

Brexit Withdrawal Agreement – update for Prospect members

The government has now concluded a Withdrawal Agreement with the European Union alongside a draft political declaration about the future relationship between the UK and the EU.

The Withdrawal Agreement includes:

- a transition period lasting until December 2020 (with the option for an extension) during which time nothing will change
- a deal on citizens' rights for EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU
- a commitment for the UK to pay £39bn to cover existing commitments made while it was an EU member
- a 'backstop' intended to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland; this would keep the entire UK effectively in the customs union indefinitely unless and until a final deal is agreed. The UK could only exit this arrangement with EU agreement.

The political declaration sets out an ambition for a close future relationship – but it provides very little detail on what this relationship would look like, when it would come into effect or what further compromises might be required.

Prospect's policy on Brexit was determined by our members at national conferences in 2016 and 2018.

The policy includes a commitment to update members when the shape of the final deal is clear. It is important to stress that this Withdrawal Agreement may not be agreed by the EU or the UK Parliament and does not cover the final relationship between the UK and the EU.

However, Prospect's initial reaction to what we have seen of the deal so far is:

We are deeply concerned about the lack of clarity about the future

Although a transition period is welcome, it is unacceptable that we will leave the EU on 29 March 2019 with no idea of what the final settlement will look like.

The following areas have still not been negotiated:

- the future migration regime
- membership of key EU agencies such as Euratom, the European Aviation Safety Agency and the European Chemicals Agency
- participation in EU science programmes such as Horizon 2020
- the degree of regulatory alignment between the UK and the EU
- the arrangements at the borders.

The issue of the Northern Ireland border is still not resolved

Prospect is committed to campaigning for no hard border in Ireland. While the backstop arrangement is designed with this in mind, we are still no further forward in securing a long-term solution that protects jobs and rights in Northern Ireland.

Workers' rights are still under threat

This deal does not provide a legal guarantee that workers' rights will not be undermined when we leave the EU. This was one of Prospect's key concerns with Brexit and we are extremely worried that hard-won rights will be harder to enforce than they currently are under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

We believe there must be democratic oversight of the deal

Prospect national conference in 2018 instructed the union's national executive committee to: "argue that the public should be given a say on the results of the negotiations and to ensure a democratic stamp of approval on the final outcome – deal or no deal."

We remain committed to the idea that the public should be given a final say on whether to accept the deal or maintain our current relationship with the EU. Whether parliament accepts or rejects this Withdrawal Agreement, we believe that Article 50 must be extended to allow this democratic oversight to occur.

This process has been marked by uncertainty for many industries and workplaces across the UK. In particular it has caused disruption for civil servants who already have huge workloads due to sustained government cuts.

Prospect is committed to continuing to support members and to campaign for their interests. We will provide more updates when we have more information about the final shape of the Brexit settlement.