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EU agrees to extend ratification deadline: sources
16/06/2005 20h11

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Tony Blair (L) is greeted by Jean-Claude Juncker
©AFP - Gerard Cerles

BRUSSELS (AFP) - A "very large majority" of EU leaders agreed to extend a deadline to ratify the bloc's embattled constitution beyond the target date of November 2006, sources said.

During the period EU states would be free to vote on the EU charter if they wanted to, but there would be "no decision on the final fate of the treaty," said an EU official.


"We must not declare the death of the constitution today," he said, as EU leaders sought to draw back from an all-out crisis after French and Dutch voters dealt crushing referendum rejections to the EU charter.

There was some debate over exactly how to describe the extension, another source said.

"It will probably be more a period of reflection than a pause ... to give member states the flexibility to choose what they want to do" on ratification, she said.

Under the terms of the constitution, which was signed by EU leaders in Rome last October, it must be ratified by all 25 member states within two years to come into force.

The deal to extend the ratification process was struck as EU leaders negotiated on the first evening of a two-day summit, clouded by uncertainty over the future of the charter.



The constitution was hammered out over four years, and was designed

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