

24 April Brexit update: Sorry, it's not political

As the UK and EU return to the negotiations via videoconference, calls are growing for another Brexit extension. **Ros Taylor** and **Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz (LSE)** round up this week's developments.



Photo: [Nick Papakyriazis](#) via a [CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0 licence](#)

For those curious about what Brexit negotiations in the time of coronavirus look like, Michel Barnier has posted a photo:

🔊🔊🔊🔊🔊🔊 Good to speak with [@DavidGHFrost](#) today to organise next week's negotiating round, via videoconference.

We need real, tangible progress in the negotiations by June. We must advance across all areas. <https://t.co/FGN5ko7JcH> pic.twitter.com/zXBmpF1L6c

— Michel Barnier (@MichelBarnier) [April 15, 2020](#)

Today Barnier 'eviscerated' the British delegation, according to the FT:

Wow. Barnier eviscerating the Brits over the state of talks.

1. Reneging on level playing field, with UK saying two sides are "too far apart to reach an agreement"
2. Brits deviating from data privacy standards
3. No progress on fishing

— mehreenkhn (@MehreenKhn) [April 24, 2020](#)

The EU's negotiator added that the UK 'had yet to engage seriously' in key aspects of the talks, the BBC's Katya Adler reported:

Barnier: "Never in history of negotiations has EU been faced with such a tight timetable for negotiations. UK can't impose this tight timetable, then not engage in key issues of importance to EU". Says, EU still awaiting "reasonable proposals" from UK on issues of fishing [#brexit](#)

— katya adler (@BBCkatyaadler) [April 24, 2020](#)

Meanwhile, did the UK have "ample opportunities" to participate in a joint EU scheme to procure PPE, as the European Commission [claims](#)? Or did it make a political decision not to take part, as Sir Simon McDonald suggested?

That's better: Sir Simon McDonald, er, no, we didn't miss the email on EU ventilators....
pic.twitter.com/JDci0ZNDRI

— Catherine Philp (@scribblercat) [April 21, 2020](#)

Sir Simon then wrote an apologetic letter saying he'd been mistaken and the decision [wasn't political at all](#). Either way, the scheme has not yet delivered any ventilators to its participants – but has commissioned them from manufacturers.

But the spokesman also tells [@DeutschJill](#) that no country has received any equipment under the scheme (as Hancock said yesterday) but the commission has signed contracts with providers

— Kate Day (@kate_day) [April 22, 2020](#)

The Centre for European Reform published a [strong call](#) by Sam Lowe for a Brexit extension:

'The pandemic means the UK should request a transition extension as a matter of urgency. To do otherwise would be unnecessarily reckless.'

David Lidington, Theresa May's de facto deputy, also said that the emergency makes the extension of the transition period "[inevitable](#)", reported The Times. The view from Ireland is that "[if the UK expects EU good faith in the future relationship talks it must demonstrate the same in implementing commitments it made](#)". CityAM says No 10's Brexit unit is [split](#) on the issue. Or, as Brexiteer Douglas Carswell put it:

Orchestrated efforts by establishment insiders to use Coronacrisis to keep us bound to the EU. This is how the establishment operates <https://t.co/Nd2XYh38OS>

— Douglas Carswell (@DouglasCarswell) [April 22, 2020](#)

Whatever the difficulties of the negotiations, tensions are rising. A leaked German document claims Britain is making [unreasonable demands](#) for access to the Europol database.

Our pick of the commentary

The UCL's Brexit & Beyond [podcast](#) discusses whether the transition period will be extended, the realities of conducting negotiations remotely, and the EU's response to COVID-19 more broadly.

[What's the prospect of a UK-China trade deal after a no-deal Brexit](#), asks John Ryan (LSE)? Johnson will have to choose sides when the US-China trade confrontation resumes – an accord with one may mean discord with the other. In the end, however, the US-UK relationship is destined to be more "special" than the UK-China one.

No-deal Brexiters are pinning their hopes on a 'WTO exit'. But, says the LSE's Steve Woolcock, [the WTO is in a parlous state](#). This is the first of a series which will explore in depth why the WTO is struggling.

Finally...

Another twist in the tale of the Romanians flown in to pick fruit and vegetables. Would-be British harvesters say they were [prepared to work hard](#), but the farmers' demands were unreasonable and totally incompatible with family life.

This post represents the views of the author and not those of the Brexit blog, nor LSE.

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