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## **BREXIT: THERESA MAY COMPROMISES WITH EUROSCEPTIC LAWMAKERS ON CUSTOMS BILL**

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Deustceh Welle (16 July 2018)

The lower house of the British Parliament passed the controversial trade bill after May gave in to hardliner demands. The prime minister has been struggling to find common ground within her own party over Brexit.

British Prime Minister Theresa May gave in to demands from her party's hardliners on Monday, accepting four amendments that would limit the government's ability to set up customs arrangements with the European Union after Britain leaves the bloc in March 2019.

Lawmakers in the lower House of Commons voted 305 to 302 in favor of the amendments to the Taxations (Cross-Border Trade) Bill and later passed the entire legislation in a 318 to 285 vote.

The amendments preclude the British government from collecting EU tariffs on goods that travel through Britain on their way to the bloc unless the EU also agrees to collect British tariffs on goods destined for Britain.

### **Who's who in Brexit?**

May became prime minister after David Cameron resigned from the post in the wake of the Brexit referendum vote in June 2016. Despite her position, she has struggled to define what kind of Brexit her government wants. Hardliners within her Conservative party want her to push for a clean break. Others want Britain to stay close to the bloc. The EU itself has rejected many of May's Brexit demands

### **Sacrifice for a legislative win**

The prime minister accepted the amendments in an attempt to save a vote on the cross-border trade and taxation bill, which appeared to be heading for a defeat before the vote.

Conservative lawmakers from the European Research Group, a coalition of up to 60 right-wingers in favor of a clean break with the EU, targeted the law to push the government toward a "hard" EU exit.

Downing Street defended the government's decision to accept the four amendments, saying that it

was still consistent with previous government policy.

### **Hard or soft options**

It's essentially a choice of a harder or softer Brexit. Harder prioritizes border control over trade. UK firms would pay tariffs to do business in the EU, and vice versa. The softest Brexit would see access to the single market, or at least a customs union, maintained. That would require concessions — including the payment of a hefty "divorce bill" — to which the UK has provisionally agreed.

### **Pro-EU conservatives disappointed**

Opposition lawmakers and some Conservative Party members in favor of closer ties to the EU after Britain's departure rebuked May for accepting the amendments.

Pro-EU Conservative lawmaker Anna Soubry accused May of caving in because she was "frightened" the European Research Group's ability to defy the government. May has a razor thin 13-seat working majority with the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

Monday's vote once again exposed deep divisions within the Conservative Party over Brexit following recent resignations by prominent cabinet members David Davis and Boris Johnson.

The legislative battle is likely to continue into Tuesday, when lawmakers turn their attention to another Brexit-related trade bill.

After a shrill referendum campaign, nearly 52 percent of British voters opted to leave the EU on June 24. Polls had shown a close race before the vote with a slight lead for those favoring remaining in the EU. Conservative British Prime Minister David Cameron, who had campaigned for Britain to stay, acknowledged the 'will of the British people' and resigned the following morning.

jcg/amp (AP, AFP, dpa)

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