Future EU-UK relations: the next steps

The UK leaving the EU is not the end of cooperation. Talks are ongoing to determine how the two will work together on everything from trade to transport and combatting crime.

The EU and the UK face many of the same challenges such as climate change and police cooperation and have much to gain from working together on these issues.

The Withdrawal Agreement, which has been ratified by both parties, covers the protection of the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens living in other parts of the EU, the UK’s financial commitments undertaken as a member state, as well as border issues (especially between the UK and the Republic of Ireland) and this needs to be implemented in full.

Future relations will be part of a separate agreement, which is currently being negotiated on the basis of the political declaration that was approved and ratified by both parties.

Parliament’s position

In a resolution adopted on 12 February, MEPs called for a comprehensive agreement that includes a level playing field to be guaranteed through robust commitments and an agreement on fisheries.

On 29 May, David McAllister, chair of Parliament’s UK Coordination Group, said in a statement: “Parliament will not consent to an agreement that does not include provisions on a level playing field, fundamental rights, robust governance and a stable framework for fisheries.
“It also considers the full implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, co-signed by the UK Prime Minister, to be crucial.”

On 15 June, Parliament President David Sassoli attended a meeting on the ongoing talks with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, European Council President Charles Michel and Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen. Following the video conference, they issued a joint statement.

A few days later, on 18 June, Parliament adopted a report expressing regret that no real progress has been achieved in the talks after four negotiating rounds and that differences remain substantial.

On 11 September, the UK coordination group and the political group leaders issued a statement expressing their concern about the UK government's proposed Internal Market Bill and calling for all provisions of the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, to be fully implemented. Regarding the negotiations, the statement noted that the Parliament remains committed to an ambitious partnership with the UK.

On 1 October, the European Commission launched infringement proceedings against the UK for breaching its obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement.

On 8 October, as part of the necessary preparations for the end of the transition period, Parliament approved new rules that aim to ensure the railway tunnel connecting continental Europe and the UK continues to operate safely and efficiently.

Addressing an EU summit on 15 October, Parliament President David Sassoli said of the EU-UK negotiations that “an agreement is in the best interests of both sides, but, as I have said before, this can never be at any cost”. He urged the government in Westminster to uphold the rule of law and honour the commitments ratified by both parties, and also reiterated that nothing that jeopardises peace and stability on the island of Ireland can be accepted.

In a plenary debate on 21 October, MEPs stressed the importance of reaching an agreement on future EU-UK relations that does not compromise EU interests and values. Speaking in that debate, EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier said: “Agreement is possible if both sides are ready to work constructively and in a spirit of compromise.”
What the future relations agreement will cover

The issues in any agreement on future relations range from the exchange of goods and services to the environment, research and education.

One of the key negotiations will concern the conditions and principles for future trade, including the issues of possible tariffs, product standards, a level-playing field, fisheries, the respect of fundamental rights and how to resolve disputes.

Citizens

Citizens’ rights are protected by the withdrawal agreement. EU citizens in the UK and British citizens in the EU have the right to continue living and working where they are now. This topic will remain a key concern for the European Parliament, for example regarding freedom of movement and health coverage for EU citizens in the UK. MEPs are following closely how the withdrawal agreement is being implemented.

Timescale
Under the withdrawal agreement, there is a transition period until the end of December 2020. During the transition period, the UK has access to the single market and is subject to EU legislation, although it is no longer able to shape new EU laws.

The aim is to conclude talks before the end of the transition period.

If no agreement is reached by the end of the transition period, the UK will trade with the EU under World Trade Organization rules.

*Read what measures are in place to mitigate the impact of a no deal.*

**How the negotiations work**

Michel Barnier leads the negotiations on behalf of the EU, based on political guidelines issued by the European Council and on European Parliament resolutions. Barnier also led negotiations on the withdrawal agreement.

Parliament set up a UK contact group, led by German EPP member David McAllister, who is the chair of the foreign affairs committee, to liaise with EU negotiator Barnier and coordinate with parliamentary committees that are involved.

Any agreement can only enter into force if it is approved by the European Parliament and the Council. Unlike the withdrawal agreement, it is also possible that the agreement on future relations will also have to be approved by national parliaments if it refers to competences the EU shares with member states. It will also need to be approved by the UK.

**Find out more**

Commission: negotiations on future relations deal
Brexit page of the Council