
HUNT CLARIFIES NO-DEAL COMMENTS: UK 'WOULD SURVIVE'

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Jeremy Hunt has clarified his comments about a no-deal Brexit, saying Britain "would survive and prosper" - but it would be a "big mistake for Europe".

On Thursday he told ITV News a "messy" no-deal Brexit "would be a mistake we would regret for generations".

But he later tweeted that his words "should not be misrepresented" and the UK would only "sign up to a deal that respects the referendum result".

Tory MP Nigel Evans said: "We don't need any lectures from Remainers."

The backbencher, who campaigned for Brexit, told the BBC: "He's got his own views. He voted remain. The prime minister needs to ensure, as she promised, that Brexiteers are in charge of our leaving the European Union." And fellow Conservative Brexiteer Conor Burns told the Telegraph: "The thing that we want to avoid for 'generations to come' is being locked into a permanent orbit around the EU where we end up with a deal but don't have a seat around the table".

It comes as Brexit talks resumed in Brussels between UK and EU officials, amid growing speculation about the possibility of the UK leaving the European Union without a deal in March 2019.

On Friday, Danish finance minister Kristian Jensen told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that Theresa May's Brexit plan drawn up at Chequers was a "realistic proposal for good negotiations".

But asked about comments by Latvia's foreign minister, that the chance of a no-deal Brexit was "50-50", he said: "I also believe that 50-50 is a very good assessment because time is running out and we need to move really fast if we've got to strike a deal that is positive both for the UK and EU."

Mr Hunt told ITV on Thursday that he believed the government's Chequers plan was the "framework on which I believe the ultimate deal will be based".

But he said, although the UK must be "prepared for all outcomes", if the UK were to leave without a negotiated deal: "It would be a mistake we would regret for generations, if we were to see a fissure, if we had a messy, ugly divorce."

"Inevitably that would change British attitudes towards Europe." On Friday, he tweeted: "Important not to misrepresent my words. Britain would survive and prosper without a deal... but it would be a big mistake for Europe because of inevitable impact on long-term partnership with UK. We will only sign up to deal that respects referendum result."

Business Secretary Greg Clarke, who has been meeting counterparts in Austria and Finland, said on Thursday he was "confident" a "mutually beneficial deal" could be reached.

But he said that if the European Commission did not "respond positively and constructively" to the UK's proposal, "the disruption and impact on our continent's businesses, economies, and millions of hard-working families across the UK and EU will be significant and lasting".

The government has been touting its plans for Brexit agreed in July at Chequers - the prime minister's country residence in Buckinghamshire - to the EU and its leaders over the summer.

But the EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier has appeared to rule out a key UK proposal - allowing the UK to collect EU customs duties on its behalf - in July.

Meanwhile, BuzzFeed News is reporting that it has seen a list of 84 areas of British Life - from organic food production to travelling with pets - which would be affected, should the UK leave the EU without a negotiated withdrawal.

Brexit talks resumed in Brussels this week between UK and EU officials, with the focus on the Irish border - a key sticking point - and future relations.

A European Commission spokesman said: "As this week's round is at technical level there won't be a meeting between Michel Barnier and Dominic Raab.

"We will confirm in due course whether a subsequent meeting has been arranged."

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