



CEC Weekly Political Update

22nd March 2019

Brexit extension agreement

On Wednesday, PM Theresa May addressed President of the European Council Donald Tusk, with an anticipated request to extend the deadline for the UK's withdrawal from the EU. PM May asked the Union for to extension until 30 June 2019. On Thursday, the European Council discussed this matter and issued a response. The consent granted by the EU's 27 is, however, conditional and does not meet the requested 30 June deadline.

The European Council agreed:

- an extension until 12 April 2019 will be granted if the House of Commons decides to reject the deal for the third time. This is also

the date by which the UK would have to decide whether or not it will take part in the European Parliament elections.

- an extension until 22 May 2019 will be granted, however under the condition that the House of Commons agrees to accept the negotiated deal – this will have to happen next week – 25–29 March 2019;
- an additional, unspecified extension, under the condition that the United Kingdom holds European Parliament elections.

PM Morawiecki took credit for this result and argued that it was Poland's approach, and its advocacy for a compromise that led to the agreement, which will provide additional time and potentially allow to avoid a hard Brexit. Yesterday's discussion during the European Council summit, however, made it clear that there are significant divisions amongst the member states in regard to Brexit. Initially, Poland was willing to grant an extension without any conditions and argued that it would not create significant legal difficulties – a favourable and forgiving approach to the UK. On the other hand, France's Emanuel Macron spoke strongly against this solution. With nearing elections to the European Parliament, Brexit is increasingly becoming a legal and organisational matter. Its political aspects play an equally important role.

The fate of Brexit now lies solely with the British government and the House of Commons. Theresa May plans to submit the negotiated deal for a third vote in parliament, however, she may face some legal obstacles. The Speaker of the House of Commons John Bercow argued that the government cannot ask parliament to vote on the exact same matter. Consequently, Theresa May will have to find a way to include an amendment to the deal, which will allow for its submission to a vote. Commentators suggest that, most likely, agreements and further assurances negotiated between PM May and Jean-Claude Juncker in Strasbourg will be incorporated to the document. Still, many believe that the third vote is unnecessary, because British MPs, who already voted against the deal twice, are unlikely to change their positions. The deal was first voted down by a majority of 432 to 202, the second time, PM May managed to turn 41 MPs, but the deal was rejected by 391 to 242. Consequently, despite the dynamics of this situation, it will be difficult for PM May to secure a majority vote in favour of the deal.

A recent public petition calling for Theresa May to cancel Brexit by revoking Article 50 has already gathered over two million signatures. It has sparked debates in the House of Commons, but experts argue that is unlikely to facilitate any actions, such as revoking Brexit or calling a second referendum. A significant change of circumstances would have to occur for the EU and its member states to revise the agreed deal – general elections in the UK or a second referendum. Considering PM May’s persistence and dedication to delivering Brexit, the government itself will be reluctant to take any action hindering the process. Further developments will now depend on the House of Commons.

CEC Government Relations is the leading political communications consultancy in Central Europe, providing strategic political and media intelligence, monitoring and analysis for Western multinationals in the region. Key expertise includes the defence, energy, environment, IT, financial and extractive industry sectors. CEC also has experience in media management, local government, and third-party mobilisation as an integral part of its communications activities. The Warsaw office works closely with other CEC offices in Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, as well as its partner agencies in other European Union countries.