

# THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UK AND THE EU



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## Brexit is history

The starting point for this discussion is the recognition that the UK is a Euro-pean state outside the EU. Although c. 60% of the UK population now be-lieves Brexit to have been a mistake, there can be no return to the status quo before the Brexit referendum in 2016.

Intervening mega-events, particularly COVID, the Ukraine war, migration, climate change and digital developments, let alone Brexit itself, have changed both the EU and the UK irrevocably, and both are dynamic entities. The question for the UK is its future relationship with its most important neighbours, recognising that the EU may well be a different sort of union by the time the UK rejoins it.

**The current political outlook in the UK is poor**  
Rebuilding the relationship is made more

difficult by the current state of British politics. With an upcoming General Election, none of the three main UK-wide political parties will face facts about UK/EU relations. Any idea of a new pro-EU party is doomed by the UK's First-past-the-post electoral structure. The non-party European Movement UK (EMUK) is consequently of significant importance in representing the views of 60% of the UK population on this critical subject.

## So, how does a new UK/EU relationship evolve?

A pre-requisite for the UK joining any form of European union is a sustained period of national renewal, at both public and political levels. It is improbable that the EU would consider UK accession or believe in the UK as a reliable long-term member state without compelling evidence that this has happened.

Furthermore, the EU is naturally focussed on its own internal affairs, including its 2024 Elections and the extraordinarily complex and interlinked issues of enlargement and deeper integration necessitating Treaty change. It would not want to enter new disruptive EU/UK accession talks pending resolution of these matters.

### What are the key elements of UK national renewal?

- Recommitment to values which are fundamental for the EU, but which have been repeatedly abused by recent UK governments: democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.
- Good, stable governance and redevelopment of UK soft power overseas.
- Commitment to the underpinning philosophy of the EU: a limited pooling of sovereignty for the common good.
- Recognition of the need for essential regional collaboration on mega-issues such as trade, defence, science, education, climate, health, and digital developments.
- In summary, a new national self-image of the UK's place in the world.

### What will induce this renewal process?

As so often in politics, acceptance of a mistake and a change of direction will be driven mainly by adverse events, especially:

- Economic damage: there is a wealth of economic data and expert opinion demonstrating the adverse impacts of Brexit on trade, foreign direct investment, debt levels, public services, and cost-of-living; it is a slow puncture, accelerated by both active and passive divergence between EU and UK regulation.
- War: the Ukraine war has already galvanised UK/EU relations, with coordinated sanctions, arms supplies, Ukraine reconstruction planning and its potential NATO and EU membership.
- US Election: the prospect of a Trump presidency and US withdrawal from its global responsibilities, especially in defence, demand the most urgent pan-European collaboration.

### How can EMUK best support this process?

- By focussing on the future not the past.
- By constantly monitoring the adverse impacts of Brexit and using the evidence to promote the upside potential from participating in the governance of our own continent.
- By emphasising how, as a future member of a European union, the UK will have more control of its own future and more global influence.
- By continuing its "step-by-step" campaigns to restore UK/EU collaboration, leading to the inescapable conclusion that the UK should be part of both the Single Market and Customs Union.

- By mobilising young people.
- By promoting a deeper understanding of the EU throughout the UK public.
- By creating a climate in which a new generation of pro-European political leaders will emerge.

### Following renewal, what new UK/EU relationship might emerge?

If the UK develops as outlined above, our fellow Europeans are likely to welcome us back into some form of union. The UK's contribution, whether as a marketplace, a source of funds, a nuclear power, or a leading democratic state, would deliver huge benefits to any European union in both internal and geopolitical terms.

Much, however, will depend on the progress of the EU itself over this period.

The current contest between nationalist and liberal democratic forces within the EU will profoundly affect the 2024 European Elections and thus the EU's future structure and directions.

Concurrently, the tension between the EU's contrasting objectives of enlargement and closer integration (as is demanded by citizens and civil society) may provoke Treaty Change, adding to the current uncertainty.

From a UK viewpoint, a looser EU structure (such as the "concentric circles" concept launched by President Macron) might facilitate accession, but might both reduce its influence (compared with full membership) and weaken the global power and effectiveness of the Union.

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## EPILOGUE

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The future shape of the UK/EU relationship will be primarily dependent on developments within the UK. Brexit was made in the UK and must be reversed there. This begs the question as to whether the UK will ever want to return to its historic role, beyond short-term self-interest, as a major player in the shaping of a democratic continent of Europe.

Pro-Europeans won this argument in previous generations. We now need to win it all over again. ■