

# EUROSCEPTICISM LESSON

## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

### Euroscepticism and the European Union

---

**Frédéric Lavoie:** My name is Frédéric Lavoie, and I am a Research Assistant at the Jean Monnet Network on Transatlantic Trade Politics. This is part of a series of interviews for that Network called the Transatlantic Trade Videos. We are here today with Elvire Fabry, who is a Senior Research Fellow at the Jacques Delors Institute in Paris, France, and is cooperating with the Network as a member of the University of Antwerp team. Welcome, Doctor Fabry, and thank you for taking the time to speak with us today.

**Dr. Elvire Fabry:** Hello.

**FL:** So, to get into our questions: first, the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union – the EU – has inarguably been a traumatic event for the two sides, requiring months of difficult negotiations to untangle decades of economic and legal cohabitation. How has the EU managed to keep a united front through all of this?

**EF:** Well, you're very right that this has been a particular worry for the 27 member states of the EU. Since the beginning, they were very aware that the first threat that they were facing was the risk of division, and that the British government could take use, and benefit off that division. Because, of course, member states have different interests, different levels of economic integration with the UK – and of course we think about Ireland, but there is also Germany, the Netherlands, which have specific economic interest with the UK. And the British government understood very well that they could, by succeeding to divide member states, he could also win some specific concessions from those capitals.

And I think it's interesting, at this point, to look back at the way the European Commission has handled this negotiation, because it has been quite different from other negotiations. Of course, negotiating the process of Brexit – first the withdrawal of the UK and then the future relation – was very specific: it has nothing to see with any other trade negotiation. And there were so many issues that needed to be covered, that settling down the right method to negotiate and to process was very complex and we saw that it took many years.

I think that it's interesting at this point to have a look at what I called, but others also called, the Barnier method – Barnier, the name of the chief negotiator. Michel Barnier, who was a former Foreign Affairs – French Foreign Affairs Minister – and who was heading all the process of negotiation for the 27, in the name of the European Commission, and in the name of the 27. And the task force that he's been building to negotiate this process. And I think that, if we try to understand the methods and how he succeeded to build this cohesion, we can think about three things: transparency, task force, and the way he's been leveraging the weight of the single market.

First, about transparency: from the beginning of the negotiation, one thing that is very interesting is that he didn't only focus on the mandate that was given to him to negotiate the withdrawal of the UK, but he really started building strong political support between the 27 capitals. And one thing that helped that was the transparency that he brought on the different steps of the negotiation, through different things: through the publication of many documents related to the negotiation; through a very strong engagement in the different capitals. He had made, himself, so many trips in the different capitals, not only to discuss with the different administrations at different levels, but also with the national parliaments, with the different stakeholders – different levels of stakeholders: trade unions, think tanks, all the different levels of leaders who could contribute to disseminate quite far even in the public opinion, an understanding of what was happening, what was going on, and how the European Commission was handling, managing with this negotiation.

Another thing was very clear, a very clear presentation of the method used by the 27, with important focus on the sequencing of the negotiation: no negotiation before the activation of Article 50 of the Treaty of European Union; first, negotiate the withdrawal and then, future relations; the link between the four freedoms of the single markets. All different elements that helped, that contributed to a better understanding of the priorities of the European Commission and the way it has, from the beginning, it has insisted on some red lines and at the defense of the common interests of the 27. We have seen that, during those several years, the British government has had tried in many ways to reinforce bilateral relations with the different capitals – and not only between Berlin and Paris, but not only: Dublin, of course, but also in the Netherlands – and that although this transparency between the 27, this constant communication has helped really building that cohesion.

Then, the role of the taskforce that was created as soon as in 2016 was also important. It has contributed – I mean for Michel Barnier, it was very important because it provided him with a sort of overview of all the different issues that had to be tackled, and with the possibility to use the contribution and expertise of different services of the European Commission, and which contributes to establish a broad overview of the different elements of the negotiation. While the British government wanted to slice down the different elements of the negotiation, and which could have provided more space for more compromise on the side of the member states.

And, finally, I think a third element that was important, it was the way this negotiation was built on, and then a broader understanding of the way the single market is functioning, how it has matured, it has grown up, and really building on the weight of the single markets. In a way, this long negotiation that was closely followed by the medias and then the public opinion, has contributed to develop some pedagogy on the way the single market is functioning – more specifically, the functioning of all this trade dimension which has some technicalities, and allowing the public to understand what is a certification, the conformity checks, what are tariff quotas, how a trade union functions, what is mutual recognition rule of origin – all those elements have been explained in a very pedagogical approach, and it has contributed to allow citizens to perceive really what is the reality of the EU, after so many decades of building, and what is the role of norms. For so many years, European norms and regulations have been criticized for, in a way, imposing harmonization, but the result today is, precisely, that that block of harmonization norms is a very strong leverage for the Europeans, and has contributed to reinforce what is now called the Brussels effect. The attractiveness of European norms, to get access to the single market, is that it's an incentive for firms to align on those norms, if they want to access the single market. Progressively, when negotiations were moving on, the way the European Commission has

approached this negotiation had also some influence on all the negotiations, and even the review of some agreements, like it was the case for Switzerland, but also in relation with other partners, like with China, with a much more focused approach on the level playing field and the way Europeans wanted to preserve, like in the case of the UK, preserve some level playing field and avoid some unfair competition at the doorsteps of the EU, or increase the level playing field with a challenging partner like China.