Britain’s Road to Perdition
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LONDON – Full English Brexit is off the menu. Before leaving the European Union altogether, the British government now wants an “interim period,” in which the United Kingdom would retain the commercial rights of EU membership, while still contributing to the EU budget, observing EU regulations and legal judgments, and allowing the free movement of people. This period would last for at least two years after March 2019 – the official deadline for the Brexit process – meaning that until 2021, Britain would essentially be an EU member state without any voting rights.

In the meantime, British Prime Minister Theresa May’s government, having promised to maintain a “deep and special” relationship with Europe, would try to negotiate a new “treaty-based arrangement” with the EU. But Britain will have a vanishingly small chance of concluding a new treaty in so short a time.

Indeed, come 2021, the UK will still be hurtling toward a “cliff edge”: a full break from Europe, with no alternative arrangement in place to cushion the blow. Politically, that timing would pose even greater risks for May’s government than it faces today, since the next general election must be held by June 2022. So the UK may try to extend the transition period beyond 2022. And as past experience tells us, once an extension is granted, it may never end.

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