# 'Anti-gay' Michel Barnier replaces France's first gay prime minister



The appointment of Michel Barnier, a seasoned politician and diplomat, as France’s new prime minister has resurrected debates and criticisms regarding his historical legislative decisions, specifically related to gay rights. Barnier, a 73-year-old former European Union negotiator for Brexit, took office on Thursday, succeeding Gabriel Attal, who was France's first openly gay prime minister, marking a significant moment in the country's political evolution.

Barnier's voting record from the early 1980s has come under scrutiny in light of his new appointment. In 1981, at the age of 30, Barnier, alongside over 150 conservative lawmakers in the National Assembly, voted against a pivotal law that decriminalised homosexuality for young people. Archived records from the National Assembly indicate that a year earlier, in April 1980, Barnier had also opposed legislation aimed at advancing gay rights.

The resurfacing of these records has sparked a wave of criticism and discussion within French political and social circles, particularly given the contrast between Barnier’s past votes and his predecessor’s historic significance. Attal's tenure as the first openly gay head of government was seen as a progressive step towards LGBTQ+ representation and rights in France.

While Barnier's stance over four decades ago is generating debate, his broader political career remains notable. Serving previously as France's Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services, and chief negotiator for the European Union in the Brexit discussions, Barnier has established himself as a key figure in both national and international politics.

As the newly appointed prime minister, Barnier has yet to comment directly on the implications of his past voting behaviour. However, analysts suggest that his historical record might impact his reception and relationships with the LGBTQ+ community, as well as influence ongoing discussions and policies regarding civil rights in France.

Observers within the political landscape continue to grapple with the significance of Barnier's appointment. Moving forward, his administration's approach to civil rights and social policies will likely be closely watched, given the heightened awareness and activism surrounding LGBTQ+ issues.

The National Assembly's archives, brought to light by a diligent French researcher, serve as a critical reminder of the enduring impact legislative history can have on contemporary political dynamics. With Barnier now at the helm as prime minister, how he navigates these revelations and their implications will be closely scrutinised by both supporters and critics alike.