

Donald Tusk: UK 'betraying the increasing majority' pushing to abandon Brexit

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News

European Council President Donald Tusk has accused the UK of "betraying" the "increasing majority" now pushing for the UK to stay in the EU.



Donald Tusk | *Photo credit: Press Association*

Speaking in Parliament in Strasbourg on Wednesday, he said, "You cannot betray the near six million people who have signed the petition to revoke Article 50, or the one million who marched in London at the weekend, or the increasing majority who want to remain in the EU."

"They may feel they are not sufficiently represented by the UK, but they must feel they are represented by you in this chamber because they are Europeans," he added.

Tusk, in a debate on the outcome of last week's EU summit, said the extension offered to the UK envisages two scenarios and, if no agreement is reached this week, this would stretch to 22 May.

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But the Polish official said that he believes 12 April is the “key date” for the UK to decide if it wants to take part in the European elections in May.

“This is the new cliff edge date,” he told MEPs.

“Until then, the UK has a choice to make as to whether it wants a deal or not.”

“The EU would be open to a long extension if the UK wants to rethink its Brexit strategy. There are voices who some who say this would be harmful or inconvenient to some of you here. Such thinking is unacceptable.”

“You cannot betray the near six million people who have signed the petition to revoke Article 50, or the one million who marched in London at the weekend, or the increasing majority who want to remain in the EU” **Donald Tusk**

Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, in his speech to a half-empty chamber, made only a passing reference to Brexit, saying that he found the summit debate last week on China “far less complicated than Brexit.”

He said, “If you compared Brexit to a sphinx then the sphinx would be an open book by comparison.”

Another speaker, German MEP Manfred Weber, the EPP leader and a leading candidate to replace Juncker as Commission chief, said the summit had made a “good decision on Brexit” and praised Tusk's remarks earlier.

He said, “We now need more clarity from our British friends” including its possible involvement in the Euro elections.”

Weber said, “Those who are fighting for a second referendum and to stay in the EU, well, I wish them all the best but it is important to explain to citizens why a country leaving might have a say about the EU's future.”

Looking ahead to the votes later on Wednesday, the centre-right member added, “I wish our friends in the Commons good luck. The options are clear and the MPs now have to choose.”

Socialist group leader Udo Bullmann reminded MEPs that the debate took place “just two days” before the original date set for the UK to exit the EU.

“To the Brexiteers I say this: when are you going to pardon yourselves to the British people for the torture they have suffered for over two years?” **Udo Bullmann MEP**

Bullmann said, “What Donald Tusk has said is absolutely right. To the Brexiteers I say this: when are you going to pardon yourselves to the British people for the torture they have suffered for over two years?”

“And when will you admit the total disaster which you have led them to? Your lies and deception have led the UK to a dead end, a cul-de-sac.”

Turning to UK MEP Nigel Farage in the chamber, he said, “When will you apologise to the British people for what you have done to them?”

He said, “You will shy away from this because you are afraid of what they will say. They will tell you where to go.”

Bullmann also thanked Tusk “for defending citizenship” and added, “Yes, we are Europeans and no one should deprive the British the right from participating in Europe. There is now only solution: ask the people what they want.”

Another speaker was ECR co leader Ryszard Legutko, who accused the EU of trying to “punish the UK” and to send a signal to “those who would dare to follow in their footsteps.”

The aim, he argued, was to “humiliate” the British by encouraging those who want a second referendum.

“There is no question of us punishing or humiliating the British. We have far too much respect for a great nation to do that. The humiliation is in the Tory party” **Guy Verhofstadt**

He said, “If, though, Remainers had won by same majority it would be considered here to be binding and irrevocable.”

He also condemned the “tone of self-congratulation here today,” saying, “This is not the time for self-congratulation. This has been the most crisis-ridden period in history of the EU and Brexit is just one of several crises.”

Turning to Juncker and Tusk, he said, “And you must share responsibility for this. Do not delude yourself.”

He went on, “The Brexit clock is ticking and we should be ready to help the UK any way we can. This is our problem too. But the clock is also ticking for the EU.”

He told Juncker and Tusk they “should be listening to voters across Europe who are desperate for change.”

ALDE leader Guy Verhofstadt, responding to the ECR MEP’s remarks, told the debate, “There is no

question of us punishing or humiliating the British. We have far too much respect for a great nation to do that. The humiliation is in the Tory party.”

He also called out Farage, who announced recently he would take part in a march to London with other Brexiteers.

“In the Scottish Parliament, we’re debating revoking Article 50 because from a Scottish perspective, every single party in Scotland except the Conservatives are united around the view that the best Brexit is no Brexit” **Alyn Smith MEP**

Verhoftstadt told him, “I thought you were walking on a march this week?”

He said Farage reminded him of “Field Marshall Haig in TV’s Blackadder who sat in an office in London during WW1.”

He said Farage was “here in Strasbourg” while fellow Brexiteers were walking “in the wind and rain.”

Turning to the Commons vote, he said MPs would be faced with 16 options, adding, “After all the negative voting against a deal and so on, maybe we now see some light at end of the tunnel. But such an existential crisis can only be agreed on the basis of a cross-party agreement as we do here in this Parliament.”

He said, “We are open to changing the political declaration, to make it more binding and seek a far more intense relationship with the UK than is foreseen.”

The Belgian deputy added that he believes that “not now, but within a few generations the UK will return to the EU family.”

He added, “That is its place, not being outside.”

He too made reference to the one million who marched in London and the millions who have signed the anti-Brexit petition.

He said, “We must respect the rights of EU citizens in the UK and Britons in Europe so it is time to see how we can formalise this as soon as possible. Even in the event of a no deal they must not become victims of the games we have seen these last two years.”

Further comment came from SNP MEP Alyn Smith who, to warm applause, urged the European Union to “leave a light on” for Scotland to find its way back to the EU if the country is removed against its democratic will.

The intervention was warmly applauded across the Chamber and by Tusk and Juncker.

Smith said, “We see MPs today at Westminster finally trying to reach a settled view. Good... In the Scottish Parliament, we’re debating revoking Article 50 because from a Scottish perspective, every single party in Scotland except the Conservatives are united around the view that the best Brexit is no Brexit.”

“Chers collègues, I’m not asking you to solve our domestic discussions. I am asking you to leave a light on so we can find our way home.”

He said, “What a tragedy and a sad place we are in. This is a self-inflicted disaster because the UK,

even now at this late hour, has not made a decision on what it wants.”

Smith, who said his speech would probably be his last in plenary after 15 years as an MEP, said he had a message for the EU: “Do not close your doors. A lot is going on in Scotland working to turn this around.”

About the author

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