Resolution on the proposed mandate for negotiations for a new partnership with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

2020/2557(RSP) - 12/02/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 543 votes to 39, with 69 abstentions, a resolution on the proposed mandate for negotiations for a new partnership with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The resolution was tabled by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL groups.

Parliament underlined its determination to establish as close a relationship as possible with the United Kingdom, a relationship which should, however, be different from the one enjoyed by the United Kingdom as a Member State of the Union, and which should be based on the following principles:

- a third country must not have the same rights and benefits as a Member State of the EU, or a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) or European Economic Area (EEA);

- protection of the full integrity and correct functioning of the single market, the customs union and indivisibility of the four freedoms;

- preservation of the autonomy of the EU’s decision-making;

- safeguarding of the EU legal order and the role of the Court of Justice of the European Union in this respect;

- continued adherence to democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as respect for the principle of the rule of law;

- a level playing field, ensuring equivalent standards in social, labour, environmental, competition and state aid policies, including through a robust and comprehensive framework on competition and state aid control;

- the precautionary principle, the principle that environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source and the ‘polluter pays’ principle;

- safeguarding of EU agreements with third countries and international organisations;

- safeguarding of the financial stability of the EU.

Parliament reaffirmed that the agreement should provide an appropriate framework for future relations based on three main pillars:

(1) Economic partnership

While supporting the EU in its negotiation of a balanced, ambitious and comprehensive free trade agreement with the United Kingdom, Parliament stressed that the objective of such an agreement should be to provide market access and trade facilitation in a manner as similar as possible to that which existed before the UK's withdrawal from the EU, while continuing to create decent jobs and boost the EU's export opportunities, promoting sustainable development, respecting EU standards and complying with democratic procedures.

Reaffirming its determination to prevent all forms of 'dumping' in future EU-UK relations, Parliament stressed the need (i) to ensure a level playing field and safeguard EU standards in order to avoid a race to the bottom, with a view to 'dynamic harmonisation' of legislation and policies, and (ii) to ensure that the UK does not gain an unfair competitive advantage by undercutting levels of protection.

According to Members, the future agreement should include:

- ensuring a level playing field through robust commitments and provisions on competition, state aid and relevant tax matters (including the fight against tax fraud and evasion and money laundering), full respect for social and labour standards (including equivalent levels of protection and safeguards against social dumping), environmental protection and climate change related standards, the promotion of UN sustainable development goals, and a high level of consumer protection;

- mutually beneficial market access for goods, services, government procurement, recognition of professional qualifications and, where relevant, foreign direct investment, to be negotiated in full compliance with the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO);

- the commitment of both sides to continue to work together for free, fair and robust rules-based trade in international fora, with a view to achieving effective multilateralism.

While striving for the widest possible trade in goods, the Commission should consider the possibility of applying quotas and tariffs to the most sensitive sectors, as well as the need for safeguard clauses to protect the integrity of the EU single market, in particular as regards imports of food and agricultural products which shall have to comply strictly with EU rules.

(2) Foreign Affairs Partnership

Even though the UK shall be excluded from the EU decision-making structures, the UK shall remain an important partner. In this regard, Members considered that cooperation in the field of security and defence policy should be an integral part of the comprehensive partnership agreement envisaged to govern future relations, without prejudice to the decision-making autonomy of the Union or the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom was encouraged to contribute to civilian and military Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

In view of their geographical proximity and the common threats they face, Parliament stressed the importance for the European Union and the United Kingdom to strive to preserve effective arrangements for law enforcement cooperation that are efficient and of mutual interest for the security of their citizens. Any sharing of information involving personal data with the United Kingdom should be subject to strict rules, including a level of protection of personal data equivalent to that provided for by Union law.

(3) Specific sectoral issues and thematic cooperation

The resolution also addresses issues relating to fisheries, citizens' rights and mobility of persons, data protection, the future of financial services, EU programmes, the situation of the island of Ireland and the role of the European Court of Justice in settling disputes.

Parliament emphasised the following points:

- the inseparability of the issue of free access to waters and ports from that of free trade and access of UK fisheries products to the EU market;

- the need to pay particular attention to the UK legal framework in the areas of national security and the processing of personal data by law enforcement agencies;

- the future agreement should be based on a strong environmental ambition, supported by cooperation in the relevant international fora;

- the agreement should ensure non-discriminatory access to networks for market players and guarantee a level playing field, in particular with regard to carbon pricing, state aid and environmental protection;

- the importance for EU and UK consumers of the UK maintaining high standards of food safety and labelling;

- the need to work towards full preservation of the citizens' rights guaranteed by the withdrawal agreement for both EU and UK citizens and their families; any future provisions on mobility should be based on non-discrimination between EU Member States and full reciprocity;

- access to the financial services market based on equivalence decisions, provided if the EU considers that the United Kingdom's regulatory and supervisory regimes and standards are fully equivalent to those of the EU.

Parliament expressed concern about the UK Prime Minister's interpretation of the provisions of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland to the Withdrawal Agreement concerning border controls in the Irish Sea. It called on the Prime Minister to clarify the approach envisaged by the United Kingdom with regard to the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Lastly, Parliament supports the negotiating directives, which stipulate that Gibraltar shall not be included in the territorial scope of the agreements and that any separate agreement shall require the prior approval of Spain.