After a referendum in 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) government gave official notification in March 2017 of the UK’s intention to leave the European Union (EU) two years later. Negotiations between the UK and the EU during this two-year period intended to settle the terms of the withdrawal and set the parameters of their future relationship. However, it took more than 40 months of talks and three extensions to the negotiating period before approval of the Withdrawal Agreement could be completed. On 1 February 2020, the Withdrawal Agreement entered into force and, with this, UK membership of the EU came to an end. Although now a third country, during the transition period established in the Withdrawal Agreement, EU law continues to apply to the UK until 31 December 2020 (or later if this period is extended). Meanwhile, the EU and UK aim is to conclude the economic and security agreement(s) forming the basis of their future partnership.
What role in European defence for a post-Brexit United Kingdom?

Briefing by Tania Latici, April 2019

The departure of the UK from the EU will not alter geography, and the UK will remain a European country. The UK and the countries of the EU share the same strategic environment and the same threats to their peace and security. Historically, pragmatically and geographically, they remain deeply linked from a security and defence perspective. In legal terms, after leaving the EU, the UK becomes a third country to the EU and cooperation will continue on that basis. Both parties have committed to ensure as close as possible a partnership in foreign policy, security and defence matters. The area of security and defence has the potential to result in a positive post-Brexit tale.

The future partnership between the European Union and the United Kingdom: Negotiating a framework for relations after Brexit

Study by Carmen-Cristina Cîrlig and Laura Puccio, September 2018

In 2018, the EU and the UK started discussions on their future relationship after Brexit, aiming to agree on a political framework for their future partnership, to be adopted alongside the withdrawal agreement. Conclusion of a treaty or treaties on the future EU-UK relations will only take place after the UK becomes a third country. This study looks at the respective principles underpinning the negotiations and analyses some of the legal constraints and existing precedents shaping EU economic and security cooperation with third-country partners.

Further reading

Ratifying the EU-UK withdrawal deal: State of play and possible scenarios

Briefing by Carmen-Cristina Cîrlig, April 2019

Outcome of the European Council (Article 50) meeting on 17 October 2019

Briefing by Izabela Cristina Bacian, October 2019

EU and UK positions on citizens’ rights: First phase of Brexit negotiations

Briefing by Eva-Maria Poptcheva and Laura Tilindyte-Humburg, July 2017

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