

Briefing on the state of play of the negotiations on the EU-UK future partnership

Following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union on 31 January 2020, the parties entered a transition period until 31 December 2020. Until then, EU law, across all policy areas, will still be applicable to and in the UK, which will also remain in the EU Customs Union and in the Single Market. The EU and the UK have in the meantime been working on three workstreams:

1. Ensuring the proper implementation of the [Withdrawal Agreement](#).
2. Preparing for the negative economic consequences that the end of the transition period will entail.
3. Negotiating a future partnership between the EU and the UK with a view to limiting those negative consequences, based on the [Political Declaration](#) agreed between the parties in October 2019.

The EU and the UK held the **first round of negotiations** on the future partnership agreement in the week of 2 March. On the basis of the [European Commission's negotiating mandate](#) and the [UK's approach to the negotiations](#), the first round provided the parties with an opportunity to discuss, compare and clarify their respective positions, identifying points of convergence and divergence. The agenda for the negotiations covered, among other things, trade in goods and services, level playing field for open and fair competition and transport. During the meetings, the parties identified several areas of divergence, in particular, the level playing field, judicial and police cooperation in criminal matters, the overall governance of the future agreement, and fisheries.

Following the first round of negotiations, the European Commission published a [draft legal text of the Agreement on the new Partnership with the UK](#), based on the negotiating directives approved by EU Member States on 25 February 2020, and in line with the Political Declaration agreed between the EU and the UK in October 2019. The UK has also put forward legal proposals which, however, have not yet been made public.

The first round of negotiations was followed by the **first meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee under the Withdrawal Agreement**, held on 30 March. The Joint Committee was co-chaired by European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and the UK Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove. The Committee was created under the Withdrawal Agreement, which entered into force on 1 February 2020, and tasked to oversee the proper and timely implementation of the Agreement. The first meeting discussed particularly the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. The parties agreed that there was an urgent need to present a detailed timetable and proceed with the necessary measures for the implementation of the Protocol, such as preparing for the introduction of customs procedures for goods entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain, and ensuring that all necessary sanitary and phytosanitary controls as well as other regulatory checks can be carried out in respect of goods entering Northern Ireland from outside the EU. The parties decided that the Specialised Committee on the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland should engage without delay in discussing

and preparing the decisions the Joint Committee has to adopt in relation to the Protocol before the end of the transition period.

In a **teleconference meeting on 15 April**, Michel Barnier, the European Commission's Chief Negotiator, and David Frost, the UK's Chief Negotiator, agreed on the need to organise further negotiating rounds in order to make real, tangible progress in the negotiations. They decided that the next negotiating rounds would be held in the week of 20 April, 11 May and 1 June. A high-level conference is foreseen to take place in June to take stock of the progress in the negotiations. The conference will also be an occasion to take stock on what real progress the UK has made for the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The **second round of negotiations** on the future partnership between the EU and the UK was held in the week of 20 April. The aim for the second round was to advance on all areas of the negotiation in parallel – including the most difficult areas identified in the first round. The second round enabled the parties to identify areas where their positions were close – at least on the technical level. However, the goal of achieving parallel progress on all areas was only very partially achieved. The four fundamental areas on which the progress that week was disappointing remained the same as in the first round of negotiations: the level playing field, overall governance of the future relationship, police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, and fisheries.

On 30 April, the EU and the UK held the **first Specialised Committee meeting on the implementation and application of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland**. The parties took stock of the implementation efforts from both parties. In this context, the European Commission's Task Force for Relations with the UK had prepared a [technical note](#), outlining all measures that the UK must take as soon as possible in order to comply with its obligations under the Protocol which become applicable as of the end of the transition period.

The **third round of negotiations** between the EU and the UK took place in the week of 11 May. The agenda for the third round covered all areas of the negotiations, including the areas where limited progress was achieved during the previous two rounds. The discussions enabled the parties to clarify a number of issues in areas such as trade in goods, transport and the UK's participation in future programmes of the Union. The EU and the UK were also able to initiate the beginnings of a dialogue on fisheries, even if their positions remained very far apart. However, with the exception of some modest overtures, the parties failed to make any progress on any of the other more difficult topics, such as the level playing field, the overall governance of the future partnership and police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, including protection of fundamental rights and individual freedoms, and data protection.

The **fourth round of negotiations** is scheduled for the week of 1 June. The EU and the UK will have the possibility to **jointly decide by 30 June on the extension of the transition period**, according to the possibility that is foreseen in the Withdrawal Agreement, and taking into account the progress made in the negotiations.



In the process of establishing the future EU-UK relationship, the role of intermediaries (customs brokers and freight forwarders) was made priority by the EU and UK national authorities. For that purpose, the special **EU-UK Intermediaries Task Force (ITF)** was established. CLECAT and several of its members (both direct members and individual companies) are represented. The customs and other authorities of the various countries surrounding the UK are also part of the task force. The group discusses capacity-related issues, correct and timely communication, practical arrangements for facilitation and other aspects, where both trade/customs and transport priorities are covered. Below you will see relevant documents from the **third meeting of the ITF**, held in March:

- [ITF third meeting revised issues](#)
- [ITF third meeting slides](#)
- [ITF third meeting notes](#)

CLECAT will continue to work closely with its Members, the UK Government and the European Commission, on a range of procedural and operational issues, including market access and customs clearance procedures, to increase the readiness of CLECAT Members, their freight forwarders and customs agents for the end of the transition period.

Other UK Government news:

- [UK Government confirms plans to introduce import controls](#)
- [UK Government publishes list of customs agents and fast parcel operators](#)
- [UK Government rejects EU's request to have a permanent office in Belfast in order to monitor the checks and controls on goods crossing the Irish Sea post-Brexit](#)

More information on the state of play of the negotiations on the EU-UK future partnership, as well as related publications and documents, can be found on the European Commission's dedicated [webpage](#).