

Article – Verhofstadt: “We will only approve Brexit deal after UK has approved it”



He made the comments during a live session with followers of our Facebook page in Strasbourg. The agreement has been negotiated in recent weeks by the EU and the UK government, but would need the approval of the Parliament before it can enter into force.

Verhofstadt said the deal agreed with the Johnson government respects the principles and values of the EU: “It safeguards the internal market, it avoids a border on the isle of Ireland because the controls will be done outside the territory of the island and most of the EU rules will still be applicable in Northern Ireland. That was very important, because we don’t want a solution for Ireland that creates a border. Immediately when you establish a border on the island, there would be a return of the violence we have seen in the past.”

However, before the Parliament’s vote on the agreement is required, it will still need to be adopted by the UK first. Verhofstadt said: “We need the approval of the British parliament. And once that is done, it will return to the European Parliament. The European Parliament will scrutinise the agreement and finally give its consent.”

It is key that EU citizens' right in the UK are guaranteed as there are several million EU citizens living [in the UK], said Verhofstadt (Renew Europe, Belgium). He said there were still a number of problems such as the UK not offering sufficient assistance to EU citizens to help them to fill out the required paperwork. "There are many people who don't ask something, because they don't know anything about these procedures and they could be deported."

During the live discussion there were several requests from people asking for the EU to stop granting extensions to allow the UK to stay in the Union for longer. Verhofstadt said: "The worst thing that can happen is that there is no deal. That would be a catastrophe, not only for Britain, but also for our companies and for our citizens. I hope there is no extension and therefore it is very simple. If the British parliament agrees in the coming days or coming weeks, then we could do our job and everything maybe can be done before the 31st of this month."

"Should the UK reject the current deal, then an extension should only be given under specific circumstances," said Verhofstadt. "In that case we would say an extension is only possible when there is a way out of this crisis. That means that on the British side they decide on something, for example an election or a second referendum. What we will not do is to give an extension without any purpose. They have to decide on a way out."