

Brexit

The United Kingdom (UK) joined the European Union (EU) (see Note 1) in 1973 (see Note 2), under the Conservative government of Edward Heath. The membership was endorsed by a referendum in 1975. In the 1990s, opposition to European integration began to grow. The growth of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in 2010 started the idea of a new referendum. The Prime Minister at that time, David Cameron, promised to hold a new referendum, and it happened on June 23rd 2016. The result of the referendum was as follows:



	Leave	Stay
England	53.4%	46.6%
Wales	52.5%	47.5%
Scotland	38.0%	62.0%
Northern Ireland	44.2%	55.8%
Overall (The UK)	51.9%	48.1%



The main reasons for wanting to “break away” from Europe were:

- 1) **Immigration**: many immigrants escape their countries because of poverty or war and go to European countries, and they demand money, food, housing and jobs from the European governments;
- 2) **EU taxes**: the UK paid over £20 billion to the EU commission every year as payment for membership of the EU.

The exit of the UK from the EU was given a name - “**Brexit**”, a combination of the words “**Britain**” and “**exit**”. David Cameron, who was against leaving the EU, resigned, and was succeeded by Theresa May. Starting on March 30th 2017, the UK had two years to negotiate trade deals with other countries. This was known as the “transition period”.



The negotiations between the UK and other EU members were unsuccessful, because British MPs could not agree on a “**deal**” presented by Theresa May. Despite many renegotiations, Theresa May was not able to satisfy the majority of British MPs. So, in April 2019, Theresa May successfully negotiated with the EU parliament for an extension of the transition period, until October 31st 2019.

What was so important about a “deal”?

The main point of having a deal between the UK and the EU was to ensure a smooth exit for businesses and individuals. Without a deal, there would be no guarantees on citizens' rights of residence, supermarkets could experience shortages of goods and the NHS shortages of medicines. Taxes would be charged on all imported and exported goods, which would mean higher prices in UK shops. There would also be delays as trucks bringing products into the UK would need extensive border checks.



Land border

There is a 310-mile border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and this will be the only land border between the UK and Europe. Neither side wanted to see checkpoints, towers, customs posts and security cameras at the border, but it is a possibility.

Another change of leader

More difficult negotiations led by Theresa May resulted in no progress, and eventually, the people lost confidence in her as a leader and so she was replaced, after a vote of “no confidence”, by Boris Johnson.

Boris succeeded in setting many new deadlines for the end of the transition period, and each one was missed. The final one was December 31st 2020, and it was met. The European parliament said that there wouldn't be another one. This was the last chance!



Trade Deals

When the UK was in the EU, it was automatically part of EU trade deals with more than 70 countries. Between 2017 and 2020, the UK made new deals with all of those countries, as part of the trade deal process.

After months of negotiations, on 21st December 2020, the UK and the European Union finally agreed a trade deal that defined their future relationship, which came into effect at 11:00pm on 31st December 2020. It was a “free trade agreement”, which means removing barriers like taxes and bureaucracy.



What changed on January 1st 2021:

- People who want to move between the UK and the EU to live, work, or retire, cannot do so.
- To visit European countries from the UK, you need a passport, and sometimes a travel visa.
- Not all European countries automatically accept a UK driving license as a valid license to drive.
- The UK government doesn't make payments to the EU, saving £20 billion annually.
- EU residents in the UK have to return to their own countries.
- Arrivals from the UK stand in a different queue at passport control in EU countries.
- Businesses trading with the EU faces a lot of bureaucracy.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>

Note 1: The European Union

The European Union (EU) is an economic and political partnership involving 28 European countries. It began after World War II, and was intended to promote economic co-operation and avoid wars between the countries. It is now a "single market", allowing goods and people to move around freely, as if the different countries were all one country. It has its own parliament and its own currency, the euro, which was adopted on January 1st 1999. Initially, 11 countries adopted the new currency. Today, all members except three use the euro. The UK, Denmark and Sweden chose to continue to use their own currency.

Note 2: When countries joined/left the EU:

01/01/1958: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands

01/01/1973: Denmark, Ireland, UK

01/01/1981: Greece

01/01/1986: Portugal, Spain

01/01/1995: Austria, Finland, Sweden

01/05/2004: Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia

01/01/2007: Bulgaria, Romania

01/07/2013: Croatia

01/01/2021: UK left