

PRESS RELEASE

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Brexit: the agri-food chain calls for consultation on future trade relationship

Ahead of the European Council discussion on the Brexit negotiations on 22-23 March, FoodDrinkEurope, Copa and Cogeca and CELCAA call on the EU Heads of State and governments to approve draft European Council guidelines on the future trade relationship. In particular, they welcome the stated objective of tariff-free trade in all goods sectors, and look forward to agreement on a status quo transition period, both of which are vital to operators in the food chain.

The undersigned organisations welcome the agreement reached on Monday 19 March about the principle of a transition period. Nevertheless they are convinced that this status quo transition period, i.e. the UK being fully part of the EU Single Market and Customs Union, should last until new trade arrangements are implemented and functional, to avoid unnecessary legal uncertainty and disruption of trade.

Regarding a more general agreement, FoodDrinkEurope, Copa and Cogeca and CELCAA are concerned that the UK government has ruled out membership of the Single Market and Customs Union which will inevitably lead to significant trade disruption. It is also not clear whether the UK is considering to continue participating in the relevant EU regulatory agency in this field - the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) - whereas it is in other sectors (such as chemicals, medicines, and aviation). The undersigned organisations are convinced that the EU27 and the UK have much to gain from continued expert and scientific cooperation, including through UK's involvement in EFSA.

The size and success of the agri-food sector, Europe's leading economic sector, is attributable largely to its integrated supply chains, involving operations throughout all EU28 Member States. The sector wants a much closer EU-UK relationship than what is currently likely; ensuring the continued close alignment of post-Brexit regulatory arrangements as well as customs cooperation will also be of crucial importance to the good functioning of those supply chains, and thereby to European growth and jobs.

With regard to the Island of Ireland, practical and creative solutions are still needed to avoid the introduction of a physical border and trade restrictions between Northern and Southern Ireland.

Prime Minister May's January 2017 Lancaster House speech explicitly recognised the importance of the agri-food sector to EU-UK trade; FoodDrinkEurope, Copa and Cogeca and CELCAA now call upon both sides in the negotiations to consult with the agri-food industry as the terms of the future trading relationship are being worked out.

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