
BREXIT: THERESA MAY FIGHTS FOR DEAL AND PREMIERSHIP

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UK Prime Minister Theresa May was at her Chequers country retreat fighting for her Brexit withdrawal agreement. Some of her senior Cabinet ministers have denied they are about to oust her from office.

Theresa May was battling to convince lawmakers within her Conservative Party to back her Brexit withdrawal deal on Sunday amid reports that senior ministers in her Cabinet were planning to force her resignation.

May met with senior party officials and pro-Brexit lawmakers who oppose her deal at her Chequers country retreat after inviting them to discuss a way forward. Boris Johnson, Dominic Raab, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Iain Duncan Smith were reportedly present at the meeting.

The crisis talks started amid reports in The Sunday Times, The Telegraph and The Daily Mail about an imminent Cabinet coup. The Times reported that 11 senior ministers had "confirmed that they wanted the Prime Minister to make way for someone else."

Ministers deny leadership ambitions

But some of the names cited to replace her in a caretaker role have dismissed the reports.

May's effective deputy, David Lidington, said he did not have "any lingering shred of ambition" for the prime minister's job, despite the rumored backing of six Cabinet colleagues.

Two other ministers named as potential successors were Michael Gove, the environment secretary, and Jeremy Hunt, the foreign secretary.

Gove repeated his support for May on Sunday: "I think it is not the time to change the captain of the ship," he said. "I think what we need to do is to chart the right course."

A third meaningful vote?

The government is planning to propose an amendable motion on its Brexit strategy on Monday. This may include a further attempt to get May's withdrawal deal passed, despite two major defeats and a refusal from the House of Commons' speaker to allow the same text to be presented for a

third time without any substantive changes.

Following this, a cross-party group of lawmakers has put forward an amendment to secure indicative votes in the House of Commons. These may be heard on Wednesday and include softer Brexit options similar to Norway's current relationship with the bloc.

If the withdrawal agreement fails, or is not presented, the UK government needs to go back to the EU by April 12 with a plan of how to proceed with Brexit.

Opposition chimes in

Some politicians, including Labour deputy leader Tom Watson, have said they would back May's deal if she allows for a referendum to be held on it.

Breaking with the government's official policy, Chancellor Philip Hammond said a second referendum was "a perfectly coherent proposition and it deserves to be considered."

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said Sunday that her Scottish National Party (SNP) would push for Brexit to be halted by revoking Article 50 to avoid a no-deal exit.

"I would like to see Article 50 revoked," Sturgeon said. "That would be preferable to crashing out with no deal."

A petition to "Revoke Article 50 and remain in the EU" — the largest-ever petition on the parliament's website — had recorded 5.1 million signatures by Sunday afternoon.

This came a day after one of the largest-ever demonstrations was held in London, with more than a million people calling for a People's Vote on Brexit.

Cabinet showdown and options

Ahead of the parliamentary votes, May's Cabinet ministers meet on Monday morning to discuss how to proceed.

If her Conservative colleagues do move to replace her, they will still have to decide who they want in her place, and what to do about Brexit.

The UK is still scheduled to leave the EU on March 29, despite an agreement with the EU to delay the exit date. The House of Commons must first ratify that agreement for the delay to take effect.