Andrew Marr: We’ve been seeing this week the first signs of canvassers stumbling around the by-election centres of Stoke Central and Copeland. That's where Labour will hear a meaningful verdict on their recent performance. The Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry joins me now.

Emily Thornberry, 47 Labour MPs, including 10 front benchers voted against the whip or didn’t support the whip this week. Were they right do so? You have a remain constituency.

Emily Thornberry: Listen, I know your narrative is, as you said at the top of the programme, that we are hopelessly divided. I really don’t think that is fair. Let me say why. The Labour Party is a national party and we represent the nation and the nation is divided on this, and it is very difficult and many MPs representing majority remain constituencies have this very difficult balancing act between do I represent my constituency, or do I represent the nation? Labour, as a national party, have a clear view. We have been given our instructions. We lost the referendum. We fought to stay in Europe but the public have spoken and so we do as we’re told. But the important thing now is not to give Theresa May a blank cheque, we have to make sure we get the right deal for the country.

Andrew Marr: Absolutely, and I want to come onto that, but it sounds as if you’re saying that you understand the motives of those Labour MPs who voted with their conscience against triggering Article 50 and will carry on doing so. Should they therefore not perhaps be disciplined, given that they are – you said the country’s split and they are standing with their
constituents as is their right and perhaps some would say, their duty?

**Emily Thornberry:** It’s not my – I’m afraid it’s not my job to work out what should happen. I do understand, I understand completely and is well know my constituents voted overwhelmingly to remain in the UK. But I am a national politician, Labour is a national party and we offer some hope. You say we’re hopelessly divided, I say we offer some hope in terms of the way in which we thoughtfully work our way through this and we tread a path through it so that we bring the country with us and that has to be on the basis of making sure that we have a number of guarantees from Theresa May and we make sure that we have a number of achievements. So making sure we have proper access to the single market –

**Andrew Marr:** I’m going to come onto all of this I promise, but just on this, whether you’re split or not, it sounds almost as if on this issue collective responsibility has to be put to one side because of the nature of the split in the country.

**Emily Thornberry:** No. The Labour Party is a national party and we have a nationally and collectively agreed position on this and that is what we’re going to do. We are not going to frustrate Brexit, we need to make sure we get the best deal.

**Andrew Marr:** So let’s come onto the Shadow Home Secretary. Have you spoken to Diane Abbott since she didn’t vote?

**Emily Thornberry:** No I haven’t, no.

**Andrew Marr:** A lot of people in the party, as you know are furious about this. They say yes, she might have had a migraine, we understand that, but we have MPs like Ronnie Campbell coming hundreds of miles with cancer to vote on this matter.
Really putting themselves through the mill to get there, and she had a migraine, she could have stayed in the House of Commons and been counted in and she didn’t. Can you understand why so many of your colleagues are so cross with her?

Emily Thornberry: I don’t know the details of this. All I’m told is that she was ill. That’s all I know.

Andrew Marr: And you’re not going to say anymore about it, I can tell.

Emily Thornberry: There’s nothing else I can say.

Andrew Marr: Okay, well let’s move onto what you do want to talk about which is the Labour amendments. Can we just go through some of these and these are very, very important to the Labour Party –

Emily Thornberry: And this is the Opposition doing its job and holding the government to account and making sure that the government does the right thing.

Andrew Marr: Absolutely. So let’s go through with them. Guaranteeing rights for EU nationals living in the UK. Now there’s an amendment specifically about that, but as we were hearing in the paper review there is no suggestion really that the government are going to deport foreign nationals if things go wrong in the talks. Why is such an important amendment?

Emily Thornberry: Well, the government may be saying they won’t deport but I’ve had people coming to my surgeries in tears. I had a meeting of 200 French nationals coming to see me and saying – not from my constituency but saying they are extremely concerned about the future. They have fallen in love with this country, they’ve fallen in love with someone from this country,
they’re setting up businesses here, they’ve put their life down here and yet they’ve got to have their life on hold for a number of years whilst Theresa May sorts it out. It’s not fair.

**Andrew Marr:** So this is a basic humanity question from your point of view?

**Emily Thornberry:** It’s a basic humanity question but it’s also politically. I think it’s right to do, at this stage, to make a gesture, you know we are falling out with our European neighbours in a way that is not a good place to be if we’re about to start negotiations. Surely as a gesture of good faith she should be sorting this out unilaterally on behalf of the people, you know people who are living in my constituency now.

**Andrew Marr:** I understand that. Let me move onto the next red line which is workers’ rights, securing workers’ rights and tariff free access to the single market. Do you think that is doable?

**Emily Thornberry:** I think that we have to have and we’re in negotiations, we have to have at the forefront of our mind making sure that we look after the economy first and foremost. Our biggest trading neighbour is Europe and so therefore getting as good a deal in terms of being close to the single market so that does mean – She has said that she will be able to get tariff free red tape free access to the single market. We’re just holding her to what she says she can do.

**Andrew Marr:** And similarly it’s crucial for the Labour Party that you get a vote at the end of the process, as we were discussing earlier on, not simply on the deal but deal or no deal, whatever happens, the Commons is going to be involved with a proper meaningful vote at the end of the process?
**Emily Thornberry:** Yes, and it’s that and it’s also about engaging the Commons throughout the process or parliament throughout the process, because she needs to go to Europe and say I represent Britain and in order to do that she has to bring parliament with her because we represent the country. So it’s not good enough for her to just go off and say you know, taraa, I’ll sort something out, trust me. No, we don’t trust you. We want to make sure that we hold you to account throughout it so that you don’t go on - I mean she has said one of her options, as you know, is to break the British economic model. Now she has said that’s one of the things that she will be prepared to do and we have to make sure we stop her doing that.

**Andrew Marr:** Okay, so stopping her from doing that. Are these red lines for you?

**Emily Thornberry:** Yes, I mean we need to make sure –

**Andrew Marr:** They are red lines so –

**Emily Thornberry:** - that throughout the negotiations we are ensuring that these things happen.

**Andrew Marr:** Without this, for you, for the Labour Party, this is a catastrophic process?

**Emily Thornberry:** No. I think that the difficulty with the negotiation is that it is a question of give and take. It will be a process happening over the next two years – so

**Andrew Marr:** So these aren’t really red lines?

**Emily Thornberry:** No, no, no, no.

**Andrew Marr:** They are red lines?
Andrew Marr: These are things that need to make sure that we achieve.

Andrew Marr: So my question is very clear. If you don’t get what you achieve do you vote in favour of Article 50 anyway? Because it’s totally illogical if you do.

Emily Thornberry: No, no, it’s not totally illogical. There are going to be negotiations happening in the next week. There are many ways in which the government may be able to react to this that will be positive. So for example, on one of the amendments that we have put down they may say we’re not go to support this amendment but we can give – during a speech we can give an assurance, you know, we can speak in back channels, we can say you will get this, we will not go off the rails in relation to workers’ rights..

Andrew Marr: So we must take – the public must take for granted private conversations between you and ministers and assume that that’s what’s going to happen? Even if you don’t win votes.

Emily Thornberry: No, no, but we also need to have – I personally I think that it’s much better for them to be saying it on the record and to be saying it so that we know what it is that they’re committing themselves to so that we can hold them to account. That seems to me to be the sort of thing. But there will need to be back channels, private conversations, there are many conversations going on now. We’re speaking to government, we’re speaking to Tory back benchers and we are trying to get a compromise together that will work.

Andrew Marr: Take the position of somebody like Clive Lewis, very important in the Labour Party and a very clear position. He
voted for Article 50 in the first vote, but he says, look, we have these very, very important amendments, we need to change this legislation, we need to change it for workers’ rights, tariff free access to the EU, help for EU citizens and all the rest of it. And if we don’t get those then I’m going to vote against it. That is a totally logical position. What is wrong with that?

Emily Thornberry: What’s wrong with it is that we have said that we will not frustrate Brexit. We have got our instructions from the British people, we are struggling and we are fighting to ensure that we get the best possible deal and we’re doing that by holding the government to account. But we are democrats and the public have voted for us to leave the European Union. So we cannot frustrate it but we have to make sure that she does the right thing when she’s in Europe.

Andrew Marr: And you can’t stay on the front bench if you don’t accept that so presumably Diane Abbott must vote with the whip to keep her job as Shadow Home Secretary next week?

Emily Thornberry: Well, we are in a state of negotiations. I cannot sit here today and tell you which of the amendments will be put before parliament, which ones will be voted through, where the negotiations will get us. But I can tell you the direction of travel of the Labour Party, which is a clear direction, you know, this is where we’re trying to go as a national party to make sure the government does the right thing.

Andrew Marr: At the end of the process, whatever happens to those amendments, you’re going to vote in favour of Article 50, even if you’ve lost on every single issue you will still vote in favour of Article 50 and you’re insisting that somebody like Diana Abbott must vote with you?

Emily Thornberry: It’s a fast moving picture.
**Andrew Marr:** A very blurred picture.

**Emily Thornberry:** Let’s see what happens. It’s not blurred. It’s not. I’ve said a number of times what our principles are and how we’re trying to get them and how we are – I mean unfortunately we’re not the government but we are doing our utmost to hold the government to account as an Opposition, right?

**Andrew Marr:** But if it’s not blurred at least you can say that Diane Abbott must vote with the whip to keep her position as Shadow Home Secretary next week.

**Emily Thornberry:** The whip will be decided next week. Let’s see what happens in relation to the Amendments. We have a Shadow Cabinet meeting next week, it will be for the Chief Whip and the Leader to decide what the whip is, you know, on the various amendments, which amendments we’re pushing, which amendments we’re not, and what the final vote will be, but we will not – and most important – the public actually are more interested, I think, than which amendment, blah, blah, blah, is we will we frustrate Brexit? No, we won’t. Will we be fighting to get the best deal? Yes, we will.

**Andrew Marr:** But not very successfully. If you haven’t got real red lines you have got real leverage...

**Emily Thornberry:** Not very successfully?

**Andrew Marr:** .. you haven’t got real red lines. You’re going to vote for it come what may. That’s the problem that you’ve got.

**Emily Thornberry:** No, no, no. Look at the successes we’ve already had. You know she didn’t want to have a vote before parliament at all. She didn’t want to have a White Paper.
Andrew Marr: That was decided in the courts.

Emily Thornberry: and she didn’t want to have a White Paper. We’ve had a White Paper. You know we think that we’re –

Andrew Marr: Again, that was the courts, not the Labour Party with respect.

Emily Thornberry: The White Paper was not the courts. The White Paper was us demanding it and campaigning for it and we’ve actually got them to put – they didn’t even want to put in black and white what their –

Andrew Marr: And many Tory MPs as well.

Emily Thornberry: Yes of course and obviously – we’re in a minority, we’re the Opposition, so we have to do it through negotiations with Opposition MPs too. That’s the difficulty that we’re in. We cannot simply get up and demand something and get it, we have to work with others, we have to campaign for it and slowly, slowly we are achieving the things that we need. We can’t deliver it straight away but.

Andrew Marr: We’re keep watching very carefully. For now Emily Thornberry thank you very much indeed.

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