

Closer trading relationship with EU “more important than ever” in an increasingly fraught and volatile world, says TUC

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The TUC has called for a closer trading relationship with the EU in an increasingly unpredictable and volatile global economy.

The call comes as US tariffs come into force from today, and the union body publishes new polling which shows significant support for a reset in the UK's relationship with the EU.

According to the nationally representative poll of 5,000 people, two in three (66%) Brits back a closer relationship with the EU – with just 20% opposed. This includes key target voters:

- Eight in ten Conservative to Labour switchers at the 2024 general election
- More than half (56%) of Reform-leaning voters (who voted Labour in 2024 but would now vote Reform) support a closer UK-EU relationship- 28 pc oppose

‘Botched’ Tory agreement

The TUC says the Conservatives' Brexit arrangement was “botched” – and set workers and business back in both the UK and EU.

According to official figures, the long-term impact of the UK leaving the Single Market and Customs Union is between 4 and 5 per cent of our GDP.

The TUC says the 2016 Brexit referendum must be honoured while delivering a “much-needed” closer trading relationship.

The union body is calling for:

- New opportunities for good quality jobs for UK workers in the EU and EU workers in the UK, such as Erasmus+ to support vocational training and apprenticeships, among other opportunities.
- Alignment of UK and EU emissions trading schemes so that UK goods are not hit with EU carbon border tariffs
- Reduction in trade barriers and border checks to improve trade flows between the EU and the UK, which in turn is good for job creation and growth. This must include mutual recognition of professional qualifications, and closer alignment of chemical and food standards, among other areas.
- Commitment to uphold mutual high standards on workers’ rights

The TUC is also calling for a seat at the table for trade unions at the EU-UK summit in May to ensure the reset talks deliver for workers.

TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak said: “In an increasingly volatile and unpredictable global economy, including the likelihood of US tariffs, it’s more important than ever that we secure our trading relationship with our closest neighbours.

“The British public agree – they overwhelmingly back a common-sense reset.

“The Conservatives’ botched Brexit agreement has set workers and business back at home and abroad.

“It’s time for a new approach that honours the referendum result while giving us a much-needed closer trading relationship with EU.

“That means reducing trading barriers and border checks to boost and protect jobs in communities. And it means upholding mutual high standards on workers’ rights and supporting job opportunities for British workers in the EU and European workers in the UK.”

Pollster Peter McLeod said: “It’s striking how open voters are to Britain revisiting the TCA. In our recent focus groups people supported a closer relationship, both in principle and on seeing details of a possible revised deal. The new poll confirms that what we heard from those voters also holds nationally by a very strong margin. There’s strong support for a revised deal among voters who switched Tory-Labour at the election, and among Labour voters who are now leaning to Reform.

“The focus groups help explain why a lot of people feel this way. The dominant view was that Brexit has not been a success and that it would be sensible to try for a better deal. Some of the Leave voters in our groups expressly said that their votes had been a mistake, while others said politicians had failed to deliver on the promises of the Leave campaign.

“On seeing the outline of a possible new deal voters are firmly positive about Britain taking this step. The key reason for doing it is clearly economic. They feel businesses and farmers in particular have been hurt

by Brexit and that the new deal would help repair some of the damage.

“We showed messages both for and against doing a deal and they found the message in favour more persuasive. A strong majority across all groups, including groups considering voting Reform, endorsed doing a deal.”