

WIL Breakfast Debate with
Michel Barnier, EU's Chief Brexit Negotiator
European Parliament
September 26th, 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the fourth cycle of the Brexit negotiations just started, following intensive discussions between its main protagonists, around 60 WIL members and guests were privileged to meet and discuss with **Michel Barnier, the EU's Chief Negotiator for Brexit.**



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European Parliament, Brussels*



The European Network for Women in Leadership (WIL) is committed to the promotion and advancement of the **professional and social interests of women in leadership positions** across Europe.

Since 2010, WIL Europe has been acting as a platform where senior level women can **meet and exchange, network, enlarge their horizons, and identify opportunities and ideas** that are not readily available in their current social and professional environments. We achieve our mission through **international and local events, peer networking, core social and economic debates with key political and business leaders**, and via our **online website and newsletter**.

Since 2012, WIL Europe has launched its **Women Talent Pool program**, an 18-months cycle program which aims to **support high potential women to become tier 1 leaders** by offering them a range of online and offline learning and networking opportunities.

The meeting, who took place at the **European Parliament in Brussels** on the 26th of September 2017, gave rise to an **exceptional exchange of views**, as Mr. Barnier shared insights of **Brexit negotiations and its latest developments**, while participants coming from across Europe and representing various organizations showcased how **Brexit may potentially influence the sectors for which they are responsible**.



Speech by Michel Barnier, the EU's Chief Brexit Negotiator

*The future of Europe is more
important than Brexit,*
Michel Barnier, EU Chief Brexit Negotiator

In particular, Michel Barnier stressed the importance of **conducting negotiations on an objective and legal basis**, without harming EU citizens and the single market. He also presented his views about **the future of Europe**: *"the negotiations should be the opportunity to explain why we are together, and how being part of the EU allows us to be respected, to defend our cultural and social model, our identity while preserving our national identities."*



Intervention by Anne Houtman, Lecturer at Sciences Po Paris, former Director for General Policy at DG Energy of the European Commission (second on the right)

Following the debate with Mr. Barnier, the discussion on Brexit and its impacts on Europe continued with **Anne Houtman**, Lecturer at Sciences Po Paris, former Director for General Policy at DG Energy of the European Commission, who remarked that there was a lot of confusion, deliberately or not, around the notions of 'sovereignty' and of 'diversity', which deserved a better debate. The expression 'shared sovereignty' suggesting a loss of it was wrong, e.g. the decisions of the United Kingdom to join the EU, to delegate some competences to the EU or to leave it were fully sovereign decisions. The gains from exchanging - goods or ideas - within the EU are all the more important due to the diversity of its Member States, and the UK is different. In addition, Anne Houtman called for **better communication with those EU citizens who are far away from 'the center' and more debates with Eurosceptics**.

Several interesting positions and exchange of views took place among our participants.



Intervention by Katherine Corich, Founder and Chair of Sysdoc, and Associate Fellow-University of Oxford

"The Brexit vote was, in my view, not only about politics, but a protest vote by people wanting change, many who live in poverty. It was a vote for a better life" said **Katherine Corich** (Founder Sysdoc Group and Associate Fellow – University of Oxford), who also raised concerns about the political uncertainty regarding UK's future relationship with the EU, which is having an impact on the economy as it is holding back business investment.



Interventions by Victoria Parry (left picture), Partner at Osborne Clark and Laura Batchelor (right picture), Director of Fipra

Victoria Parry (Partner at Osborne Clark, UK) remarked that most citizens voting for Brexit did not understand the heart of Europe and called upon Brussels to better connect with the people. **Laura Batchelor**, Director of

Fipra, agreed that the EU Institutions should communicate more about the topics that people really care about and can easily identify with, such as healthcare and education.

On the same note, **Emanuela Palazzani** (Founder & CEO of Atman Advisory) stressed that the media are key resources to understand the importance of being part of the EU but often fail to convey the European politics to general national audiences.

Sigrid Marz, (Senior Client Partner at Korn Ferry) suggested that Member States should first build a coherent EU27 national vision and recalled the recent German elections as a good example in which gave a brief insight and explained that it will be difficult to build a government with a pro-European vision as CSU, Bavarian Conservative Party, holds skeptical views regarding the European integration as opposed to the Green Party.

On the same topic, **Elisabetta Righini** (Counsel at Latham & Watkins LLP) commented that she had never witnessed so much interest for the national elections in another European country. *"We were all French during the elections in France and we were all Germans during the elections last Sunday"*, she said and added that this is the right time when we should all become responsible for Europe.



*Networking time – European Parliament
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