



## THE PROCESS FOR WITHDRAWING FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Government has published a paper on “The process for withdrawing from the European Union”. This fulfils a commitment made to Parliament during passage of the Referendum Act 2015 to provide information to the public on the process of leaving the EU.

The document sets out the process that would follow a vote to leave the European Union, and the prospects for negotiations. The rules for exit are set out in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. The report makes clear that this is the only lawful route available to withdraw from the EU.

The report highlights that:

- It could take **up to a decade or more** to negotiate firstly our exit from the EU, secondly our future arrangements with the EU, and thirdly our trade deals with countries outside of the EU, on any terms that would be acceptable to the UK.
- This long period of uncertainty could have an impact on financial markets, investment and the value of the pound, and as a consequence on the **wider economy and jobs**.
- Issues such as the rights of the approximately **two million British citizens** living elsewhere in the EU, **access to markets** for vital industries, and the **status of Irish and Gibraltar borders** would all need to be addressed.

The process of withdrawal would be a complex negotiation requiring the involvement of all 27 remaining EU Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament. It would mean unravelling all the rights and obligations which the UK has acquired during more than 40 years of membership - from access to the Single Market, to structural funds for poorer regions, to joint action on sanctions. Crucially, the negotiation would include the status and entitlements of the approximately 2 million UK citizens living, working and travelling elsewhere in the EU who currently enjoy a range of specific rights to live, to work and to access pensions, healthcare and public services that are only guaranteed because of EU law.

Article 50 foresees a two year process but the Government believes that it would be difficult for the UK to complete a successful negotiation in this timeframe. Any extension would require the agreement of all 27 remaining EU Member States.

It is unclear from Article 50 how far the arrangements for the UK’s future relationship with the EU would be included in a withdrawal agreement. But it is likely that the scope of those arrangements would require the negotiation of a separate agreement with the EU. An ambitious agreement on trade and wider co-operation could require the unanimous support of all 27 Member States and ratification by some countries’ national parliaments too – presenting a further opportunity to block the agreement for any reason.

The Government believes that while these negotiations continued, the UK would be constrained in our ability to secure new trade agreements with countries outside the EU. Those countries are likely to want to know the terms of our new relationship with the EU before opening negotiations with the UK. Countries like the United States, which are already negotiating with the EU, are likely to want to conclude those deals first before negotiating with the UK.

This means that a vote to leave the EU would be the start, not the end, of a process that could take up to a decade or more.

The report sets out the impact of withdrawal on a number of specific sectors such as car manufacturing, farming and financial services while also setting out a number of broader issues that would need to be resolved during the withdrawal process such as:

- access for UK citizens to the European Health Insurance card
- cross border security arrangements including access to EU databases
- the rights of UK fishermen to fish in traditional non-UK waters including those in the North Sea
- access to the European Medicines Agency, responsible for safety monitoring of medicines developed by pharmaceutical companies for use in the EU.

The full analysis is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-process-for-withdrawing-from-the-european-union>