



# UK IN A CHANGING EUROPE

**UK-EU RELATIONS TRACKER**  
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## INTRODUCTION

This tracker provides an overview of the state of relations between the United Kingdom and the European Union. Released quarterly, it will assess relations between the UK and EU as well as relationships between the UK and EU member states. It will also highlight developments in British politics which may affect the UK-EU relationship, and internal dynamics within the EU that might shape its approach to the relationship with the United Kingdom.

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## UK-EU RELATIONS

### SUMMARY

The Windsor Framework of late February 2023 marked not only the culmination of a steady warming of UK-EU relations (begun under Liz Truss) but is widely seen as a springboard for future improvements. With tensions over the Protocol easing, we may see the amount of technical work following formal meetings of the EU-UK committees governed by the Withdrawal and Trade and Cooperation Agreements increase. No committee formed under either agreement has yet met in 2023, aside from the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee in March.

In policy terms, early 2023 has seen shifts from the UK on the status of EU nationals, as well as cooperation on trade and climate between the EU, UK and other international partners. However, the government's Illegal Migration Bill and the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill may come to represent a new source of tension in EU-UK relations.

### THE WINDSOR FRAMEWORK

The announcement of the [Windsor Framework](#) in late February followed a January [agreement](#) regarding data sharing. Under this, the UK agreed to provide access to near real-time customs databases and IT systems tracking the movement of goods between GB and NI. The Framework, to be implemented through Joint Committee decisions and unilateral measures, including legislation, amends the operation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. The UK government has agreed it will no longer proceed with the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, with the EU dropping its consequent legal action against the UK. Details of measures contained in the framework can be found [here](#).

The resolution of tensions around the Protocol will allow closer cooperation on issues of mutual interest. Following its announcement, the European Commission President expressed a willingness to relaunch the process for the UK's participation in Union programmes, including Horizon Europe. This will, however, be dependent on the implementation on the measures laid out in the agreement, and on the UK accepting the costs of participation.

### REACTIONS

Conservative MPs, including Eurosceptic MPs such as Peter Bone, David Davis and Minister of State for Northern Ireland Steve Baker were generally positive about the deal. European Research Group Chairman Mark Francois stated that the group would vote against the government in a House of Commons vote on the Stormont Brake on 22 March, describing the mechanism as "[practically useless](#)". However, no major Tory backbench rebellion materialised,

with the motion passed by 515 votes to 29.

The Labour Party, on the other hand, announced its support for the government's proposals and voted in favour of the Stormont Brake on 22 March.

In Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein, Alliance and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) reacted positively to the Windsor Framework and renewed calls for a return to the Assembly and formation of an Executive. The DUP had announced the formation of an eight-person panel to assess the Framework's implications for unionism. In the vote of the 22 March, all DUP MPs voted against the motion, with party leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson stating that the Windsor Framework left "fundamental problems" of the Protocol unresolved.

US President Joe Biden welcomed the Announcement as an 'essential step to ensuring that the hard-earned peace and progress of the Good Friday Agreement is preserved'. The White House has since confirmed he will visit Northern Ireland and the Republic in April.

## **JOINT COMMITTEES AND THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTNERSHIP ASSEMBLY**

The first meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee since February 2022 took place on 24 March. The Committee formally agreed the Windsor Framework, and discussed future cooperation between the UK and EU on issues such as security and energy.

The most recent meeting of the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly occurred in late January 2023 in London and was centred around the Retained EU Law Bill. This was held in camera. The next meeting is due to be held in Brussels later this year.

## **POLICY INTERACTIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION**

- **IMMIGRATION:** The French government has dashed hopes of a bilateral agreement on the return of undocumented immigrants arriving in Britain from Europe. Paris insists that such an agreement must be negotiated with the EU.
- **EU NATIONALS:** The Home Office has accepted the High Court's ruling that removing the rights of residence of EU nationals who had applied to stay in the UK after Brexit is unlawful and is working to implement the judgment. This had been a point of contention in UK-EU relations, with the European Commission accusing the UK of implementing a two-tier system for EU nationals residing in the UK.
- **CLIMATE:** The European Commission, EU Member States, the UK and 25 other partner countries across the world agreed in January to form a 'Coalition of Trade Ministers on Climate'. The group will look at trade strategy in response to changing climate and weather conditions, and its next meeting will take place in early 2024 at the WTO Ministerial Conference. This follows the UK's signing of an agreement on renewable energy cooperation with EU and North Seas countries in December 2022.

# BILATERAL RELATIONS

## REACTION TO THE WINDSOR FRAMEWORK

The European Commission does not anticipate any major obstacles from member states to the Windsor Framework, with member states agreeing to the key elements of the deal in a meeting of the Council of the EU on 21 March. Member states generally reacted positively to late February’s announcement. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar gave a [speech](#) on the ‘most welcome’ announcement, and the Tánaiste and Irish minister for foreign affairs, Michael Martin, issued a [statement](#) on the ‘very welcome way forward on the Protocol’.

Other member state officials used social media to welcome the agreement, and the renewed impetus it provides for UK-EU relations.

## BILATERAL COOPERATION

The UK has accelerated its efforts to build bilateral cooperation with member states over the past few months. Bilateral cooperation can only develop in areas that are not covered by the TCA.

**Table 1: Joint Statements/Declarations on bilateral cooperation signed 2022-present**

MEMBER STATE(S)	AGREEMENT TYPE	POLICY AREA	DATE SIGNED/ISSUED	TEXT
ESTONIA	JOINT STATEMENT	SECURITY AND DEFENCE	JUNE 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
ESTONIA	JOINT STATEMENT	TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP	DECEMBER 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
FINLAND	JOINT DECLARATION	SECURITY	MAY 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
SWEDEN	DECLARATION OF SOLIDARITY	SECURITY	MAY 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
PORTUGAL	JOINT DECLARATION	BILATERAL COOPERATION	JUNE 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
UK-Visegrád Group (V4)	JOINT STATEMENT	BILATERAL COOPERATION	MARCH 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
SLOVAKIA	JOINT DECLARATION	SECURITY AND TRADE	FEBRUARY 2023	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
MALTA	BILATERAL COOPERATION FRAMEWORK	FOREIGN POLICY, SECURITY, RULE OF LAW, TRADE AND INVESTMENT, ENERGY AND CLIMATE, PEOPLE AND CULTURE	FEBRUARY 2023	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
CYPRUS	MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING	BILATERAL COOPERATION	NOVEMBER 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
NETHERLANDS	JOINT STATEMENT	FOREIGN POLICY, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY	NOVEMBER 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
LITHUANIA	JOINT DECLARATION	BILATERAL COOPERATION	MAY 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>

MEMBER STATE(S)	AGREEMENT TYPE	POLICY AREA	DATE SIGNED/ISSUED	TEXT
SLOVENIA	JOINT STATEMENT OF INTENT	BILATERAL COOPERATION	FEBRUARY 2022	<a href="#">Gov UK</a>
E3: GERMANY AND FRANCE	JOINT STATEMENT	IRAN NUCLEAR PROGRAMME	MARCH 2023	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
ITALY	JOINT STATEMENT OF INTENT	BILATERAL DEFENCE COOPERATION	FEBRUARY 2023	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
ITALY	PARTNERSHIP	GLOBAL COMBAT AIR PROGRAMME, IN COLLABORATION WITH JAPAN	DECEMBER 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
ESTONIA	JOINT STATEMENT	DEFENCE	NOVEMBER 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
POLAND	PARTNERSHIP	DEFENCE AND MISSILE SYSTEM	APRIL 2022	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>
ESTONIA, POLAND, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, DENMARK, CZECH REPUBLIC, NETHERLANDS, SLOVAKIA	JOINT STATEMENT	UKRAINE	FEBRUARY 2023	<a href="#">GOV UK</a>

### **OTHER MEETINGS AND INFORMAL CO-OPERATION**

The UK signed a [joint declaration](#) with Germany in June 2021 which set up a ‘strategic dialogue’ – the first iteration took place in [January 2023](#). The UK also leads the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) with eight other member states: the Prime Minister [attended](#) the JEF summit in Riga in December 2022.

The fact that Rishi Sunak was the first UK PM to have attended the UK-Irish Council since 2007 and his bilateral with the Tánaiste Michael Martin at the November 2022 meeting was also widely covered in the press in Ireland: see [RTE](#) and [Irish Times](#).

Finally, fringe bilateral meetings at the occasion of international summits have been the opportunity to establish a dialogue to move forward. The meeting between Rishi Sunak and Ursula Von der Leyen in the context of the COP 27 in November 2022, to which the PM had originally not intended to go, set the tone of a relationship that led to the successful conclusion of the Windsor Framework.

### **BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH FRANCE AND THE FRANCO-UK SUMMIT**

The UK-France relationship had been warming over recent months, fuelled by the good personal relations between leaders and ministers on both sides and the announcement of the Windsor Framework. Cooperation at ministerial level has also improved for Home Affairs – including through the [Groupe de Calais](#).

The first France-UK Summit since 2018 took place on 10 March. President Macron spoke of the summit as a ‘reunion, reconnection and a new beginning’. The UK and France adopted a [Joint Declaration](#) that covers 8 areas (in order of appearance): Ukraine; European Political Community; defence and security; fight against organised crime, cyber and hybrid threats and terrorism; foreign policy and global issues; energy and decarbonisation; illegal migration and social and economic ties.

Although a lengthy document, much is about reiterating, reinforcing and enhancing cooperation that was already established through existing bilateral agreements (Lancaster House Treaties) or multilateral ones as well as reiterating commitments under international agreements (climate). However, on illegal migration, they agreed a joint multi-year operational plan and a joint funding arrangement, with the UK committing to 541 million euros for the 2023-2026 period and the creation of a detention centre in France.

The Declaration also refers to cooperation ahead of a number of international summits, starting with the Summit for a New Global Finance Pact that will take place in Paris in June 2023. The Joint Declaration includes many references to enhancing cooperation at administrative level.

## CONCLUSION

UK-EU relations have certainly warmed in recent months and show signs of a potential reset, as well as closer cooperation on issues of mutual interest moving forward. However, it is too early to yet judge the practical impacts of this shift and how agreements such as the Windsor Framework will operate in practice. Subsequent iterations of this tracker will continue to trace these relationships and assess whether practical progress matches the hopes that have been raised in recent weeks.

For any queries relating to the UK-EU relations tracker, please contact [sophie.stowers@ukandeu.ac.uk](mailto:sophie.stowers@ukandeu.ac.uk)