
EU SUMMIT COULD AVOID FINAL CALL ON BREXIT EXTENSION

- 19.03.2019

EurAcyiv (19 March 2019)

European Union leaders could hold off making any final decision on any Brexit delay when they meet in Brussels later this week, senior diplomats in the bloc said, depending on what exactly British Prime Minister Theresa May asks them for.

The senior national diplomats in Brussels spoke on Monday afternoon (18 March) after the UKs speaker of parliament seemed to have dashed Mays hopes for a third House of Commons vote which had initially been expected as soon as this week to approve her stalled divorce deal with the bloc.

Speaker deals blow to May's bid for 3rd 'meaningful vote'

British Prime Minister Theresa Mays bid to get her EU divorce deal through parliament was hit Monday (18 March) with a bombshell announcement by the speaker, ruling MPs could not vote again on the same proposal they had already rejected.

The speaker, John Bercow, said the deal would need to be fundamentally different to qualify for another vote, after parliament rejected the agreement in January and again last week.

As the EUs Brexit planning was thrown up in the air again, several senior EU diplomats said the leaders summit on 21-22 March could chose not to make any firm decisions.

Now it looks like we have to wait till the week after the Council to find out what happens, said one diplomat.

With no divorce agreement yet ratified, the UK parliament voted last week for May to seek a delay of the exit date.

Any such delay beyond the current date of midnight (2300 GMT) on 29 March would need to be unanimously backed by all the other 27 EU states staying on together after Brexit and the Thursday-Friday leaders summit was seen as the time to do it.

Another senior diplomat said the leaders could decide to skip any final call on any extension of the divorce negotiating time - long or short - unless there is a third vote in the UK by Thursday.

The summit would not take a final decision but just discuss political parameters and conditions. May would win a few more days. We would decide next week through a written procedure, a third

person said under condition of anonymity.

Sources in the EU's political hub Brussels said earlier on Monday that Britain could ask for a Brexit delay even after the summit, suggesting that the decisive moment for Brexit might still be some days ahead.

They said that the 27 national leaders would not necessarily need to meet physically to approve any such request, if it came from London, as it could be done through a written procedure.

Extension options

May has said she would seek only a short postponement to prepare the necessary legislation if her deal is endorsed before 29 March, and dangled the prospect that if it is not, the exit from the EU could face a long delay. Many Brexiteers worry such a postponement could lead to Brexit never happening.

The EU is unlikely to refuse an extension, to avoid being blamed for economic disruptions if Britain crashes out of the bloc with no deal in place to mitigate the impact. But leaders have yet to discuss their preference for a short delay – until the end of June – or a longer one until the end of this year, or even 2020.

A document circulated among the 27 EU ambassadors by the bloc's legal services last Friday said in principle, Britain could get more than one extension.

But it said the EU must avoid damaging the legitimacy of the bloc's new European Parliament, which will convene for the first time on 2 July following 24-26 May elections across the bloc.

If an initial extension puts the withdrawal date after the date of the European Parliament elections, and if these elections were not organised by the withdrawing state, this would make any further extension impossible, it said.

Some in the EU worry that Britain could extend until the end of June while eschewing the European elections and then revoke its leave notice, which it could do unilaterally by law, putting the status of the bloc's new parliament in doubt.

Kaynak/Source: