



EU-UK relations: Will 2026 be the year to reset the reset?

by Ian Bond, 3 February 2026

The world of 2026 is very different from the world of 2016, when the UK voted for Brexit. Neither the UK nor the EU seems to appreciate the scale of the changes, however. The EU and UK need a fundamental rethink of how they can enhance their security and prosperity. That is the conclusion of a new joint paper by the Centre for European Reform and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung United Kingdom and Ireland, [‘EU-UK relations: Will 2026 be the year to reset the reset?’](#). The policy brief is based on a detailed assessment of progress in implementing steps towards a closer relationship that were agreed at the first ever EU-UK summit meeting in May 2025.

The Labour government that took office in the UK in July 2024 proclaimed a reset in relations with the EU. At the May 2025 summit meeting, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen described the EU and UK as “historical and natural partners standing side by side on the global stage, facing the same challenges, pursuing the same objectives, like-minded, sharing the same values”.

But eight months after the meeting, there is a sense of lost momentum on both sides. Some of the reduced impetus was down to the British government’s continued reluctance for much of 2025 to confront eurosceptics in the media and the political opposition. Labour in 2025 remained disappointingly willing to tolerate the well-documented economic damage caused by being outside the EU.

The EU must also take a share of the blame. There is still a sense among EU officials and member-states that the UK should be made to pay a price for Brexit. The two sides failed to agree on terms for the UK’s participation in the EU’s Security Action for Europe programme – designed to promote joint procurement of much-needed weapons and munitions for European defence – after the EU demanded a huge up-front payment from the UK.

The author of the paper, Ian Bond, said *“Since the UK voted for Brexit, Europeans have had to deal with Russia’s war against Ukraine, Donald Trump’s aggressive trade policy and his threats to annex Greenland, and China’s willingness to use its near-monopoly on the supply of critical minerals to put pressure on other countries. In turbulent times, the EU and the UK would both benefit from overcoming the lack of trust that the Brexit process engendered. They should work together in pursuit of shared economic and security interests, including increasing European strategic autonomy”*.

Notes for editors:

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