
NO AGREEMENT IN LATEST SCOTS-UK BREXIT POWERS TALKS

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10.08.2017

BBC (9 August 2017)

The latest talks between the Scottish and UK governments about the repatriation of powers after Brexit have concluded with no agreement.

First Secretary of State Damian Green met Deputy First Minister John Swinney and Scotland's Brexit Minister Michael Russell in Edinburgh.

The Scottish government fears a "power grab" by Westminster, but UK ministers insist there will be more devolution.

Mr Russell said the latest talks were "useful", but had not changed anything.

He said the Scottish government remained "absolutely clear" that it could not recommend Holyrood give its consent to the EU Withdrawal Bill in its current form.

Both sides confirmed there will be further talks in the coming weeks.

'Naked power grab'

The key concern for Scottish ministers is what happens to powers over agriculture, fishing and the environment which are devolved, but currently exercised in Brussels.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon united with her Welsh counterpart Carwyn Jones to describe the current proposals, which would see powers repatriated to Westminster in the first instance to set up a common UK framework, as a "naked power grab" from the devolved administrations.

Scottish Secretary David Mundell, who was also at the talks, has previously spoken of a powers "bonanza" for Holyrood.

Following the meeting, Mr Green said he thought the talks were "good".

He said: "Obviously there are issues on which the UK government and the Scottish government place a different emphasis.

"But we agreed that we need to work first of all on the principles.

"We agree that we want to give more powers at the end of this process to the Scottish government and the Scottish parliament and we agree that keeping free trade within the UK to enhance the prosperity in Scotland and the rest of the UK has to be a really important outcome of Brexit."

Asked about the "power grab" claims, Mr Green said: "I hope as these talks go on we will be able to convince them that there is absolutely the opposite of the intention of a power grab."

"We want more powers to come to the devolved administrations. That has to be done in the context of keeping free trade within the United Kingdom, but we've agreed more talks in a few weeks' time."

'Significant crisis'

Mr Russell agreed the talks were "civilised", but said he had left UK ministers in "no doubt" that the Scottish government could not accept the "impractical and unworkable" legislation.

He told BBC Scotland: "The Scottish government wants to move forward on this issue with the UK government. We've made it clear we don't believe Brexit is the right thing but we've agreed to work with them and we've tried to do that from the beginning."

"But we can't do it on the basis of undermining the Scottish Parliament, we can't do it on the basis of taking powers away from Scotland."

"But we are willing to listen, and that's why a positive outcome of this was another meeting, proposed by the first secretary [Mr Green] to bring us back together and we hope at that meeting they will come forward with some concrete proposals about issues."

Asked about his position on the Withdrawal Bill, Mr Russell said: "Right now, the recommendation of the Scottish government will make will be to say that we could not approve this bill."

"It's not a veto, and the UK government will be aware of that. But it would deepen what is already a very significant crisis in my view, if they were to overrule the Scottish Parliament."

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