

EU and UK must urgently address consequences of Brexit on regions

Written by Eleni Marianou on 20 December 2017



Brexit | *Photo credit: Adobe Stock*

The potentially damaging effects of Brexit on Europe's regions remains absent from negotiations between the EU and UK, says Eleni Marianou.

The UK's exit from the EU will have a disproportionate impact on regions in the UK and across the EU27, affecting trade links, regional economies and sectors such as fisheries and tourism. But as negotiations move into a new phase, recognition of this potentially damaging situation remains absent from discussions.

In response, the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) has adopted the 'Cardiff declaration', which stresses that strong cooperation and collaboration between UK and European regions after Brexit is more important than ever.

Following a long-period of negotiations, the Brexit deadlock has finally been broken. The UK has reached agreement on the key principles of its divorce from the European Union, set out in a joint report published on 8 December, which was endorsed in European Council conclusions on 14 December.

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This paves the way for phase two of the Brexit negotiations to commence, which will focus on the framework for future relations between the UK and EU post-Brexit, including trade arrangements.

Compromises have been agreed in principle by both sides, but a number of important issues remain outstanding. Among these is the severe implications that Brexit will have for several regions across Europe, which to date have been entirely absent from the Brexit negotiations.

Initial analysis from areas such as Brittany, Cornwall, Wales, Ireland and Scotland shows that Brexit will have a disproportionate impact on many regions and their key economic sectors, particularly if the UK pursues a hard Brexit, or worse if no deal is agreed.

The UK's withdrawal from the single market and the customs union, and the subsequent reconfiguration of trade links will have implications for border arrangements and the transit of goods from Ireland to the UK and the UK to Europe.

These restrictions are likely to have damaging effects on regional economies in the UK and throughout the EU27, impacting on regional ports, their maritime economies, fishing and tourism sectors, and research links between universities.

In response to this worrying analysis, political leaders from regions in Europe's North Sea, Atlantic and Channel sea basins, and further afield, gathered in Cardiff in mid-November for a high-level conference to outline their concerns about the disproportionate impact of Brexit on Europe's regions, and their commitment to strong cooperation between Europe's regions after Brexit.

At the meeting, they discussed and the Cardiff declaration which calls on the EU institutions and the UK government to address these issues as a matter of urgency.

The Cardiff declaration has come out of the work the CPMR has carried out over the past year to assess the implications of Brexit for regions and to consider how cooperation between the UK nations and regions and their European partners can continue after Brexit.

There is strong political support for continued cooperation and collaboration between European and UK regions, and in the coming months we will be pressing hard to ensure that this support is converted into robust action at EU-level and in the UK.

The CPMR, which represents approximately 200 million citizens in around 160 regions across Europe,

will present the declaration to the European Commission and European Parliament, calling for regions to be fully represented in the Brexit discussions.

In January next year, a CPMR delegation, led by the Pays de la Loire region, will meet with the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, to convey the Cardiff declaration's political messages.

Despite clear evidence of Brexit's impact, the ongoing negotiations between the UK and the EU continue to ignore its harmful consequences for regions.

In the French region of Normandy for instance, which is reliant on the UK for most of its visitors, there are serious concerns about the impact of Brexit on tourism, and for the Spanish region of Galicia, Europe's biggest fishing region, the UK's withdrawal could have a major bearing on fishing grounds and a serious impact on its local economy.

In Scotland's communities, particularly those in remote coastal areas, it is predicted that exiting the single market would damage growth and jobs, and two thirds of exports from Wales currently go to the EU, so any changes to its relationship with the EU could hit its economy hard.

There are also large expat UK populations in Spain and other parts of Europe, and while the impacts of Brexit will be concentrated around the Atlantic, Channel and North Sea areas, the effects of Brexit will also be felt in regions in Sweden, Greece and other parts of the Mediterranean.

The Cardiff declaration outlines the commitment of the CPMR and its member regions to ensuring that close links are maintained with the UK's regions and nations post-Brexit, for the benefit of all citizens. Brexit will have an impact on all European regions, but it must not become a stumbling block to the established strong relations that benefit us all.

We are calling on the UK government and the EU institutions to take action to address the disproportionate impact of Brexit on Europe's regions and key sectors, and we are committed to strong cooperation between European and UK regions after Brexit.

We believe that future frameworks for cooperation between the UK and the EU must be established after Brexit, through EU territorial cooperation programmes, Horizon 2020 (research and innovation), Erasmus+ (education and training), and Creative Europe (culture).

We support the principle of robust transitional and customs arrangements, and for full and unfettered access to the single market and we also call for a strong EU budget post-Brexit, underlining the central place of territorial cohesion at the heart of any future vision of the EU.

Let us be clear. The voice of regions must be heard in the Brexit negotiations. Europe's regions must continue to prioritise our established work and friendships with the UK. Otherwise, it is the citizens in our Europe's regions that will be face the consequences.

About the author

Eleni Marianou is Secretary General of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)

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