



Speech by Michel Barnier at the press conference on the adoption of the Commission's recommendation on draft negotiating directives

Brussels, 3 May 2017

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here with you today.

Since my first statement in this press room five months ago, we have worked a lot with President Juncker, his team and all the services of the Commission, with President Tusk and his team, with Member States, with the European Parliament, President Tajani and Guy Verhofstadt, and national parliaments.

I and my team have met with representatives of business communities in each Member State, trade unions and civil society. And we will continue.

Our hard work paid off: the result of our collective work is what happened last Saturday: the 27 leaders and the Presidents of the three institutions showing their unity by agreeing on clear guidelines for the negotiation.

Today, the Commission proposes a recommendation that translates these guidelines into negotiation directives. In line with the two-phase approach these directives are for the first phase of the negotiations only.

Our recommendation shows where we want to land when we conclude the first phase of negotiations; notably on citizens' rights, the financial settlement and the new external borders. I will pay great attention to the situation in Ireland, and I will go to Ireland next week.

The UK must put a great deal of energy and effort into these three issues over the next weeks and months. That will increase the chances of reaching a deal.

Some have created the illusion that Brexit would have no material impact on our lives or that negotiations can be concluded quickly and painlessly.

This is not the case; we need sound solutions. We need legal precision and this will take time.

Now, a few words on the actual content of these negotiating directives.

1- Citizens' rights

This is our priority. There are over 4 million Europeans living in the UK or British citizens living in the territory of the 27.

Our objective is clear: these men, these women, these families must be able to continue to live as they are doing today, for the whole of their lives.

Who do we want to protect?

Not only those who are living or working today in the United Kingdom but also:

- those who have lived or worked there in the past;
- those who will be living or working there before the date of exit of the United Kingdom;
- their family members.

And what I've just said applies equally to British citizens who are living and working in one of the 27 countries of the European Union.

Which rights do we want to protect?

Not only the right of residence but also the rights that relate to:

- access to the labour market;
- access to education;
- access to healthcare;

- recognition of diplomas or qualifications.

All these rights must be protected and guaranteed on the basis of EU law, guaranteed by the Court of Justice of the European Union.

2- The financial settlement

Our objective is clear – it was reaffirmed by the European Council on Saturday – the United Kingdom must honour, under a single financial settlement covering all the financial relations between the EU and the UK, all the commitments undertaken by it as a Member State of the Union.

- This is not a punishment or an exit tax.
- The EU and the UK undertook mutually to finance programmes and projects.
- We decided on those programmes together. We benefit from them together. We are financing them together.
- This money has been committed in projects all over Europe. Thousands of authorities, businesses and project promoters are involved. One can imagine – one ought to imagine – the political and legal problems if these programmes had to be cut short or interrupted.
- We must settle the accounts. Nothing more and nothing less.

Once again: there is no punishment. There is no Brexit bill. The financial settlement is only about settling the accounts.

Our objective throughout this first phase will be to reach agreement with the United Kingdom on a rigorous methodology for calculating its obligations.

3. Governance

The agreement with the UK must provide for effective implementation and dispute settlement mechanisms. Whenever EU law is concerned, for example with regard to citizens, we must rely in the long term on the EU Court of Justice.

Otherwise, the rights established by the agreement, in particular for citizens, would be no more than an illusory promise.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These negotiations will be extraordinary. They are a source of concern for many citizens and many organisations. We need to respond by being transparent.

This is why we are publishing today our recommendation for the Council's negotiation directives. We will be transparent throughout the process.

Transparency can help sustaining the constructive public debate and in these negotiations which will be in any case difficult. I think that the EU should always remain cool-headed and solution-oriented.

We should put all our efforts towards reaching a deal. This is a spirit in which I, with the trust of the institutions and all Member States, will continue working.

The EU-27 is on track to make sure that the UK's withdrawal happens in an orderly fashion.

The UK's decision to leave the European Union has now caused ten months of uncertainty. We need to remove that uncertainty. It is high time to start negotiating. As soon as the UK is ready to come to the table, we shall start negotiating.

The clock is ticking.

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