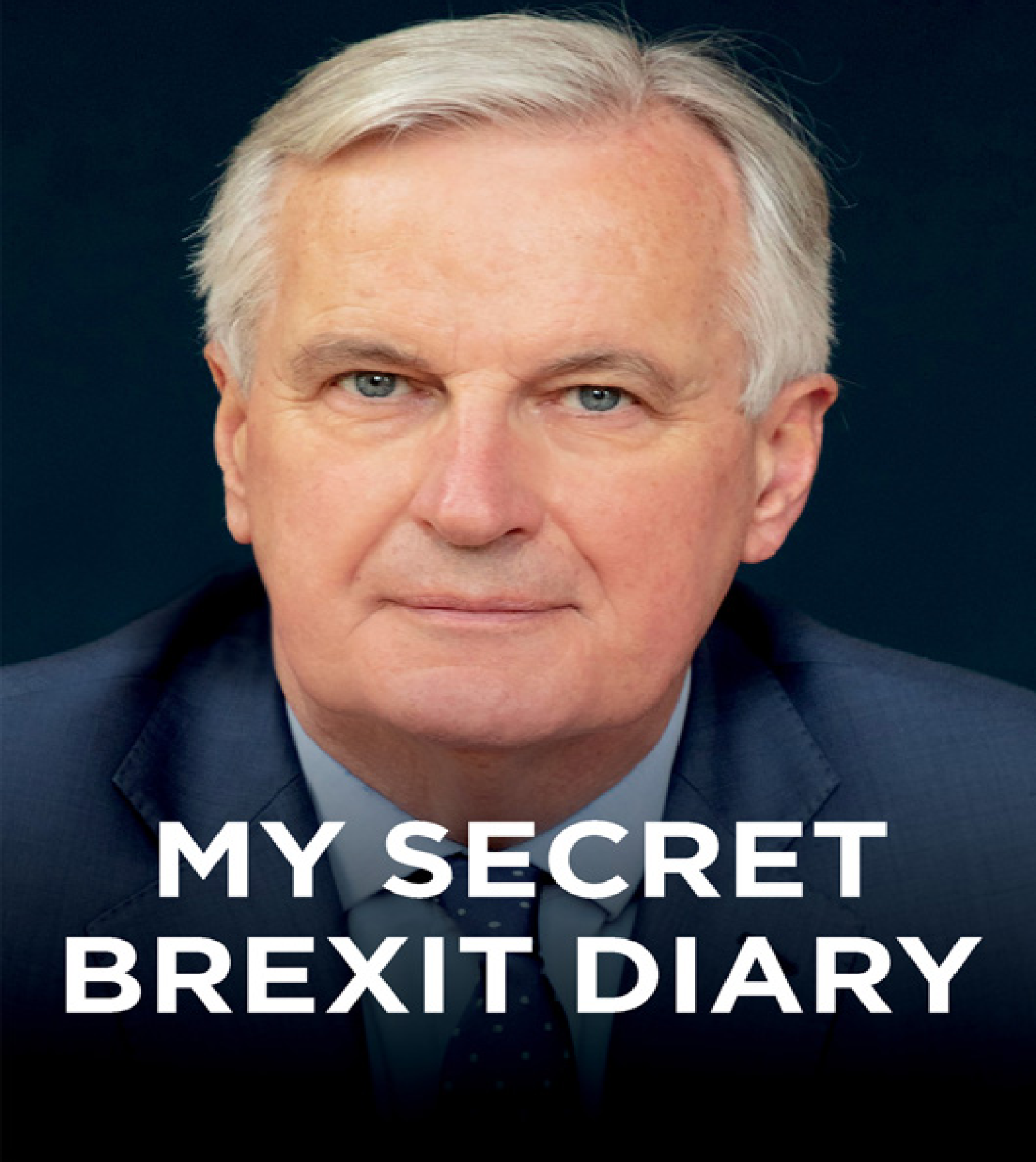


MICHEL BARNIER



**MY SECRET
BREXIT DIARY**

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Praise for *My Secret Brexit Diary*

‘If the treaties are the legal texts of the Brexit talks then this is the human version, revealing a Michel Barnier who is much warmer and far less diplomatic than his public persona. It’s a masterclass in how the EU operates, and a rare glimpse into the tensions on their side.’

– Adam Fleming, Chief Political Correspondent, BBC News

‘For historians writing about the UK’s long and painful exit from the European Union, Michel Barnier’s account is essential reading. For anyone interested in Brexit, it offers a valuable guide to the EU’s negotiating strategy and the people who shaped it.’

– Jennifer Rankin, Brussels Correspondent, *The Guardian*

‘This is a political thriller: 500 pages of twists and turns, advances and setbacks, taking place behind the scenes in an altogether extraordinary negotiation.’

– Nicolas Demorand, *France Inter*

‘The former European chief negotiator has delivered his Brexit novel: a unique experience of four and a half years recounted day by day, in the theatre of the powerful with its noble aims and petty squabbles, its backtracking and its bluffs, its laughter and its tears, including very personal ones. And it’s absolutely riveting.’

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- Anand Menon, King's College, London

'This book is required reading for anyone seriously interested in the exhausting saga of the Brexit negotiations, and it is good to have an English edition of what is undoubtedly an important historical document.'

- Robert Tombs, University of Cambridge

MY SECRET BREXIT DIARY

A Glorious Illusion

Michel Barnier

Translated by Robin Mackay

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Dedication

To Oriana and Theodore, both born during this long
negotiation, who kindly shared their grandfather with the
British

Epigraph

Beat at this gate that let thy folly in,
And thy dear judgement out!

Shakespeare, *King Lear*

Quote

La Grande Illusion is a wonderful film by Jean Renoir, released in 1937. It is also the title of an essay by Norman Angell (*The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage*), published in 1910, in which the English author argued that, given the economic and financial bonds uniting the European nations with one another, war had become an impossibility. Although this prediction turned out to be wrong, in his book Angell clearly shows that war is a process of mutual depletion in which there is no winner.

Illustrations

[1.](#) The first lie of the Brexit campaign: in May 2016, Boris Johnson alleges that the £350 million per week relinquished by Brussels would be used to fund the NHS instead. © Darren Staples/Reuters

[2.](#) A hateful conflation from Nigel Farage in June 2016, which intentionally misattributes the cause of the flow of Middle Eastern refugees to freedom of movement within the EU. © Daniel Leal-Olivas/Stringer/Getty Images

[3.](#) Thyborøn, Denmark, 21 April 2017, a trip out to sea in minus 22 degrees Celsius, to listen to fishermen who work in British waters. © Henning Bagger/Denmark OUT/AFP/Getty Images

[4.](#) 12 May 2017, on the yellow line that divides Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, or the 'invisible border' between the EU and the UK. © Michel Barnier

[5.](#) With Brian Burgess, an Irish farmer, and his 'European cows', several metres from the Northern Irish border. © Michel Barnier

[6.](#) Patrick Blower, *Telegraph*, 19 June 2017. © Garland/Telegraph Media Group Limited 2021

[7.](#) My two deputies, Sabine Weyand and Stéphanie Riso, and I received David Davis, Tim Barrow and Olly Robbins on 17 July 2017 – they had left their papers behind! © Thierry Charlier/Reuters

[8.](#) At Berlaymont, seat of the European Commission, a convivial moment on my birthday with my whole team, 9 January 2018. © Michel Barnier

[9.](#) In May 2018, at the Derry/Londonderry Guildhall. A spontaneous discussion with Northern Irish school pupils. © Michel Barnier

[10.](#) For four years, we visited a new capital city each week in order to meet their nation's government, the national parliament, trade unions or businesses. Here we are in Lisbon with Prime Minister Antonio Costa, 26 May 2018. © Michel Barnier

[11.](#) A frank and direct discussion with the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in his office in Parliament in Budapest, 4 June 2018. When it comes to Brexit, he always supported the EU. © Government of Hungary. Photographer: Balázs Szecsődi.

[12.](#) Ingram Pinn, *Financial Times*, 27 July 2018. © Financial Times

[13.](#) Christian Adams, *Evening Standard*, 4 March 2019. © Christian Adams/Evening Standard

[14.](#) Jean-Claude Juncker and I meet Theresa May in Strasbourg. Demanding negotiations don't preclude courteous manners! © Alex Kraus/Bloomberg/Getty Images

[15.](#) Meeting of the Brexit Steering Group at the European Parliament, chaired by the Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt. European unity is founded on transparency and trust. © EU/Étienne Ansotte, 2019

[16.](#) Teatime! The role of Leo Varadkar, the Irish Taoiseach, was decisive throughout the negotiations. Photo taken 8 April 2019 in Dublin. © Charles McQuillan/Stringer/Getty Images

[17.](#) No one, not even Nigel Farage, ever convinced me of the added value of Brexit. Here we are in Strasbourg at the European Parliament, where we had many tussles during the plenary session. © EU/Étienne Ansotte, 2019

[18.](#) Andy Davey, *Evening Standard*, 16 September 2019. © Andy Davey/Evening Standard

[19.](#) 17 October 2019, in the early hours. After three years of effort, we had reached an agreement with Boris Johnson and his negotiator Stephen Barclay on the UK's exit from the EU. © EU/Jacqueline Jacquemart, 2019

[20.](#) During this long journey, I felt the need to return to Savoie, my 'homeland' and the place where my roots lie. © Michel Barnier

[21.](#) 28 January 2020, with my two new deputies, Clara Martínez Alberola and Paulina Dejmek Hack. The task force takes up anew the reins of negotiation over our future relationship. © Michel Barnier

[22.](#) At the Élysée with Emmanuel Macron on 31 January 2020, the day of the UK's exit from the EU. © Ludovic Marin/AFP/Getty Images

[23.](#) Patrick Blower, *Telegraph*, 3 March 2020. © Garland/Telegraph Media Group Limited 2021

[24.](#) In Brussels on 29 June 2020. One of the official negotiation sessions between the British and the Europeans. © John Thys/AP/SIPA/Getty Images

[25.](#) Peter Brookes, *The Times*, 18 September 2020. © The Times/News Licensing

[26.](#) In Berlin on 12 October 2020, with Chancellor Angela Merkel. We were both environment ministers for our respective countries in 1994. In her words: 'Europe's future is more important than Brexit.' © Bundesregierung/Steffen Kugler

[27.](#) In London, 27 October 2020. En route between our hotel and the conference centre where the negotiations were taking place; remaining anonymous was not easy. © Michel Barnier

[28.](#) In the basement of the conference centre in London, in the room we were assigned by the British. Our teams worked here, night and day, for weeks. © Michel Barnier

[29.](#) 10 December 2020, fifteen days away from a deal which at that point still seemed unlikely. PM Boris Johnson and David Frost were in Brussels for a business dinner with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. © EU/Etienne Ansotte, 2020

[30.](#) In the late hours of 23 December 2020, my adviser Matthieu Hébert and I prepare the speech for my last press conference. © Michel Barnier

[31.](#) Elena Mongiorgi, *Lacrime Europa*, January 2020. © Elena Mongiorgi