

European Council

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

Anybody listening to the Prime Minister's statement will be struck by the importance of the issues raised at the Council, and also by the loss that we will have as a nation by not having a seat around the table in future. In her reply to Chris Bryant, she said that it is a matter for her successor whether he takes up to seven weeks before he comes to this House. Is it not the case that the Government could reset the recess dates that are on today's Order Paper to make sure this House has an opportunity to question her successor on his policies, which have a huge bearing on the issues in her statement?

Theresa May The Prime Minister, Leader of the Conservative Party

The hon. Lady will have an opportunity to consider this matter in the debate on the motion on the recess dates that is coming before the House later today.

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Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister has just clarified that there will be no opportunity to debate the motion on the summer Adjournment dates. This is an extremely grave matter. About 0.25% of the population will be selecting the next Prime Minister at a crucial time in our history. Is there anything you can do to make sure that the House has an opportunity, when other Members are here, to properly debate this issue and make sure that the next Prime Minister can be held to account by this House without there being an extended period of summer recess in the way?

John Bercow Speaker of the House of Commons, Chair, Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, Chair, Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, Chair, Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion Committee

I am grateful to the hon. Lady and most certainly understand her concern. I want to offer her two responses. First, it is perfectly open to Members if they disapprove of the motion to vote against it. They are not obliged to accept it; they can oppose it. Secondly, although I do not myself know at this stage what is in the minds of Ministers today, or what was in their minds at the time of the tabling of the motion, since I am not psychic and it was not something they discussed with me or would ordinarily have been expected to discuss with me, I can tell her something that may be of interest to her.

I have been assured that there is no intention on the part of the Government to prevent the new Prime Minister from appearing before the House before it rises for the summer recess. The Leader of the House had his first outing relatively recently on a Thursday morning at business questions, and as he addressed the House the Government Chief Whip

approached me, unsolicited but on the back of a number of queries about Prorogation and the timescale for the announcement of the new Prime Minister, specifically to tell me “as I say, unsolicited” that the Government had no intention of doing that.

The Government Chief Whip told me that he judged it most important that that not be the case. I am merely faithfully reporting what he told me on that occasion. If there has been some change in thinking, I am sure the Government would wish to communicate that to the House. I think it very important that there be some clarity about the Government's intentions beyond simply the motion, which is a procedural motion, sooner rather than later, not because that is a matter of procedural necessity but because it is a matter of parliamentary courtesy.