
LUXEMBOURG'S PM LAYS INTO BORIS JOHNSON AFTER HE SKIPS PRESS CONFERENCE

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"This is a nightmare!" So said Luxembourg's PM Xavier Bettel during an impassioned address in Luxembourg on Monday afternoon.

"You can't hold the future hostage for party political gain," he went on, to rapturous applause.

Bettel spoke alone to reporters, next to an empty podium, after Boris Johnson, the British Prime Minister, left in a car following private talks, with the chants of anti-Brexit protesters directed at him as he departed.

Speaking passionately on the current state of Brexit, Bettel said it was time to "stop speaking and act", insisting "we won't accept any agreement that goes against the single market or the Good Friday Agreement".

Euronews' Political Editor Darren McCaffrey asked Bettel if the ongoing situation "is all theatre so that Boris Johnson can blame the EU when it all falls apart in October?"

Bettel responded:

"Some people would love to give the blame to another. Again, one party, the Conservative party, decided to organise the referendum. A clear information campaign was not organised in the UK, with all risks of the referendum and Brexit.

Now people try to blame others because we can't find agreement. We did not decide to start Brexit."

Johnson's message was recorded and released to the media after Bettel had made his address and taking questions. He made assurances that although a deal is not 'in the bag', everyone involved knows a deal is being seriously attempted.

Johnson insisted "there is a good chance of a deal" being struck over the next few weeks, but maintained the backstop would have to go for that to happen.

Explaining why he didn't attend the press conference with Bettel as planned, Johnson claimed "I don't think it would have been fair to the Prime Minister of Luxembourg" due to the noise being made by protesters.

However EU leaders insist there's only a chance of a deal if the UK can put concrete proposals on the table to come up with a solution to the backstop, which has been the key problem with getting

an agreement over the line. Bettel said Johnson had no such concrete proposals for him.

And earlier on Monday, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said the same. Johnson attended a lunch meeting with him, and the EU's Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, with Brexit on the agenda ahead of a crunch leaders' summit next month.

Juncker told reporters it was a "friendly" meeting and negotiations "will continue at high speed", with a 10 Downing Street spokesperson insisting talks would need to "intensify" over the coming days.

The UK Prime Minister was also greeted by a chorus of boos and chants from protesters, and questions from journalists, as he left the restaurant where he was expected to build his case for a revised deal taking the UK out of the EU, which he hopes will be agreed at an EU leaders' summit on October 17-18.

On the way out, Juncker was asked if he had seen any "concrete proposals" from the UK government. A statement from the Commission was then released, saying it is the "UK's responsibility to come forward with legally operational solutions that are compatible with the Withdrawal Agreement", to achieve a way forward on the backstop. The statement added "such proposals have not yet been made".

"The leaders agreed that the discussions needed to intensify and that meetings would soon take place on a daily basis," a spokesman from Johnson's office said in a statement following the lunch.

"It was agreed that talks should also take place at a political level between Michel Barnier and the Brexit Secretary, and conversations would also continue between President Juncker and the Prime Minister."

Johnson told reporters he was feeling "cautious" as he went into a restaurant with Juncker, where a UK government source said the leaders would be eating snails, salmon and cheese.

No extension to transition period

"If we can make enough progress in the next few days, I intend to go to that crucial summit on Oct. 17, and finalise an agreement that will protect the interests of business and citizens on both sides of the Channel, and on both sides of the border in Ireland," Johnson wrote in the Daily Telegraph, ahead of the meeting in Luxembourg.

Meanwhile the PM's spokesman said Britain has no intention of seeking an extension to the transition period after it leaves the European Union if a divorce deal is struck with the bloc.

A deal reached between the EU and former Prime Minister Theresa May, which was later voted down by the British parliament, included a transition period until December 2020 to ensure an orderly exit from the bloc.

On Sunday Johnson reiterated his intention to take Britain out of the EU with or without a deal in a newspaper interview in which he likened himself to comic book character The Incredible Hulk.

Commenting on the bill that would require Johnson to ask for an extension to the Brexit deadline if he can't reach a deal, he said that while the fictional scientist Bruce Banner may be bound in

manacles when he was angry he explodes out of them as Hulk.

The madder Hulk gets, the stronger Hulk gets, Johnson was quoted as saying by the Mail on Sunday. Hulk always escaped, no matter how tightly bound in he seemed to be - and that is the case for this country. We will come out on October 31.

Johnsons comments suggest that he will try to find a way to bypass the law passed by parliament, which was voted through after 21 Conservative MPs rebelled against the government. The MPs were subsequently kicked out of the party.

One rebel, Sam Gyimah - a rising star in former PM Theresa Mays government - joined the Liberal Democrats on Saturday. Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson has pledged to fight the next general election as the anti-Brexit party, with plans to revoke Article 50 altogether.

'Very confident'

Johnson and Juncker are due to discuss one of the main sticking points over a deal, namely the so-called backstop, which would require Britain to retain some EU rules in order to avoid a hard border in Ireland.

He said he was very confident that a solution could be found.

Theres a very, very good conversation going on about how to address the issues of the Northern Irish border. A huge amount of progress is being made, Johnson told the newspaper, without giving details.

But while the possibility of Johnson breaking the law over Brexit has provoked disquiet in parliament, it may not have hurt him in the polls. The most recent polling by Opinion for the Observer newspaper has the Conservatives rising from 35 to 37% over the past week.

However, a separate poll by ComRes for the Sunday Express put Conservative support at just 28%, down from 30% and only a shade ahead of Labour at 27%. ComRes said just 12% thought Britains parliament could be trusted to do the right thing for the country.

Johnson's reference to the Hulk led to both analysis and mockery on social media Sunday, with some commentators pointing out that Bruce Banner's alter-ego may not have been a valid comparison for the British leader.

Kaynak/Source: