

Tempers flare in European Parliament debate over Brexit

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News

A furious row broke out in the European Parliament after a UKIP MEP appeared to compare the EU's treatment of the UK over Brexit talks to "punishment beatings."



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In a heated debate in Parliament on Wednesday, UKIP's Patrick O'Flynn said European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker wanted to give a "punishment beating" to the UK for leaving the EU.

Juncker was sitting very close to the UK MEP in the chamber but did not respond to the verbal attack.

However, Alyn Smith, an SNP deputy and ardent Remainer, gave a withering response and asked for Parliament's President Antonio Tajani to intervene with a view to possible disciplinary action against O'Flynn.

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He said, "Why do we give a platform to these wreckers to spread their poison?"

Irish EPP member Mairead McGuinness, a Parliament Vice President who was standing in for Tajani in the debate, suggested she would refer the matter to the Italian and indicated that she disapproved of the use of such terms.

She said that as an Irish citizen, the use of terms such as "punishment beatings" were "difficult in the context of my own country."

In a short, two-minute speech, O'Flynn, a former national journalist, said that "despite being determined" to give a "punishment beating to the UK" Juncker was not "exclusively" responsible for the current Brexit impasse.

"Ask yourself why latest polls show that despite threats of no water, no jobs and no medicine, more people want to leave the EU this month with no deal rather than stay in the EU" **Patrick O'Flynn UKIP MEP**

He said this had been made worse "by the worst Premier in UK history, who stands for nothing and delivers nothing."

But he told Juncker "it would be a terrible mistake to think she is representative of the UK people. We are a different kind of EU nation. Ask yourself why latest polls show that despite threats of no water, no jobs and no medicine, more people want to leave the EU this month with no deal rather than stay in the EU."

Most speakers in the fiery debate highlighted that, although the Withdrawal Agreement itself is the best and only deal available, the political declaration on the EU-UK future relationship that accompanies it provides for significant flexibility and could be amended if that would help resolve the situation.

Examples mentioned included a customs union, a Norway-type relationship and EEA membership.

It was also made clear by MEPs that a long extension, if requested by the UK government for appropriate reasons, should be considered to accommodate the abovementioned scenarios.

Several members said an extension should respect the upcoming European elections and "in no way undermine the functioning of the EU institutions."

Almost all speakers reiterated that protecting EU citizens' rights remains an absolute priority.

About the author

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