is clear?”

Mr Hunt

I suggest to the hon. Lady that she should have conversations with the leave voters in her constituency, and ask them whether they agree with that view. I think that leave voters have a very simple message: they just want us to get on with it. We must ask ourselves whether it would truly

settle the issue in their minds were we to go back and ask people the same question again, or a similar question.

Wera Hobhouse

Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr Hunt

I will give way once more, and then, perhaps, make some progress.

Wera Hobhouse

Is the Secretary of State not neglecting the people who voted to remain in the European Union and who are not being listened to now? They are angry too.

Mr Hunt

I think it is a world first for me to praise the Liberal Democrats from the Dispatch Box, but they, at least, have been completely consistent from the start in saying that they want to reverse the result of the referendum. I am afraid that other Members have been hiding behind various devices, and saying that they do not want to reverse the result when they actually do. I think that, leave or remain, this is a moment when we have to remember that we are above all a democracy in this country, and it would be incredibly dangerous if we were not to listen to what people have asked us to do.

Sir Michael Fallon

Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Hunt

I will give way one last time, and then I will make some progress.

Sir Michael Fallon

My right hon. Friend has already said that.

Is the point not that, either way, the question is unlikely to be resolved decisively in any referendum that might command, say, 60% or 65% of the electorate, which the 1975 referendum, which I think my right hon. Friend is too young to remember, actually did?

Mr Hunt

I thank my right hon. Friend for his flattering comment about my age. I agree with him. It would not resolve the issue, but I think there is a danger that if the result were reversed, it would make the very same people who said that the political class—the political elite—was not listening to them even more convinced that that was the case.

The shadow Foreign Secretary talked about foreign affairs and security, and I want to touch on that briefly. My starting point is very simple: however profound, significant and important Brexit might be, it does not change the simple fact that no European country has done more for the defence and security of Europe than Britain, and that partnership long predates our membership of the EU. In 1940 this country rejected any thought of abandoning Europe, even at the risk of invasion and national ruin, and joined forces with the United States and other allies to launch the liberation of the continent in 1944. Then Britain and the US, with our European friends, strove to build a new world order based on rules and institutions rather than power and militarism, and every British Government regardless of party has acted in the spirit of that tradition—a Labour Government setting up NATO, Margaret Thatcher standing shoulder to shoulder with Ronald Reagan against the

Soviet threat. The EU, too, through its establishment of a rules-based order in continental Europe and the generous and far-sighted opening up to post-Soviet accession countries, has played a central role.

I particularly commend the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) for reminding us of the historical perspective, which is, in short, a partnership of shared values stretching across political and national divides, from left to right, across the Atlantic, including EU and non-EU members, which has kept the UK and Europe safe. The political declaration aims to enhance that partnership, and the task of putting that into practice will begin on the day the deal is agreed.

As European countries commit to that partnership going forward, so my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has shown by word and deed that Britain's commitment to the security and defence of Europe remains unconditional and immovable. Indeed, right now, in the middle of the Brexit debate, the British Army comprises the single biggest element of NATO's enhanced forward presence, safeguarding Poland and the Baltic states. That is why the declaration allows the closest relationship in foreign and security policy that the EU has ever had with a third country. Part III makes it clear that "where and when" our interests converge, Britain and the EU will be able to "combine efforts" to the

"greatest effect, including in times of crisis".

Here I can reassure the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), who worried about our country becoming isolated, that that is not going to happen. Where we agree with the EU, we can act together; where we disagree, we will be free to act independently or with others. But we will no longer be constrained by a lowest common denominator foreign policy.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary described earlier, Britain will be given unprecedented scope to co-operate with the EU to protect our citizens from terrorism and organised crime as we regain parliamentary control of our immigration policy. We had a number of important contributions on that point, including from the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) and the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, and I can reassure them that under the withdrawal agreement our law enforcement agencies will continue to use EU tools and databases throughout the transition period, including SIS II and ECRIS. Paragraph 87 of the declaration states that as the transition period concludes, the UK and the EU have agreed to continue to exchange information on wanted or missing persons and criminal records, and that our future relationship should include those capabilities.

Yvette Cooper
rose—

Mr Hunt

I sense an intervention coming; why did I think that might happen?

Yvette Cooper

What will the timetable be for the negotiation of a security treaty and its full ratification, and will it be completed within the transition period?

Mr Hunt

Because negotiations involve two parties, I cannot say when they will conclude, but it is the clear intention of both sides that they should conclude before the end of the transition period at the end of

2020. In summary, the future security partnership envisaged in the declaration would enable British and EU law enforcement agencies to share essential data, including passenger name records, fingerprints, DNA and vehicle registrations.

The right hon. Lady mentioned the arrest warrants issued for the alleged Salisbury murderers, an issue of close interest to me as Foreign Secretary. I can reassure her that as part of the future security partnership we have agreed to swift and effective arrangements enabling the UK and member states to surrender suspected and convicted persons efficiently and expeditiously.

Many hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) and for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves), spoke passionately about the contribution made by Poles and other EU nationals to their constituencies. I entirely share those sentiments, as do my constituents in South West Surrey. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made it clear how this country will treat the millions of EU citizens who live among us with decency and generosity in all circumstances. I hope and believe that our neighbours will act in the same spirit towards Britons who reside in the EU.

Drew Hendry

Does the Foreign Secretary believe that it is treating people with fairness, dignity and respect to charge them for maintaining their status here? Does he honestly believe that that is the right kind of signal to send out to the people he says are so valued?

Mr Hunt

We make charges to cover administrative costs, just as EU countries make charges for the administrative costs that our citizens incur when in their countries. What is really significant when it comes to generosity is the fact that we have made this offer unconditionally. We made it before any reciprocal offer was made by EU countries in return. That is a sign of how much we value the extraordinarily important contribution that these people make to our national life.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), in a very dignified speech, raised the issue of Galileo. I regret that the EU has unwisely made it impossible for Britain to remain a full partner of the Galileo satellite communication system. Carl Bildt, the former Prime Minister of Sweden, has described the EU's behaviour on this as

“strategic folly of the first order”.

So we will develop a plan for a sovereign system of our own, because when the EU rejects co-operation, the United Kingdom is perfectly big and confident enough to develop our own alternatives. But if this House rejects the declaration and the withdrawal agreement and we leave the EU without a deal, our security co-operation with our closest neighbours will be put at risk. The reason is that, in a no-deal situation, such co-operation would depend not on any agreement but on good will, and that could well be missing. At a time when threats are evolving and cross-border collaboration has never been more important, our law enforcement agencies would not have the guaranteed channels that they currently have for exchanging essential information with our EU neighbours.

Dr Wollaston

Does the Secretary of State agree, however, that another option would be to extend article 50, and that it is incorrect to present the House with a false choice in which we would automatically fall out on 29 March?

Mr Hunt

I had a conversation with my hon. Friend earlier this evening about how lively things are in her constituency. I think that if any of us asked our own constituents whether the right solution to the dilemmas we face would be to extend the agony by postponing the article 50 due date, they would be absolutely horrified. They want to get this over with. They want to get it resolved.

I mentioned the risks of a no-deal situation to our security, which were recognised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and my hon. Friends the Members for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis). They all alluded to that issue.

In conclusion, when it comes to defence and security, irrespective of our membership of the EU, the lesson of history is clear. When Britain and Europe stand together against common foes, our combined strength deters our adversaries and keeps the peace. If we did not do that, our common security would be placed at risk in a way that would be wholly unnecessary. So let us grasp this opportunity for a new and different partnership, post Brexit, based on the essential truth that British and European security are indivisible and, whether inside or outside the legal structures of the EU, our common interests are best served by working together to protect the values we all cherish.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Jeremy Quin.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow (Order, 4 December).