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## First for football

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# Soft Brexit will shatter Tory party, May warned

Ministers threaten to quit in customs union row

**Sam Coates Deputy Political Editor**

Theresa May was warned last night that the Conservative Party is at risk of splitting if she pursues a "soft" Brexit this week. Ministers including Chris Grayling and Penny Mordaunt have made it clear they would consider resigning if the prime minister bows to the will of the Commons, should it vote for a customs union with the EU tonight.

MPs will vote on a range of alternative options to Mrs May's Brexit deal to see if one can command a majority with the customs union option thought to be the most likely to succeed.

Several ministers are preparing to confront her at cabinet tomorrow to warn her against pursuing a softer Brexit and a number of Downing Street staff including Stephen Parkinson, a special adviser to Mrs May, would oppose a customs union.

Cabinet ministers worry the prime minister risks becoming a 21st-century Robert Peel, the 19th-century Conservative prime minister who pushed through the repeal of the Corn Laws in spite of opposition from his own party.

"However, all sides recognise that Brexit is stuck without an obvious route for a resolution.

Some cabinet ministers are suggesting that Mrs May should try for an eighth-hour "fudge" with the prime minister returning to a customs partnership that would see the UK stay in some parts of a customs union. The idea was previously rejected by the cabinet and EU.

There were no cabinet conference calls over the weekend despite Britain having only 11 days left until April 12 when the country potentially leaves the EU without a deal, and neither are there any plans for a cabinet meeting this morning.

Downing Street is waiting for the results of tonight's 10pm Commons vote before deciding what to do. Depending on the Speaker's agreement, up to nine options will be put to a vote, including a second referendum, plans to stay in the customs union and what has been dubbed 'Common Market 2.0', which would see the UK inside the single market with a customs arrangement.

The "winner" of this process could then be pitched against Mrs May's deal in a fourth vote that could be held tomorrow, although this has not yet been agreed.

Yesterday, David Gauke, the justice secretary who supports a softer Brexit, said Conservative MPs must accept that the party does not have the votes for its favoured Brexit. "Sometimes you do have to accept your second or third choice in order to avoid an outcome you consider to be even worse," he told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show.

However, just 25 Tory MPs voted for a customs union option when it was put to a vote last week. By contrast 107 Tory MPs, including several in the cabinet, signed a letter at the weekend calling for a managed "no-deal" exit. In a sign of Mrs May's waning authority, unusually the letter was written by a minister in the Brexit department, Chris Heatham-Harris.

Greg Hands, a former trade minister, will today publish a lengthy paper on



Food of the gods: A Fresco newly unearthed in Pompeii may appear grand but it actually adorned a lowly snack bar. Page 11

## Foreign drivers exploit UK licence loophole

**Chloe Leung, Graeme Paton**  
**Stephen McGrath, John Todd**

Rising numbers of foreign motorists are using a legal loophole to get a British licence without taking a driving test in the UK.

Figures obtained under freedom of information law show that the number of non-British drivers trading in their licence for a UK one has risen by 29 per cent in a decade.

Last year more than 150,000 drivers who took their test outside Britain obtained a UK licence under an exchange deal operated by the government.

Britain has a reciprocal deal with 50 countries, which allows motorists to pass tests in their own country and swap licences for a UK one when they become British residents — often for a £45 fee. The system covers all members of the EU, European Economic Area, crown dependencies and 17 other countries including Australia, Canada, South Africa, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe and Singapore.

The discourse raises questions over drivers' language skills, with almost two thirds of countries involved in exchanges not having English as an official language.

Five years ago the government reformed the test process in Britain to prevent foreign drivers from being examined in a foreign language. The theory test — previously available in 19 non-UK languages — can now be taken only in English or Welsh and interpreters are banned during the practical exam. At the time, ministers said that the change was essential to ensure all drivers "have the right skills to get our roads safer".

The Times has learnt of test centres in South Korea promising motorists from China that they could pass in a week. One Chinese migrant, 44, spent £1,500 for a six-day course. A staff member at the test centre on the Jialu Island, off the south coast, said: "Once your attendance reaches 78 per cent, we guarantee that you will get a licence within one week. Even if you fail one of the tests, you will have a second test the next day."

Motoring groups said that a refresher course should be taken as part of the exchange. The government insisted that all driving test standards within the

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### IN THE NEWS

<b>Pay gap widens</b> The gender pay gap has grown from 9.3 per cent to 10 per cent in the past year despite hopes that making employers publish their figures would shame them into taking action. Page 2	<b>Random stabbings</b> Two arrests have been made after four people were stabbed in north London in apparently random attacks over the weekend. Two of the victims are in critical condition. Page 5	<b>Facebook chiefs plea</b> Mark Zuckerberg has called on regulators to take a "more active role" in governing the platform after the site was scrutinised over Facebook's size and influence. Page 14	<b>Ukraine comic on top</b> Volodymyr Zelensky, 41, a professional comedian with no political experience, was on course to win the first round of Ukraine's presidential election. Page 30	<b>RBS loan debacle</b> Royal Bank of Scotland is under fire for pursuing small and medium-size companies for debts linked with a government loan scheme that it has admitted abusing. Page 37	<b>Win for Hamilton</b> Lewis Hamilton took victory at the Bahrain Grand Prix after Charles Leclerc, of Monaco, who had been leading, suffered mechanical failure in his Ferrari. Page 62
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However, all sides recognise that Brexit is stuck without an obvious route for a resolution.

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However, just 35 Tory MPs voted for a customs union option when it was put to a vote last week. By contrast 120 Tory MPs, including several in the cabinet, signed a letter at the weekend calling for a managed "no-deal" exit. In a sign of things to come, Mrs May's Downing Street authority, unusually the letter was written by a minister in the Brexit department, Chris Heathon-Harris.

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The disclosure raises questions over drivers' language skills, with almost two-thirds of countries involved in exchanges not having English as an official language.

Five years ago the government reformed the test process in Britain to prevent learner drivers from being examined in a foreign language. The theory test — previously available in 19 non-UK languages — can now be taken only in English or Welsh and interpreters are banned during the practical exam. At the time, ministers said that the change was essential to ensure all drivers "have the right skills to use our roads safely".

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Motoring groups said that a refresher course should be taken as part of the exchange. The government insisted that all driving test standards within the Continued on page 6, of 1

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CPM + RDS + ARPU

Off-stone + Story +

Cost to serve +

Organic + NIB =



Culture + Structure

Nick Petrie

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