

Hard v soft: should we be given the choice?

Published: January 19, 2026, 5:44 am

I was discussing Brexit last night. My co-discussant made a good point that is worth sharing.

Eighty five per cent of votes cast in the general election were for parties saying they would take us out of Europe. Like it or not, that debate appears to be over.

The difficulty that remains is in finding anyone with a shred of credibility to negotiate a deal. In that case is a referendum back on the table again?

Suppose it was agreed now that there would be a referendum in late 2018 on the deal available, with the alternative being hard Brexit; that is, the no deal option. So this would not be a "do we stay after all?" referendum because that option has gone. But it is a real choice.

The point my co-discussant made is not that this changes the UK's position, whatever that might be, but it does change the EU's. If they don't want a hard Brexit they then have the chance to put a soft Brexit to the people of this country who could choose it as opposed to there being no deal available, which seems to be the choice most political parties in the UK are going for, Labour included if John McDonnell is to be believed.

I see some merit in that idea.

That would be taking back control.

And it would mean that a soft option would have to be negotiated.

But that is precisely why I also can't see it happening. The Jacob Rees-Mogg brigade wouldn't want that.