



Sabine Weyand

Deputy Chief
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Brexit Task Force
in the European
Commission

What will the German trade expert bring to the Brexit negotiations?

#BREXITPAPERS

Sabine Weyand: German trade expert in Brexit driving seat

14th September saw Sabine Weyand, a senior German official in DG Trade, selected as Deputy Chief Negotiator for the European Commission, reporting to Chief Negotiator in the Commission Michel Barnier.

Despite holding a senior post in DG Trade, Weyand has managed to keep a low profile in the media. Indeed, even after the announcement of her new position, coverage on the implications of her appointment has been surprisingly limited, even in her native Germany. This #brexitspaper, therefore, seeks to shed light on what Weyand brings to the table and what we can expect from her.

Who is she?

Sabine Weyand is a senior civil servant with over 14 years' experience in the European Commission.

Her main areas of expertise are trade regimes in third countries, trade relations with OECD countries, China, and countries across south and south-east Asia.

Beyond these policy specific roles, Weyand was influential in setting up and managing a dialogue forum with civil society on trade, in order to bolster the representative credentials of the Commission.

She is also experienced in engaging with the Council and Heads of State, owing to her role in the Secretariat General as the official in charge of relations with the European Council, Council, and COREPER I.

As of March 2016, she has been working as Deputy Director General in charge of Directorates E, F, G and H in DG Trade. From E-H, these Directorates cover Neighbouring countries, USA and Canada (E), WTO, Legal Affairs and Trade in Goods (F), Trade Strategy and Analysis, Market Access (G) and Trade Defence (H).

On paper, Weyand, along with Barnier, will be charged with negotiating the details of Britain's departure from the EU. She will, therefore, play a key role in setting the future framework for EU-UK relations. Her new role will begin on the 1st October.

In keeping with the general discussion and EU institutional communications over the Brexit negotiations, her remit is both broad and vague.

For instance, her team is entrusted with the job of coordinating 'the

Commission's work on all strategic, operational, legal and financial issues' related to the Brexit negotiations.

With most senior German and French politicians taking a 'Brexit means Brexit' stance into the negotiations, figures like Weyand and Barnier are under pressure to act independently of their national capitals and to represent the European interest.

However, the appointment of a Franco-German duo to head the task force reflects how the two biggest economic powers amongst the remaining 27 are eager to wield significant influence over the nature of the UK's exit.

This can be put down to the wide ranging economic and political implications of how the negotiations will eventually pan out and, indeed, how they are perceived when still in play.

What can we expect under Weyand's watch?

The Commission has been eager to stress that although the task force is in place, this does not mean that negotiations will begin soon.

Despite Juncker's commitment to no negotiations without notification of Article 50, however, we can speculate on the principles on which Weyand may stand firm.

As a seasoned representative of the Commission and its vocation of the 'European interest', the UK's pursuit of *à la carte* access to the EU has been dealt a further blow.

It is difficult to see Weyand giving up much ground over the issue of free-movement in the trade negotiations, given the Commission's seemingly non-negotiable stance on access to the EU Single Market being conditional on the acceptance of free-movement.

It is important to note that the parallels between the Commission's stance on this subject and that of Germany and France will make it difficult to discern the driver behind the actions of Weyand/Barnier.

No to concessions

In any case, whichever way we slice the cake, the German is unlikely to indulge the UK's exceptionalism in this regard, in the same way that her superior, Barnier, was unwilling to pander to the City of London when he oversaw EU laws to cap bonuses and regulate short-selling.

Furthermore, it is difficult to see how any concession on free-movement would be received in Weyand's home nation, owing to the current domestic sensitivity surrounding the integration of migrant and immigrant populations in Germany.

Fully prepared

Owing to her experience negotiating and monitoring trade agreements, Weyand will be fully prepared to perform a role at the heart of trade negotiations.

In particular, she will be accustomed to the infamously long and protracted negotiations punctuated by stalemates, which characterise political interaction in the area of trade and may very well come to define Brexit negotiations.

We must be wary, however, of reading too much into Weyand's appointment and the creation of the Brexit task force.

This is because it is by no means clear whether the Commission or the Council will take the lead in the negotiations on the EU side.

In addition, the role of the European Parliament remains uncertain, although MEPs are sure to make some noise!

Upcoming Brexit Papers

Guy Verhofstadt: Fighting the federalists' corner in Brexit talks?

Trading places: The possible future UK-EU trading relationship.

Dates for your diary



24 September - Labour Party elects its Leader (Jeremy Corbyn or Owen Smith) - Grayling will assess how this will impact the Brexit negotiations after this date

Start 2017 - UK expected to trigger Article 50

April/May 2017 - French Presidential elections

September 2017 - German Federal elections

2019: EU parliamentary elections and appointment of new Commission are planned to occur