

Spain's foreign minister on Brexit: 'We need a deal'

Arancha González Laya said Brexit had demonstrated 'the illusion of independence.'



Spain's Foreign Minister Arancha González Laya | Pool photo by Andre Pain/AFP via Getty Images

With Brexit negotiators now under orders to turn matters over to their political bosses, Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha González Laya offered a pointed message on Tuesday: "We need a deal."

Among EU27 countries, Spain maintains some of the closest relations with the U.K, with more than 365,000 U.K. citizens registered to live in the country, extensive economic and trading ties, and the British territory of Gibraltar attached as a tiny appendage to Spanish soil.

In an interview with POLITICO on Tuesday, González Laya said of Brexit: “What it has shown at the heart of it is ... the illusion of independence and the need to manage interdependence — and this is why we need a deal, because we need to manage our interdependence.”

Spain’s desire for an agreement reflects the shades of differences on Brexit among the EU27. While all of the EU national leaders have said that a bad deal would be worse than no deal, some capitals clearly dread the prospect of a no-deal scenario more than others. Despite such differences, there is no indication the bloc is prepared to shift its negotiating mandate or brightest red lines on outstanding issues like the so-called level playing field to maintain fair competition and governance of any final agreement.

“It’s OK to insist on the dream of independence. It’s fine,” González Laya said, using the coronavirus pandemic as an example. “But when you look at reality every day, you know that the vaccine is going to be invented somewhere; is going to be bottled somewhere else; is going to be shipped around the world. And until all of this happens, you are not going to be safe and your citizens will not be safe. I’m taking this as an example. I could take many others.”

“From a very pragmatic Spain,” she said, “we have always maintained that a deal was more desirable than breaking up without a deal.”

González Laya warned that no deal would have a terrible impact on people and businesses. “We looked at the consequences of what this no deal would mean,” she said. “In Spain, it’s pretty clear: there will be a border — in Gibraltar ... this will become the external border of the European Union and this will have an impact for Gibraltarians as well as for Spaniards in the region.”

“We know what it will mean for shipments of fruits and vegetables. We know what it will mean for the activities of banks and automobile factories. And because we know all of this — it’s called interdependence — our obligation is to find a deal. Now that’s not a deal at any cost,” she added.

Based on her experience in trade negotiations, González Laya said only a fair result would be acceptable, and that it would likely reflect the U.K.’s limited willingness to remain bound to EU rules.

“We need to find a deal that is balanced,” she said. “We know that it will be less

ambitious than what we had hoped for because the appetite is simply not there. Fine. But at the end of the day, let's find a deal. We owe it to our businesses and we owe it to our people today. Adding more turbulence to the current extremely volatile economic and social environment will only make matters worse."

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