

Brexit LIVE: Barnier sent stern warning from ERG – ‘Change your unreasonable demands!’

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MICHEL Barnier must change his “unreasonable demands” with respect to a post-Brexit trade deal, Mark Francois, chairman of the eurosceptic European Research Group has said in a letter to the EU’s chief negotiator.

Mr Francois’s letter was tweeted by party colleague Andrea Jenkyns on the day face-to-face trade talks between the UK and the EU kicked off today in Brussels, with both sides agreeing to “intensify” negotiations in July. The Tory MP for Rayleigh and Wickford said “certain EU demands are simply not going to work”. He added: “I hope that you find this letter and the points that I have set out above useful – and that it spurs you to change some of the unreasonable demands that the EU is currently making.”

Four rounds of talks led by Boris Johnson’s Europe adviser David Frost and the EU’s chief negotiator Michel Barnier, which have been taking place remotely due to the coronavirus pandemic, have led to little progress.

However, the two sides are set to meet face-to-face today in Brussels after agreeing to “intensify” negotiations.

There will be greater involvement from Mr Frost and his EU counterpart in the latest round of talks.

And negotiating teams will be smaller than in the video conferences with just 20 British officials heading to the Belgian capital.

The UK formally left the EU on January 31 and is in a transition period until the end of the year.

The COVID-19 crisis has only added further frustration to the department.

The Cabinet Office operates at the heart of Whitehall and oversees everything from policy implementation to constitutional reform.

Sir Mark Sedwill’s departure as permanent secretary has reignited talk that Downing Street is about to bring the Cabinet Office under its control.

The Prime Minister reportedly does not want talks to continue past September because it will leave businesses with little time to get ready for the end of the transition period in December.

This comes as Downing Street confirmed that the UK’s chief Brexit negotiator will take on his new position as Mr Johnson’s national security adviser at the end of August.

Although his role as negotiator will not be replaced, Mr Frost has said that Brexit talks will remain his top priority “until those negotiations have concluded”.

A spokesperson for the Prime Minister indicated that the position could overlap but said this would be a short period of time.

They said: “Talks can’t go into the autumn.”

The spokesperson also highlighted how Mr Johnson does not want to be continuing with talks in October.

Sir Mark announced he will be standing down from his position with David Frost, the Prime Minister’s chief Brexit negotiator, taking over as National Security Advisor in September.

The departing Cabinet Secretary had once been lined up to follow Sir Kim Darroch as ambassador to the US.

He will reportedly be asked to take other roles, including helping the UK to prepare to chair the G7 next year.

Ms Long-Bailey was fired on Thursday after sharing an article online which contained an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory.

Writing in The Guardian, Ms Long-Bailey discussed what led to the “mess” she found herself in after sharing the article by Maxine Peake, who lives in her Salford constituency.

She said she took full responsibility for her actions and was determined not to ignore the issue of anti-Semitism.

At the end of May, France and Germany announced they are backing the creation of an EU bond to raise €500billion (£447billion) to boost the European economy, severely weakened by the coronavirus pandemic.

The two leaders, Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel, unveiled their proposal in a joint video press conference.

If approved, it would be the first time the bloc has pooled its debt in this way.

Boris Johnson’s chief negotiator warned the European Union must not drag out Brexit talks into the autumn after being promoted to the Prime Minister’s National Security Adviser.

David Frost, who leads the UK’s Taskforce Europe negotiating team, stressed the future relationship talks remained his top priority despite being handed the significant promotion.

He will succeed departing Civil Service chief Sir Mark Sedwill in August, but Downing Street has already announced plans for a “transition period” to allow Mr Frost time to conclude a post-Brexit deal with Brussels.

In their first face-to-face meeting since March, he told Michel Barnier, the EU’s chief negotiator, a deal must be wrapped up quickly to allow him to start his new job.

Brexiters are preparing to celebrate another milestone in the process of quitting the EU tomorrow – with the end of the month marking any lingering possibility of an extension to the transition period beyond 2020.

In accordance with the Brexit withdrawal agreement thrashed out between the UK and EU last year, and enshrined in the EU Withdrawal Act, the deadline for a UK request to any further delay beyond the end of the year is July 1.

Pro-Brexit think tank the Bruges Group underlined their belief that an extension is now impossible, tweeting: “Well folks, it’s nearly the end of June, which means we did it.

Britain has been warned French boats may still choose to fish in British waters regardless of what Brexit trade deal is agreed with the EU.

Sky News’ Adam Parsons accompanied French fishermen as they sailed in British waters to catch fish.

Mr Parsons spoke with some members of France’s fishing industry and exposed their fears regarding the future of their trade and the impact Brexit could have on their sector.

Mr Parsons spoke to Emilie, a lobster seller whose husband catches fish in UK waters who detailed plans to continue seeking catch around Britain regardless of whether the UK Government agrees to it or not.

Britain is trying to “rewrite the rulebook” with ongoing trade deal negotiations, Ireland’s foreign minister Simon Coveney has claimed.

Mr Coveney, asked during an interview on Irish radio station Newstalk why four rounds of talks have seen little in the way of progress, said: “It’s effectively because they’re looking for completely different things.

“It’s very hard to make progress when that is the background.

“Unfortunately, the British government has moved away from the political declaration that they signed only six months ago.

Predicting the situation would come to a head in October, Mr Coveney, who has retained his job after the shake-up which has seen Micheal Martin replaced Leo Varadkar as Taoiseach, added: “As ever during the Brexit negotiations, it will probably involve a huge amount of pressure and probably a standoff.

“It will require good politics to find a way through that will be acceptable to all sides.”

The EU is at risk of having to contend with its own governments in the fight for a Brexit deal as the deadline for reaching an agreement with the UK starts to tighten.

Face-to-face Brexit talks took place in Brussels today for the first time since the start of the pandemic. Although Boris Johnson’s aim for negotiations to be completed by the end of summer was deemed “wishful thinking” by Adam Parsons, the Sky News Europe Correspondent still warned that a deal needed to be done by the end of October latest.

The reporter explained the haste was necessary to allow time for each Government of the 27 other nations of the European Union to ratify the agreement.

Britain’s new role at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) after Brexit could help drive the much-needed progress to facilitate global trade, unearthed reports suggest.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson once again repeated his readiness to go ahead with a no deal Brexit if the talks with the EU continue to be deadlocked.

Speaking by phone to his Polish counterpart Mateusz Morawiecki, Mr Johnson promised Britain would negotiate “constructively” in face to face talks that resumed today.

However, he reiterated his position that the UK is ready to leave on what he referred to as “Australia terms”, meaning without a trade deal.

The EU’s position in the Brexit trade talks is untenable as it is exaggerating fears in order to keep Britain tied to its regulations, a US trade expert has claimed.

Last week, Brussels said it was willing to hammer out a compromise with Britain on the sensitive issue of “level playing field” rules for business.

Michel Barnier, the EU’s chief Brexit negotiator, said his team was willing to work with the UK on a “credible and operational” framework for so-called level playing field commitments.

These aim to ensure close alignment between the two sides’ state-aid, environmental and employment regulations.

In a recent podcast by the CATO institute, US trade expert Simon Lester analysed Brussels’ tactics in the negotiations and dubbed its position untenable.

He said: “The EU is expressing concerns about the UK deregulating or offering new subsidies in a way that gives them an unfair advantage and they want rules to deal with that.

“I think the Europeans are exaggerating those fears a bit.

Switzerland and the European Union are unlikely to agree a deal on a new treaty regulating their relations until next year, when the outcome of Brexit talks is known, former EU Commissioner Guenther Oettinger has said – because Brussels is terrified it might give the UK an edge.

Switzerland, which is not part of the EU, has a patchwork of 120 sectoral accords with the bloc, and the two sides have spent years negotiating a framework agreement.

However, officials have said a Swiss-EU accord is unlikely to emerge until the terms of Britain’s future relationship with the bloc have been settled, because Brussels has been loathe to give the Swiss concessions which Britain might seize on.

Britain, which quit the EU at the end of January, has until the end of this year to reach an agreement with the EU on their future relationship but the talks are at an impasse.

Mr Oettinger told the Neue Zuercher Zeitung newspaper: “I don’t think that an (EU-Swiss) agreement will be reached in the second half of the year before the exact course of Brexit is clear.”

Mr Francois added: “In summary, all I and my colleagues in the ERG have ever really wanted, is to live in a free country, which elects its own Government and makes its own laws and then lives under them in peace.

“We have come a very long way in securing this objective and we have no intention of abandoning it, either now or in the future.”

Michel Barnier must change his “unreasonable demands” with respect to a post-Brexit trade deal, Mark Francois, chairman of the eurosceptic European Research Group has said in a letter to the EU’s chief negotiator.

The Tory MP for Rayleigh and Wickford said “certain EU demands are simply not going to work”.

He added: “I hope that you find this letter and the points that I have set out above useful – and that it spurs you to change some of the unreasonable demands that the EU is currently making.”

Farming leaders have welcomed the Government’s pledge to set up an independent trade and agriculture commission amid calls to protect UK food standards.

The National Farmers’ Union (NFU) has been calling for an independent commission which reviews trade policy and makes sure that all food imports are held to the same standards expected of British farmers.

The organisation’s call comes amid ongoing fears that post-Brexit trade deals could undermine the UK’s food, animal welfare and environmental standards.

Organisations from the NFU to conservation groups have warned against allowing imports of food that would be illegal to produce here, with fears that farmers and standards could be undermined by products such as chlorine-washed chicken and hormone-fed beef.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has once again called on Boris Johnson to seek a Brexit extension, with just one day to go before it will be impossible for the Prime Minister to do so even if he wanted to.

In accordance with the withdrawal agreement, neither side will be able to ask for a delay to the process after the end of June.

However, Mr Khan, a persistent Brexit critic, tweeted: No one anticipated that crucial Brexit deal trade negotiations would take place in the middle of a global pandemic.

“Asking for an extension would show that the government is willing to put the national interest ahead of political dogma.

David Frost, Britain’s chief negotiator with the European Union, will complete the Brexit talks even if he takes up his new position as National Security Adviser (NSA) before they have finished, Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s spokesman said on Monday.

Frost’s appointment as the new NSA was announced on Sunday, when Britain’s most senior civil servant said he was stepping down from both his roles after reports of clashes with Johnson’s top political adviser.

The spokesman said: “He is taking up his role around the end of August and there’ll be a short transition period so if there is a small overlap with the Brexit negotiations that is possible. David has said he will of course remain chief negotiator while the talks are being concluded one way or another.

“We have been very clear with the EU that the talks need to be concluded sooner rather than later. We need to make sure businesses can prepare properly for what will happen at the end of

the year. If the negotiations go on too long, into the autumn, then they will not know what to prepare for.”

The EU’s bid to continue involvement in the UK has been shut down by Chief Negotiator David Frost who warned the Commission that there was “no way” Britain could acquiesce.

Face-to-face Brexit talks are taking place in Brussels today for the first time since the start of the pandemic.

With a deadline of July 1 for the UK to ask for an extension, there is much for chief negotiators, David Frost and Michel Barnier, to wrangle over.

Sky News Europe Correspondent Adam Parsons revealed that the continued involvement of the European Court of Justice in UK matters has struck a nerve in the negotiations.

David Frost “holds all the cards” in the delicately-poised talks with Michel Barnier – meaning the UK could be on the brink of a Brexit breakthrough, a Tory MP claims.

Tory Brexiteer Andrew Bridgen believes the EU has to afford the UK more leniency in Brexit trade talks, and that this could play into Mr Frost’s hands as he meets with Mr Barnier today.

Today marks the first day of a five-day long negotiation between Brussels and London, and is also the first face to face meeting between Mr Barnier and Mr Frost since March.

So far little progress has been made as deadlock persists over fisheries and regulatory alignment, even after Prime Minister Boris Johnson held talks with Ursula von der Leyen – President of the European Commission – earlier this month.

David Frost, who is currently heading the UK’s Brexit negotiations, has been appointed to the key post of national security adviser.

The move has been criticised as unlike previous holders of the post, Mr Frost is a political adviser rather than a career civil servant, and lacks security experience.

But Downing Street have defended the appointment and insisted such appointments were not unusual in other countries and that Mr Frost – who has the status of an ambassador – had spent 25 years as a diplomat in the Foreign Office before leaving in 2013.

The Prime Minister’s official spokesman said: “The appointment of the NSA is always a decision for the Prime Minister.

“It is not unusual in other countries for ambassadors to serve as national security advisers and ambassadors can be political appointees. David Frost has the status of an ambassador.

“The First Civil Service Commissioner has agreed the appointment. That is consistent with the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act.”

Ciaran McGrath is taking over live reporting from Katie Harris

The EU’s chief negotiator Michel Barnier said: “Negotiations resumed this morning with David Frost & team, in a restricted format. We will make the most of our intensified talks over the coming weeks & months.

“Our goal: a comprehensive future relationship [with the UK]. The [EU] remains calm & united in its principles and values.”

As face-to-face talks kicked off for the first time since the coronavirus crisis forced negotiations to be held remotely, European Commission spokesman Daniel Ferrie said: “Our overall message this week, but also for the coming weeks and coming months, is to intensify our negotiations in order to make progress in order to get a deal.”

Angela Merkel has warned Britons will have to “live with the consequences” of Boris Johnson rejecting Theresa May’s plan to keep close ties with Brussels after Brexit.

The German chancellor spoke with six European newspapers on Friday ahead of Germany assuming the rotating presidency of the EU council on July 1.

In comments carried by The Guardian, Mrs Merkel said: “With Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the British Government wants to define for itself what relationship it will have with us after the country leaves.

“It will then have to live with the consequences, of course, that is to say with a less closely interconnected economy.

“If Britain does not want to have rules on the environment and the labour market or social standards that compare with those of the EU, our relations will be less close.”

Boris Johnson has played down the prospect that he would insist on a Brexiteer replacing Sir Mark Sedwill at the top of the civil service.

On a visit in west London the Prime Minister said: “The great thing about the civil service is that nobody should know, least of all me.

“We have a wonderful civil service, they are impartial, they are the best in the world.

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Boris Johnson’s Europe adviser has arrived at the European Commission’s headquarters in the Belgian capital for the first face-to-face negotiations since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

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Education Secretary Gavin Williamson did not deny that Boris Johnson would seek a Brexiteer to replace Sir Mark Sedwill as Cabinet Secretary when asked on BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

Mr Williamson said: "The Prime Minister's search is to get the very best person into that role and applications will be opening from next month to get someone of the very highest calibre to step into some big shoes."

A majority of Scots back an extension to the Brexit transition period, a new poll has found.

A survey of 1,100 people – by Survation on behalf of Mark Diffley Consultancy and Research – found 63 percent were in favour of extending the deadline.

A UK-wide survey that ran alongside the poll found 52 percent of Britons were against delaying the transition date.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has repeatedly insisted that the UK will not extend the transition period beyond the end of the year.

The surveys were commissioned by a new campaign group, Starting up in Scotland.

Britain's fishing industry could be one of the finest in the world if Boris Johnson refuses to bow to pressure from the EU, former Brexit Party MEP June Mummery has predicted.

The ex-MEP called on the Prime Minister to "hold firm" on fishing, which has been a major stumbling block in trade talks with Brussels.

Ms Mummery predicted the UK's fishing industry, which has been decimated by the EU's Common Fisheries Policy, would be "buoyant" in just five years if Mr Johnson takes back control of Britain's waters.

The former MEP told Express.co.uk: "Boris has the chance to put all of the wrongs right. We will be one of the finest fishing industries in the world if Boris gets this right."

Boris Johnson repeated his threat of walking away from trade talks with the EU during a conversation on Saturday with Polish prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki.

A Downing Street spokeswoman said: "On the UK's future relationship with the EU, the Prime Minister welcomed the agreement on both sides to an intensified process of negotiations in July.

"He said the UK would negotiate constructively but equally would be ready to leave the transition period on Australia terms if agreement could not be reached."