

## No one will want to invoke Article 50

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Article 50 defines the mechanism that enables a country to leave the EU. As far as we know it is the only way out. And once the process has started it is, as written, irrevocable. What is more it provides just two years to agree a new and alternative agreement or it says there will be no agreement at all.

The Leave vote did not bind David Cameron's government or any future government to invoke Article 50. It did not, in fact, demand that they do anything. It was simply advisory. It could be ignored. And it certainly did not say how any negotiation should be conducted with what intended outcome. Like almost everything else about this referendum it was not clear what it wanted. It just provided an option to say what it did not want.

I very strongly suspect that there is, barring Nigel Farage who will at present get no say, not a single UK politician who would want to invoke Article 50. There are two good reasons for this.

Cameron has already consigned himself to the longest obituary in political history, given that he is a relatively young man, by delivering the Brexit vote. Hard to imagine, but his legacy may be worse than Blair's. And not a single realistic UK politician will want to join him by being seen as the person who guarantees we leave. No wonder Johnson and Gove look so sheepish: they realise just how disastrous is the situation that they have created and do not want to share Cameron's fate.

But there is another reason why no one will want to start the Article 50 process and the EU has already exposed its hand here. It wants the UK to go quickly and so wants Article 50 invoked now. But precisely because doing so gives them all the negotiating power no one in the UK will want to do that. After all, once Article 50 is invoked the EU can say no to absolutely anything the UK suggests, wait two years and see the UK leave empty handed and there would be literally nothing the UK could do about it.

One hopes the UK will realise that and as a result do something much more sensible. It must negotiate first, and when there is agreement invoke Article 50. Or alternatively,

and with more likelihood, say 'hang on a minute, we just need to put that to a referendum'. And I suspect there is not much barring breaking Treaty conditions that would undermine any credibility it has with just about every European electorate that the EU could do about that.

Article 50 is key to all this. And like the ace of trumps, the U.K. Has to decide very wisely when to play it, and in this case, if at all.