

# Teasing Theresa: The EU, Brexit and the British Elections

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Region: [Europe](#)

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*It took little time for political leaders in the European Union to start dangling the carrot in front of a wounded British Prime Minister. **Theresa May's** defeated victory in the British general elections had barely sunk it, and the comments, even invitations, were being issued by various European leaders.*

This all lies in the interpretation of the British election result. German and French politicians have been spinning it as a vote of scepticism and reserve regarding Brexit. Could it be that the British are getting cold feet, wishing to stay put in the EU?

The French President, **Emmanuel Macron**, insisted that the door to Europe remained open for Britain should the May government wobble and change course.

“Of course the door remains open, always open until the Brexit negotiations come to an end.”

Similar views were also uttered by German finance minister **Wolfgang Schäuble**, never much of a fan of the democratic vote in matters of finance.

“The British Government has said we will stay with the Brexit. We take the decision as a matter of respect. But if they wanted to change their decision, of course, they would find open doors.”[1]

Neither men have mentioned the stringent outlines set by the European Parliament in a resolution passed earlier this year that effectively shuts the door on an easy revocation of the exit process. The Article 50 notification outlining the intent to withdraw from the EU can only be withdrawn with the full consent of EU members. “A revocation of notification needs to be subject to conditions set out by all EU-27.”[2]

Such a stifling measure was premised on one thing: preventing Britain from revocation only to then resubmit to buy more time to gain a more advantageous position. The revocation of Article 50, as the language of the resolution goes, “cannot be used as a procedural device or abused in an attempt to improve on the current terms of the United Kingdom’s membership.”

The softened sentiment towards Britain has not been voiced by those at the coal face of negotiations eager to get things underway. A sense of dislocation is being felt. Brexit is “nowhere”, a purgatorial place of no specific location for one simple reason: talks haven’t even begun. Nor have there been talks about talks, a sort of endless gurgling chatter that

merely passes time.

Arbitrarily designated as a deadline, March 2019 will mark the end point when an agreement must be reached. Flexibility and elasticity, far from being seen as attributes of merit, are deemed matters of vice.

Belgian MEP **Guy Verhofstadt**, ever the European monomaniac for the EU project, disliked the crippling uncertainty.

“I should welcome a position from the UK. Do they confirm their position from the 29 March letter? Or will they change it?” (Verhofstadt has been a constant figure of angst amongst those on the British side in this debate, with **David Davis**, the UK Brexit minister, claiming that he would be “peripheral” in negotiations.)

There has been a three month delay since May unleashed the machine of withdrawal in her Article 50 letter. **Michel Barnier**, the EU’s designated chief Brexit negotiator, has been attempting to calm members in the European Parliament jittery at the prospects of an unravelling edifice. That reassurance has been simple: point the finger at May for having initiated an election to begin with.[3]

Barnier was more diplomatic to the press, taking a conciliatory tone:

“My role is not to make any comment on the political life in member states.”

He had no desire to “make a case against Theresa May.” As it is, the first formal discussion (a so-called sit-down) about Brexit talks, as such, will take place on June 22, though it may simply amount to another round of talks about talks.

In the meantime, a revived, resuscitated **Jeremy Corbyn** of Labour has promised a campaign of conversion and conviction in roughly 65 conservative marginal seats. His anticipation is simple: a possible fall of the Tory minority government. (The election last Thursday delivered some striking figures in that regard, leaving the home minister, **Amber Rudd**, with a majority of 346 in Hastings and Rye.)

According to *The Guardian*, a swing of a mere 1.63 percent would render the Labour party the largest in the Commons, a situation that would necessitate the need for another, rather different minority government.

Europe, however, will remain the big test. Corbyn’s own reservations against the EU may well have flown in the face of the opinions of various youth voters keen to see him in Downing Street. While the form Brexit will take will vary in character, the essence of it from the perspective of EU planners is that it preferably not take place at all. Yet again, a test of popular sovereignty will be had.

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**Notes**

[1]

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-uk-remain-macron-latest-comments-theresa-may-eu-uk-membership-talks-end-a7788616.html>

[2]

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/experts-believe-exit-from-brexit-would-be-legally-possible-a-1142055.html>

[3] <http://www.politico.eu/article/brexit-barnier-tries-to-reassure-meps-worried-about-brexit/>

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