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# Theresa May hails 'defining' Brexit moment

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Media caption'A defining moment for our whole country"

**Parliament's backing for the government's Brexit bill will be a "defining moment for our whole country", Theresa May has told MPs.**

The prime minister said her timetable of triggering formal negotiations by the end of March remained on track.

And she told the SNP - which has called for a second independence referendum - not to "play politics or create uncertainty or division".

Labour's Jeremy Corbyn accused the government of being "complacent".

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Mrs May's statement to MPs on last week's European Council summit came after the EU withdrawal bill was backed by the House of Lords, clearing the way for it to receive Royal Assent and become law.

This gives her the power to invoke Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty and begin formal negotiations, which is expected to happen at the end of March.

It also comes after Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said she wanted an independence referendum to be held between the autumn of 2018 and the spring of the following year.

Welcoming Parliament's backing for her Brexit bill, the PM told MPs: "This will be a defining moment for our whole country as we begin to forge the new relationship with Europe and a new role for ourselves in the world."

Image copyrightAFPImage captionNicola Sturgeon says the Scottish Parliament should determine the timing and wording of a second independence referendum

Brexit, she said, would "work for the whole of the United Kingdom", adding: "That's why we have been working closely with the devolved administrations, including the Scottish government - listening to their proposals and recognising the many areas of common ground, such as protecting workers rights and our security from crime and terrorism.

"So this is not a moment to play politics and create uncertainty - it's a moment to bring our country together, to honour the will of the British people and shape for them a better Britain."

Ms Sturgeon has said a second independence referendum was needed to protect Scottish interests in the wake of the UK voting to leave the EU.

## High price?

And the SNP's Westminster leader, Angus Robertson, pressed Mrs May to say if she was willing "even at this late stage... to secure a comprehensive UK-wide approach" to leaving the EU "or do you still plan to plough on regardless, even though you know what the consequences of that will be?"

The prime minister, who is considering how to respond to the demand for a referendum, said she had been in discussions with all the devolved administrations and criticised "constitutional game-playing with the future of the United Kingdom".

She claimed most people in Scotland do not want a second referendum, saying that "the most important single market for Scotland is the single market of the United Kingdom".

But Mr Corbyn warned the prime minister that there was "no doubt that if the wrong decisions are made, we'll pay the price for decades to come".

"Now more than ever we need an inclusive government that listens and acts accordingly," he said, adding that "all the signs are that we have a complacent government".

## Labour supporters backing PM?

He urged Mrs May to listen to the "collective wisdom" of Parliament, saying MPs deserved better than a "take it or leave it" decision on the final Brexit deal as he called for a "meaningful" vote.

He also pressed Mrs May to guarantee the rights of EU nationals living in the UK as soon as possible.

The prime minister repeated her desire to deal with the future of EU nationals at an "early stage" in Brexit talks, adding that UK expats in other member states also need to be considered.

Former Labour minister Kate Hoey, one of a small number of Labour MPs to have been Leave campaigners, told Mrs May that "millions" of Labour supporters would be delighted that she can now trigger Article 50.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2017/03/14/theresa-may-should-get-brexit-not-let-nicola-sturgeon-blow-course/>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/15/unionists-already-have-facts-side-must-stir-scotlands-passions/>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/scotland/sturgeon-claims-right-to-set-rules-qqqw7s3cl>

# Sturgeon claims right to set rules

**Daniel Sanderson**

March 15 2017, 12:01am, The Times

Nicola Sturgeon said the timing, question and franchise of a second referendum must be “made in Scotland”REUTERS

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Nicola Sturgeon has demanded full control of the rules governing a second independence referendum, as tens of thousands of Scots called on Westminster to block her new attempt to lead them out of the UK.

On the day after she stunned political opponents by revealing her intention to hold a new vote by early 2019, the first minister said the timing, question and franchise of a second referendum must be “made in Scotland”, and she called for a “no strings attached” green light from London.

It followed speculation that Theresa May is preparing to block Ms Sturgeon’s call for a new referendum by refusing to agree to a section 30 order, which would transfer the power to Holyrood to legislate for a new vote, or place severe restrictions on when it could be held.

By last night more than 60,000 people had backed a petition stating that another independence referendum “should not be allowed to happen” and accusing Ms Sturgeon of pursuing “independence at any cost”.

The UK government will formally respond to the petition, which was set up on Westminster’s website and was well on course to attract the 100,000 signatures necessary for it to be considered for a debate. Meanwhile the SNP had raised more than £200,000 through an online referendum fundraising drive in less than 48 hours.

The Church of Scotland intervened in the row, saying it would be “wrong” for the UK government to withhold permission for a new referendum, should MSPs, as is inevitable given Holyrood’s pro-independence majority, back it in a vote on Wednesday. Murdo Fraser, the senior Scottish Tory MSP and church member, publicly questioned the move.

Before the 2014 referendum, the UK and Scottish governments signed the Edinburgh Agreement after a period of negotiation. It set out the ground rules for the vote, including placing a time limit on when it could take place.

However, Ms Sturgeon said that any new referendum should come with “no strings attached”. She added: “It should be up to the Scottish parliament to determine the referendum’s timing, franchise and the question, which of course will be open to independent scrutiny and testing, as it was last time.

“Scotland’s referendum should be built on the principles of democracy, mandate and precedent, all of which should be observed as we move to give the people of Scotland the choice the current political situation demands.

“There should be no strings attached, no blocking mechanisms applied and no Downing Street diktat — Scotland’s referendum must be made in Scotland.

“That was the exact description the UK government themselves used ahead of the 2014 referendum, and the same principle should apply now.”

A two-day Holyrood debate will be held next week ahead of a vote on whether to seek a section 30 order on Wednesday. The Scottish Greens have already said they will back the SNP.

The Scottish government favours a repeat of the Yes/No question asked in 2014. The first minister’s spokesman insisted it was fair, despite Alex Salmond boasting yesterday that it gave the pro-independence side an advantage in 2014 and the Electoral Commission ruling against a Yes/No question for the EU referendum.

The Rev Dr Richard Frazer, convener of the church and society council of the Church of Scotland, said the institution would remain impartial on the independence question. But he added: “The UK parliament will have the final say on whether to grant the right to hold an independence referendum. It would be wrong if it was withheld.”

Responding to Ms Sturgeon, John Lamont, the Scottish Conservatives’ chief whip, accused her of provoking further division.

Mr Lamont said: “Not content with demanding a referendum that people don’t want, it appears Nicola Sturgeon is now proposing a power grab on her terms.

“The bottom line is the SNP government is trying to railroad Scotland into a second referendum — because it knows people don’t agree with them.”