

## Jean-Claude Juncker: EU's door remains open to UK

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News

EU leaders have made an indirect plea to the UK over the possibility of reversing Brexit.



EU leaders have made an indirect plea to the UK over the possibility of reversing Brexit | *Photo Credit: Fotolia*

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Speaking in the European parliament on Tuesday, both European Council President Donald Tusk and his European Commission counterpart, Jean-Claude Juncker, said the “door remains open” to the UK remaining in the EU.

Their comments come after UKIP MEP Nigel Farage recently admitted that a second referendum may be necessary to deal with the issue “once and for all.”

Addressing parliament’s plenary in Strasbourg, Tusk pointed out that the adopted guidelines for the next phase of the Brexit talks would not have been possible “without the unity of the EU 27 and hard work of Michel Barnier”, the EU’s chief Brexit negotiator.

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But Tusk warned, “Time is limited. We must retain the unity of the EU 27 in every scenario of the Brexit talks and I have no doubt we will do this.

“If the UK sticks to its decision to leave then Brexit will become a reality in 2019 with all the negative consequences that will bring.

“This will happen unless there is a change of heart among our British friends.”

He went on, “Wasn’t it David Davis (the UK’s chief Brexit negotiator) who said a democracy that cannot change its mind about something ceases to be a democracy. We on the continent have not changed our position and our hearts are still open [to the British].

His sentiments were endorsed by Juncker who told MEPs, “Our door still remains open and I hope that will be heard clearly in London.”

“Time is limited. We must retain the unity of the EU 27 in every scenario of the Brexit talks” European Council President Donald Tusk

However, Manfred Weber the European Parliament’s centre-right EPP group leader struck a far less conciliatory tone, telling the two presidents and MEPs that the British had “achieved very little” in over 18 months’ of Brexit talks.

The German MEP was particularly scathing of the British position on Brexit and said, “We have seen a lot of complaints over the holiday from our British friends who say they are preparing for all possibilities.

“Well, my message to them is to stop complaining and start delivering - give us an idea of what you want.

“An example of this is the issue of the colour of the UK passport. Theresa May says that after Brexit, the UK passport will return to the colour blue, saying this is an expression of UK sovereignty.

“But for me this is all about honesty. EU law says nothing about the colour of passports. Why does the UK government not tell the British people the truth and spell out its real priorities.”

Weber added, “Changing the colour of the passport is the first and only thing the UK has achieved in 18 months of talks and if I was British I would be deeply worried about that.”

He said, “We on the EU side are ready to negotiate - we wait for London.”

“Changing the colour of the passport is the first and only thing the UK has achieved in 18 months of talks and if I was British I would be deeply worried about that” European Parliament EPP group leader Manfred Weber

Tusk, Juncker and Weber were taking part in a debate on the results of December’s EU summit where EU leaders agreed that "sufficient progress" has been made in the Brexit negotiations to move on to phase two, which includes talks on the future relations between the EU and the UK.

They also welcomed the launch of permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) on defence, and debated social issues, migration and eurozone reform.

Parliament’s president Antonio Tajani opened the session in Strasbourg on Monday, expressing concern over repeated human rights violations in Turkey.

The Italian MEP said, “30 years after the Sakharov prize was first awarded, the Parliament must continue to support those to whom it is awarded, as some continue to be persecuted. Leyla Zana, who was awarded the Sakharov Prize in 1995, has been removed from her post in the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

“It is not acceptable that someone elected by the people should be removed from their seat”, he said.

He said rights violations in Turkey target not only the political opposition, but also representatives of civil society, including journalists and academics.

Having mentioned several of those currently being persecuted, he said parliament will continue to support them “in their struggle for freedom and justice.”

On Wednesday, after the presentation of the Bulgarian presidency of the EU, the first in a series of debates on the future of Europe will take place, kicking off with Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar.

## About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

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