

Think

new things

Make

new connections

Terms of Reference

Advancing EU–UK Cooperation: Charting a Path to the 2025 Summit and Beyond

Friday 28 – Saturday 29 March 2025

Summary

This one-night Ditchley discussion will explore how the EU and UK might develop a new vision for cooperation that takes account of the constraints of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement but also explores the potential for cooperation and coordination beyond it on areas not covered by the Customs Union and Single Market, including on security and defence matters, the development of shared energy projects, AI and other emerging technologies expected to shape the future. We will not look at British re-entry of the Single Market, judging this politically impossible for the foreseeable future.

The challenges flowing from President Trump’s radical agenda and the deepening of strategic competition between the West and China create a new global context for cooperation between the EU and the UK. Looking ahead to the planned EU and UK summit, we will examine what can be achieved in the short term but also look to what kind of strategic relationship the EU and the UK might want in the uncertain and challenging global context that is emerging. What can be achieved during the Polish Presidency? What are realistic objectives for the terms of the incumbent British Government and the European Commission, Parliament and Council?

How can the upcoming summit set the right direction for further development of a warm and mutually supportive relationship between the EU and the UK, as natural liberal democratic allies on most international issues and crises? On which issues would progress matter most for the EU and vice versa for the UK? How could progress be achieved without renegotiating the TCA? How can we reduce friction on trade and mobility within legal, financial and political constraints for the EU and the UK?

What kind of relationship do the EU and the UK want with the United States under President Trump, mindful that the course he is taking might represent a radical and enduring shift but also is hotly contested and might begin to be reversed or slowed as early as the mid-term

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elections? What kind of relationship do the EU and UK want with China on the one hand and India on the other? Are there any mutual advantages in considering coordinated approaches to aspects of relations with China and India?

Defence, national security and defence production

With the Trump administration being less willing to provide military support for Ukraine and European security, how can the UK and its European partners work together to take responsibility for the defence of their continent and ensure a sovereign and stable Ukraine? Faced with the hybrid Russian disruption campaign across Europe, how can they collectively improve deterrence and national security to counter Russia's undermining of stability? How can we make sure that we coordinate national security responses, for example cyber defence and the detection and disruption of Russian sabotage, across European nations? Does NATO provide a sufficient framework or are other mechanisms needed? How can EU-NATO coordination be improved?

Europe needs to massively increase defence production capabilities to meet the new threat. How can we coordinate increased defence production so that it results in flexible and well-coordinated collective defence capabilities, rather than a series of national procurements that amount to less than the sum of their parts? How do we build an approach to defence capability that incorporates the UK as one of Europe's two nuclear weapons states? With tight state budgets across the continent, how can increased defence capabilities be financed sustainably?

Economic and energy security

Following the announcements of tariffs by the Trump administration, the threat of a global trade war looms large. How can the EU and the UK coordinate their responses effectively, including with Canada and other G7 partners?

The EU and the UK share a strong commitment to climate targets and a burden of high energy prices. As climate change and the gathering momentum of the energy transition interact with global strategic competition and geopolitics, how can we move to cheaper energy without replacing one dependency with another? How could the EU and UK collaborate to develop shared energy projects and linked energy grids? How closely do the EU and the UK want to continue to work with Chinese companies on the route to a green transition? President Trump's priorities are different and focused on re-industrialisation of the US and cheaper energy but not necessarily set on competition with China on green technologies. What scope is there for coordinated EU and UK positions on China and renewable technologies and EVs?

The UK left the EU partly to take back control on the movement of labour. But the UK also needs global talent if it is to boost economic growth. British talent could add to the EU in turn. What kind of relationship on the mobility of talent might the EU and the UK aspire to in the future? Is there scope for mutual recognition of qualifications in different fields, along with mobility? What about mobility for PhDs?

AI and technology cooperation

Geopolitical competition between the US and China on AI and other disruptive technologies intensified with the release of the Deepseek R1 model, showing that China has been able to make innovative strides despite restriction of access to cutting edge GPU semiconductors. That said, Deepseek's innovations also suggest that the route towards truly powerful AI models might be less expensive and more tractable than expected. The UK and EU countries, particularly France, are a long way behind the US and China but still relevant on AI adoption and innovation, along with quantum and other technologies.

Do we need a UK and EU equivalent of the trade and technology council with the US that sought to develop coordinated approaches to technology policies – the trade policies of the future? How can we build resilient and secure supply chains for these critical emerging capabilities? To what extent should Europe and the UK look to combine and coordinate data centre capability and the energy supplies to power them?