
Article 50: how the future of EU-UK relations will be decided

The UK government announced today it is invoking article 50 of the Treaty of the EU, which serves as formal notification of its intent to withdraw from the Union.

Starting today the UK and the EU have two years to negotiate a withdrawal agreement. In addition the two will need to start determining the future trade relations, though this is expected to take significantly longer. Read on to find out more about the procedure and the role played by Parliament.

About article 50

Article 50 sets out the process for a member state to leave the EU. It is up to the country in question to withdraw “in accordance with its own constitutional requirements”. Once triggered, article 50 allows for two years of [negotiations](#), although this can be extended unanimously by the European Council.

Although the aim is to come to a deal, it is also possible there is no agreement at all.

Two agreements

The EU and the UK have two years to negotiate a withdrawal agreement setting out the arrangements for how the country will leave the Union, while “taking account of the framework of the future relationship with the Union”. The arrangements setting out the framework for future relations will be part of a separate agreement, which could take considerably longer to negotiate.

If negotiations are successful, the withdrawal agreement would need to be ratified by the UK, approved by the European Parliament, as well as by at least 20 out of 27 member states represented in the Council.

The agreement on the future framework would need to be approved by all member states and the European Parliament.

What the withdrawal agreement will cover

The withdrawal agreement will cover issues such as:

- The rights of EU citizens in the UK
- The rights of UK citizens living in other parts of the EU
- The UK's financial commitments undertaken as member state
- Border issues (especially the one between the UK and the Republic of Ireland)
- The seat of EU agencies
- International commitments undertaken by UK as member state (for example the Paris agreement)

What the agreement on the future framework could cover

The agreement on the future framework would set out to describe the conditions for cooperation on a variety of issues, ranging from defence, the fight against terrorism, the environment, research, education and so on.

One of the key sections would be to agree the basis for future trade. It could also describe possible tariffs, product standards, and how to resolve disputes.

How the negotiations will work

Now that the UK has invoked article 50, the European Council - representing the national governments - will issue guidelines to serve as the basis for negotiations. Former commissioner Michel Barnier will lead negotiations on behalf of the EU, although the Council always clarify or update the guidelines. Negotiations could already start a few weeks from now.

In his presentations to the European Parliament, Barnier has stressed a number of principles for the negotiations: the four freedoms must be indivisible; any transitional agreement must unambiguously be limited in time; EU membership must always remain the most advantageous status; any new relationship must be based on a level playing field and on respect for the rules of competition; the balance of rights and obligations agreed with non-EU countries must be taken into account: and close cooperation is desirable in the field of defence and security.

What happens if there is no agreement

If there is no deal and there is no agreement on extending the deadline, then the UK automatically leaves the EU after the two-year period. In addition if no agreement is reached on trade relations, the country would have to trade with the EU under WTO rules.

The role of the Parliament

The withdrawal agreement cannot enter into force without the consent of the Parliament. In the coming weeks MEPs are expected to adopt a resolution setting out the red lines for the Parliament.

Guy Verhofstadt has been appointed by the Parliament as Parliament's coordinator. For his work he will be able to draw on the expertise of the parliamentary committees.

MEPs will be able to influence negotiations by adopting resolutions setting out the Parliament's position.

Find out more

[Brexit top story](#)

[UK withdrawal from the European Union: legal and procedural issues](#)

ARTICLE 50

OF THE TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION



A Member State which decides to withdraw shall notify the European Council of its intention.

art. 50.2



In the light of the guidelines provided by the European Council, the Union shall negotiate and conclude an agreement with that State, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union. (...)

art. 50.2



(...) the member of the European Council or of the Council representing the withdrawing Member State shall not participate in the discussions of the European Council or Council or in decisions concerning it.

art. 50.4



It shall be concluded on behalf of the Union by the Council, acting by a qualified majority*, after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament.

* qualified majority:

72% of EU countries vote in favour (excluding the withdrawing member state)



They represent at least 65% of the EU's population (not including the population of the withdrawing member state)



The Treaties shall cease to apply to the State in question from the date of entry into force of the withdrawal agreement or, failing that, two years after the notification (...) unless the European Council, in agreement with the Member State concerned, unanimously decides to extend this period.

art. 50.3

Source: EUR-Lex, Parliament's research service



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Find out what will happen next