

EU leaders make Theresa May wait until 1am to deliver five-minute Brexit speech, before ignoring her

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EU leaders made [Theresa May](#) wait until 1am to deliver her message that Britain will not change its mind about [Brexit](#) – and gave her just five minutes to speak, before ignoring her speech at a European Council dinner in Brussels.

The Prime Minister was made to wait until “long after the waiters were waiting to clear the dishes away”, one observer said.

No other leader spoke in response to Ms May’s brief speech – a united front reflecting the EU’s refusal to start exit negotiations until the formal Article 50 notice is invoked, early next year.

[Donald Tusk](#), the [European Council](#) President, had urged all the other leaders to stay silent, because formal talks must not begin until that two-year process is underway.

The stance also reflected the reality that the rest of the EU is currently more focused on Russian aggression in Syria and a faltering trade deal with Canada.

In her speech, Ms May told her counterparts face-to-face that Britain would definitely be leaving, after suggestions in Europe that the referendum result may not be final.

And she said Britain expects to be part of EU decision-making until Brexit is completed, rather than be snubbed at any summits and negotiations when key matters are discussed.

Number 10 sources denied the issue had provoked a row, although some senior EU figures are known to be angry that a country wanting to leave still expects a say on the bloc’s future.

The triggering of Article 50 – by the end of March – would see Britain leave the EU in the Spring of 2019 – although [Ms May has hinted the two-year timeline for talks could be extended](#).

In Brussels, both the French president and German chancellor warned that if Ms May pursued a “hard Brexit”, talks would be hard too.

The dinner saw EU leaders enjoy pan-fried scallops, crown of lamb with roast fig and iced vanilla parfait.

On arrival, Ms May said: “The UK is leaving the EU, but we will continue to play a full role until we leave and we will be a strong and dependable partner after we have left.

“It’s in the interests of both the UK and the EU that we continue to work closely together, including at this summit.”

Meanwhile, Mr Tusk said he would be the “happiest one” if the UK reversed the decision to quit and stuck with EU membership for years to come.

He told reporters: “It’s not our choice and if you ask me I would prefer 28 members not only for the next month, but also for the next years and decades.

“After the decision in the UK we have to respect the decision of the referendum. If it is reversible or not, this is in the British hands.

Brexit negotiators are 'in cloud cuckoo land', says man who negotiated Britain's EU rebate

"I would be the happiest one if it was reversible but we now we have to start our formal works."

Leaders will discuss trade rules when the European Council continues on Friday, including anti-dumping measures.

Ms May will then hold talks with European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, which No 10 sources said would be an "opportunity to establish a relationship" and talk about "how we see the process ahead".