

## Mayor of London says 'London is part of Europe'

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News

In a one-day visit to Brussels on Tuesday, Sadiq Khan met with Michel Barnier and other EU leaders to discuss the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.



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Speaking outside the European Commission after the meetings, Khan said, "I've had a good day here in Brussels, meeting some of the top politicians in the European Union - the key message from them is that they are really keen to see London continue to play a role in Europe."

The meetings come with talks between the EU and UK set to begin at the start of March. These will focus on trade and the future relationships between the two sides.

The UK's transition period with the EU is set to end in December.

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Khan said he was particularly keen to “renew the UK capital’s ties” with the EU ahead of the mayoral election campaign in the UK capital which take place in May.

The EU Green Deal, he said, was the focus for his meeting with Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans, the Dutch official in charge of the flagship EU policy.

“Londoners and Europeans have made their view on the climate emergency extremely clear – London can and will continue to work with Europe on critical environmental issues post-Brexit,” he said.

In meetings with Parliament’s President David Sassoli and former Brexit Steering Group chair Guy Verhofstadt, Khan said there was also “a detailed exchange about how the rights of citizens can be protected post-Brexit.”

“Londoners and Europeans have made their view on the climate emergency extremely clear – London can and will continue to work with Europe on critical environmental issues post-Brexit” **Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London**

Speaking later at a news conference alongside Verhofstadt, the Socialist mayor, a keen Europhile, said many Londoners were “heartbroken” by the UK’s departure from the EU last month, adding, “I’m going to bang the drum for our city and to be close to our friends in Europe but also seeing if there’s a possibility, even though we’ve left the EU, of some sort of associate citizenship going forward.”

“I’ve been pleased with the response and it gives hope to Londoners and others across our country. Even if the British government doesn’t reciprocate in relation to associate citizenship, we think the EU will put out the fraternal hand of friendship and recognise there are people in our country who want to stay close to the EU.”

A scheme called “associate citizenship for Britons”, the idea being floated by Khan and Verhofstadt is, he told reporters, “the next best thing” to the UK staying in the EU’s single market and retaining the bloc’s freedom of movement rules, which he admitted “clearly is not going to happen.”

Speaking after the meeting with the mayor, Italian member Sassoli said, “Over one million EU citizens live in London. Ensuring citizens’ rights are protected remains a key priority for the European Parliament.”

Verhofstadt added that he would continue to work for what he calls “European associated citizenship” for all those who “want to keep their links with Europe.”

“Over one million EU citizens live in London. Ensuring citizens’ rights are protected remains a key priority for the European Parliament” **David Sassoli, European Parliament President**

Although Member States such as France and Germany have already stripped British citizens of their voting rights in municipal elections, despite guarantees that nothing would change during the transition period, EU citizens will have the right to vote in mayoral elections in London in May.

A series of hustling meetings have been organised with the Mayoral candidates specifically designed for EU citizens to promote participation.

The meetings aim to give EU citizens the opportunity to question mayoral candidates in public. The first such meeting will take place on 18 March in the Scalabrini Community Centre in Brixton, London.

Responding to the visit on behalf of civil rights group New European, Roger Casale, former Labour MP and a colleague of Khan from the time they were MPs with neighbouring constituencies in London, said, “It’s great news that the Mayor is reaching out to Brussels – Europe is a community of values and Londoners still feel very much part of that community. The emphasis is on citizens’ rights is very welcome.”

Barnier, speaking separately, said the UK cannot have the same trade deal with the EU as Canada, said to be the preferred option of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

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Barnier said the EU was ready to offer an “ambitious partnership” with the UK post-Brexit, but its “particular proximity” meant it would be different.

His comments come after the UK’s chief negotiator, David Frost, made a speech in Brussels calling for a “Canada Free Trade Agreement-type relationship.”

Speaking to reporters as he arrived at the European Parliament for a meeting, Barnier cast doubt on the possibility, adding, “We remain ready to offer the UK an ambitious partnership. A trade agreement that includes in particular fishing and includes a level playing field, with a country that has a very particular proximity - a unique territorial and economic closeness - which is why it can't be compared to Canada or South Korea or Japan.”

## **About the author**

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