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MEP for South West England and Gibraltar
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz
Brussels



December 2018

(Generic letter)

Dear MP

In the next week you will be making a decision whose repercussions will shape our country for generations to come. As a member of the European Parliament representing 55 parliamentary constituencies in the South West, I would like to share my view of the current situation.

While the dogged resilience of the Prime Minister in negotiating the withdrawal agreement has won her much praise, it is fair to say that the deal she has brought back from Brussels has failed to win many friends. In the short term it means a loss of control over laws that we will agree to follow, while the future relationship remains extremely ill defined. Indeed, even leading Conservative advocates of Brexit have acknowledged that this deal is worse than our current arrangement as members of the EU, where we can help shape EU policy.

As a local MP in touch with your constituents I am sure you are aware that recent polling indicates some have had a change of heart on Brexit and altered their views on our relationship with the EU. A YouGov poll conducted shortly after the Prime Minister's deal was unveiled confirmed public dissatisfaction, with twice as many people opposing it as supporting it, 42% to 19%ⁱ. This poll follows the recent Survation poll, the largest independent survey of its kind to date on Brexit. Nationally, 54% cent of people said they would now vote to remain in the EU, compared with 46% who said they would vote leaveⁱⁱ. It is clear that the will of the people has changed.

Like other parts of the country, the South West region has seen a large swing from leave to remain in the Survation poll, with many areas where a majority voted Leave now showing majority support for remain. In the South Hams local authority, there was a 3.66% swing from leave to remain, from 47.15% to 43.49%, reflecting a wider national pattern.

In addition to the changing mood in your constituency, it is now clear that the public has lost confidence in the Brexit negotiations. When asked how they would vote if the Government secured a deal and this was put to the people, 33% said they would reject it, 26% accept it. People realise that the Brexit deal Theresa May is seeking with the EU does not regain sovereignty as was promised; it will leave us with less power to determine our laws and rules than we have now. A Chequers type deal would leave the UK as a rule taker, losing our ability to be a rule maker. A majority also believe withdrawing from the EU would be bad for the UK economy and the NHS.

I know you are as concerned as I am for the future of our South West farmers. Given the lack of clarity around the nature of the future trade deal, voting for the Prime Minister's deal means voting for an uncertain future for farmers. We simply cannot know what sort of tariffs they will face in future but we do know they will face fierce competition from large farming nations that have much lower standards – and prices – than we do in the UK. I am simply not

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convinced that farmers will be prioritised in the negotiations to come, rather than the more powerful finance industry, for example.

A further significant point to emerge from the Survation poll is that there has been a change in perceptions about immigration. This is considered to be one of the most influential issues driving people to vote leave, but 42% of the UK public now believe that immigration has had a positive influence on Britain. Furthermore, 63% agree with the idea that we should be free to live and work in each other's countries, indicating that there is support for free movement when it is seen as a reciprocal right, in contrast to the negative framing during the referendum campaign.

While the public appetite for Brexit diminishes by the week, it is clear there is no political agreement about the way forward either. You will be aware of the political paralysis on Brexit and that there can be no deal that will gain majority support in parliament. But there is a clear and democratic path out of this mess: a People's Vote in the form of a referendum at the end of the negotiations. This is not a re-run of the in/out referendum, and the Electoral Commission would need to decide the best form such a referendum should take and the exact questions to ask. However, given the strong shift in public opinion, remaining in the EU would have to be one of the options.

The idea of a People's Vote has been gaining increased cross-party and public support in recent months. In October at least 650,000 people marched in London, the biggest demo since 2003, when a million people took to the streets to protest the Iraq war.

A People's Vote offers an opportunity to extricate ourselves, in the most democratic way possible, from an impending national disaster. So much more is now known and understood by the public – and politicians – about the EU and our relationship with it. People have a democratic right to demand a further opportunity to decide whether the reality of Brexit is actually what they wanted, or whether their interests and those of the country are best served by remaining in the EU.

I hope you agree, it's time to let the people decide the best way forward.

ⁱ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2018/11/16/7-more-things-weve-learned-about-public-opinion-br>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.survation.com/what-does-the-british-public-now-think-about-brexite/>