

Plot to derail Brexit? Commission gets £1m to stage European elections - AFTER UK quits EU

EUROSCEPTICS fear a secret plot to derail Brexit is being hatched after it emerged that Whitehall officials have set aside almost £1million to pay for European Parliamentary elections next year – after the UK is due to have quit the EU.



John Bercow is known to be a staunch Remainer

And the news prompted one Tory MP to claim it as evidence of the “contempt” for Brexit he claimed existed on the board of the European Commission.

The electoral watchdog, which has responsibility for regulating party and election finance and setting standards for well-run elections, set alarm bells ringing with the news that it has been handed an £829,000 budget by the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission to cover “activities relating to a European Parliamentary election in 2019”.

The next such elections are due to be held between May 23 and May 26 – almost two months after the UK leaves the bloc on March 29.

The Electoral Commission insists the cash had been set aside “as a precautionary measure, so that we have the necessary funds to deliver our functions at a European Parliamentary election, in the unlikely event that they go ahead”.

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John Bercow accused of ‘bellowing and being aggressive’



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Former leader Iain Duncan Smith says the idea is “madness”

None of the money has yet been spent, the commission has pointed out.

However, given that the committee is chaired by speaker of the House of Commons – and arch-Remainer – John Bercow, the move has triggered claims of a move to stall the process by which Britain leaves the bloc, or even prevent it completely.

The UK currently has 73 MEPs, all are scheduled to end their terms on March 29.

Theresa May is already under pressure to get the required legislation through Parliament in time to get the royal assent it needs so that an order can be made to cancel next year's European elections.



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PM Theresa May is already under pressure to get vital Brexit legislation through Parliament

Former Tory leader Iain Duncan-Smith MP took aim at the Electoral Commission in the wake of the latest developments, saying: “It raises the question – are they planning for us not leaving the European Union?

“Are they ignoring what Theresa May has said and deliberately still believing that we won’t have left the EU?

“It’s complete madness to earmark money to spend on an election the Prime Minister has already said we will not fight unless you are already working to

make sure the UK stays in the EU, in which case you are working against the British people.”

Brexiters Jacob Rees-Mogg added: “It is important that the Withdrawal Bill is passed soon because this will provide the necessary clarity that the European elections are not taking place.”

Andrew Bridgen, Tory MP for North-West Leicestershire, said: “Members serving on the road of the Electoral Commission have made no secret of their contempt for Brexit.

“Are we to believe it’s an accident that it has budgeted for next year’s European parliament election with the support of the Speaker, John Bercow, who is a staunch remainer?

“Unfortunately Bercow has been given the opportunity to waste a huge amount of taxpayers’ money by the government’s delay in dealing with the House of Lords wrecking amendments and send the prime minister off to the June European Council summit with a strong mandate from Parliament.”

This latest development follows a Sunday Telegraph investigation last month which found that four of the body’s ten commissioners had made statements about Brexit since the referendum, all of them in support of staying in the EU.

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