

Salzburg summit ends with little progress on Brexit

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News

The informal summit of EU leaders in Austria has ended with cold water being poured on UK Prime Minister Theresa May's proposed new economic partnership with the EU.



Photo credit: Press Association

Leading criticism of the deal, European Council President Donald Tusk said May's proposals "will not work" and the plans risked undermining the EU's single market.

Tusk was speaking on Thursday after EU leaders had discussed the UK's plans, which were presented to them by May at a dinner on Wednesday evening.

Addressing a post-summit press conference in Salzburg, Tusk said there were some "positive elements" in the UK's blueprint for future relations with the EU, which was agreed by ministers at Chequers in July.

But the downbeat tone struck at the close of the summit was echoed by French President Emmanuel Macron who said, “My first wish is to stay united and to have a common approach, the 27. It is essential. The second thing is that we remain coherent. The solution must be found. The third thing is that we need to have a real retirement agreement by November.”

More reaction came from Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who said “time is running short to reach a deal.”

Luxembourg’s Prime Minister Xavier Bettel also said time was “getting short”, adding, “We both need to find a compromise”, while the Netherlands’ Prime Minister Mark Rutte warned of a failure to reach agreement, saying, “As long as there is no deal, there is the risk of ‘no-deal’.”

Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel, among the 27 EU leaders who heard May’s presentation on Wednesday, said, “Today I can see that it is necessary to make all the steps because the proposals are not enough in order to have an agreement.”

European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, speaking of the dinner with May, said, “It was interesting, it was polite, it was not aggressive. She is doing her job.”

May, however, found an unlikely ally in the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who told reporters he was getting close to building a majority of member states in opposition to “a camp of prime ministers” who believe the “British must suffer.”

Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, also speaking after the summit closed on Thursday, said he would like to see Britain hold a second referendum on membership of the EU. Theresa May has ruled this out.

The UK Prime Minister, ahead of the two-day meeting, had urged the EU leaders to “evolve” their position on the Irish border and back her “serious” proposals.

But there is still no agreement on issues including how to avoid new checks on the Northern Ireland-Republic of Ireland border.

The EU had hoped to conclude a deal in time for November but, after the perceived failure of the Salzburg summit to reach agreement over May’s plans, some believe this is now unlikely.

One EU insider told this website on Thursday, “The clock is rapidly ticking and we now look to be hurtling towards a hard Brexit and all the consequences that that may entail.”

Speaking separately, Nicola Sturgeon has called for Brexit to be delayed beyond next March if the UK has not secured a detailed agreement with the EU by then.

Scotland’s First Minister said it would be “absolutely reckless” to leave without knowing what will replace the country’s existing relationship.

She urged the other opposition parties to back a delay if the UK faces a choice between “no deal and no detail”.

May has already said delay is “not an option”.

About the author

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