

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the...



Time to roll back the amendments and adopt original Withdrawal Bill

Opinion



By David Lidington

This week, when the EU Withdrawal Bill returns from the House of Lords, members of Parliament will face a stark choice. During its time in the Upper House, the Bill has been amended in ways that go far beyond its primary purpose. Changes relating to some of the most contentious questions at stake in the Brexit process have been tacked on to the Bill with the avowed intention of damaging the Brexit process.

My parliamentary colleagues will have to decide whether to support the Government in restoring the Bill to its original purpose of delivering legal certainty, or whether to allow hostile amendments to frustrate those essential aims, restricting the Government's ability to negotiate.

It is profoundly in our national interest that they should choose the first path.

Having spent six years as Europe minister, I am in no doubt about the technical challenge Brexit presents lawmakers. The EU Withdrawal Bill fulfils an absolutely essential role in delivering a smooth and orderly Brexit.

It is not about what our future relationship with the EU will look like; Parliament will debate and vote on the different aspects of that in due course.

This is simply about getting everything from workers' rights to environmental standards, which are currently set at the EU level, on to the UK statute book, providing certainty and continuity from day one, and upholding the constitutional and economic integrity of our country.

The Government has listened to those who have reasonable concerns about the Bill and has made sensible changes to build consensus.

The Bill respects the UK's devolution settlements. After detailed discussions with the devolved administrations, we made changes in response to concerns expressed by the Scottish and Welsh governments, while ensuring that businesses and consumers in every part of the country can continue to buy and sell freely across the UK's own internal market.

We also listened to those who wanted to see a clearer expression of the Government's commitment to give Parliament a say on the final deal. Our amendment on that should command the support of the whole House.

But when amendments seek to pre-empt policy decisions which will rightly be taken at a later date and in a different form, the Government must stand firm against them.

At every turn, the Prime Minister has sought to build a consensus around practical answers to the profoundly complex questions which the UK's departure from the EU after more than 40 years of membership have posed.

Time and again she has succeeded – both in uniting her colleagues and in moving forward with the negotiations.

This week, I hope that MPs from all parties, including those Labour MPs who want to see their constituents' votes in the referendum acted upon, will give the Prime Minister their backing.

They will be voting to support measures that are profoundly in our national interest – and in support of a Prime Minister resolute in her determination to deliver a Brexit deal that protects our economy and promotes our future prosperity.

David Lidington is Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington, writes for the Telegraph:

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