

# CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT – DO NOT CIRCULATE

## Step by Step towards Rejoin – European Movement policy paper

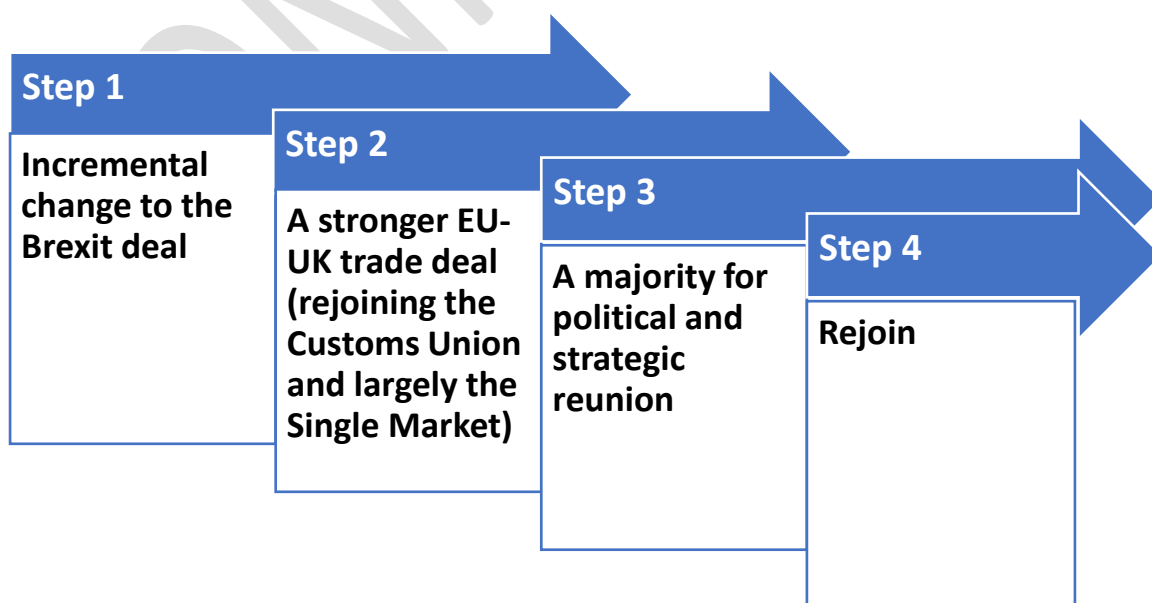
### 1. Introduction

The European Movement’s aim is to create the closest possible ties between the UK and the rest of Europe. We have agreed together that our aim is to rejoin the EU as soon as it is politically possible, and that the route back involves campaigning, step by step, towards that campaign to rejoin.

After the publication of the government’s Brexit deal in December 2020, the European Movement’s first steps have been to highlight the harm caused by this government’s hard Brexit, and to identify first incremental changes to the deal that would alleviate some of that harm.

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the publication of the deal, and with campaigning activity under ‘step 1’ gaining a head of steam, EM members are keen for EM to set out a strategy that fills in the missing steps on the road to rejoin. With greater visibility of the damage done by Brexit, there is an increasing appetite from our activists to push further and call for a more fundamental rethink of Boris Johnson’s deal. At a strategic level, greater alignment around the long term plan will improve our ability to make decisions and grow the movement to deliver our aims.

This paper proposes a top-line 4 step strategy to rejoin, set out below. It is informed by conversations with a range of policy experts and all members of the current National Executive. The National Council is invited to indicate its support for any and all of the three policy options we might take in step 2, to inform the next steps of campaign planning.



## 2. The Steps to rejoin

### Step 1 – Improving the current deal, issue by issue

As a starting point, the government's paper-thin Brexit deal can be improved on a piecemeal basis, through modest changes that retain the current overall framework. Campaigning for some or all of these changes, as the political circumstances present themselves, is step one on our journey towards rejoining the European Union.

Some areas where the deal can be augmented, and for which we are already campaigning, include:

- Reinstating the UK's participation in Erasmus+
- Agreeing a deal on veterinary standards to ease trade friction at the UK border
- Easements around working visas, mutual recognition of professional qualifications and other measures to facilitate access to the EU for creative industries
- Aligning with the Dublin Regulation on migration and asylum, like EEA countries and Switzerland

Additional incremental changes we might campaign for include:

- Securing participation in Horizon, the EU's research and development programme
- Association with the European Year of Youth 2022 and rejoining the Creative Europe Programme
- Working closely with the EU's new HERA (European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority) which has as part of its remit working with non-EU partners
- A political commitment to matching EU environmental targets and measures under the European Green Deal

While it feels a long way from our end goal, incremental change of this kind can reverse some of the most egregious and unnecessary harm caused by the deal. The changes listed above can certainly:

- re-establish some of the cultural ties that have been severed
- improve opportunities for citizens in the UK and across the EU to work, study and travel more freely
- protect the UK from some of the erosion of standards and rights that threaten to follow our departure from the EU
- protect important sectors of the UK economy, including the financial sector, the arts, and science, research and innovation;
- provide a short-term fix to some of the trade issues created by the government's deal, including relieving some of the pressure in Northern Ireland.

Securing small changes can help evidence the benefits of co-operation with the EU and can create small wins to motivate activists.

## **Step 2 – Securing the best trading relationship with the rest of Europe**

Incremental change won't address the biggest, most glaring issue, which is that the government's vision for the UK as a trading nation after Brexit is fundamentally flawed. Brexit Isn't Working because the government's vision refuses to acknowledge a simple fact: we benefit hugely from strong cooperation with our closest and biggest trading partner.

Relaxing visa rules temporarily to increase the supply of HGV drivers and poultry workers might be a necessary sticking plaster when petrol runs out, bins are overflowing, and Christmas looks set to be cancelled. But they are no more of a long-term solution than training up the army to drive petrol-tankers.

The idea that we could replace £17 billion lost trade with the EU through trade deals in the Pacific and with the US is ridiculous. The current situation in Northern Ireland, created by the flawed NI protocol, is intolerable. The burden placed on small businesses and key British industries like fishing and farming is unreasonable. As consumers are starting to discover, the trade arrangements we have been left with post-Brexit are starting to lead to a bleak reality of empty shelves, empty petrol pumps and empty pockets.

That is why the next step on the road to rejoin has to be regaining proper access to EU markets. It is in the UK's economic best interest to negotiate to trade freely with the rest of Europe, to drive economic growth, jobs and prosperity. Doing so will reduce the burden on small businesses, relieve political pressure in Northern Ireland, and protect the high environmental, food and farming standards the UK champions from future erosion.

As with step one, there are different routes to achieving this step.

### **Option A: rejoin the customs union and single market**

Rejoining the single market and customs union would solve almost all the issues that have occurred because of barriers to trade. It would address the shortages of workers, raw materials and manufactured products that the UK currently experiences. It would remove the bureaucracy for UK businesses wishing to trade in the EU.

It is very different from rejoining the EU and fully 'respects' the referendum result while still preserving almost all economic advantages of membership.

The significant disadvantage of this option is both the public perception and indeed reality of the UK becoming a 'rule taker': in participating in the single market, the UK would be expected to adopt and stick to EU rules and standards without having a say in them. It is unlikely that EU rules will change hugely over the next 10-20 years from those the UK has already adopted (and influenced as a member state). But the risk and perception of UK sovereignty being undermined is an important factor to weigh against the economic benefits and closer integration offered by participation in the single market as a non-member state.

### **Option B: rejoin the customs union only**

Rejoining the customs union without seeking participation in the single market would be a less significant step towards integration. Turkey sets a precedent for this type of agreement.

Rejoining only the customs union would address some of the trade barriers created by the current deal, including removing bureaucracy for businesses wishing to trade with the EU. It would solve some, but not all, of the issues in Northern Ireland (there would still need to be specific, stand-alone agreements to address the question of veterinary standards for example). It would require the UK to surrender control of some areas of economic policymaking, such as setting VAT, but would require significantly less of a loss of sovereignty than single market participation.

### **Option C: negotiate a tailor-made UK-EU treaty that facilitates single market access**

Another option would be for the UK and the EU to negotiate a stand-alone treaty for tariff-free, customs-free trade. Such a treaty might replicate much of what it means to be in the customs union and single market but may allow more flexibility and might include a different adjudicating body in place of the European Court of Justice.

It may be attractive to the UK government to seek a stand-alone deal of this nature, as it would put more negotiating power in the hands of the UK as a sovereign nation. But it is highly unlikely that the EU would be prepared to take an exceptional approach to negotiating market access for the UK, both because the UK-EU relationship has been so damaged by the Brexit process, and because it is not in the EU's interest to set such a precedent for further exceptionalism.

To be clear, none of these options will ever be enough for any of us from a policy point of view: a soft Brexit is still Brexit. Our aim is only to get us a little closer to the end goal of rejoining the EU. While we individually, and as a point of European Movement policy, may have a preference for one or other of the three options set out above, it is the overall ambition of the step – to re-establish our strong, equal trading relationship with the EU – that really matters. Much of what we call for, how we communicate, and ultimately what is winnable will be determined by the political climate and public opinion, and our campaigning will need to flex to external reality.

### **Step 3 – Establishing the political/strategic imperative to rejoin**

Economic union is not enough, and hard-headed business reasons alone will not get us back into the European Union. To change hearts and minds, the European Movement will need to secure majority support from the public and political parties, for the political and strategic case for the UK and the EU to work together.

The European Movement's long-term objective, to get us to step three, is to establish ways to sell the great political ambition for European integration. To promote peace

and democracy. To find solutions to climate breakdown. To protect the UK, the rest of Europe and the wider world from future health or security risks.

#### **Step 4 – Rejoin**

Only at Step 4, once we have re-established a strong relationship of trust with the EU, we have political leaders advocating strongly for the benefits of integration with the rest of Europe, and public opinion is on our side, can we run a campaign to rejoin the European Union.

### **3. Conclusion**

This paper sets out a necessarily simplistic policy analysis of the road to rejoin. The aim is only to create alignment across our movement about what we need to do to achieve our mission, not to provide a complex policy analysis of each stage along the way. But if we can agree the broad shape of the journey back to the EU, it will help everyone in the European Movement to campaign most effectively together.

It must also be emphasised that this is a strategy document, not a campaign plan or messaging script. What we say publicly about both rejoining in the long-term and the steps that might lead us to rejoining must be guided by audience insight and political analysis, rather than quoted verbatim from this or any other policy document.

### **4. Next steps**

The National Council is invited to indicate its support for any or all of the options in step 2, to inform policy and campaign direction over the next six months.