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FINANCIAL TIMES

[UPDATED] A sign the big summit could fall short?

October 25, 2011 1:09 pm by Peter Spiegel



Juncker, left, heads Eurogroup of 17 euro finance ministers. Rostowski, right, the Ecofin of all 27.

UPDATE 2: *The Polish presidency has just made the official announcement. They say the cancellation allows heads of government to decide the things finance ministers were originally going to tackle. Despite negative market reaction to the news, several EU diplomats insist this is a diplomatic miscue by the Poles rather than a sign of things to come.*

UPDATE: *European diplomat confirms meeting of 27 EU finance ministers has*

been cancelled.

It's getting uncomfortably close to crunch time for eurozone leaders, with just over hours left before the summit-to-end-all-summits. But will they actually be able to agree on the big euro rescue plan? A letter sent last night by Jacek Rostowski, the Polish finance minister, makes it seem doubtful.

Since Poland currently holds the European Union's rotating presidency, Rostowski is charged with convening a meeting of all 27 EU finance ministers tomorrow ahead of the big summit to lay the groundwork for a final agreement.

But officials tell Brussels Blog the so-called "Ecofin" council meeting is now likely off, and in a letter to Jean-Claude Juncker, the Luxembourg prime minister who chairs the group of 17 eurozone finance ministers, Rostowski makes it appear the cancellation is due to a failure to agree on outstanding issues.

As things stand at present, I understand that the full package may not be ready by Wednesday, 26 October. Were this the case, the presidency would need to postpone the Ecofin council meeting by a day or two. Therefore I would like to ask you to keep me informed on when the remaining elements of the package will be completed by the Eurogroup so that I can convene the Ecofin meeting as promptly as possible.

An Ecofin council meeting ahead of the summit is specifically called for in the conclusions of Sunday's summit, which say Ecofin must "finalise this work" on a bank recapitalisation plan before the Wednesday gathering.

Other officials told Brussels Blog that there is a growing belief that any meeting of Ecofin or Mr Juncker's eurogroup is superfluous, since heads of government will have to make all the major decisions Wednesday night anyway. But cancelling meetings of finance ministers ahead of time may not augur well for what's to come.

Tags: EU summits, Poland

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