
BREXIT POWER GRAB BY MPS HANGS OVER MAY'S 'PLAN B'

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UK prime minister Theresa May is due to explain her 'Plan B' on Brexit on Monday afternoon (21 January), but could face a power grab by members of the British parliament.

British media reported that amendments have been prepared by two cross-party groups of MPs, each of which would allow the House of Commons to delay Brexit.

Both related to Article 50 of the EU treaty, which the UK government triggered almost two years ago.

The UK's Article 50 notification of its withdrawal from the EU began negotiations between the UK and the EU about an orderly divorce, but the deal agreed by the two sides was rejected by a historical margin of 230 votes in the House of Commons last week.

Under Article 50, the UK will leave the EU on 29 March regardless of whether a deal has been struck.

But such a 'no-deal' Brexit is warned to have serious consequences for both sides' economies and citizens' well-being, as the flow of goods like food and medicines would be interrupted.

One draft amendment to be tabled Monday would give May until 26 February to have a deal approved in parliament - failure to achieve this would lead to a binding parliament vote on whether to extend the Article 50 period and by how long.

Such extension is legally-possible, but would need the approval of all 27 other remaining EU member states.

Bloomberg reported Sunday that EU governments disagree over the length of the extension period they would grant the UK.

Some member states reportedly oppose any extension of the 29 March deadline, others would agree to an extra couple of weeks until the European Parliament elections in May, while a third option of an extension of a year supposedly also has some support.

Details of a second attempt by MPs to take control of the process, dubbed the 'secret plan' by BuzzFeed, were revealed over the weekend.

The plan would involve MPs not only voting about a possible extension, but about revoking Article 50.

Last year, the European Court of Justice confirmed that if the UK wanted to, it could unilaterally withdraw the Article 50 notification.

That would mean that the UK would continue to be an EU member, possibly indefinitely until it triggers Article 50 again.

Irish backstop

Over the weekend, British newspapers speculated on what could be in May's Plan B, which she was forced to come up with after MPs rejected her Brexit deal by 432 votes to 202.

Some media suggested that May would try to clinch a separate bilateral treaty with Ireland.

A major contention with May's deal is the so-called 'backstop' on Northern Ireland.

The mechanism is an insurance policy to prevent any hard border between Northern Ireland - part of the UK - and the Republic of Ireland, an EU member.

The return of a hard border on the Irish island is expected to incite a return of sectarian violence.

On Saturday the UK was reminded that despite the fragile peace, some dissident terrorist groups still exist.

A car bomb went off in the Northern Irish city Londonderry, with police suspecting the New IRA terrorist group to be behind it.

"The New IRA, like most dissident republican groups in Northern Ireland, is small, largely unrepresentative, and determined to drag people back to somewhere they don't want to be," Police Service of Northern Ireland assistant chief constable Mark Hamilton said, according to AFP.

Since 1998, republicans that want to reunite with Ireland and unionists that want to remain part of the United Kingdom, have been at peace thanks to the Good Friday accords.

The peace talks were held with both sides part of the EU, which helped because there was no border.

The Daily Telegraph reported on Sunday that May wanted to rewrite the peace treaty to reassure Ireland that no hard border would resurface after Brexit.

German foreign minister Heiko Maas weighed in on the issue on Sunday, telling national television station ZDF that he did not see how talks between the UK and Ireland could help solve the backstop issue.

"It is a bit of a mystery to me what the British government wants to negotiate with Dublin or what sort of an additional agreement it should be," he said.

Wait and see - but also prepare

Maas added a renegotiation of the EU-UK deal would be "very difficult".

"We have to wait to see what the Britons suggest," he said.

Meanwhile, governments and businesses alike have begun preparations for the event of a no-deal Brexit.

Bloomberg reported Monday that airline caterers have begun stockpiling.

"Companies could be in difficulty if they haven't prepared themselves and ensured a continuity of supply," Stephen Corr of Gate Gourmet told Bloomberg.

"We've been gradually increasing inventory levels of products from the European Union to ensure that any initial disruption at the UK border can be covered," he added.

Kaynak/Source: