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On the day we were billed to leave the EU, the Chief Minister writes to PM May, asks her to revoke Article 50, as Gibraltar Prepares for European Elections

Reacting to the vote in the House of Commons today on the UK's proposed Withdrawal Agreement, the Chief Minister of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC MP, said:

"As a result of today's further rejection of the Withdrawal Agreement by the House of Commons, I felt it was incumbent upon me to write to the Prime Minister to reflect the position of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, given the changed circumstances that arise from the extension of the Article 50 notification period to 12th April as agreed between the UK Government and the Council of the European Union.

I reminded her that the people of Gibraltar voted in the EU Referendum by a huge margin to remain in the EU, although we accepted that the result of the Referendum was a decision of the British people to leave the EU and that we had worked with her team to carve out protections for Gibraltar in the Withdrawal Agreement.

I recorded the Gibraltar Government's serious concern about a no-deal departure of the UK from the EU, despite the mitigation work we have done for that eventuality.

I told the Prime Minister that, in the circumstances, and whilst we will continue to consider the Withdrawal Agreement as a secure exit route for Gibraltar, given that this has not been endorsed by the House of Commons, the position of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar will have to be to support a revocation of the Article 50 notification in preference to a long extension of membership of the EU or a no-deal departure from the EU. I have confirmed to her that I have signed the petition for the revocation of the Article 50 notification.

I told Mrs May that, in the Gibraltar Government's opinion, a revocation would enable her and the United Kingdom Parliament to determine how to proceed without needing the agreement of the EU Council. Such a move would enable the United Kingdom to be relieved of any pressure of time being applied by the operation of the time limits imposed by the EU. Indeed, the revocation of Article 50 need not be an artifice to move from a route to departure from the EU to remaining - although remaining in the EU remains, in my view, the best option for Gibraltar. In fact, however, revocation can be an opportunity to simply re-group and re-organise leaving the EU, but without the EU enjoying the pressure lever that a timed long extension allows them.

I said to Mrs May that we do, nonetheless, accept that the revocation of the Article 50 notification, cannot be the democratic end of matters. I have therefore shared with her my view that there



would be a need for a further vote on whether to continue down the route of departure from the EU, on the basis of the Withdrawal Agreement or otherwise. In this respect, in my respectful submission, I would consider the most democratic route to a determination of the way forward to be to put the question - now in the stark light of reality - of whether to leave the EU (and how) or otherwise to remain, once again, to the British people in a new referendum. In such a referendum, in support of which over 1 million people (including many Gibraltarians) marched in London last week, I make the point to Mrs May that I am sure she will agree that the franchise should, rightly, once again include the British people of Gibraltar (given we vote in European elections and participated in the 2016 referendum), and that I would campaign to remain.

I also make the point that in the time we have been able to work together on the UK's departure from the EU, Mrs May and her team have consistently been thoughtful, caring and steadfast when it has come to the wishes and interests of the people of Gibraltar, for which I have thanked her.

Additionally, given the result of the vote this afternoon, the Deputy Chief Minister has given instructions to start work on the mechanics to hold elections to the European Parliament on Thursday 22nd May, should this become necessary.

On the day we were due to leave the EU, there is now everything to play for. Stopping Brexit completely or a very soft Brexit are now possibilities. The routes to that may be a long extension, a revocation, a referendum or a general election. We remain ready for all eventualities - including the Withdrawal Agreement potentially passing next week - and working to ensure all outcomes are safe for Gibraltar. Our work in the past three years stands us in very good stead as we navigate these uncharted waters. Indeed, as a result, my Brexit team and I watched the result of the vote in the Commons today safe in the knowledge that we knew what plan to pursue whatever the outcome."