

Won't punish Britain for leaving 28-nation bloc, says EU diplomat

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London: A senior European diplomat today said that the European Union won't seek to punish Britain for leaving the 28-nation bloc.

There has been speculation in the British press since last year's referendum on the so-called Brexit that the other 27 EU members could try to extract maximum suffering from the UK in order to discourage others from leaving.

The diplomat, who wasn't authorized to be quoted by name, dismissed such views Wednesday, noting that Britain will have to grapple with the fallout from its departure from the EU's single market.

"Leaving the common market will hurt a lot all on its own," he said.

European Union leaders said that they will remain united and strive to protect the bloc's interest following Britain's decision to leave.

In a statement Wednesday the leaders said "the Union will act as one and preserve its interests. Our first priority will be to minimize the uncertainty caused by the decision of the United Kingdom for our citizens, businesses and member states".

Leaders said that they would "start by focusing on all key arrangements for an orderly withdrawal".

The leaders will meet in Brussels in one month, on April 29.

Meanwhile, European Union Council President Donald Tusk said that he will have a proposal for a negotiating mandate ready for the member states by Friday, only two days after Britain triggered the negotiating mandate for divorce proceedings.

Tusk said that he would "share guidelines for negotiations" with the remaining 27 member states when he is in Valletta, Malta, on Friday.

Once those are delivered, the 27 member states will have to come up with definitive guidelines at a summit on April 29 in Brussels.

Later, those guidelines will have to be poured into strict legal text and real negotiations could be expected to start in the second half of May.

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