

European trade unions in the Agro Food sector urge EU and UK negotiators to agree on a free trade agreement that delivers for working people

EFFAT- IUF Europe together with its UK and Irish affiliates, SIPTU, UNITE, USDAW, BFAWU and GMB, call on the UK conservative Government in Westminster and the EU to do whatever it takes to reach a trade deal that save jobs and delivers for working people across our countries.

The UK is the single largest trading partner of the EU with a total value of food and drink trade of €47.5 billion in 2018. If the UK moves to trading on WTO terms after 2020, agro-food goods would attract the highest level of tariffs with inevitable consequences on trade levels and jobs¹.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Ireland where the Food drink agricultural sector is the most reliant part of the island's economy on cross border activity. The current arrangement between the North/UK and the Republic sees an estimated 360,000 people commute and millions of goods and supply chain consignments cross each year.

A hard border, that will undoubtedly disrupt and severely delay all trade and movement of people, will cause heavy lasting damage across all sectors of the economy.

This sector is inextricably interconnected between the UK and Ireland and its future prosperity depends on not having borders, tariffs or controls between the two countries.

The Brexit process is at a watershed moment that may usher in some extremely dangerous changes that will, in all likelihood, lead to:

- The re-imposition of a hard border and a dramatic increase in community tensions as a result;
- Complete disruption of Irish/UK cross-border trade that will massively impact the well-being of the sector and the workers in it;
- Endanger the high food hygiene and health and safety standards established over decades by the European Union's regulatory system;
- Employers and governments pitting worker against worker in a race to the bottom on living standards and rights.

Furthermore all the signatory unions strongly oppose the Conservative government's Internal Market Bill. Not only does the bill break international law and is tantamount to ripping up the agreed withdrawal agreement, it also puts in jeopardy the painstakingly negotiated Good Friday/Belfast peace agreement (1998).

EFFAT-IUF Europe consistently highlighted the dangers that Brexit poses to the food and agricultural sectors² and the welfare and wellbeing of the workers employed within it. In a no-deal or bad deal

¹ The average reduction in UK food exports to the EU is 63,2% in a no deal scenario and 22,5% under a Free Trade Agreement. The average reduction in EU food exports to the UK is 61,7% in a no deal scenario and 22,6% under a Free Trade Agreement, LSE Vulnerabilities of Supply Chains Post-Brexit, September 2020

scenario the food and beverage sector will be disproportionately affected. Highly integrated supply chains will be disrupted both in the UK and the EU. Businesses will be hit by customs and excise duties when importing or exporting, SMEs will be hit with delays to VAT repayments, and there is a vast potential for increased costs and delays.

Without a rapid change of course the current situation will lead to major disruptions and job losses in the UK as well as in a number of Member States, from the Spanish fruit and vegetable sector, to the Danish dairy and meat industry.

Given its broad socio-economic importance both for the EU and the UK as well as and the number of jobs involved (400.000 only in the UK and 4.7 million in the EU), the food and drink sector should be a high priority area in the future relationship.

The Food, Drink and agricultural unions of UK and Ireland and the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT) therefore demands of the UK and EU negotiators to:

- Oppose any finalisation of the Brexit process that will leave in its wake any physical infrastructure between the Republic of Ireland and the UK;
- Agree on a a tariff and quota free trade agreement as frictionless as possible
- Ensure a level playing field provisions notably on workers' rights, that should not be limited to the free movement of workers but must cover the respect into law and practice of the whole EU social acquis and pertinent ILO standards;
- Protect the *status quo* and the full harmonisation in relation to technical barriers to trade including the use of fertilisers and pesticides and food labelling regulations;
- The UK to maintain the current protection of GIs (geographical indications) to protect jobs in rural areas and specific subsectors;
- Mobilise and protect the Good Friday/Belfast peace agreement;
- The Conservative Government to urgently review its position and not proceed with the Internal Market Bill;
- Ensure the involvement of trade unions in the preparation, the monitoring and implementation of the trade agreement;
- Oppose any erosion of regulations and any attempt by the Conservative government to sell off regulations as a bargaining chip in any deal with the EU or future trade deals outside the EU;

All signatory unions commit to redouble our efforts to advocate on behalf of the workers that we represent in the food, drink and agriculture sectors so that this situation does not deteriorate further and thousands of jobs are put at risk.