

Parliament cannot govern

Our constitutional settlement combines the executive with the legislature. Government Ministers have to be Members of Parliament or peers in the Lords. The government executive puts proposals for laws, budgets and treaties to Parliament, and needs to secure a majority for each measure.

The role of Her Majesty's Opposition in Parliament is to expose government proposals to criticism, seeking to amend and improve them or seeking to vote them down if they are thought to be unacceptable. A wise Opposition also puts forward a constructive alternative, to appear as a government in waiting, a group of politicians capable of governing after an election.

Oppositions usually accept the government's right to govern, and its right to secure its major Manifesto proposals approved by the electorate in the last election. Her Majesty's loyal Opposition does not usually do deals with opponents of our nation, does not undermine the government in an international organisation and does not bad mouth the UK when representing us abroad.

It is particularly important that governments have the power to negotiate treaties and international agreements. It is not something Parliament can do. There are too many different views. Foreign countries would be reluctant to accept an envoy from Parliament other than the government, concerned about the extent to which they could claim to speak for the UK.

It is always the case that Parliament has the ultimate power to vote down a Treaty or international agreement it dislikes. This does not usually arise because the government normally has a majority it can rely on, or has taken sufficient soundings to know it speaks for a majority.

It is particularly important when negotiating with the EU that Parliament does not undermine the government's negotiation. Ruling out leaving without signing the Withdrawal Agreement does undermine the government position, and is particularly bizarre given Parliament's justified dislike of the Withdrawal Agreement as drafted.

When opposition forces in Parliament say they do not trust the government to conduct the negotiation they do our country harm. Parliament has the power to remove the government if it really does lack confidence in it to negotiate well. It is a clear case of put up or shut up – either sack the government or allow it to conduct the negotiation as it wishes, with Parliament judging the results.