

Brexit: 'Very serious divergences remain'

As two weeks of intensive Brexit talks draw to a close, the EU and UK's chief Brexit negotiators said that the level playing field, governance and fisheries remain significant obstacles to reaching an agreement.



On Wednesday evening, EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said he had updated the European Parliament and Member States on the state of play of Brexit negotiations.

"Despite EU efforts to find solutions, very serious divergences remain in level playing field, governance and fisheries. These are essential conditions for any economic partnership. The EU is prepared for all scenarios."

UK counterpart David Frost said that after two weeks of intensive talks with the EU, progress had been made, but he added, "I agree with Michel Barnier that wide divergences remain on some core issues. We continue to work to find solutions that fully respect UK sovereignty."

Chair of the European Parliament's UK Coordination Group (UKCG), German EPP member David McAllister, said in a statement, "Today, we met Michel Barnier and

noted with deep concern that the list of fundamental divergences remains long.”

“While the EU chief negotiator clearly stated that the EU wants to conclude an agreement, Parliament underlines that we will not give up our position on key issues in the area of level playing field, governance, and fisheries. The EU needs to protect its long-term political interests.”

“Very serious divergences remain in level playing field, governance and fisheries. These are essential conditions for any economic partnership”

Michel Barnier, EU chief Brexit negotiator

McAllister said that as the Brexit negotiations enter their final stage, it was of the “utmost importance” that Parliament is given sufficient time to scrutinize any agreement between the EU and the UK before giving its consent.

“This is not merely a procedural matter, but, above all, a democratic responsibility,” he said, adding, “We are well aware that the negotiations have reached a critical juncture. A completion of a deal clearly requires additional time. We will take our democratic responsibility seriously.”

Chair of Parliament’s International Trade Committee and fellow UKCG member Bernd Lange said, “Even if we are ready to negotiate for a deal until the end, it is also clear that, despite time pressure, we will not accept compromises on key issues or the ratification process. With the European Parliament there will be no waving through at the expense of democratic control.”

“It’s a shame that the British side is only now negotiating seriously and constructively. How much unnecessary time was wasted by tactical games by Boris Johnson. This endgame is completely home-made and could have been avoided.”

Another UKCG member, French Renew Europe member Nathalie Loiseau, said that the negotiations were “slipping.”

“It’s a shame that the British side is only now negotiating seriously and constructively. How much unnecessary time was wasted by tactical games by Boris Johnson” ***Bernd Lange, UK Coordination Group***

“No progress on fair competition, on the dispute settlement mechanism or on fisheries. The British have to move if they really want a deal. And very quickly.”

Newly-elected chair of Parliament’s Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, Anna Cavazzini, said of Barnier’s most recent statement, “I have the feeling I read this message already a million times. Only now, time is running out.”

Irish EPP member Seán Kelly also expressed his concern at the lack of progress, saying, “With little movement, it’s a worrying outcome to this week’s Brexit negotiations.”

“I remain optimistic of a deal, but with millions of people and hundreds of businesses anxiously awaiting clarity, I hope this is not just tactic from the UK to try to press for a last-minute grand bargain.”

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