

## An alternative response to Brexit

The purpose of this memorandum is to present an alternative proposal as to how the '27' Member States could intervene and push Brexit in a more sensible direction, or even stop Brexit altogether, if they chose so to do.

The essential idea is simple and can be stated in a few sentences. The present British government has been captured by a small group of hardline politicians who have always opposed Britain's membership of the EU on dogmatic grounds, but who do not represent the views of the British people as a whole – certainly not British businesses nor the half of the population who would have preferred Britain to remain in the EU. And many of those who voted for Brexit in the referendum did so for reasons which have little to do with Britain's real relationship with the EU. **The British people now need to be given time to think through the practical implications of leaving the EU, to have the opportunity to reflect further on whether Brexit really is in the interests of the country and possibly change their mind.** It is also probable that political priorities will change as other political events come to seem more important, and there remains the real possibility that the British electorate will elect a new government in the near future.

The proposal is, therefore, that the '27' Member States should, at an appropriate moment, voluntarily (i.e. without being requested by the British government) decide unanimously to **extend the Brexit negotiating period under Article 50 of the Treaty from two to five or six years – not an unreasonable time for such a complex negotiation. At the same time the '27' should refuse any transition period, which only complicates matters and muddies the waters.** The present British government would probably wish to refuse such an 'offer', but, faced with the possibility of a disastrous alternative, it seems most likely that the British Parliament would insist that the government did indeed accept it. The negotiations so far have shown that there are any number of difficult detailed but important issues which have to be properly dealt with and that the two-year period for departure provided under Article 50 of the Treaty is wholly inadequate for resolving them. As these issues are worked through, it may become clearer just how unsatisfactory Brexit will be for Britain, which may affect public opinion in the country.

Britain has been a difficult but ultimately effective Member of the EU. Many EU Member States would on balance prefer Britain to be in the EU than outside. Others might be more hesitant. So it is important to note that under this proposal the **'27' would not be asked to take a view on Britain's continued membership**, but merely to decide on whether the negotiations should be extended. At some future date the British government may then seek to withdraw its Article 50 notice; **that** would be the point at which the '27' would have to decide on Britain's continued membership or not. In the meantime, of course, they would have to find a way of excluding Britain from their ongoing discussion of other issues, not least the EU's future direction.

John Bruton, a former Taoiseach of Ireland, has made the same argument as I have set out here, though for somewhat different reasons: <http://www.euractiv.com/section/uk-europe/opinion/blind-forces-are-in-play-in-the-brex-it-talks> . Importantly Bruton proposes extending the negotiating period to six years, during which period there would have to be another UK general election.

If you believe there is any merit in this proposal do please share it with your colleagues.

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November 2017

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