
JUNCKER SAYS TO PUSH FOR EU AT DIFFERENT SPEEDS

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European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said on Thursday that the EU should make it easier for some member states to deepen their integration in some areas without the whole bloc following suit.

The European Union executive will make proposals in a high-profile policy White Paper it will publish next week, Juncker said in a speech to Belgian students at Louvain-la-Neuve.

The idea of a Europe of "multiple speeds" has long made for heated debate. After Britain's shock vote to leave the bloc, some governments want to deepen shared sovereignty in the hope of making the EU more effective while others say Brexit and the rise of nationalist parties shows Europeans dislike the idea.

Juncker, a former premier of founder member Luxembourg, made clear he favored the former: "This is no longer a time when we can imagine everyone doing the same thing together," he said.

"Should it not be that those who want to go forward more rapidly can do so without bothering the others by putting in place a more structured framework that is open to everyone?"

"I will argue for this in the coming days."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whom Juncker met on Wednesday, forecast "an EU at different speeds" three weeks ago, echoing other founding states including France and delighting the Italian organizers of a summit in Rome on March 25 intended to launch a reform debate in the Union.

But other governments, notably among the poorer, former Communist states in the east, are concerned that the idea is divisive and could risk halting their post-Cold War progress toward Western levels of prosperity. Some argue that current EU rules already allow for "enhanced cooperation" by some states.

(Reporting by Alissa de Carbonnel and Alastair Macdonald; Editing by Catherine Evans)