

MEPs stall EU-UK trade deal ratification — again

European Parliament leaders had been expected to announce that the deal would finally be ratified in late April.

Leading MEPs on Tuesday once again refused to set a date to ratify the EU-U.K. post-Brexit trade deal, saying they would wait until London gives reassurances it will apply the deal.

European Parliament leaders had been expected on Tuesday to announce that the deal would finally be ratified during a late April plenary session — the last step needed for the deal after EU national governments and the British parliament gave their assent.

Yet at a “Conference of Presidents” meeting, Parliament President David Sassoli and political party leaders decided to refrain from setting any vote. Instead, they agreed that MEPs would approve the deal only in Parliament’s foreign affairs and trade committees, where a vote is scheduled for Thursday.

The decision will be “deferred due to the need for progress on roadmap for pragmatic yet full implementation of the #WithdrawalAgreement,” tweeted Christophe Hansen, the lead Brexit MEP on the European Parliament’s trade committee. “Cool heads must prevail,” Hansen added.

The situation could still change in the coming weeks, depending on the ongoing conversations between the Parliament and British officials.

The parliament’s ratification of the deal has been held up amid ongoing tensions between the EU and U.K.

In March, political group leaders in the Parliament decided to postpone their ratification vote after the U.K. unveiled plans to unilaterally extend grace periods on post-Brexit customs checks at Northern Ireland’s ports for at least six months. The European Commission said in a statement at the time that such a move marked the “second time” the U.K. government had been “set to breach international law” after a heated row over the border erupted in 2020.

Technically, the trade deal has provisionally been in effect since January 1, a step taken to avoid the economic uncertainty of a no-deal scenario. U.K. and EU negotiators pushed their talks close to the December 31 deadline before reaching a deal, despite the European Parliament's warnings that at least three months would be needed for proper scrutiny and ratification.

Sassoli told POLITICO last month the April 26 plenary would be "the last date" for ratification, adding that "there will be no extension" past that session.

Source:

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