

U.K. Sees Brexit Deal Deadline Slipping to End-November

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An anti-Brexit demonstrator outside the Houses of Parliament in London, U.K.

Photographer: Luke MacGregor/Bloomberg

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U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May is resisting the European Union's timetable for Brexit talks and is calculating that U.S. President Donald Trump might help her.

While EU officials are signaling they want September to be a showdown moment in negotiations, the U.K. is aiming for a later deadline, according to a person familiar with the situation. May's team thinks that by the end of November the EU will be so preoccupied with the prospect of Trump disrupting a Group of 20 summit that they will want to get the Brexit deal wrapped up, the person said.

The calculation, based on conversations with EU officials, is that leaders such as Germany's Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron of France will want to present a united European front in support of the rules-based system -- with May onside -- when they meet Trump at the summit on Nov. 30, the person said.

The British approach is at odds with the plan emerging from Europe. The U.K. is due to leave the EU on March 29 and both sides have said they are aiming for a deal in October. Negotiators need to leave enough time for the U.K. and European parliaments to debate and ratify the final terms of the divorce.

Showdown

In recent weeks, European officials have said they want progress even sooner as an informal summit of leaders on Sept. 20 is now set to become a showdown Brexit meeting. EU officials have turned a summit scheduled for Oct. 18-19, which was expected to be about Brexit, into an opportunity to plot an international response to Trump's tariff offensive.

With progress in the negotiations painfully slow, politicians in both the U.K. and the EU have begun warning that the chances of failure -- with Britain crashing out of the bloc with no deal -- have started to increase. Talks are stuck on the sensitive issue of how to keep the Irish border free of checkpoints and police after Brexit, when it will become the EU's frontier with the U.K.

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May's team now thinks the EU's focus on preparing to meet the U.S. president's challenge to the global order will provide the bloc with an incentive to get a deal done ahead of the G-20 leaders' meeting in Buenos Aires at the end of November. There is no EU summit scheduled for November, but an extra meeting could be called for the purpose of signing off the Brexit deal.

The EU has joined China and Japan in clashes with Trump over his decisions to impose tariffs on imports from his country's biggest trading partners, and to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord.

Supportive

The person pointed out that May had been supportive of Merkel's stance against Trump at the G-7 meeting in Canada in June, which ended in [disarray](#) after the president withdrew his backing from the official concluding communique.

Another person familiar with the matter confirmed that German officials want a deal before the G-20 meeting so European leaders can be united when they meet Trump. But that doesn't mean Germany is shifting its position on Brexit.

Merkel's team will be willing to wait to get an agreement with May if necessary, the person said, adding that Germany won't compromise on the need to protect the integrity of the EU's single market.

A French presidency official said the aim was still clearly to get the divorce deal settled by October. "There's never been any deadline in September, nor November," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.