

EPP Congress: EU needs to move on from Brexit, says Michel Barnier

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News

Chief negotiator tells EPP Congress that future of EU much more important than Brexit.



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EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier has told delegates at this year's European People's Party (EPP) Congress that EU policymakers need to move on from the UK's pending departure

Speaking at the annual centre-right, Christian Democrat get-together in Zagreb, Croatia, Barnier said "We must be ready to move on".

He told delegates, "we in the EU regret Brexit, but we also respect the democrat choice of the majority of the British citizens," adding that although the UK's withdrawal was unfortunate, "the

future of the EU is much more important than Brexit.”

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“Brexit is an important event, but it’s just as important now that we devote our energies to the positive agenda that lies before us.”

He admitted that talks with the UK government had been challenging saying, “over the last three years the negotiations have been difficult, very difficult.”

And he said, that despite intense media attention and several political challenges over the last three years, the EU never lost sight of its core interests, or undermined its unity and solidarity.

Barnier said that one of his key Brexit negotiating priorities was safeguarding peace in Ireland and Northern Ireland. “Obviously when discussing Northern Ireland we talked about its economy, trade, goods and borders. But what always mattered to me, was the people of both Northern Ireland and Ireland.”

Also important was maintaining EU solidarity with Ireland, when its “fundamental interests” were at stake. “He paid tribute to Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, saying “we found a solution to ‘square the circle’ of reconciling our objectives with the UK.”

“Although the UK’s withdrawal was unfortunate, “the future of the EU is much more important than Brexit” **EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier**

This included avoiding a border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, preserving the economy of the whole of Ireland, protecting the integrity of the single market, and ensuring that Northern Ireland remained in the UK’s custom territory.

Another top priority was the protection of the EU’s internal market. “From the start of the negotiations there was never any compromise, with the UK, which would have been detrimental to the internal market.” He added, “The internal market is our main strength, and that is the main reason why we are respected across the world.”

Fundamental to the single market was the principle of free movement of people, which the UK wanted to stop. “That is why in the agreement the rights of citizens from both the EU and UK will be protected for life, if this agreement is ratified.”

And while UK’s policymakers and the country’s media have focussed primarily on the political squabbling surrounding approval of the basic Brexit withdrawal agreement, Barnier warned that withdrawal was, “not the final destination, but simply the divorce.”

“We will need to rebuild a lot of things that have been unravelled; In particular economic relations and a trade partnership, that was built around common rules while at the same time defending social rights, environmental protection, the rights of consumers and issues concerning state aid and taxation. All of which are the building blocks of our social market economy.”

He said he hoped any future agreement with the UK will include zero tariffs and quotas, as achieved in the trade agreements with Canada and Japan. But he also stressed, that the EU would not tolerate “zero dumping” of cheaper goods and services from the UK, post-Brexit.

However, he also reminded delegates that the UK was still a major contributor to European security and defence, saying, “the UK may be leaving the EU but it is not leaving Europe. “We need to build a common capacity with the UK, in terms of internal and external security, and work towards our common defence together.

About the author

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