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*Article published in the*  
*Times of Tonbridge*  
*20 November 2019*



The General Election called for 12th December is dominated by Brexit. The Election is only happening because Boris Johnson knew his Brexit deal would not survive full parliamentary scrutiny. But, far more importantly, Brexit is the biggest political issue for the UK since 1945. Every area of policy, be it the economy, foreign affairs, the environment, health, education, social security or whatever, will be profoundly affected by whether or not we leave the European Union.

Some will argue the decision has already been taken through the 2016 referendum. But after three and a half years it has proved impossible to find a deal which is acceptable to Parliament. And let us not forget that “restoring the sovereignty of Parliament” was the core argument on the Leave side.

Parliament is not “at war” with the people any more than the UK is “at war” with the EU. Representative democracy demands that MPs use their own judgment and act in the best national interest. And Brexit is not a war, it is a retreat.

The one benefit from the discord of the past three and a half years is that we now know what a Brexit deal would look like. Every possible version of Brexit has been stress-tested almost to destruction and the Johnson version has emerged. Unlike in 2016, Remain can now be compared with a real Leave choice. This is why I believe there should be a further referendum.

My experience from constant canvassing in Tonbridge over the past two weeks is of deep anxiety about the path we are treading. Many people are confused and long for restoration of decency, clarity and collaboration in public affairs. So much has deteriorated since the 2016 referendum that we are now in a state of national crisis.

The outcome of Brexit will be to perpetuate this crisis for at least a decade while the UK struggles, from a much weakened position, to negotiate new relationships with Europe and the rest of the world. In Kent we will suffer particular environmental and transport hardship due to the unique importance of the port of Dover and our motorways.

Conversely a decision to Stop Brexit ends the crisis and enables the UK: -

- \* to avoid a divorce bill of £39 billion
- \* to have no hard border in Ireland or the Irish Sea
- \* to have free access to the world’s largest market for all our goods and services
- \* to participate in existing beneficial trade deals across the world
- \* to participate in the coordination of international security, climate change, medicines, chemicals, nuclear materials and air transport
- \* to have secure markets for our agricultural products and fish
- \* to ensure our citizens can live, travel, work and study freely within 27 neighbouring countries; and
- \* to play a leading role in the shaping of Europe’s future.

As Liberal Democrats, we believe that the challenges we face are home-grown and are not due to our membership of the EU. We stand ready not just to Stop Brexit, but also to re-

respond to these challenges by applying the massive Remain bonus in improving public services across the board.