
MOST BRITONS SUPPORT A VOTE ON FINAL BREXIT DEAL

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A majority of British voters questioned in a YouGov poll have said they favor a referendum on a final Brexit deal. For the first time, the number supporting a final vote has overtaken those who do not.

Most British voters support a referendum on the final terms on any Brexit deal, according to a YouGov poll for UK newspaper The Times. Some 42 percent of those questioned said there should be a vote on the final Brexit terms, while 40 percent said there should not.

In a 2016 referendum on EU membership, Britons voted 52-48 percent to leave the bloc. There have been calls for a re-run of the referendum – a "second vote" – something that British Prime Minister Theresa May has ruled out.

The YouGov poll also suggested that if the original Brexit vote were to be held a second time, the result would be the same. It showed that two years from the referendum, the views of most voters had not changed: a 45-42 percent majority said they would vote to leave the European Union, according to The Times.

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.

British and EU negotiators are hoping for a final Brexit agreement by October, in order to allow time for ratification by European and British parliaments before a March 29, 2019 deadline. There are several sticking points, however, including the status of the border between Northern Ireland, a UK territory, and the Republic of Ireland.

Britain's Brexit Secretary Dominic Raab said on Thursday that 80 percent of Britain's withdrawal deal had been agreed adding that he and EU negotiator Michel Barnier would discuss "how we complete the remaining 20 percent, including guarantees to avoid a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland."

Deadline extension

It is possible, however, that the date will be extended, provided the remaining 27 EU member states support the continuation of negotiations. Ireland's foreign minister, Simon Coveney, said the country would "absolutely" support an extension. He said that in order for a deal to be hammered out within the current timetable, there would need to be an "intensification" of negotiations between London and Brussels.

Adriano Bosoni, Senior Europe Analyst at Stratfor, told DW how long the negotiations could drag on for. "It could be another year; it could be another two years," Bosoni said. "The treaties do not specify the length of the extension; they only say that if there is unanimity and the 27 members vote for it, there could be an extension. I do not rule this out because this is such a chaotic situation and nobody really knows what's going to happen."

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.

kw/rc (DPA, Reuters)

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