
PM MAY SAYS EU SEEKING TO AFFECT RESULT OF BRITISH ELECTION

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Reuters (3 May 2017)

British Prime Minister Theresa May accused European politicians and officials on Wednesday of seeking to affect the outcome of the June 8 national election by issuing threats over Brexit.

May, whose Conservative Party has a double-digit lead over the main opposition Labour Party in the polls, has framed the early election as an opportunity to strengthen her hand in upcoming negotiations on Britain's exit from the European Union.

Speaking in front of her Downing Street office after visiting Queen Elizabeth to mark the dissolution of parliament, the formal start of the election campaign, May said there were some in Brussels who did not want to see Brexit talks succeed.

Over the weekend a German newspaper gave a damning account of a dinner last week between May and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, reporting that he had told May that Brexit could not be a success.

"Britain's negotiating position in Europe has been misrepresented in the continental press, the European Commission's negotiating stance has hardened, threats against Britain have been issued by European politicians and officials," May said. "All of these acts have been deliberately timed to affect the result of the general election."

There was no immediate EU comment on her accusations.

May has dismissed the German newspaper report as Brussels gossip and on Tuesday repeated her promise to be a "bloody difficult woman" in talks with Juncker, as brinkmanship between the two sides increased ahead of the negotiations.

"PR GIFT"?

A senior politician from the opposition Labour Party warned May was increasing the chance of not getting a deal by accusing EU politicians of trying to meddle in a British election.

"By picking a needless fight with our European partners in this way, the prime minister is making a good deal with Brussels less likely, and a chaotic Brexit with no agreement at all more likely," Chuka Umunna said in a statement.

But Rupert Harrison, an adviser to former finance minister George Osborne until last year's Brexit referendum, said the German report had played into May's hands as her team wanted to make the election all about giving her a strong mandate for the Brexit talks.

"When Juncker gives Theresa May a pre-election PR gift, does anyone really expect her not to play it for all she can?" he said on Twitter. "They'll hope this story runs and runs."

Earlier on Wednesday Brexit minister David Davis and finance minister Philip Hammond kicked off the formal election campaign with a poster predicting a tax "bombshell" if Labour won and a warning Britain could not risk "unleashing economic chaos" at such an important time for the economy.

A poll by research firm Kantar on Wednesday put the Conservatives on 48 percent, up two percentage points on a week earlier, while support for Labour was unchanged at 24 percent.

May said reaching the best Brexit deal with Brussels would be the overriding task for whoever wins the June 8 election and urged voters to give her their backing to "fight for Britain".

She said that while Britain wanted to reach a deal with the EU, that view was not shared by everyone in Brussels.

"The events of the last few days have shown that, whatever our wishes, and however reasonable the positions of Europe's other leaders - there are some in Brussels who do not want these talks to succeed. Who do not want Britain to prosper."

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-election-brexit-idUSKBN17Z1S2>

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