The United Kingdom

Maria Alvarez Lopez
The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom (UK) joined the European Union in 1973, having maintained a long-standing relationship with the bloc since its founding. In 2016, following a referendum, it became the first Member State to end its EU membership. The UK’s exit from the EU was governed by a withdrawal agreement signed on 17 October 2019. The trade and cooperation agreement signed on 30 December 2020 defines the framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK.

On 23 June 2016, the UK held a referendum in which 51.9% of voters opted to leave the EU. In March 2017, the British Government notified the European Council of its intention to withdraw from the EU, thereby triggering the withdrawal procedure set out in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

The UK formally left the EU on 1 February 2020, but remained in the EU’s single market and customs union until 31 December 2020. The withdrawal agreement and the trade and cooperation agreement, both signed on 17 October 2019 set out the rules for the UK’s orderly departure from the EU. In particular, it covered:

- Citizens’ rights;
- The financial settlement;
- The governance structure of the withdrawal agreement;
- A protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland to avoid the reintroduction of a hard border on the island of Ireland, protecting the 1998 Good Friday Agreement while also safeguarding the integrity of the EU’s single market;
- Specific arrangements for Gibraltar.

The withdrawal agreement came into force on 1 February 2020.

On 1 January 2021, the UK left the EU’s single market and customs union. On the same date, a trade and cooperation agreement governing the new relationship between the EU and the UK took effect provisionally until 1 May 2021, when the TCA formally came into force, following the European Parliament’s approval.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, with different legal effects. The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- Freedom of movement;
- Economic and financial settlement;
- Good governance and democratic principles in the relationship between the EU and the UK;
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency and financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific areas.
cross the Irish Sea, because the EU’s Union Customs Code continues to apply to Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Protocol for customs checks on the island of Ireland, but lays down rules for goods going from Great Britain into Northern Ireland. In other words, all goods entering Northern Ireland from outside the EU, including those from Great Britain, are subject to customs declarations.

The implementation of the Protocol has been extremely challenging since its entry into force. The UK has taken unilateral measures to disapply parts of the Protocol several times, culminating in the tabling of the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill on 14 June 2022.

On 27 February 2023, after months of intense negotiations, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, presented a political agreement on the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, referred to as the Windsor Framework.

The Windsor Framework encompasses a comprehensive set of joint solutions to address the challenges and concerns of all the communities in Northern Ireland regarding the implementation of the Protocol, while safeguarding the integrity of the EU’s Single Market. These solutions are within the framework of the withdrawal Agreement, of which the Protocol is an integral part.

The joint solutions include new arrangements on customs/free movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, agri-foods, medicines, VAT and excise, tariff rate quotas for certain categories of steel, and conditions ensuring UK State aid does not affect trade between Northern Ireland and the EU, among others.

These solutions are accompanied by measures enabling the EU to analyse and assess the risk of goods not staying in Northern Ireland, given the absence of a physical border. If, in practice, goods are found to be crossing into Ireland, structural safeguards are available to remedy this situation. In its resolution of 15 March 2023, on the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, the European Parliament welcomed the Windsor Framework.

On 22 March 2023, the House of Commons voted in favour of one of the elements of the Windsor Framework, the so-called Stormont brake, although the vote has been perceived as a vote on the framework as a whole. The vote passed by 515 votes to 29. During the debate at the House of Commons, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak stated the government’s intention to drop the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill.

**The Parliamentary Partnership Assembly**

Article 11 of the TCA provides for the possibility of establishing a Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA) and the two parliaments agreed to set up this body.

The PPA meets twice a year, alternating between the European Parliament, in one of its usual places of work, and the Parliament of the United Kingdom. It is a forum for an exchange of views on issues arising out of the TCA, including supplementing agreements, and any other matters of mutual interest. The first meeting of the PPA took place from 12-13 May 2022 in Brussels.

**María Álvarez López**

04-2024

---

**The Union’s enlargement and neighbourhood**

**The Enlargement of the Union**

**The Western Balkans**

**The European Economic Area (EEA), Switzerland and the North**