

15th May 2020

Michel Barnier Press Conference on Round 3 EU-UK Negotiations

The aim was to make progress on all subjects in parallel, including the most difficult issues.

Discussions have been based on new texts proposed by the UK which now cover most subjects covered by the EU draft text (published 18th March).

This week's discussions have allowed the EU to clarify a number of points on issues such as trade in goods, transport and the participation of the UK in the future union programmes.

They have also been able to start an initial constructive dialogue on fisheries, though positions are currently extremely divergent.

Apart from these modest steps, no progress has been made on the other, more difficult subjects.

Level playing field

The UK has not got into a real discussion on the level playing field. It is the rules on fair play for trade set out in the Political Declaration which remains the relevant document for today and the future.

Governance

On governance of future relations, the only useful discussions were related to sectors and sectorial issues. We have not been able to make progress towards the single framework for governance that the EU would like in order to build a full complete partnership ensuring completeness of transparency.

The EU side was disappointed by the UK's lack of ambition on other areas. For example, fighting money laundering. There was also a lack of ambition for the respective roles of British parliament, EU parliament and civil society when it comes to implementing future relations. The UK refuses to include mechanisms for consultations with the two parliaments or civil society. This is a particularly important point for the EU.

Police and judicial cooperation

Although both sides broadly agree on the objectives, there are a number of fundamental problems which need solving. However, the UK refuses to agree on guarantees for mutual protection of fundamental rights and freedoms which stand in the European Convention on Human Rights even though this is in the Political Declaration.

It is a case of not lowering current standards and maintaining data protection. Reciprocity between member states and the UK is an important issue. Exchange of biometric data should be reciprocal with reciprocal guarantees.

This round has been disappointing but the EU remains determined to build a partnership with the UK. An extension of the transition period by one or two years is still possible by common agreement.

Mr Barnier's mandate has been recently reconfirmed by the EU institutions and he wanted to reiterate some points.

1. EU ambition remains and will remain a free trade agreement without customs duties or quotas for all goods. Zero tariffs, zero quotas. This would be a first in trade for the EU. There will have to be changes at the end of the transition period, but an ambitious relationship is the aim. A cut and paste of an existing trade agreement would be artificial. The EU wants to look towards the future with this deal and not base it on an existing precedent.
2. Trade policy is no longer what it was and merely a case of dismantling tariff barriers. Trade agreements have to be at the service of sustainable development, social protection, environmental protection. The EU wants to raise these standards. Any trade policy has to be based on conditions of fair competition, state aid, social standards and taxation. Must also contribute to achieving shared goals e.g. environmental protection. Despite the UK having its own ambitious climate goals, it is refusing to get into the discussion on shared measures etc. Open and fair competition isn't a "nice to have", it is a must have.

Northern Ireland Protocol

The UK has not yet laid out its approach on fulfilling the protocol on NI. The solution agreed ensures peace and stability and holds up Good Friday Agreement.

The system needs to be fully operational by 1st January next year, but the EU is still waiting on the approach that the UK authorities will take.

The EU wants a modern, unprecedented forward-looking agreement, not a narrow one already established by a precedent or one sliced up sector by sector.

The EU will not act in haste on such an important matter, just as their negotiating mandate was not written in haste.

The next round must bring new dynamism to avoid a stalemate between the EU and the UK. Mr Barnier called on both sides to make a success of round four, taking place in the first week of June, by making tangible progress that is needed across the board.