

Negotiations March 2, 2020

Agenda for Round 1 of negotiations can be found [here](#).

The UK's chief Brexit negotiator, David Frost and his EU counterpart Michel Barnier met on March 2 to try to agree on the logistics for the negotiations. This meeting was followed by a larger "plenary" session to set out the ambitions for the week. March 3 marked the start of negotiations in a conference centre in Brussels as the Commission's HQ is not able to handle the number of meetings that UK and EU officials will be having.

The talks on March 3 and March 4 held the 11 different working group meetings in parallel, with talks wrapping on March 5 in a final plenary session to summarise progress and problems.

Press Conference with European Commission's Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, following the first round of EU-UK negotiations - 05/03/20

Each delegation in the negotiations had approximately 110 people, which is high compared to usual free trade agreements. Mr Barnier spoke of rebuilding a new ambitious partnership with the UK and that, although they are constrained by the timeframe set by the UK, the EU will do everything to build a basis for a future partnership, whilst defending the interests of citizens, businesses and workers in Europe. These negotiations are also being addressed under the challenges of the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and preparing for the end of the transition period either with or without a deal.

Mr Barnier said it was natural for differences to exist and that the first round was anticipated to be a chance to compare, exchange and ask questions on the respective mandates in order to address points of convergence and divergence. There was convergence on some objectives, for example civil nuclear and participation of programmes in the EU, but there were four areas of "very serious divergences":

1. Level-playing field

Referring to the Political Declaration, Mr Barnier said the EU had agreed with the UK that they would want to prevent trade distortions and competitive advantage on both sides, as well as maintaining high standards. However, "the UK are saying they want to keep the same ambitions, but they do not wish to translate those undertakings into a common agreement and do not want appropriate mechanisms on either side to respect those standards." The EU has also taken note of the UK asking the US for level-playing field commitments, despite being unwilling to do so with the EU.

2. Criminal justice and law enforcement

The UK informed the EU that they do not wish to formally commit in continuing to apply the European Convention on Human Rights, nor do they wish for the European Court of Justice "to play its full role in interpreting European law...this is a must have for the EU, it is about the protection of the rights of European citizens and the interpretation of European law can only be done by the Court of Justice." Mr Barnier said that if the UK does not move its position, it will have "an immediate and concrete effect on the level of ambition".

3. Governance of the future agreement

The UK wishes to have a series of sectorial arrangements on a case by case basis. However, the EU wants an agreement with a global framework. Mr Barnier spoke of an overarching governance which would “avoid needless multiplicity of parallel structures with separate ratification procedures” and would make it easier to address new challenges that may be met in the future. He mentioned the current health crises as an example of a being able to provide a coordinated and speedy response.

4. Fisheries

The UK wishes to negotiate reciprocal access to British and European waters on an annual basis, which Mr Barnier says is impractical due to the hundreds of species of fish that would need to be negotiated on. This also would not provide the people involved in fisheries the predictability that they need. Mr Barnier is hopeful that a trading, commercial and economic agreement that includes a balanced solution for fisheries can be reached.

Mr Barnier said that the differences come as no surprise after the first round of negotiations but that he continues “to believe we can reach a good agreement for both sides” and that there are two keys for success: not going back on commitments and mutual respect.

EU – UK joint committee overseeing implementation of withdrawal agreement

Michael Gove will be the UK representative on a joint committee to oversee the implementation of the withdrawal agreement and Maroš Šefčovič, European commission vice president will represent the EU. The joint committee will hold its first meeting on March 30 and will deal with the implementation of key issues such as the Northern Ireland protocol, with the priority of making sure the agreement is operational before December 31. Agendas and minutes of the meetings will become available in due course.