

Juncker and Polish leader meet in 'friendly' atmosphere

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News

A face-to-face meeting between European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has failed to find a breakthrough in the impasse between the EU and Poland.



Mateusz Morawiecki and Jean-Claude Juncker | *Photo credit: Press Association*

The meeting in Brussels on Tuesday night did not produce any change to how Poland manages the rule of law, currently the subject of a major dispute with the EU.

Ahead of the get together, Juncker said he wasn't "in the mood to make wild threats" about cutting EU funding to Poland.

Afterwards, Juncker issued a statement saying the two men had had a "detailed discussion of questions related to the rule of law."

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They agreed to meet again to “pursue the discussion with a view to making progress by the end of February.”

Juncker said, “The dinner took place in a friendly atmosphere.”

The “wide ranging and constructive discussion” continued the conversation which began at their first meeting in the margins of the December 2017 European Council.

Issues discussed included the future of the European Union, the Polish position within the European Union as well as EU policies on the internal market, the digital single market, energy and migration.

Speaking separately, European Council President Donald Tusk, a former Polish Prime Minister, was less friendly about Poland, describing the current situation there as “shocking for Europe, and not only for pro-European Poles. Poland has gone against everything that is important to the EU. And they did it deliberately,” he said.

Reforms of the Polish judiciary by the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party have raised concerns across Europe that judges and prosecutors will no longer be independent. Under new laws passed this year, PiS will control appointments in the supreme court and in the National Council of the Judiciary, which regulates the profession.

It will also control the presidents of district and appeals courts. In December, the European Commission said there was a “clear risk of a serious breach of rule of law” in Poland, and triggered Article 7 of the EU treaty, a sanctions procedure that had never been used before.

Member states are to vote in Brussels on 29 January whether they agree with the Commission’s assessment. The decision is to be taken by a four-fifths majority. A subsequent decision to confirm Poland is guilty of “a serious and persistent breach” must be taken by a consensus of the EU-27 minus Poland, prior to the adoption of sanctions, which would freeze Poland’s EU voting rights.

The European Commission’s decision to invoke Article 7 against Poland has been branded as both “misguided and counter-productive” by ECR group member Ashley Fox; Poland’s ruling PiS is also part of the ECR political family.

He said, “The European Commission’s politically motivated decision to invoke Article 7 against Poland is both misguided and counter-productive.

“The Commission must think twice, then think again, before attempting to intervene in the domestic affairs of member states as doing so risks inflaming, rather than resolving, differences.

“In the case of Poland, it should be taking the opportunity to build relationships with the new Prime Minister, not provoking confrontation. The rising popularity of Mateusz Marawiecki’s government shows that the Polish people do not appreciate Brussels’ interference.

But Ska Keller and Philippe Lamberts, leaders of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament, defended the EU on the opening of the Article 7 procedure against Poland.

A statement said, “It was high time to open the article 7 procedure against Poland. We are glad that the European Commission finally followed our repeated calls. The European institutions were patient far too long with the Polish government dismantling the juridical system in the country.

“Democracy and rule of law are not optional. All those committed to these fundamental principles and no government has the right to bring them down. This measure is not meant to target the Polish people but the government who doesn’t respect separation of power in the country.”

About the author

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