



## Statement by Michel Barnier at the plenary session of the European Parliament

Strasbourg, 5 April 2017

President Tajani,

Honourable Minister,

Honourable Members,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Presidents, thank you for allowing me to speak before the European Parliament today.

Complementing President Juncker's speech, and thanking him for his confidence, let me start by congratulating the excellent work done - under the auspices of President Tajani and all the political groups - by Guy Verhofstadt and his team, with whom I have cooperated closely since I started in this role. We have already started working efficiently and constructively and I am sure that that will continue.

Your Resolution will be the first political stand taken by a European Institution following the notification letter sent last week by Theresa May to the President of the European Council.

With this Resolution you will set the tone by speaking to the British government, the governments of the 27 Member States but also - and especially - to European citizens.

And it goes without saying that I also understand the message you wish to pass to me, as negotiator.

Our common objective is to succeed in this negotiation - that means reaching an agreement.

There are three pre-conditions for that to happen:

The first condition, rightly underlined by President Juncker, is unity.

Unity is in our interest: it is only by staying united - as the Presidents of the groups have said - that we can defend the interests of the 27 and the fundamental principles on which the European project is built, as we recalled in Rome.

Unity is essential, for our Union but also for our British partners: at the end of the day if the Union is disunited, there simply will not be an agreement.

And if there is no agreement - as outlined by Philippe Lamberts - the consequences will be heavy, for the United Kingdom especially, but also for the Union. That is why the *no deal* scenario is not our scenario. Our ambition must be to succeed.

Not against the UK, but with the UK!

For this to happen, we must explain what we are doing and why we are doing it. That is our duty towards citizens. We must say objectively, and without aggression, what Brexit means, something that has not always been done.

Dare I also say that this negotiation should have an informative dimension for us all?

This will be the time to recall - even to rediscover - all the progress we have made together to improve the daily life and work of citizens, consumers and businesses.

My firm conviction is that our unity will be all the stronger for being built on transparency and public debate.

We will negotiate in a transparent manner. This extraordinary negotiation - which must remain extraordinary - will not be a secret negotiation.

The second condition is about removing uncertainty.

Our role is to re-establish legal certainty and security where the UK's decision to leave the Union has created uncertainty and insecurity.

First, for citizens.

For the beneficiaries of the European budget.

For the Union's borders.

In order to remove this uncertainty, the principles – which I will defend in your name – must be perfectly clear.

For European citizens in the United Kingdom and vice versa: the continuity and reciprocity of the rights they currently enjoy must be effectively guaranteed, without discrimination, as President Pittella said.

I listened carefully to what the Presidents of the political groups have said on this subject.

Theresa May's letter also called for a quick agreement on this question.

But after six months of work with our team, I can say that the devil is in the detail. We must ensure that this agreement effectively guarantees the rights of citizens, as President Juncker said. It is indeed the Parliament's role to remain vigilant.

On the budget: there must be a single financial settlement, covering all commitments made by the United Kingdom as a Member State.

Here again, your Resolution is unambiguous. We will never punish the United Kingdom - never! We will only ask that it honours the commitments we have taken together. We must, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Farage, settle the accounts. No more, no less.

For the borders, particularly in Ireland: as Gabriella Zimmer said, we will work towards arrangements that do not call into question the existing peace process and dialogue, particularly the Good Friday Agreement, whilst being compatible with Union law.

The third condition is doing things in the right order and putting them into perspective.

The UK letter makes clear that the UK Government will push for parallel negotiations on the withdrawal and on the future relationship.

This is a very risky approach. To succeed, we need on the contrary to devote the first phase of negotiations exclusively to reaching an agreement on the principles of the exit.

We are not proposing this to be tactical or to create difficulties for the UK. On the contrary, it is an essential condition to maximise our chances to reach an agreement together within two years - which is very short.

This is also our best chance to build trust - as Manfred Weber mentioned very clearly - before proceeding to the second phase of negotiations. This second phase will be devoted to scoping our future relations and discussing necessary transitory arrangements.

To put it differently: the sooner we agree on the principles of an orderly withdrawal, the sooner we can prepare our future relationship in trade - a free and fair agreement, and a level playing field - but also in security and defence.

It is on the basis of these three conditions – unity, lifting uncertainty and phasing of negotiations – that we can succeed.

My hope is that the European Parliament makes these three conditions its own.

Your Resolution will set the tone.

To conclude, a word on our common work.

President Juncker said that in this negotiation, your role will be essential from the beginning to the end.

The beginning is today's Resolution.

The end will be your vote on the draft withdrawal agreement, which we will negotiate over the coming two years. You will have the final word.

It is first here in the European Parliament that we will have a democratic debate on this negotiation, which is not – and should not – be like any other.

This public debate, in each of our countries, is essential to order to reach an agreement not only on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom, but also on the agreement on our future relationship. I would remind you that the latter must be ratified by your Parliament and all national parliaments.

We will work together on the road ahead.

That is why I am happy to be here before you today, and to have been given the opportunity to speak, alongside President Juncker and the Council.

And also to work in confidence with President Tusk and his team in the run-up to the extraordinary European Council which will take place on 29 April.

This is why I am willing to come before your Conference of Presidents, the Conference of Committee Chairs and, as often as possible, before each of your groups.

In conclusion, I will simply say that throughout the long road ahead in this extraordinary negotiation, my team and I will be always at your disposal.

Thank you.

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