

Udo Bullmann: Give the British people a chance to 'reassess' Brexit

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News

Socialist group leader Udo Bullmann has branded the UK a “divided nation”, saying he has “severe doubts” there is a majority among the public to leave the EU and that the British people should be given a chance to “reassess the situation.”



Photo Credit: European Parliament Audiovisual

Bullmann was speaking ahead of the meaningful vote in the House of Commons on Tuesday evening on the Withdrawal Agreement between the UK and EU.

Addressing a news conference in Parliament in Strasbourg on Tuesday, the German MEP, whose group is the second biggest in Parliament, said he expects UK Prime Minister Theresa May to lose the vote.

He said, "I have severe doubts Mrs May will mobilise sufficient support. But remember, we never agreed to Brexit and we regret it. I am deeply convinced the British people should now have the chance to reassess the situation."

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He told reporters in Strasbourg, "You always have to think of the next step. My guess is the EU are prepared for the touchdown and are ready for additional conversations after today's vote."

'EXTRA SPACE'

Bullmann cited a letter sent to May by Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker, Presidents of the Council and Commission, in which they said that the provisions of the Protocol "do not affect or supersede the provisions of the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement" and "do not alter in any way the arrangements under Strand II of the 1998 Agreement in particular."

On this, Bullmann said, "In the exchange of letters on Monday between the EU and UK, Mrs May asked for 'extra space' and Tusk and Juncker said yes."

"The EU does not intend to use the backstop and to put a part of the UK in an endless situation of being part of the single market or Customs Union. This is what the EU has said and is what it means, but if the UK is seeking a guarantee on the Irish backstop to sell back home no one can give that."

"Getting back control was the motto of the [2016 Brexit] referendum campaign, but you can only get back control if you again ask the people what they think now, either with another referendum or an election" **Udo Bullman MEP**

On the possibility of May being defeated in the vote, he said, "There is room for manoeuvre but it would be unfair to put our assessment ahead of that of the Commons tonight."

'CRAZY NARRATIVE'

"What we do see though is a divided nation and I have severe doubts you would see a Brexit majority in the UK now. The public now see the reality of things and not the crazy narrative they were presented with in the 2016 referendum campaign."

On what could happen if May loses the vote, the MEP added, "Of course, you could always withdraw Article 50 and then reflect on things. My guess is the EU side may agree to this as soon as the UK makes clear what is going to change."

“Getting back control was the motto of the referendum campaign, but you can only get back control if you again ask the people what they think now, either with another referendum or an election.”

He said he and his Socialist colleagues were in daily contact with the UK Labour party but that they had heard “different voices.”

“The last word has not been said on the Labour side and I think we will hear more from them.”

He added, “We need to show respect for the British people and we do not want to muzzle them, but there have also been a lot of emotive reactions from the UK side when we say what we, the EU, think.”

ARTICLE 50 EXTENSION ‘POSSIBLE’

When pressed, Bullmann conceded that an extension to Article 50 is possible, adding, “but we would have to ask the UK to clarify its position because the EU cannot grant an extension if they do not know where we are going.”

He added, “This is a historic vote and the European Parliament will always try to be helpful. This [the Withdrawal Agreement] is not the best of all worlds and I accept that what is on the table is not easy to swallow for all sides.”

“The whole Brexit game has been hijacked by party politicking. We will see how big the defeat is in the [House of] Commons tonight and then see what happens ... If the entire UK political class go on vacation tonight we will get a no deal” **Philippe Lamberts MEP**

He also pointed to the fact that 130 MEPs had recently presented their views by voicing their regret at Brexit and asking for the UK to reconsider the decision to leave the bloc on 29 March.

PARTY POLITICKING

Speaking separately on Brexit, the Greens joint leader Philippe Lamberts said, “The whole Brexit game has been hijacked by party politicking. We will see how big the defeat is in the Commons tonight and then see what happens. But in order to avoid a no deal something new needs to happen. If the entire UK political class go on vacation tonight we will get a no deal.”

The Flemish member added, “I do not know how often I have to repeat it, but the Irish peace agreement is what has created the current problem. This agreement legally binds the UK and is the sole, single remaining problem.”

“This [the Good Friday Agreement] is what makes [Brexit] legally impossible and no amount of words will circumvent that fact. It creates a legal constraint and we cannot mask this difficulty.”

“I am appalled at those UK politicians who openly say ‘to hell’ with the Good Friday Agreement. Do they realise we are talking about lives here and not a fantasy?”

He told reporters, “Mrs May can come back with a new proposal after the vote today, but the reality of things will not change. Giving more time to think about it will not change this.”

LETTING THE BRITISH PEOPLE DOWN?

MEPs are due to hold an emergency debate on the outcome of the Commons vote on Wednesday

morning.

Speaking to MPs on Monday, May urged critics of her Brexit deal to give it a “second look,” adding, “It is not perfect but when the history books are written, people will look at the decision of this House tomorrow and ask: ‘Did we deliver on the country’s vote to leave the EU, did we safeguard our economy, security or union or did we let the British people down?’”

She also addressed Conservative MPs yesterday at the backbench 1922 Committee.

Meanwhile, Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Labour Party, responding to the Prime Minister’s statement on the Brexit deal in the Commons, said, “During the past 2 years of these shambolic negotiations the Prime Minister has failed to listen.

“We were promised the ‘easiest trade deal in history’, yet we have seen a divided government deliver a botched withdrawal deal.”

“She [Theresa May] hasn’t once tried to work with Parliament to construct a Brexit deal this House and the country can support. And now she is left facing a humiliating defeat. She is blaming everybody else but herself.”

“The government is in disarray. It is clear if the Prime Minister’s deal is rejected today, it is time for a General Election. It is time for a new government.”

Corbyn separately told his MPs that a no-confidence vote in the Prime Minister was “coming soon” after the meaningful vote.

About the author

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