Starmer Faces Backlash After German Chancellor Merz Decries Brexit and UK Agrees to New EU Payments

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British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer is under mounting pressure following public remarks by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who expressed regret over Brexit and criticised the UK's ongoing relationship with the European Union (EU). Newly released documents showing Britain may resume financial contributions to EU agencies have fuelled a backlash, with opponents warning these measures undermine the very essence of Brexit.

At a press conference marking the signing of a bilateral treaty, colloquially referred to as the Kensington Treaty, Chancellor Merz stated he “deplores deeply” the UK’s decision to leave the EU, stressing that closer cooperation between Germany and the UK is essential in facing shared challenges. Standing alongside Starmer, Merz emphasised the need for renewed alignment on matters such as defence, trade, and migration, signalling a deeper post-Brexit reset of relations.

Complicating matters, internal government agreements under Starmer’s administration reportedly commit British taxpayer funds to EU agencies responsible for food standards and carbon emissions regulation. Critics voice concern that the UK could effectively pay into Brussels without having a say in the governing rules, contrary to Brexit principles championed by Leave supporters. These financial obligations form part of a broader “Brexit reset” strategy, promoted by Labour as a way to rebuild diplomatic links and trade partnerships.

Reform UK Deputy Leader Richard Tice condemned the developments, arguing that Starmer is “betraying Brexit,” warning that Britain is conceding influence and paying the price for greater EU cooperation. He highlighted the risk that alignment without representation could erode national sovereignty, adding that these moves undermine democratic mandates and neglect potential global trade opportunities with countries such as India and the United States.

From a centre–right standpoint, the treaty with Germany presents both a strategic opportunity and a political risk. On one hand, enhanced collaboration with Europe's leading power may strengthen defence, especially given shared NATO commitments and growing concern over global instability. On the other hand, the perception of financial contribution to EU bodies may stir unease among voters who expect full autonomy following Brexit.

The situation will likely demand clear communication from Number 10 Downing Street and the Chancellor's Office to reassure the public that the UK remains independent in rulemaking, while benefiting from closer ties with key neighbours. Ultimately, both the treaty and associated financial arrangements will influence Starmer's credibility among traditional Conservatives and Leave-leaning voters, shaping the broader debate over Britain's post-Brexit identity.