# UK and EU summit in London signals thaw as leaders target trade, security, and youth mobility



The atmosphere surrounding the EU and UK bilateral summit in London marks a significant moment in post-Brexit relations. As the two sides gather, officials and analysts are unified in their assessment: the acrimony of the past has notably diminished. Instead, a sense of urgency is pushing both parties towards collaboration, driven by shared geopolitical concerns that surpass previous animosities. From the war in Ukraine to shifting dynamics with major powers like Russia and China, this summit represents a recognition that united efforts are essential in an increasingly volatile global landscape.

Preparations for the summit foreshadow important negotiations, particularly regarding a major food trade agreement, which is anticipated to alleviate many of the trade barriers that have sprouted since the UK left the EU. The proposed veterinary deal aims to ease the movement of food products across borders, potentially streamlining customs processes and reducing costs for consumers. While specific details remain scant, indications suggest that this arrangement could bolster trade by allowing the UK to dynamically align with evolving EU regulations on food safety and animal welfare—an alignment that critics claim compromises Britain's post-Brexit sovereignty.

The political stakes are high for Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who is navigating the intricate terrain between maintaining a robust stance on national independence and fostering beneficial relations with the EU. In discussions with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Starmer has underscored the need for mutual economic growth, employment opportunities, and increased border efficiency, particularly in light of public sentiment that has soured towards Brexit due to economic challenges and a significant drop in international trade performance.

In addition to trade issues, youth mobility has emerged as a key agenda item at the summit. There is a potential for establishing new frameworks that could facilitate travel and work opportunities for younger generations, echoing sentiments for a revival of the Erasmus programme, which many have critically missed since Brexit. However, the nuances of such agreements will require careful consideration to navigate the political landscape, particularly with rising criticism from internal opposition.

Security and defence cooperation is another vital aspect of the discussions, with the UK keen to participate in EU projects aimed at bolstering collective defence capabilities, especially given the pressing need to respond to Russian aggression in Ukraine. The possible financial contributions by the UK to EU policy areas could further complicate negotiations but might also represent a sensible investment in the shared security that an increasingly precarious global order necessitates.

Fishing rights, a contentious issue, are expected to be a focal point of negotiation as well. With the existing agreement set to expire in 2026, leaders from the UK's fishing industry are urging caution against concessions that might allow continued EU access to British waters. Any resolution concerning fisheries could be intricately linked to the wider trade discussions, particularly the proposed veterinary agreement, which could provide benefits to UK fishermen while simultaneously advancing broader trade relations with the EU.

As the summit progresses, there is cautious optimism about the potential for these talks to lay the groundwork for future negotiations. Public trading relationships are at a pivotal juncture, and both leaders and analysts alike are hopeful that the diplomatic efforts undertaken now could herald a new phase in UK-EU relations, fostering stability and cooperation in the face of common challenges. While the road ahead is fraught with complexities—political, economic, and social—the stakes for both parties have never been higher, underscoring a mutual desire to advance dialogue and partnership and move beyond the shadows of Brexit.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: 1
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckg4r54kd8do> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-pm-starmer-agree-deal-strengthen-eu-partnership-his-office-says-2025-05-17/> - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer is set to finalize an agreement with the European Union aimed at strengthening post-Brexit relations and easing trade barriers, particularly for food products. The deal, to be unveiled during a summit in London, is expected to benefit British producers by reducing export difficulties and customs checks, while also helping families by reducing travel delays and expenses. Specific details remain limited, but the initiative is portrayed as a positive step for economic growth, employment, and border efficiency. Additionally, Starmer hinted at the possibility of a youth mobility agreement being included. Public sentiment about Brexit has soured in recent years, attributed to economic challenges and diminished international trade performance, reinforcing the political motivation behind rebuilding EU relations.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/706810a8-1d62-4ac6-85a8-888e036f46e3> - UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer is set to negotiate a major food trade agreement with the EU during a summit in London. The proposed veterinary deal aims to streamline food trade, lower supermarket costs, and reset UK-EU relations. However, the agreement is likely to require the UK to 'dynamically align' with evolving EU regulations on food safety and animal welfare, without having voting rights on the rules. The pact may also include a financial contribution from the UK to support EU policy areas. The deal forms part of a broader initiative that includes a new security and defence partnership. Prime Minister Starmer discussed the agreement with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Albania ahead of the summit. There are political risks involved, especially criticisms from Conservatives accusing the government of surrendering Brexit-won sovereignty. Additionally, the summit may address youth mobility and access for EU students to UK universities. Despite expected concessions, Starmer has emphasized the economic and consumer benefits, asserting the deal will not re-enter the customs union or single market, but will reduce trade friction and improve border efficiency.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/business/forget-trump-uk-deal-with-eu-is-what-matters-klement-2025-05-13/> - The recent U.S.-UK trade deal, which maintains a 10% tariff on most British exports, offers limited benefit for the UK and is overshadowed by the much more consequential potential of a renewed trade and regulatory relationship with the European Union. UK exports to the EU currently outweigh those to the U.S. by a factor of three, and imports from the EU are six times those from the U.S. As the UK and EU prepare for a summit, there is hope for greater integration, particularly through regulatory alignment. Aligning UK regulations with EU standards could boost UK exports by 2.2% to 3.3% and raise GDP by up to 2%. A new UK bill could streamline this alignment without additional legislation. Defence cooperation is also on the table, with the UK aiming to participate in the EU's €800 billion 'Readiness 2030' program, potentially benefiting firms like BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce. While political and financial challenges persist, this renewed cooperation could mark a turning point in EU-UK relations and help mitigate Brexit's economic impacts.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/087f35aa-6d0b-49ec-af6c-9b30b87d787d> - UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer now identifies Nigel Farage's Reform UK as his primary political opponent amid rising support for the party and waning Conservative influence. Starmer believes a major political realignment is underway, referring to the Conservatives under Kemi Badenoch as nearing 'the end of the road.' Public opinion polls confirm this shift, showing Reform UK ahead of both the Conservatives and Labour. Despite mounting criticism from within his party over welfare cuts and his tough rhetoric on migration, Starmer continues to push his agenda. He recently visited Albania to firm up his migration policy ahead of next week's EU-UK summit. Starmer is also proposing 'returns hubs' for failed asylum seekers, though Albania has declined involvement. Farage, capitalizing on record-high small boat crossings and the government's inability to curb illegal migration, has called for a national emergency. Starmer's approval ratings continue to decline sharply, especially among Labour voters, despite his attempts to refocus political debate around migration and economic control. His warnings about the increasing threat from Farage underscore concerns about the efficacy of his strategies and the challenge of converting political messaging into tangible results.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/what-britain-eu-may-discuss-monday-summit-2025-05-16/> - At the upcoming summit in London, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and EU leaders aim to reset relations and explore cooperation in several strategic areas. Key topics on the agenda include establishing a defence and security pact to enhance European collaboration in response to threats like Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The UK may seek access to EU defence projects through the SAFE loan scheme, though agreements may hinge on fisheries negotiations. Discussions may involve a veterinary agreement to streamline border checks for agricultural goods, with the EU pushing for regulatory alignment and judicial oversight. Youth mobility is another priority, with potential for limited travel and work schemes for under-30s, and possible re-entry into Erasmus+. Fisheries and energy trading will be discussed, especially as current agreements expire in 2026. There is also interest in linking the UK and EU carbon markets, which could affect emissions pricing but improve market efficiency. Additional topics may include professional qualification recognition, travel for artists, and data-sharing. The summit is expected to lay groundwork for future negotiations rather than finalize comprehensive deals.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/18283f89-e213-4e17-9edf-8c52123f7527> - As UK-EU negotiations approach a crucial summit in London on Monday, Britain's fishing industry leaders are urging Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to resist EU pressure for long-term access to British waters. Mike Cohen, head of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, emphasized that EU fishermen currently extract £500 million worth of fish annually from UK waters under the post-Brexit agreement set to expire in 2026. The talks aim to resolve disagreements on fisheries, an agrifood trade deal, and a youth mobility scheme. Starmer, optimistic about reaching a favorable agreement, framed the discussions in the context of improving UK international trade relationships, including recent deals with India and the US. However, political tensions remain, with Conservatives accusing Starmer of conceding too much to Brussels. EU negotiators are linking any long-term fisheries agreement to progress on a veterinary deal to facilitate food and animal trade, which would also benefit UK fishermen. The summit is expected to launch a new UK-EU security and defence partnership and possibly signal willingness on a future youth mobility agreement. Final decisions may come from a rare Sunday meeting of EU ambassadors in Brussels.