

Politics

BREXIT: Exit, but on what terms

Put simply, Brexit is the process of the UK leaving the European Union (EU). Thereafter, the UK will no longer be a member of what will be a union of 27 states.

What Brexit means

From that point on it becomes more interesting. Why? Because no one is quite sure what happens next; we are entering unknown territory. No other member country has left the EU.

Over the coming months and years, we will all see how things unfold and what the real consequences are of Brexit. In the meantime, there are many uncertainties and issues to be resolved, such as: the future of EU citizens living in the UK and UK citizens living in Europe; the free movement of people seeking work anywhere within the EU; how powers will be taken back from the European Parliament set out in the 'Great Repeal Bill'; what type of replacement agricultural policy should be put in place, and under what conditions and restrictions the UK will trade with the EU post-Brexit.

A potted history of the EU

Following the Second World War, several influential political leaders recognised that if European countries traded freely with one another economies would improve and the risk of war would be diminished. To this end, several European organisations were established, which eventually led to the Treaty of Rome in March 1957 when France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg agreed to form the European Economic Community (EEC) or Common Market.

EEC members removed some barriers to trade with one another and, after a time, workers and

capital were permitted to move freely between states. The economies of the founding members grew significantly, which made membership attractive to other nations. The UK became a member of the Common Market in January 1973, along with Denmark and Ireland.

In 1993, the Maastricht Treaty was agreed by all member states and the European Union was established. The treaty called for greater powers for the European Parliament, creation of a central European bank and a Europe-wide currency (Euro) and a common defence policy. In the years since then, some of these, such as the currency, have come into effect and other nations have also joined the EU, making a total of 28 member states - including the UK.



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Why the UK is leaving the EU

A number of factors have influenced public opinion about leaving the EU. These include, for example: concerns about the number of people coming to the UK to live and work; frustrations about perceived petty regulations that have an impact on everyday life; and resentment about decisions made by EU officials in Brussels that apply to the UK.

There was political pressure for a referendum to ask the British people of voting age whether the UK should leave or remain in the European Union. The referendum took place on 23 June 2016 when 51.9% of voters chose 'Leave' and 48.1% 'Remain'. Turnout was 71.8% and more than 30 million people voted. As Leave won, Britain is withdrawing from the EU.

Not all regions of the United Kingdom voted to leave

The majority of voters in England and Wales were in favour of leaving, but in Scotland and Northern Ireland the vote went in favour of remaining in the EU. The reasons for the difference may not be entirely clear. However, Northern Ireland has a land border with the Republic of Ireland, an EU member state, and wants to keep the free movement of people and goods across the border. For its part, Scotland may hold a second referendum on independence and seek continued membership of the EU perhaps as a separate nation from the UK.

Saying goodbye to Europe

For decades, there was no mechanism for countries to leave the EU. However, all this changed in 2009. Countries signed up to an agreement called the Treaty of Lisbon, which was designed to help the EU function more smoothly as its membership grew, and to ensure Europe would act as a single bloc in international affairs. As a small part of the treaty, Article 50 details the terms enabling a country to withdraw from the EU.

In just five paragraphs, Article 50 sets out that any member state:

- can decide to leave the EU
- must give notice of its intention to leave to the European Council (made up of the leaders of all member states)
- must negotiate its withdrawal with the EU
- has two years in which to reach an agreement - unless other members agree to an extension
- cannot take part in EU internal discussions about its own departure.

Triggering Article 50

On 29 March 2017, less than a year after the referendum, the Prime Minister Theresa May triggered the procedures set out in Article 50 and the UK is officially on a path to leave the European Union after 44 years as a member.

Soft or hard landing?

Many questions remain unanswered. If we consider the future economic position of the UK for example, should we aim to continue to allow free movement of people in exchange for favourable trading conditions with Europe - a soft exit? Or should we sever all ties with Europe, go it alone and set up trade agreements with countries in the rest of the world - a hard exit?



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EU Referendum

In a recent report, *EU Referendum One Year On*, Anand Menon, Professor of European Politics and Foreign Affairs at King's College London and director of the UK in a Changing Europe initiative funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), says: "Well, it's not boring is it? Politics continues to surprise us, and all the while the Article 50 clock keeps ticking.

For a satisfactory Brexit, there is much we will need to know rather rapidly. How parliament will deal with the 'Great Repeal Bill' is one thing. A related minefield concerns where the powers that are repatriated from the EU end up - Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh will all have their piece to say on the matter.

Turning to more substantive issues, the kind of agricultural policy that will replace the Common Agricultural Policy is something we should start worrying about sooner rather than later. So too is the need to deal with the rights of EU nationals in this country.

In contrast to the uncertainty that has characterised the UK's approach, the EU, for its

part, has sorted out its negotiating position and is waiting for the British government to arrive. For all the early hopes that clever diplomacy might divide the other 27 EU members, they have remained resolutely united in their determination to see the process through without weakening the EU. Indeed, Brexit even seems to have provided a fillip to plans for some kind of enhanced EU defence capability.

Much has changed over the course of the last year. But there is evidence that not enough has been done to think through both the immediate process of leaving the EU and the structures and policies we would like to have in place once we have exited. Brexit, in other words, will pose a challenge to our government, our political parties, our civil service and all those involved in the various sectors where it will hit home."

Whatever decisions are made on all of the myriad issues that must be resolved, they are going to affect you and your future. Can you afford not to have your say or hold an informed opinion?



Further information

BBC - Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-32810887

The UK in a Changing Europe - EU referendum one year on: www.ukandeu.ac.uk/research-papers/eu-referendum-one-year-on