

Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions on the implications for local and regional government of the United Kingdom's intention to withdraw from the European Union

(2017/C 272/03)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

— Having regard to the result of the referendum which took place in the United Kingdom (UK) on 23 June 2016;

1. Recalls that the European Union (EU) is the greatest political achievement in history guaranteeing peace, democracy and prosperity for its citizens, that it remains the best instrument for its Member States to address new challenges, and that strengthening its unity and promoting its interests should be our priority.
2. Recalls that the UK's withdrawal agreement must be fully compatible with the EU Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and calls on the remaining Member States and the EU's institutions to consider that the UK's withdrawal from the Union should be used as an opportunity to build a fairer, better and more inclusive EU based on the promotion of multi-level governance between the European, national, regional and local levels.
3. Notes that the EU will need to work together with the UK government, its devolved administrations and local government in order to identify mutually beneficial forms of cooperation, taking into account existing success stories.
4. Emphasises the fact that regional and local authorities can contribute positively to the pursuit of productive and sustainable future cooperation between the UK and the EU.
5. As the EU's assembly of regional and local representatives, intends to play a role in accompanying the negotiation process, and to address the anticipated consequences of the UK's withdrawal throughout all of its political work. In this regard, will actively step up its dialogue with the local and regional governments that are most concerned by this process, in order to provide the EU's negotiator with a complete picture of the evolving situation at local and regional level.
6. Calls for an agreement on the principles of an orderly withdrawal to be reached as soon as possible, as it would provide citizens, local and regional government and companies with the certainty they deserve and would be, in this respect, a prerequisite to the future EU-UK relationship; points out, however, that Article 50 TEU does not prevent a Member State from withdrawing the notification of its intention to leave, provided that its intentions are genuine and not a procedural device to restart the two year period, nor used as a bargaining chip to secure concessions.
7. Notes that the formal announcement triggering Article 50 and the related two year period is to be made on 29 March 2017. Underlines in this context that the result of the complex negotiations on both the withdrawal from the EU and the arrangements for the UK's future relationship with the Union should be subject to the appropriate forms of democratic endorsement before taking effect.
8. Considers that the future relationship between the EU and the UK should be based on a balance of rights and obligations, a level playing field as well as efficient enforcement mechanisms and should not pave the way for dismantling the single market and the four freedoms of movement.
9. Stresses that there can be no agreement between a non-EU country and the EU that is better than EU membership.
10. Calls on the parties who will negotiate the withdrawal agreement to prioritise concrete measures that protect the acquired rights of EU citizens living in the UK, as well as UK citizens who live and work in other EU Members States, on the basis of reciprocity and non-discrimination.
11. Underlines that an acceptable solution must be found as regards the future relationship between the UK and the EU in order to prevent border arrangements from hampering social, economic, cultural and political ties.

12. Stresses that territorial cooperation programmes should remain open to all UK devolved administrations and local government beyond 2020. Highlights that the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGCT) could be a useful instrument in this regard.

13. Considers that cooperation between local and regional government in the Irish Sea, Channel and North Sea areas, deserves particular attention.

14. Wishes to see a practical solution that recognises the unique context of the land border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Highlights that the EU has played a major role in cross-border cooperation, not least between local governments in Ireland and Northern Ireland for more than 25 years, through the INTERREG and PEACE programmes in particular. Calls on the Northern Ireland assembly and local government on both sides of the border to continue working to ensure peace and prosperity.

15. Hopes that the region of Andalusia and, in particular, the workers of the Campo de Gibraltar district, do not lose out as a result of the UK leaving the EU, given the close-knit social and economic interdependence in this area.

16. Expects that all legal commitments taken by the UK as a Member State will be part of the single financial settlement to be calculated on the basis of EU official accounts and to be concluded in the withdrawal agreement. Against this background calls for the budgetary impact of the UK's withdrawal upon the regions and local authorities of the remaining Member States to be assessed in each EU policy area.

17. Notes that the UK's exit, in the framework of the next MFF, will have an impact on the EU budget and therefore suggests that this change in the budget should be used as an opportunity to pursue in-depth reform of the EU budget, taking into account the needs of local and regional government.

18. Emphasises that the consequences for cohesion policy of the UK leaving the EU will depend on when the UK's withdrawal will enter into force and what kind of future relationship will exist with the UK, notably as regards potential shifts in categories of regions; it should be avoided that the decline in the EU average GDP per capita could harm certain regions, just because their GDP per capita has been artificially increased in comparison to the European average.

19. Stresses that the EU-27 should closely follow the drafting process of the Great Repeal Bill, as the disentanglement of EU legislation in the UK is both an issue of multi-level governance and of the preservation of fair rules on standards and competition.

20. Highlights that the European maritime and fisheries policies are going to be among the EU policies most affected by the UK's withdrawal, and that special attention should be paid to possible arrangements to mitigate the consequences for all regions and local authorities concerned. Requests that any measures should take into consideration the historic fishing rights of adjacent ports, regions and countries, and provide security for local fisheries, which are at the heart of coastal communities.

21. Is concerned that a reduction of funding for CAP would adversely impact farmers and rural areas across the EU, potentially including the protection of biodiversity. Highlights that UK withdrawal could have a significant impact on agriculture and food production, and therefore on local communities, in particular on the island of Ireland, and wishes to see these issues adequately addressed in the negotiations.

22. Invites the parties to the withdrawal agreement to consider temporary arrangements so as to minimise disruption to the current long-standing R&D projects, and by extension to local economies.

23. Notes that it should be clarified as to whether current UK energy projects, especially those launched by or geared towards local and regional authorities and aiming at CO₂ reduction and sustainable energy provision, would continue to be eligible for CEF, EFSI and EIB funding, and what sort of transitional arrangements would be necessary as a result of the UK's exit from the EU.

24. Calls on the parties to the withdrawal agreement to consider the potential effect of the UK's exit on the EU's Youth and Education and R&D programmes and invites them to consider appropriate solutions via the so-called 'partner countries' approach, which allows for the inclusion of non-EU countries on the basis of bilateral agreements with the EU. In that respect calls on the Parties to facilitate the participation of UK local and devolved authorities in the future EU programmes including those for research, competitiveness and innovation, culture, lifelong learning, youth, e-government, public sector reform, in a similar fashion that countries, such as, for instance, Norway or Iceland currently do. Recalls that student exchange (with and without ERASMUS) has been one of the great success stories of European integration and both EU and UK universities have been able to benefit from this to a spectacular extent. Any future agreement should therefore try to preserve the active role of UK universities in this regard, which also hugely benefits local and regional economies.

25. Points out that it is in the interests of the EU's local and regional government to foresee permanent and structured cooperation with the UK's sub-national governments following the UK's withdrawal. Notes, in this regard, that the CoR is best placed to devise and implement institutional mechanisms to promote regular consultation and interaction with local government and devolved parliaments and assemblies in the UK. Also stresses the need to further develop partnerships with the Congress of the Council of Europe and relevant networks of local and regional authorities where UK local governments would continue to be represented.

26. Recalls that, even if the CoR does not have a formal role in the negotiations, it is clear that some of its members — according to their national legal framework — will have the possibility of adopting formal positions at least as regards the arrangements concerning the future relationship between the UK and the EU, including on trade.

27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the chief negotiator of the European Commission, the Brexit coordinators for the European Parliament and the European Council; the Government of the UK, the assemblies and governments of the UK's devolved administrations and local governments, and the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Brussels, 24 March 2017.

*The President
of the European Committee of the Regions*

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