

Martin Schulz: UK cannot expect better deal with Brussels than EU membership

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News

European Parliament president pens British newspaper article amid ongoing speculation about his own EU future.



Martin Schulz | *Photo credit: Press Association*

Parliament's president Martin Schulz has called on Britain's new Prime Minister Theresa May to launch formal negotiations to exit the EU immediately after the summer.

In a newspaper article, the German MEP says, "Now that the country has full clarity on its new Prime Minister, after the summer I expect the British government to notify its intention to withdraw the UK from the EU. Talks must then start without rancour."

His comments come as May was formally being installed as successor to David Cameron on Wednesday.

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Earlier in the week, May, who circumspectly backed the Remain campaign in the 23 June EU referendum, repeated her mantra that “Brexit must mean Brexit”.

May has said there are currently no plans to trigger Article 50, the mechanism which will formally start the UK’s EU exit, until later this year.

Schulz, writing in the Guardian, said, “The UK should not be treated as a deserter but as a family member who is still loved but has decided to go in another direction.

“There is no intention to ensure that the UK receives a bad deal, but it is clear that there can be no better deal with the EU than EU membership. The EU moreover must look out for its members’ interests and uphold its founding principles.”

In the online piece, published on Tuesday, he writes, “I will hide nothing: I had hoped for a different outcome. And, having worked with many British colleagues, I am deeply saddened at the result. I believe the UK and the EU are stronger together. But, while I believe that the views of the 48 per cent must not be disregarded, I also have to acknowledge that a majority of voters chose to leave the EU in the referendum.”

Schulz’s intervention comes amid ongoing speculation about his own future, with calls from the centre-right European People’s Party (EPP), parliament’s biggest political group, for him to stand down when his term in office finishes at the end of this year.

Schulz, a Socialist deputy, became president in January 2012 and was reappointed for a second term in 2014. It is believed he is keen to stay in office beyond the end of this year.

However, pressure is mounting for him to make way for someone from the EPP group to become president of the Parliament from January 2017.

The German Christian Democrats, the party of Angela Merkel, believes it is time for a conservative to head the parliament.

In a tweet, reported by the Daily Mail newspaper on Wednesday, it was alleged that the German chancellor was “trying to force” Schulz out.

Gunnar Hokmark, a Swedish EPP member, said, “What is important to us is to replace Martin Schulz.”

Media reports in Brussels have also repeated alleged differences between Schulz and Klaus Welle, the Parliament's powerful secretary general, who is also German.

One possible key ally for Schulz, however, is European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker who recently said Schulz should remain as parliament's president in the interest of European "stability."

Juncker was criticised by some MEPs about his comments, including French EPP deputy Alain Lamassoure, himself a potential contender to replace Schulz, who said, "It's not the commission president who elects parliament's president but the European parliament."

About the author

Martin Banks is a journalist for the Parliament Magazine

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