

## U.K. to seek 'temporary customs union'

The British government wants to remain part of the European Union customs union for a number of years, as part of transition arrangements, while still being able to negotiate trade deals with countries such as India.

A government paper published on Tuesday set out its ambitions around future relations with the customs union — the EU's tariff-free trading area — one of the trickiest issues in negotiations over Britain's exit from the EU. "As we leave the EU and therefore the customs union, the government seeks a new customs arrangement that facilitates the freest and most frictionless trade possible in goods between the U.K. and the EU, and allows us to forge new trade relationships with our partners in Europe and around the world," it states, arguing that it would push for a "highly streamlined" customs arrangement that would remove the need for a U.K.-EU customs border.

"One potential approach would involve the U.K. mirroring the EU's requirements for imports from the rest of the world where their final destination is the EU."

The report also outlines Britain's ambitions for an interim arrangement: a time-limited customs based on shared external tariffs and without customs processes and duties between Britain and the EU. It will also push for Britain to be able to begin negotiations with new trade partners, something that members of the customs union are not able to do.

### New trade talks

"The U.K. has been clear that, once it has left the EU, it intends to pursue new trade negotiations with others. However, the U.K. would not bring into effect any new arrangements with third countries which were not consistent with the terms of the interim agreement while the interim agreement was in place," says the report.

"Our proposals are ambitious, and rightly so. They set out arrangements that would allow U.K. businesses to continue to trade with their European partners in the future, while expanding their markets beyond the EU," said Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond, who has long been pushing for a "softer" Brexit, and for whom Britain's spelling out of ambitions for interim arrangements to smooth the process will be seen as a political victory.

The proposals were welcomed by business, albeit with caution.

"It is encouraging to see that these papers propose a time-limited interim period and a customs system that is as barrier-free as possible... But the clock is ticking and what matters now is giving companies the confidence to continue investing as quickly as possible," said Confederation of British Industry deputy director general Josh Hardie.

The European Commission also made clear that its focus remained on settling outstanding issues on Brexit, before it could begin to discuss future relations. "The quicker #UK & EU27 agree on citizens, settling accounts and #Ireland, the quicker we can discuss customs & future relationship," tweeted Michel Barnier, the Commission's chief negotiator on Brexit, while the European Parliament's negotiator on Brexit Guy Verhofstadt described plans of being "in & out of the customs union" and "invisible borders".

A Bangladeshi auto-rickshaw driver is suing for damages after his phone number was used in a movie, leading to a barrage of calls from female fans

Nuclear disarmament campaign group ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for its efforts to consign the atomic bomb to history, firing off a

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