

## Is Brexit the Way Out?

**B**rexit (short for *British Exit*) is the word used to refer to the United Kingdom's decision to officially leave the European Union, an economic and political partnership of 28 countries. It was the result of a referendum held in the UK on June 23, 2016 in which more than 30 million people voted (52% leave, 48% remain). The EU single market, which was completed in 1992, allows the free movement of goods, services, money and people within the EU: it is possible to set up a business or take a job anywhere within it as if it were a single country. It was meant to boost trade, create jobs and lower prices. But it also requires common law-making to ensure products are made to the same technical standards and imposes other rules to ensure all actors play on the same level.

'Leavers' argued that Britain's participation in the EU was a restrictive element for the country: as one of the EU's main initiatives is free movement within the Union, they focussed on regaining border control and reclaiming business rights, in their opinion too limited by EU red-tape rules.

In addition, another negative aspect of participation in the EU highlighted by them were the high membership fees: the leavers insisted on the fact that if the UK separates itself from the EU, these fees can be used to benefit the UK.

The opposite side, the proponents of remaining with the EU also focussed on the economic issues. Beside the UK receiving business benefits by being able to participate in the EU single market system, 'remainers' believe that being part of a wider community of nations provides economic and cultural strength.

Big business tended to be in favour of 'remaining' because it allows money, people and goods move more easily around the world. Some UK exporters say they've had increased orders or enquiries because of the fall in the value of the pound, while others fear products for the European market may have to be made at plants in the EU.

Prime Minister Theresa May has ruled out the UK staying in the single market once it ceases being a EU member, but until then (29 March 2019), the UK is still subject to

the laws of the EU. After Brexit, Britain is going to have to negotiate new deals all on its own, on a country-by-country and sector-by-sector basis. That is both a problem and an opportunity, because these things take years to be accomplished.

The long-term assessment of costs and benefits to the UK economy after Brexit is still unclear, but what we know for sure is that the EU wants the UK to settle any outstanding bills before it leaves. There have been no official estimates published of the size of the bill, but the figure has been thought likely to be one of up to £44bn, but Downing Street says they are confident it will end up being below £40bn.

### MORE ABOUT...

When talking about Brexit, and referring specifically to the closeness of the UK's relationship with the EU, the words 'soft' and 'hard' are often used. While 'hard' Brexit could involve the UK refusing to compromise on issues like the free movement of people even if it meant leaving the single market, a 'soft' Brexit might imply the UK remaining a member of the single market and accepting the free movement of people as a result of that.

### Reading comprehension

#### 1 FCE Read the article and choose the correct option.

- Brexit is...
  - a new European nation.
  - a new commercial deal between the UK and the EU.
  - the UK leaving the EU.
  - a new type of online trading.
- The European Union is...
  - a confederation of Nations.
  - an economic and political partnership.
  - an economic and commercial partnership.
  - a commercial and political partnership.
- The EU single market aimed at...
  - boosting trade, create jobs and allow lower prices.
  - letting people circulate freely in the Union.
  - establishing a common price policy.
  - eliminating competition among its countries.
- 'Leavers' main points were about...
  - too many people entering the UK.
  - limiting free circulations of goods.
  - European taxes.
  - regaining border control and reclaiming business rights.
- Negotiations after Brexit will be...
  - easier for the UK.
  - easier for the EU.
  - on a country-by-country and sector-by-sector basis.
  - longer than usual.
- To be able to leave the EU, the UK...
  - needs to pay a huge sum to the EU.
  - needs special financial requirements.
  - doesn't need to pay a huge sum to the EU.
  - needs all the other countries' approval.

