

Speech: PM statement on Brexit: 20 March 2019

Nearly three years have passed since the public voted to leave the European Union.

It was the biggest democratic exercise in our country's history.

I came to office on a promise to deliver on that verdict.

In March 2017, I triggered the Article 50 process for the UK to exit the EU – and Parliament supported it overwhelmingly.

Two years on, MPs have been unable to agree on a way to implement the UK's withdrawal.

As a result, we will now not leave on time with a deal on 29 March.

This delay is a matter of great personal regret for me.

And of this I am absolutely sure: you the public have had enough.

You are tired of the infighting.

You are tired of the political games and the arcane procedural rows.

Tired of MPs talking about nothing else but Brexit when you have real concerns about our children's schools, our National Health Service, and knife crime.

You want this stage of the Brexit process to be over and done with.

I agree. I am on your side.

It is now time for MPs to decide.

So today I have written to Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, to request a short extension of Article 50 up to the 30 June to give MPs the time to make a final choice.

Do they want to leave the EU with a deal which delivers on the result of the referendum – that takes back control of our money, borders and laws while protecting jobs and our national security?

Do they want to leave without a deal?

Or do they not want to leave at all, causing potentially irreparable damage to public trust – not just in this generation of politicians, but to our entire democratic process?

It is high time we made a decision.

So far, Parliament has done everything possible to avoid making a choice.

Motion after motion and amendment after amendment have been tabled without Parliament ever deciding what it wants.

All MPs have been willing to say is what they do not want.

I passionately hope MPs will find a way to back the deal I have negotiated with the EU.

A deal that delivers on the result of the referendum and is the very best deal negotiable.

I will continue to work night and day to secure the support of my colleagues, the DUP and others for this deal.

But I am not prepared to delay Brexit any further than 30 June.

Some argue that I am making the wrong choice, and I should ask for a longer extension to the end of the year or beyond, to give more time for politicians to argue over the way forward.

That would mean asking you to vote in European Elections, nearly three years after our country decided to leave.

What kind of message would that send?

And just how bitter and divisive would that election campaign be at a time when the country desperately needs bringing back together?

Some have suggested holding a second referendum.

I don't believe that is what you want – and it is not what I want.

We asked you the question already and you gave us your answer.

Now you want us to get on with it.

And that is what I am determined to do.