

Brexit: UK Parliament to decide between 'no deal' and delay

UK lawmakers have voiced their support for a three-step plan that could allow them to delay the UK's departure from the EU. MPs rejected an alternative plan that had been proposed by the opposition Labour Party.



UK lawmakers have backed a plan by Prime Minister Theresa May that could result in a delay to the country's planned exit from the European Union at the end of next month.

More than 500 MPs voted in favor of a motion by Labour Party MP Yvette Cooper on Wednesday that voiced support for the three-step plan, which foresees Parliament voting a second time on a revised version of May's Brexit deal by March 12.

If the deal is defeated, Parliament would then vote on whether to leave the EU without a deal or delay its departure date.

The vote came a day after May presented her plan to lawmakers.

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Alternative Labour plan rejected

Cooper's motion was one of four that lawmakers voted on during a debate on Wednesday:

- The Labour Party's amendment on an alternative Brexit plan: to negotiate with the EU for changes to the Political Declaration, a nonbinding document that accompanies the legally binding Withdrawal Agreement, to secure a customs union, close alignment with the single market, alignment on rights and protections, participation in agencies and agreement on security arrangements. The amendment lost by 83 votes.
- An amendment from Scottish National Party MP Ian Blackford that the UK should not leave the EU under any circumstances without a deal "regardless of any exit date." The amendment lost by 36 votes.
- Former Conservative ministerial aid Alberto Costa's amendment, backed by 141 MPs, to ensure EU citizens' rights in the UK after Brexit, with or without a deal. This amendment was accepted verbally by the house. There were no voices in opposition.
- Labour MP Yvette Cooper's motion for supporting May's three-step plan. The amendment passed by a majority of 502 votes. Several lawmakers abstained and 20 voted against.

Labour backs second referendum

Despite the defeat of his party's amendment, leader Jeremy Corbyn said Labour would continue to push for other options "including a close economic relationship based on our credible alternative plan or a general election."

But Corbyn also said a second Brexit referendum would be on the table. "We will back a public vote in order to prevent a damaging Tory Brexit or a disastrous no deal outcome," he said.

Corbyn's remarks followed a Labour statement that it would sponsor or support a second vote if the party's amendment was rejected in Parliament.

Macron, Merkel weigh in

Ahead of Wednesday's debate, Chancellor Angela Merkel discussed Brexit during a meeting with President Emmanuel Macron in Paris.

At the press conference after their discussions, both leaders made statements about an extension to the process — with a slight difference in tone.

Merkel said Germany and France “agree completely” that the withdrawal agreement already negotiated between the EU and the UK stands.

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However, she added that the EU would not refuse the UK more time if an extension was requested. “If Britain needs a bit more time, we will not refuse that, but we are aiming for an orderly solution — an orderly withdrawal by the British from the European Union,” she said.

Macron said there was a need for a clear objective if any delay was envisaged. “We would agree to an extension only if it is justified by a new choice by the British,” he said. “In no way can we accept an extension without a clear objective.”

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Ahead of the parliamentary votes, Prime Minister May repeated that she did not want any postponement. “The government’s policy is to get the legally binding changes so a deal can be brought back to this house...and we can leave on March 29 with a deal,” she said.

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