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## **NO MORE BREXIT TALKS, DESPITE MAY'S PLEAS**

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EU Observer (14 December 2018)

EU leaders said on Friday (14 December) at their meeting in Brussels that it was up to the UK to decide how to proceed with Brexit.

They repeated there could be no renegotiation of the Brexit deal agreed in November after British prime minister Theresa May had asked for further Brexit assurances on Thursday.

The EU-27 adopted a political statement on Thursday evening to say the EU does not want to trap the UK in a so-called 'backstop' - a plan to keep the UK in the EU customs union until they find a way to avoid a hard border in Ireland.

German chancellor Angela Merkel said the EU saw the backstop as an insurance policy, and that the aim was for both the UK and EU to do well in a future trade deal.

"Now we await Ms May's response," said Merkel, one of several the leaders who had asked May what she needed to get the Brexit deal through the London parliament.

Brexit MP's see the backstop as an EU attempt to tie the UK indefinitely to the bloc.

May told reporters after Friday's meeting that further clarification from the EU was still possible.

"There is work still to do. We will be holding talks in coming days about how to obtain the further assurances that the UK parliament needs in order to be able to approve the deal," she said.

However, no such preparations are under way on the EU side.

EU council chief Donald Tusk said he had no mandate to reopen Brexit talks with Britain.

"I have no mandate to organise any further negotiations. We have to exclude any further opening of the withdrawal agreement," Tusk said.

"But of course, we are staying here in Brussels and I'm always at the PM's disposal," he added.

Top EU officials were keen to offer personal support for May after some press reports spoke of her "humiliation" in Brussels.

"We have to bring down the temperature," European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker said.

Earlier in the day, Juncker had been caught on camera in a heated conversation with May.

He told press he did not mean to offend May and that his comment, which described the UK position as "nebulous", had referred to the broader state of affairs in the UK and to not May's presentation.

"I have the highest respect for the British prime minister," Juncker said.

The commission chief said the EU was ready to open talks on a future trade deal with Britain "the second after" the withdrawal agreement was approved in the UK and EU parliaments, in order to avoid having to implement the backstop.

Tusk also offered support for May.

"We have treated prime minister May with the outmost respect, all of us. We really appreciate the efforts to ratify our common agreement," he said.

"We have treated PM May with much greater empathy and respect than some British members of parliament," he added.

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Kaynak/Source: