

## **Speech by Michel Barnier, Chief Negotiator for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom, at the plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions**

The first condition is the unity of the 27, which goes hand in hand with transparency and public debate. Since I took up office on 1 October, I have met the governments of all 27 Member States. Over the past few weeks, I have started a second tour of the capitals to meet the governments again, as well as the national parliaments, trade unions and professional organisations.

During this period and for the duration of the negotiations, I will naturally work in close cooperation with the Council, the European Parliament and all other bodies and institutions of the European Union.

That is why – Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen – I am happy to be before the Committee of the Regions today. I often worked with the Committee when I was Commissioner for regional policy.

Unity is the first condition for reaching an agreement in the negotiations.

It is of course in our interest. But it is also – and I want to say this to our British partners – in the UK's interest. Because, at the end of the day, we will both need – you and us – a united Europe to reach a deal.

I would add another point: this unity will be even stronger when it is built on transparency and public debate. These negotiations cannot take place in secret.

We will negotiate in a transparent and open manner, explaining to everyone what we are doing. During these negotiations, we must also explain objectively what “leaving the European Union” means, for the withdrawing country and for the other Member States.

We need to tell the truth to our citizens about what Brexit means.

The second condition for reaching an agreement is removing the uncertainty created by the UK's decision to leave the European Union.

This uncertainty is first and foremost that of the four and a half million citizens:

- The Polish students who have access to British universities under the same conditions as British students;
- The British pensioners who are resident in Spain and who benefit from healthcare under the same conditions as Spanish pensioners;
- The Romanian nurses and doctors who contribute to the quality of healthcare in the United Kingdom;
- Or the engineers from Italy, Germany or elsewhere, who chose to work in the United Kingdom, just like the thousands of British people who have made the same choice to work in Berlin, Rome or Vienna.

We hear their doubts. We understand their worry, and we must act effectively in response. Guaranteeing their rights as European citizens, in the long term, will be our absolute priority from the very start of the negotiations. Our watchword will be: “Citizens first!”

The issues at play are complex, whether they are residency rights, access to the labour market, pension or social security rights, or access to education. We will work methodically on each of these points. We will not leave any detail untouched, and we are already working with all Member States on this.

It will take time, several months certainly. We must do serious legal work on this with the United Kingdom.

But we can and we should agree – as soon as possible – on the principles of continuity, reciprocity and non-discrimination so as not to leave these citizens in a situation of uncertainty.

Next is the uncertainty for regional and local authorities and all beneficiaries of programmes that are currently financed by the European budget.

Who are we talking about?

- Beneficiaries of the European Social Fund, which – with almost €90 billion for all regions – helps those men and women who are least qualified and have most difficulty in finding work.
- Beneficiaries of the European Regional Development Fund: we are talking about almost €200bn to support regions in economic difficulty and regions that are isolated.
- Beneficiaries of the Juncker Investment Plan; almost €315bn of investments, thanks to which we are fighting climate change, for instance by financing a wind farm in Belgium. The plan also supports advanced infrastructure in healthcare and energy in the UK.
- Beneficiaries of the Horizon 2020 research programme, which allows the EU to invest almost €80bn in science and industrial innovation, which helps us face up to the big challenges of our time.

All these programmes :

- We approved them together, at 28, with the United Kingdom.
- We finance them together, at 28.
- We benefit from them, at 28.

Each country must honour its commitments to each other. When a country leaves the Union, there is no punishment. There is no price to pay to leave. But we must settle the accounts. We will not ask the British to pay a single Euro for something they have not agreed to as a member.

In the same way, the 27 will also honour their commitments concerning the United Kingdom, its citizens, companies and regions. This is the mutually responsible way to act.

If I may quote one of the greatest men of European history – Winston Churchill: “the price of greatness is responsibility”. That is true for Britain and for us.

**A third uncertainty created by the UK decision to leave concerns the new borders of the Union. I think particularly of Ireland. I was Commissioner in charge of the PEACE programme. I understand the Union's role in strengthening dialogue in Northern Ireland and supporting the Good Friday Agreement, of which the United Kingdom is one of the guarantors.**

That is why we will be particularly attentive, in these negotiations, to the consequences of the UK's decision to leave the Customs Union, and to anything that may, in one way or another, weaken dialogue and peace.