
NO COMPLETE AGREEMENT BEFORE END OF 2020, VON DER LEYEN TELLS UK

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The UK and the EU will not be able to agree on every single aspect of their future relationship before the end of the year, and will either have to focus on priority areas or agree an extension period, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday (8 January).

Speaking at the London School of Economics, von der Leyen warned that a further extension to the transition period that ends on 31 December would be required should a comprehensive agreement on the future partnership between the UK and the EU be in the offing.

Without an extension of the transition period beyond 2020, you cannot expect to agree on every single aspect of our new partnership, she said.

Should Prime Minister Boris Johnson stick to the current end-of-year deadline for the transition period, negotiations on the future partnership would have to focus on prioritised areas, where there are no international agreements to fall back on.

Von der Leyen added that the negotiations for the prioritised areas would take nine to ten months at most, and that she would prefer to itemise a list of priority fields as soon as possible, with a possible view to reconsidering the timeframe before the July 1.

Ambitious partnership

She said the EU would be open to the idea of establishing a truly ambitious and comprehensive partnership with zero tariffs, zero quotas, zero dumping that goes well beyond trade and is unprecedented in scope, covering a range of interests, from climate action to data protection, fisheries to energy, transport to space, financial services to security.

However, she also reiterated a statement made consistently by Chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier that there would be consequences to Prime Minister Boris Johnsons commitment to ending the free movement of people between the UK and the EU.

Von der Leyen added that if the UK were to diverge from EU social and environmental standards in the future, access to the single market would be impossible to come by.

Without the free movement of people, you cannot have the free movement of capital, goods and services, she said. Without a level playing field on environment, labour, taxation and state aid, you cannot have the highest quality access to the worlds largest single market.

Security

One particular area in which the Commission president highlighted the necessity for continued cooperation was in the field of security.

We must build a new, comprehensive security partnership to fight cross-border threats, ranging from terrorism to cyber-security to counter-intelligence, she said, adding that it would be at the behest of the UK as to the level of cooperation that it would seek with the European Defence Agency.

Von der Leyen also said that rules are still being thrashed out at an EU level in terms of the rules for third countries seeking to work within the scope of the European Defence Union, as well as the involvement of extra-territorial states in the European Defence Fund.

More generally, von der Leyen announced her hope that both UK and EU legislative houses would ratify the withdrawal agreement before the end of the month.

Just before Christmas, in the UK, the House of Commons passed the Withdrawal Agreement Bill by a margin of 358-234, but the plans must still pass the House of Lords and receive Royal Assent for it to complete ratification. The agreement must also be ratified by the European Parliament.

Kaynak/Source: