

The Scottish Parliament vote to reject the UK Government's EU Withdrawal Agreement

The Scottish Parliament yesterday rejected the UK Government's draft Brexit deal and has ruled out a 'no deal' Brexit option.

This is perhaps little more than a cosmetic political stance as those who have the right to vote on the deal are MPs at Westminster, but it is a stance nonetheless. The vote in Holyrood was decisive 92 to 29, but there was no agreement among those voting against Brexit as to what the alternative to the withdrawal deal might be.

Michael Russell the Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations said at the outset that the Scottish Government want to remain in the EU, and he believed that might be achieved by a second referendum.

Mr Russell made particular mention of Edinburgh in his speech : "To put it bluntly—but accurately—no free-trade agreement in the world provides anything close to the freedom of movement for services that presently exists for Scotland in the European single market. Services cover many sectors, but of course Edinburgh is particularly dependent on financial and legal services, which fuel the economy of the city. Members for Edinburgh know that well, including the leader of the Scottish Conservatives. Yet the Prime Minister's deal will make it considerably harder for Edinburgh companies to trade in services with Europe. Why would the party led by Ruth Davidson vote in favour of that?"

Adam Tomkins Conservative MSP for Glasgow is the party's spokesman on the Scottish constitution criticised the motion as it did not offer any clues on what the alternative might be. He said : "It is two and a half years since the British people voted to leave the European Union and, in all that time, only one credible proposal on how we will leave and the detailed terms on which we will leave has been tabled. That proposal is, of course, the 585-page withdrawal agreement, which the Prime Minister and her team have painstakingly negotiated over the past 20 months.

"In analysing that deal, two simple legal facts must be borne in mind. First, under the terms of article 50, if no exit deal is agreed between the United Kingdom and the European Union, we will crash out of the European Union on a no-deal basis. Secondly, exit day is fixed in law as 29 March 2019. Therefore, the reality, whether we like it or not, is that the country is rapidly approaching the point at which it faces a clear binary choice: we either leave the European Union on the basis of the orderly withdrawal agreement that the Prime Minister and her team have negotiated—or something very close to it—or we crash out of it on a no-deal basis, which would be a disaster for the economy. That is the reality, and that is where we are heading. Those who would prefer to reject the deal must confront the plain legal fact that their actions serve only to make it more likely that we will end up crashing out of the European Union on a no-deal basis."

Neil Findlay Labour MSP for Lothian was his usual colourful self and criticised the Tories for the chaos he believes they have caused. He said : "Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister came to Scotland on her fantasy campaign tour and, with all the vim and vigour of her actual election campaign, she characteristically hid from the people she fears most—the voting public. She is the only candidate in an imaginary election and is heading for a landslide defeat, and when that happens, all bets will be off. Such a rejection will be an

unprecedented failure of Government and a personal humiliation for the Prime Minister.

“The Prime Minister’s Government has been found guilty of contempt of Parliament and it has lost two Brexit secretaries and a series of ministers. The Tory party is revolting—in many ways. The DUP has deserted it, and yesterday in Parliament the Government was defeated not once but on three occasions. A rejection in such a key area of Government policy will leave the Government unable to govern or to deliver its programme. In such circumstances, my view is that the Government will have lost the confidence of Parliament and the country and a general election should be called.”

For the Greens Ross Greer MSP said it would be bad for Scotland. He remarked : “Scotland’s aspirations to be an open and outward-looking society will be undermined. Our universities and our world-class research centres will be unable to attract the best talent. The Tories intend to take us out of the single market, particularly for services, which for a service-based economy such as the UK is simply self-sabotage. Labour standards and environmental standards are certainly not protected by the agreement.”

WESTMINSTER

Westminster is now in the middle of five days of debate on the EU withdrawal agreement and the parliamentary arithmetic seems to indicate that the Prime Minister will not get the approval of parliament for the deal negotiated with the EU.

Speaking after the vote, Constitutional Relations Secretary Michael Russell said: “The UK Government’s Brexit deal will make Scotland poorer and they must now listen and act on the Scottish Parliament’s overwhelming decision to reject it.

“I committed to bring the UK Government’s EU Withdrawal Deal and Political Declaration to this Parliament before it was

voted on in the House of Commons, and I was pleased to do so today with a motion that was the result of a unique cross-party collaboration.

“In every area of Scotland there will be businesses, organisations, communities, people and families who will suffer, directly suffer, over a long period of time under this proposed deal.

“Today the Scottish Parliament came together to say we cannot let this happen, and the UK Government must now respect today’s decisive vote.”

The motion for debate was:

That the Parliament agrees that both a no deal outcome and the outcomes arising from the withdrawal agreement and political declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK, as presented to the House of Commons by the Prime Minister, would be damaging for Scotland and the nations and regions of the UK as a whole, and therefore recommends that they be rejected and that a better alternative be taken forward.