

Britain will be vulnerable to terrorists after Brexit, claims lead EU negotiator as he stokes security fears

The European Union's chief Brexit negotiator has warned that Britain's security will suffer after it leaves the EU in an apparent rebuke to British Prime Minister Theresa May.

Writing in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, Michel Barnier said Brexit "will have very practical consequences including on defence and security". The article was published on Monday, as UK and EU teams meet in Brussels for four days of divorce talks.

"The British defence minister will no longer be able to sit at the council of defence ministers, London will leave the European Defence Agency and Europol [The EU-wide police force]," Mr Barnier said.

"British defence research facilities will not be able to benefit from EU funding, London will not be able to assume command of European operations," he added.

Mr Barnier's intervention could be a rebuke to Theresa May, who was accused of blackmail in March. She had used the Article 50 letter, which triggered the Brexit process, to warn of the security risks of failing to reach a deal.

She wrote: "In security terms, a failure to reach agreement would mean our cooperation in the fight against crime and terrorism would be weakened."

The letter mentioned security 11 times over just four pages. "We go into these negotiations with security and defence being a big thing in our corner," a source, who revealed Britain hoped to exploit EU fears over Russia, told the *Telegraph* at the time.

At the time, Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's Brexit chief, warned the EU would not accept any attempt to use Britain's military and intelligence strength as a bargaining chip.

Just last Friday, EU senior officials accused Britain of “magical thinking” over Brexit and of trying to use the Northern Irish peace process as leverage in the talks. That drew a furious response from Britain, which said the EU failed to understand the “human cost” of the hard-won peace process.

Mr Barnier’s comments come after a string of terrorist attacks across Europe, including three in London and one in Manchester. The attacks, and earlier terror outrages in Paris, Nice and Brussels, has highlighted weaknesses in intelligence sharing between EU countries.

He said: “The Union of 27 and the United Kingdom will have to join forces to face common threats.

“We will therefore examine in due course the conditions for convergence between the Union of 27 and the United Kingdom on security and defence matters...but the future of the Union is our immediate priority.”

The third round of Brexit negotiations this week will not focus on security or defence but on on the issues of Ireland, citizens’ rights and the so-called Brexit bill. No significant breakthroughs are expected in the four days of talks.

Mr Barnier said the EU had to respect Britain’s decision to quit the EU and also called for closer military integration between the remaining EU countries.

The former security advisor to the European Commission backed a proposal from the EU executive to gradually combine EU national defences by 2025.

That will be interpreted by many eurosceptics as a call to create an EU Army, although in reality that remains a very distant future prospect.

Mr Barnier said: “It is up to us, from Paris to Bucharest, to continue to make the European Union a community of destinies that will necessarily pass through the establishment of an integrated European defence.”

Campaigners have claimed that leaving the EU would make it “impossible” to tackle slavery and human trafficking due to a loss of regulations and funding from Brussels.

Britain’s departure from the EU should have no impact “whatsoever” on its close partnership with Europol, and could even help prevent human trafficking in some

cases, the independent anti-slavery commissioner has told the Telegraph.

Kevin Hyland OBE, a former police officer with thirty years of experience, said the UK was leading the fight against modern slavery and would do so “before or after Brexit.”

Though leaving the bloc meant the UK’s relationship with Europol, the EU’s law enforcement agency, would “have to change,” he said he was convinced that the partnership would not “go sour.”

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/28/britain-will-vulnerable-terrorists-brexite-claims-lead-eu-negotiator/>

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