
MAY AND EU CONSIDER EXTENDING TRANSITION TO BREAK BREXIT IMPASSE

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British PM Theresa May appeared to open the way to extend the post-Brexit transition period until December 2021, as EU leaders offered an olive branch to her in a bid to break the impasse during the EU summit on Wednesday (17 October).

Talks on finalising the UKs withdrawal agreement and a political declaration on future trade relations with the EU have been blocked by failure to agree on a backstop to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic in the event that an agreement on future EU-UK relations cannot be struck.

The EU proposes a backstop that would effectively keep Northern Ireland inside the customs union, while May has repeatedly insisted on a UK-wide arrangement.

Last December, EU and UK negotiators agreed to a 21 month transition period after the UK formally leaves the bloc in March next year during which the UK would remain part of the single market but have no say over new rules governing it, and on the need to agree a backstop on the Irish border.

European Parliament President Antonio Tajani confirmed that both sides had mooted the idea of extending the transition period by an additional year.

I certainly perceived political will to make headway, he added.

But even extending the transition period led to a compromise between May and the EU-27, there is no guarantee that she would be able to sell such a deal to her divided Conservative party.

War on all fronts as May faces puzzle of Brexit Rubiks cube

Although the EU-UK talks collapsed on Sunday (14 October), Prime Minister Theresa May will probably find out that brokering a final withdrawal deal with the bloc will actually be easier than successfully piloting it through the UK Parliament.

I did not perceive anything substantially new in terms of content as I listened to Mrs. May, Tajani told reporters, though he added that it was the tone of someone who want to reach an agreement.

Tajani, however, also emphasised that without an agreement on the three points (EU citizens rights in the UK, Brexit divorce bill and the Northern Ireland matter), the European Parliament cannot and

will not vote in favour of the agreement.

May addressed EU leaders for 15 minutes before they sat down to a dinner which she did not attend, with her spokesperson briefing that the Prime Minister had urged EU leaders to show trust and leadership.

We have shown we can do difficult deals together constructively. I remain confident of a good outcome, she added. Most EU leaders struck a note of cautious optimism that a deal would eventually be reached even though there was disappointment that, as expected, May offered no new proposals on how to break the impasse.

Tusk broke off the meeting, after nobody responded to the British Prime Minister.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said he was cautiously optimistic that an agreement would be made in the coming weeks.

The harshest words came from Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, who alluded to Mrs Mays difficulties in being able to unite her government.

We do not know what they want, they do not know themselves what they really want – that's the problem, she said.

In the meantime, the chances of an extraordinary summit being held in November to finalise an agreement have all but vanished as sufficient progress in the talks had not been made.

The EU27 leaders stand ready to convene a European Council, if and when the union negotiator reports that decisive progress has been made. For now, EU27 is not planning to organise an extraordinary summit on Brexit in November, an EU source told reporters in Brussels.

Instead, a summit to seal a Brexit deal will only be called if and when the EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier deems that there has been decisive progress.

EU leaders also underscored their support for Barnier and the importance of maintaining a united front behind him – a further rebuff to the UK's attempts to peel off support from individual member states.

Barnier warned ahead of the EU summit in Brussels that the Brexit negotiators needed much more time to complete a deal.

We are not there yet. Brexit must be orderly for everyone and for all the issues including the island of Ireland. So we need time, we need much more time. We continue to do the work in the next weeks calmly and patiently, he told reporters arriving at the summit.

Kaynak/Source: