

Brexit: ‘just a few hours’ left for a trade agreement, EU negotiator warns



Chief EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier. © Belga

The EU and the UK have “just a few hours” left to reach a post-Brexit trade agreement, chief EU negotiator Michel Barnier warned on Friday.

“We have very little time remaining,” Barnier told members of European Parliament, with only today “to work through these negotiations in a useful fashion if we want this agreement to enter into force on the first of January.”

He and British negotiator David Frost are meeting in what Barnier has called “the moment of truth” in the Brexit negotiations.

“There is a chance of getting an agreement but the path to such an agreement is very narrow,” Barnier said, echoing previous statements by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Frost, meanwhile, tweeted on Thursday evening that “progress seems blocked and time is running out.” Fisheries remain the main point of contention, according to Barnier.

The EU’s position on the matter “simply not reasonable,” according to a statement from British Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s office, which says that “if there was to be an agreement,” the EU’s position “needed to shift significantly.”

If the EU and the UK do not reach an agreement on a post-Brexit trade relationship, World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules will apply between them, meaning the introduction of high tariffs and extensive customs controls.

The rules will apply from 1 January, which is the end of a transition period after Brexit during which the UK remains part of the EU’s single market and customs

union.

Jason Spinks
The Brussels Times

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