

Michel Barnier to meet with Brexit supporters

Written by Martin Banks on 9 January 2018 in News
News

A delegation of Brexit figures, led by independent MEP Steven Woolfe, will travel to Brussels to meet with Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, on Wednesday ahead of the second phase of exit talks.



Michel Barnier | *Photo credit: Press Association*

The delegation also includes crossbench peer and former Director General of the Confederation of British Industry Digby Jones; Labour party donor and Chair of Labour Leave John Mills, and former Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce and co-Chair of Leave Means Leave John Longworth.

Organised and led by former Ukip deputy Woolfe, the meeting has been two months in the making and was requested in the aftermath of a spate of meetings between Barnier and Remain-supporting politicians, including Lord Adonis, Nick Clegg and Ken Clarke.

Woolfe asked for the meeting because of concern that the “over-representation of Remain voices was leading to misconceptions at the highest level of the European Union that there was a potential to reverse, halt or water down Brexit.”

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A number of officials and European political leaders have recently appeared in the UK media mooted the possibility that Article 50 can be reversed or Britain could stay in the single market.

The delegation will stress to Barnier that there is “strong cross-party political will to see Brexit through to completion and that the public will not accept any backsliding.”

They will emphasise that any attempt to water down the outcome of the process will not be acceptable to the British public.

According to an organiser, the meeting is also “an opportunity to strike an upbeat tone and stress that energy can and should be directly focused by both sides into securing an all-embracing free-trade deal that benefits both the UK and the EU, and that a quick deal in the coming months is not only preferable but possible.”

He said, “The timeline for reaching a clean, good deal for both sides should be as short as possible to give businesses on each side of the Channel confidence and certainty.”

On Tuesday, Woolfe said, “I am delighted Michel Barnier has agreed to meet with us. A number of Remain voices, including Blair and Clegg, are spearheading a campaign both publicly and privately to try to water down Brexit or keep the UK in the single market and the customs union.

“That is not acceptable, and the EU’s chief negotiator needs to know that the will of the British public remains completely unchanged - and shouldn't give any time or thought to these possibilities. Britain will be leaving the EU, the single market and the customs union, and all energy has to be focused on getting a good, quick deal that is beneficial for both sides.

“I’m delighted to be joined by Digby Jones, John Mills and John Longworth who will bring cross-party political clout to the table. They are also respected business and economic minds in their own right, and know that a good, quick free-trade deal between the EU and the UK is the best outcome for both parties. That is something that we plan to emphasise, and we hope that this optimism and energy will be taken into the next phase of talks by the British government.”

Further comment came from Digby Jones, who said, “I look forward to meeting with Barnier, and stressing the need to go into the next round of talks on trade with optimism and will to get an all-embracing deal for the benefit of all Europeans, especially the unemployed in countries such as France and Spain.

“I have been in teams working with Pascal Lamy on the Doha, Cancun and Hong Kong WTO rounds,

and all negotiations are always about reducing tariffs and not increasing them. With this one, we're starting at zero and that is where they should stay.

"We should also start serious discussions about bureaucratically obstructive and delaying non-tariff barriers to trade. There can be no cherry-picking by either side - financial services, aviation and all other aspects of trade must be in the mix. The people of the present EU deserve no less; this trade deal is for them, not tribal politicians of any colour or bureaucrats."

Elsewhere, Longworth said, "I look forward to sitting down with Barnier. The meeting is an opportunity to make clear that the UK is not prepared to negotiate away our newly won freedoms as a country to achieve a trade deal.

"The public and I personally will not stand for any backsliding and it must be made clear at the highest levels. No trade deal is better than a bad trade deal for the UK, and the EU has an obligation to prepare for global trade on WTO terms should no deal be reached."

Meanwhile, Mills said, "The purpose of this delegation is to turn the corner on the first phase of talks, and start talking seriously about getting to a quick, mutually beneficial free-trade deal. It must be made clear to Barnier that the possibility of the UK staying in the single market is simply not an option. It wouldn't give the UK control over its borders or judicial system, and is not what the British people voted for.

"Instead, we need to focus all our energy on reaching a deal that is beneficial for both the UK and Europe. If that is not possible, the UK can safely fall back on WTO terms and we need to make that option clear."

About the author

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[Trade](#) [6]

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[International Relations](#) [7]



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