

COMMENTARY: SPECIAL EUROPEAN COUNCIL (Art. 50)

Our experts present their thoughts on the prospect of a long Brexit extension (April 10)

Vladimír Bartovic | Why the EU should support a long extension: The EU's important agenda for 2019 necessitates a Brexit extension

Only long-term extension, with the possibility to end it earlier in case of the ratification of the withdrawal agreement in the British parliament (so-called flexextension), will allow the EU to focus on the most important agenda - peaceful and proper conduct of the elections to the European Parliament and the subsequent negotiations on the creation of EU institutions and setting the political agenda for the EU for upcoming years. The EU must give time to the UK to rethink properly the form of withdrawal and of future relations with the EU, including the organization of confirmatory referendum or new elections if agreed so by the Conservative and Labour parties, without the constant risk of falling from the cliff and leaving on no-deal that would certainly harm both the UK and the EU.

Christian Kvorning Lassen | Why the EU should reject a long extension: A long Brexit extension risks stranding the EU in a political quagmire during an important year

Despite the disastrous economic consequences of Britain crashing out of the European Union, a long Brexit extension is becoming politically untenable to support; an extension would mean Britain participating in the upcoming EP elections, which would be a disruptive element in what portends to be the most important EP elections in recent times, as well as deepening the seemingly irreconcilable divisions within Britain. The elections would likely be used by Remainers and Brexiteers alike as an informal 'second referendum' on the whole Brexit process, which in turn would only further complicate Britain's Brexit negotiations during a longer extension period.

Simply put, an extension should be based on the prospect of progress being made as a result of it; Britain has in no way inspired confidence in such a prospect. Britain has been mired in domestic political disputes and has for almost three years been unable to agree on even the fundamental manner in which they want to leave the EU. There is no reason to believe that will change with a long extension, especially as internal Tory-jockeying for leadership will likely intensify in the coming months, further obstructing a cohesive Brexit process.

Although the consequences of Britain leaving the EU without a deal are severe, a prolonged extension risks detracting from the EU's ability to adequately address more pertinent long-term issues such as climate change, migration, breaches of rule of law and deterioration of democratic standards and European values in rogue member states such as Poland and Hungary.

Martin Michelot | Why the EU should reject a long extension: Moving on is urgent for the sake of the quality of the debate

Granting a long extension to the UK seems at this point fairly illusory, in the absence of an actual structured plan for Theresa May to have the House of Commons upvote the political declaration and withdrawal agreement. Her trips to meet Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron amounts to too little too late and seem to show that she treats European leaders as a nuisance rather than the asset they could have been to her earlier on in the process. It is unimaginable for the progressive forces in Europe to run a campaign while having to answer to constituents why the UK will still organize EU elections despite having voted to leave almost three years ago. The best solution for the EU would be to put pressure on May to find a deal before the European elections; Europe needs to be able to move on, and act on the proposals for refoundation that have come from various sides of the continent. The discussion should be about the future and not about how to get through next week. No one wants a no-deal or has an interest in it, but from a long-term perspective, it can no longer afford to be held responsible by British inability to act. "I want my future back", to paraphrase Margaret Thatcher.

Vít Havelka | Why the EU should support a long extension: the UK needs time to completely rethink its Brexit strategy

The European Union should allow the United Kingdom more time to decide how to proceed with Brexit and get a second breath after years of exhausting negotiations.

The current British strategy of "running down the clock" has proven futile. British domestic politics seems to be in a complete stalemate while British MPs have already three times declined the Withdrawal Agreement, irreparably undermining not only the withdrawal agreement but also Theresa May's credibility. Simultaneously, the European Union is frustrated by the lack of agreement within the UK as it disrupts the EU's agenda during a seminal year.

The UK now needs to stop the clock and completely rethinking its Brexit strategy. This will not be feasible without a long postponement of Brexit, and presumably second referendum or new general elections