

UK Leave camp 'terrified' of second Brexit referendum, says senior MEP

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News

UK Socialist MEP Richard Corbett spoke to this website as the campaign for the UK's general election, dubbed "the Brexit election", heads into its final furlong.



Photo credit: Press Association

Latest opinion polls show the Conservative party well ahead of Labour, which has pledged to hold a second referendum if it wins.

Labour's hopes appear to have receded further following a television interview last week in which party leader Jeremy Corbyn faced a grilling over his record on tackling alleged antisemitism in the party.

Corbyn also lags well behind UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson in popularity rankings.

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However, Corbett, a close Corbyn ally, sprang to the defence of the party's under-fire leader, saying, "Personal attacks on Jeremy Corbyn have stepped up since he promised a second Brexit referendum, which the Brexiteers are terrified of because they know they will probably lose it."

Corbett, who leads the UK Labour delegation in the European Parliament, added, "These attacks focus on two things: that he met the IRA, and alleged antisemitism. But he met the IRA to try to draw them into a peace process, around the same time as John Major's Conservative government was doing precisely the same."

He went on, "On antisemitism, while it's certainly the case that the Labour Party - in some disbelief that this could possibly happen in our party - took too long to respond adequately to cases of a small number of antisemitic members, there is no way that Jeremy Corbyn is antisemitic."

"He is a lifelong campaigner against racism in all its forms."

"Personal attacks on [Labour leader] Jeremy Corbyn have stepped up since he promised a second Brexit referendum, which the Brexiteers are terrified of because they know they will probably lose it" **Richard Corbett MEP**

Elsewhere, Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, has warned that it will be "very tough" finalising a political agreement within the likely timeframe.

If the UK leaves the EU on 31 January, as it is due to do, then it will have until the end of 2020 to negotiate a political agreement with the EU.

But Barnier, speaking late last week at an event in Brussels, said, "We will work day after day to reach a trade agreement with the UK, but we will have only 11 months to do so and this will be a huge challenge and is going to need political will on all sides."

Barnier once again warned that the UK will be reduced to the status of a "third country" when it eventually exits the EU.

Addressing the European Defence Agency summit, he said, "This is the UK's choice and not ours but, after it leaves, it will not be business as usual."

He said a "new framework" would have to be found in order for the UK to take part, as it currently does, in future EU-led cooperation on security and defence.

Barnier added, "I am sure the UK will still have the same appetite to take part in defence and security issues but the fact that it will be a third country in this respect is a big change."

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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