The North Sea Energy Cooperation (NSEC) platform brings together eight EU countries and Norway to discuss how to develop offshore wind farms and grid infrastructure in the North Sea.

The aftershocks of Brexit are already starting to be felt, with the UK leaving the North Sea Energy Cooperation (NSEC) platform, one of the first direct consequences of the country’s departure from the EU on 31 January.

The platform, set up in 2016, comprises eight EU members - Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden and non-EU member Norway.

The NSEC seeks to boost uptake of offshore wind - one of the ambitions of the Commission’s much-vaunted “European Green Deal.”
However, the European Commission decided it was inappropriate for the UK, after its EU exit, to continue to participate in the NSEC, a move backed by Germany, current chair of the group’s meetings.

Some other participating countries are thought to be less keen on the UK leaving the platform, saying it is “not an EU body but an intergovernmental organisation.”

The UK’s future absence from the NSEC, however, is not the only direct consequence of Brexit: the UK will also no longer be an automatic member of the European Common Aviation Area (ECAA) or be bound by EU standards for air transport.

Some fear this could impact travel, manufacturing and maintenance businesses, as well as passengers.

The consequences of Brexit is also likely to be felt in the education and cultural sphere, with concerns about British involvement in initiatives such as the Erasmus+ education exchange programme, EU-funded scientific research projects and arts initiatives.

Irish and British civil society groups are also working to continue the work of the EU’s PEACE and Inter-reg programmes in Northern Ireland, which, they point out, have funded peace initiatives for over 20 years.

“The European Commission decided it was inappropriate for the UK, after its EU exit, to continue to participate in the NSEC, a move backed by Germany”

In an effort to mitigate the impact of Brexit, the European Economic and Social Committee, a Brussels-based body, has set up a “Brexit Follow-up Group” to monitor Brexit-related negotiations.

The Committee, whose opinions are not legally binding, has set up a series of visits to the UK “in order to establish mechanisms ensuring a smooth relationship with British organised civil society.”

Stefano Mallia, the chair of the Brexit group, told this website: “Above all, the aim is that we continue to work with UK civil society after Brexit. The UK has a relationship with the EU which has been built over 45 years of EU membership. We must prepare the groundwork required to ensure that the relationship can and will continue.”

On the future of the EU’s programmes in Northern Ireland, he said, “I’ve seen the danger of Brexit in the streets of Belfast; people care about their security, we’re not just talking about money issues - we must find a way to keep our friendship.”
He also insisted on the need of setting up “some kind of forum to keep alive the dialogue with British civil society,” adding, “We must fight to keep our friendship and I will do my best to build a structure that allows it.”

EESC president Luca Jahier admitted that “the UK's departure will force us to rethink the way in which we communicate with our citizens, so that they can relate in their everyday life to Europe's tangible and verifiable achievements.”

He stressed the need to maintain close post-Brexit contacts with British civil society, saying, “There is no other alternative than a strong relationship between the EU and the UK.”

Looking ahead to the start next month of trade talks between the EU and UK, German MEP Bernd Lange, S&D spokesperson on trade, told this site, “Even though no free trade agreement can ever replicate EU membership and its single market, an ambitious trade agreement that reflects our lasting strategic and economic partnership with far-reaching access to the EU and UK markets, will be very much dependent on how much the UK government is willing to play ball on the level-playing field.”

“Respecting and aligning to EU rules in important areas such as social and environmental standards and tax and competition policy.”

About the author

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