

Tajani: May must use Florence speech to present concrete proposals

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News

European Parliament President Antonio Tajani has urged UK Prime Minister Theresa May to use her major Brexit speech in Florence on Friday to “come clean” with the British public about how much Britain needs cooperation with the EU on key issues.



Theresa May and Antonio Tajani | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

Tajani said that to break the impasse in the ongoing talks, the UK Prime Minister needed to admit that on some issues the UK needed the EU more than the government was letting on.

The Italian MEP argued it was May’s duty to use the keenly-awaited speech to put forward concrete proposals that would protect the rights of EU citizens, solve the question of the Northern Ireland border and settle the divorce bill.

These are the three issues the EU side insists must be resolved before the UK can expect to move to more substantive talks on trade and other matters.

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May will make what is expected to be her most significant intervention in the Brexit process since her Lancaster House speech in January, when she committed to leaving the single market.

There is uncertainty whether the Prime Minister will use the opportunity to either publicly soften or harden her approach to talks.

Last week in Strasbourg, Tajani said he would ask the European Parliament to vote on whether the UK had made “significant progress” ahead of May’s appearance at Tory party conference.

The EPP group deputy said, “I accept the UK’s decision to leave and would like us to maintain close relations after Brexit, but it is up to British negotiators to make concrete proposals, not the other way around.”

Elsewhere, Gianni Pittella, leader of Parliament’s S&D group, said that the UK team had so far demonstrated an “incapacity” to engage properly with negotiations and that May’s Florence speech should represent a change in approach.

On Monday, further comment on May’s upcoming address came from former Ukip leader Nigel Farage.

The MEP told this website, “Great Britain does not need to be in a political union with the EU, and have unwelcome laws imposed upon us to trade with European countries.

“The British people voted to make the British Parliament once again supreme in law making ability. I hope that Theresa May will not be cowed by the stream of threats from Brussels bureaucrats who are obviously feeling the pressure.”

Andrew Duff, a former ALDE group deputy and now Visiting Fellow at the Brussels based European Policy Centre, told the Parliament Magazine, “One has learned over the years to approach British prime ministerial speeches on Europe with trepidation.”

A spokesperson for Parliament’s ECR group, which comprises the UK Tory MEPs, remained tight-lipped on May’s speech, saying “We’re not going to speculate on what the Prime Minister might say on Friday, but we will be reacting afterwards.”

UK foreign minister Boris Johnson, meanwhile, is expected to meet the Prime Minister ahead of her Brexit speech in Florence this week to discuss the government’s stance regarding financial contributions to the EU after the UK exits.

In what has been interpreted as an argument against continuing substantial contributions to the EU's budget as the price for market access for the UK after Brexit, Johnson wrote, "We would not expect to pay for access to their markets any more than they would expect to pay for access to ours."

About the author

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