
SORT OUT STATUS OF EU WORKERS NOW, DIXONS CARPHONE TELLS UK GOVERNMENT

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LONDON (Reuters) - Britain should turn up the pragmatism and tone down the ideology in its Brexit negotiations, and address the future status of workers from other European Union countries as a matter of urgency, the boss of retailer Dixons Carphone said on Tuesday.

Chief Executive Seb James also called for more clarity from Theresa May's government on a potential transition period to allow business time to adapt to Britain's departure from the EU in March 2019 - a subject that has put ministers at loggerheads.

Dixons Carphone (DC.L) is Britain's biggest electricals retailer and owner of the CurrysPC World and Carphone Warehouse brands. It employs around 4,000 citizens from other EU countries out of a total UK workforce of about 26,000.

The government has said striking a deal with Brussels on the rights of EU citizens is a priority, but its position has been criticized by EU negotiator Michel Barnier and the two sides have made little progress toward an agreement.

"It's not fair on people to not give them some kind of clarity as quickly as possible," James told Reuters in an interview at Dixons Carphone's Acton headquarters in west London.

"We need to get that sorted, and we need to get it sorted now," he said.

Britain's business leaders, who largely backed remaining in the EU, have been exasperated by the infighting over Brexit that has intensified in May's Conservative government since it lost its outright majority in a June election.

James said the politicians needed to get real, and feared that without a change in tone Britain might not get a Brexit deal at all.

"I hope and pray that we will begin to see the sort of pragmatism and sensible negotiating that we in Britain have historically been famous for," he said.

"At the moment there seems to be quite a lot of ideological discussion. I will be glad to see the back of it."

James was also critical of the government waiting until last week to order a study of EU migration to help it design a post-Brexit immigration system that is due to come into force just six months after the report is completed.

He said this showed practical planning for post-Brexit Britain was impossible.

"There's nothing I can do. We just have to make ourselves as resilient as we can, put our arms around our people and defend them like lions to the extent that we can."

A sign displays the logo of Dixons Carphone at the company headquarters in London, Britain August 1, 2017. Neil Hall

"Zen-Like Calm"

Though Dixons Carphone has had a strong run of trading over the last year, reporting record annual profit in June, its shares are down 22 percent, reflecting its exposure to discretionary purchases at a time when consumers' real earnings are falling.

"The market is worried, and particularly overseas investors are very worried, that the UK economy is going to take a very nasty knock," said James.

But he said he was in a state of "Zen-like calm" about the share price.

"If we continue to grow profitability and do that in a very sustainable, long term and recurring way I think we'll get our share price back and more."

Dixons Carphone, which also trades as Elkjop, Elgiganten, Gigantti and Lefdal in Nordic countries and Kotsovolos in Greece, trails German consumer electronics business Ceconomy (CECG.DE) in annual sales.

Ceconomy, which this month demerged from Metro MEOG.DE, has said it wants to pursue industry consolidation.

Ceconomy and Dixons Carphone compete directly in just two markets - Sweden and Greece.

"We do see industrial logic for a European consolidation," said James.

"You could imagine a world in which we and Fnac Darty (FNAC.PA) and Ceconomy were part of a single group able to homogenize the offer we make to customers both on the product and the service side."

"(But) it's not going to happen tomorrow," said James, noting Ceconomy's complex ownership structure could take years to resolve.

James, 51, who was approached about becoming CEO of broadcaster ITV before EasyJet's Carolyn McCall got the job, said he was committed to Dixons Carphone.

"We've got lots to do ... I'll do this (three year) tour of duty and we'll see what happens," he said.

Additional reporting by William James; Editing by Mark Potter