

EU leaders set to offer Boris Johnson three-month Brexit extension

The European Union is preparing to grant Britain a flexible three-month Brexit extension, according to a leaked draft of an agreement set to be signed off by Brussels.



French President Emmanuel Macron had been pushing for a short extension of around two weeks. -Credit: PA

A paper being circulated among member states, seen by The Guardian, would allow the UK to stay in the EU until 31 January 2020 - but would leave open the option of quitting the bloc earlier if MPs ratify Boris Johnson's deal.

The Prime Minister requested an extension to the existing 31 October deadline earlier this month after MPs toughened up a law requiring him to do so if no agreement had been signed off by the Commons.

According to the leaked text, the UK would be able to leave the bloc on the first day of the month after a deal is approved.

"The period provided for in article 50 (3) TEU as extended by the European

council decision (EU) 2019/584 is hereby further extended until 31 January 2020," it states.

The document adds: "In the event that the parties to that agreement complete their respective ratification procedures and notify the depositary of the completion of these procedures in November 2019, in December 2019 or in January 2020, the withdrawal agreement will enter into force respectively on [the first of the month of the relevant month]."

The text - which is expected to be formally signed off on Monday - follows days of EU wrangling over the length of any further Brexit extension.

French President Emmanuel Macron had been pushing for a short extension of around two weeks in an attempt to put pressure on British MPs to back Mr. Johnson's agreement.

But European Council President Donald Tusk, who has held intensive talks with EU capitals over the weekend, made the case for a longer extension.

If approved, the extension could raise the prospect of a snap general election by shutting down the possibility of a no-deal Brexit on 31 October.

Labour has so far signaled its opposition to the 12 December poll demanded by the PM, arguing that they will not do so until a no-deal Brexit is "off the table".

MPs will be given a vote on his election bid on Monday, but it is unlikely to get the two-thirds majority - 434 votes - it needs under the Fixed Term Parliaments Act.

However, Number 10 has made clear it will "look at" an alternative joint SNP-Lib Dem plan for a Commons vote on Tuesday on whether to have an election on 9 December instead.

Source:

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