

One Europe: why Britain belongs, and how to get there

Andrew Duff



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Andrew Duff is an Academic Fellow of the European Policy Centre. He was a Member of the European Parliament (1999-2014), President of the Union of European Federalists (UEF) and President of the Spinelli Group. He tweets [@AndrewDuffEU](#) and [@andrewduffeu.bsky.social](#)

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Executive summary

To secure its future, the European Union must expand its membership and, at the same time, deepen its own defence. The immediate priority is to help Ukraine out of its dire predicament. The return of enlargement, stalled for many years, poses challenges for other European states on the periphery of the Union. Nowhere is the challenge more acute than in the United Kingdom.

The early policy of the current UK Labour government was to “make Brexit work”. This has now been ditched. What will replace it? In this discussion paper we look at the EU’s formal accession process, step by step, and

discuss how a bid for full membership might be handled. We suggest a need for both sides to lay the groundwork through confidence-building measures. There is ample scope for practical collaboration on security and defence, capital markets integration and economic reform to boost Europe’s productivity, as well as migration and asylum. The UK should demonstrate that, if it regains its status as a full member state it would no longer obstruct constitutional reform of the Union. Both sides should aim to settle the question of Britain’s place in Europe for good.

Article 49 and a Commission Opinion

Amid growing speculation about a British bid to rejoin the EU, it is worth taking a closer look at the precise accession process that would unfold were the UK government to trigger Article 49 TEU. It has been nearly 60 years since the UK last made a membership application, under the premiership of Harold Wilson: few helpful tips can be gleaned from back then, a time well before the installation by the EU of eligibility criteria for candidates. More instructive will be lessons drawn, not all of them heartening, from the UK's more recent negotiations to secede from the EU under the terms of Article 50 TEU.

Once the prime minister has notified the EU Council by letter of his wish to join the Union, the Commission will be dispatched to produce a formal Opinion on the British candidacy. This document, turning out to be lengthy, will start with an assessment of the present state of relations between the UK and EU. Inevitably this will refer to the legacy of British membership between 1973 and 2020, including the Withdrawal Agreement of 2020, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement of 2021 (TCA), and the Windsor Framework of 2023. Other subsequent post-Brexit developments already include the UK's recent decisions to rejoin the Horizon and Erasmus + programmes and to align the two carbon emission trading systems. Still to be negotiated are the reintegration of the UK with the EU electricity market, a youth mobility scheme, and the long-promised sanitary and phytosanitary agreement on animal health and food safety.

The Commission's analysis of the latest state of play will likely span the UK's conformity with the EU's political criteria: these insist on the stability of its national institutions to guarantee democracy, the rule of law and human and civil rights, including respect for and protection of minorities. The economic assessment of the Opinion will focus on trade policy, fiscal policy, the stability of the pound sterling, the labour market, financial services and regional imbalances. Here, Britain's former status as a fairly scrupulous member of the EU's internal market will facilitate the Commission's report.

Contrary to the hopes of Brexiteers, the UK's departure has not yet led to wide unbridgeable gaps between the two polities on either side of the Channel. Where divergence has occurred, notably where the UK has struck new international trade agreements, the economic impact has not been more than marginal. In some cases, such as with Mercosur and the new EU India trade agreement, reconnection with the EU's customs union and commercial policy will be of material benefit to the UK. Amid the global instability caused by President Trump's continuing tariff wars, rejoining the EU trade bloc proffers the British safety in numbers.

The Commission Opinion will assume that the UK will be neither seeking nor achieving any substantive opt-outs from the *acquis communautaire*, the body of EU law.

The UK's former exclusion from the duty to adopt the single currency is null and void.¹ Britain will be joining the list of member states 'with a derogation' – those which do not (yet) fulfil the necessary conditions to join the single currency.² Britain need not try to recover its former eurosceptic cop-out from the Charter of Fundamental Rights nor its derogations from EU policy in the field of justice and home affairs.³ Equally redundant are the so-called concessions won by former UK Prime Minister David Cameron as part of his spurious renegotiation of the terms of membership in 2016.⁴

The Commission will be bound to comment on the calculated risk that the UK may seek to rejoin the Union only to leave again. Brexit rendered the EU smaller, weaker and poorer; managing the secession process imposed an enormous bureaucratic and political burden on the EU institutions.

In reviewing the UK's capacity to adopt the obligations of membership, the Commission will seek to expose any points of likely friction and major divergence: if such exist, it will find them. The UK's geographic insularity (with Ireland) will raise familiar issues with respect to the Schengen Area. Fisheries will feature, as they always must. Special issues in the UK's bilateral relations with EU member states will be recorded, notably with Ireland, and with Spain over Gibraltar.

Precedent suggests that the Commission will seek evidence from relevant international bodies as to the advisability of UK EU membership, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe. Non-governmental organisations in Britain and the EU will not be reluctant to share their opinions. Business and trade unions will be certain to express their views on the UK's candidature; in the UK, social partners are already pressing the government to adopt more robust European policies.⁵ The balance of opinion from all these sources is likely to be overwhelmingly favourable to the prospect of Britain's readmission.

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weaker and poorer; managing the secession process imposed an enormous bureaucratic and political burden on the EU institutions. The Commission Opinion will surely recommend that any renewed UK membership be underpinned by a robust bipartisan consensus at home.

It may therefore be drawn to make remarks about the unproportional first-past-the-post system that elects the House of Commons – where, for example, the Labour party in 2024 won over 63% of the seats on less than 34% of the popular vote. It was a regrettable feature of Britain’s previous membership of the Union that when one of the two major parties was in favour of ‘Europe’, the other was against – only to switch sides as they crossed into and out of office.

Nor will the Commission resist the temptation to remark on the totally non-elected nature of the House of Lords, a constitutional situation which, were the UK to be transposed geographically to the Balkans, would be deemed to rule out EU membership. Attention will also be drawn to the delicate, quasi-federal set up of the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and their role in the UK’s decision to join the EU and to sustain membership thereafter.

If the Commission’s Opinion is broadly favourable to UK candidacy, which it will be, the European Parliament will then give its consent to the opening of negotiations, acting by an absolute majority. This vote will be forthcoming: the participation of British MEPs seems broadly to have been missed across the House, even among the right-wing nationalist groups.

The Council, acting unanimously, should then be able to endorse the positive recommendations of the Commission and Parliament. Ministers will set a date for the start of the negotiations and grant a mandate to

the Commission. A screening process will begin across the 35 chapters that comprise the whole dossier of the *acquis*. Each chapter will be open for ‘negotiation’, and in most cases closed without fuss.

In truth, there is very little actual negotiation in the accession process: the important thing is to determine how quickly and easily the candidate can assimilate the EU *acquis*. Only a few questions are left open, such as the size of budgetary contribution, the number of seats in the European Parliament and the nature and duration of any transitional arrangements. Agreement on these last matters will be drafted into the accession treaty.

The final step is for the Commission to deliver a concluding Opinion recommending that membership proceeds. The Council will adopt the formal decision to sign the accession treaty, and that document will be sent for ratification by every member state “in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements”, as well as by the applicant.

The process need not be hurried. Croatia, the last successful entrant, applied to join in February 2003 and eventually made it in July 2013. Montenegro, the current front-runner, made its application as long ago as 2008. In the case of a new application by the United Kingdom, one could expect the technocratic process to be dispatched rather speedily.

The *how* is quite straightforward. The determinant of exactly *when* Britain returns to the EU is, of course, highly political. EU leaders will be wise to pace the progress to ensure that the British application spans two terms of the Westminster parliament, including a general election whose result entrenches the decision to rejoin. (The next election must be held before summer 2029.)

EU ratification of the accession treaty

EU member states will react in various ways to the prospect of the return of the prodigal Brits. Ireland and the littoral countries – Holland, Belgium and France – will be most relieved. Germany and the Baltic and Scandinavian states will welcome the addition of a potentially liberal voice in economic matters that is also a robust contributor to security. Other capitals will be less directly concerned. None will dare object. Expanding Union membership is one of its historic missions, aimed at “creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe”, entrenched first by Jean Monnet in 1951 specifically with Britain in mind.⁶ For any of the 27 to reject the UK now would be both churlish and reckless. For that reason, all member states will proceed to try to ratify the new EU British treaty, mostly via their national parliaments.

A French law, dating from 2005 and aimed against Turkey’s entry to the EU, commits France to holding a referendum on any EU enlargement; an alternative method can be to welcome the newcomer by the high threshold of a three-fifths majority in both chambers of the French parliament.⁷ In the case of a British re-entry, that moment will come after the end of President Emmanuel Macron’s term in May 2027. There is some prospect of his successor at the Elysée being either Marine Le Pen or Jordan Bardella from the nationalist far-right *Rassemblement National*, both of whom could normally be expected to veto every EU advance. Happily, however, if there has been one certain positive consequence of Brexit, it is that no other member state will dare to toy with leaving the Union. For once, French *raison d’état* will coincide with the European interest.

The geopolitical context here is important. The UK will not be the only European state seeking admittance to the Union. We have written extensively on the intriguing symmetry facing the future of Europe between Ukraine to the east and the UK to the west.⁸ Ukraine is clearly the priority. Despite reservations among some member states about a lowering of the standards normally applied to accession candidates, it is probable that Ukraine will have to be brought into the EU in a hurried emergency as part of a 'peace deal' imposed on Kyiv by the collusion of Presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. Such a development would force open the way to accession to other candidates, including Moldova and, in the first instance at least, Albania and Montenegro.

Unnerved by the insecurity provoked by Trump, Iceland is holding a referendum on 29 August about restarting its accession negotiations, suspended since 2013. Norway is also re-assessing its partnership with the EU. A new phase of dynamic European integration in which expanding the membership of the Union becomes the driving force would galvanise opinion in Britain too. Once again, there is safety in numbers: if the EU proves itself to be open and adaptable to new members, what about the Brits?

A second development not unrelated to Trump and Putin is the return of the defence dimension to EU politics. For the first time since the Cold War, serious efforts are being made, especially by Germany and Poland, to rearm. At an institutional level, thought is being put into the question of how to make operational Article 42(7) TEU that provides for mutual military assistance to any member state under attack.⁹

UK ratification of the accession treaty

Back home, Brexit grows persistently more unpopular.¹⁰ Almost nobody now dares talk of "making Brexit work", the slogan of Keir Starmer's Labour party at the time of the general election of 2024. While the hard right wails over any hint of Brexit "betrayal", very few Brexiteers are rash enough still to claim success. Starmer himself hopes vaguely that a "reset" of the relationship with the EU will induce greater economic growth, but he still clings to his fatal "red lines" of no customs union, no single market and no freedom of movement. Few in his own party believe him. Even his Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, now finds that "the biggest prize is clearly with the EU. The truth is economic gravity is reality. ... I strongly believe that Britain's future is inextricably bound with that of Europe's – for economic reasons, but also reasons of security, resilience and defence".¹¹ Fiddling at the edges of Boris Johnson's TCA is proving for the Labour government to be costly, complex, time-consuming and ultimately frustrating.¹²

Negotiating a new customs union agreement with the EU, the policy of the Liberal Democrats, makes good sense, especially for manufacturing industry, and would

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The UK is a strong defender of Ukraine's fight against Russian invasion. Prime Minister Starmer has even taken a lead in corralling, with the French, a 'coalition of the willing' to support Kyiv's struggle. Although the UK's own armed forces are currently too enfeebled to be much use in battle, the political signals are important: the UK still aspires to be a European leader in western security and defence. London has dropped its historic aversion to the EU's development of a common defence policy. As Starmer told the Munich Security Conference in February, he harbours "a vision of European security and greater European autonomy" and accepts the trend towards the Europeanisation of NATO. The UK now leads a Joint Expeditionary Force aimed at bolstering security in the Baltic Sea, the High North and North Atlantic. Britain retains its expertise in security and military intelligence, as it does its permanent seat on the UN Security Council and its leadership of the Commonwealth.

be welcomed by the EU. Yet Brussels remains opposed to accommodating a Britain that wishes to freeload and cherry-pick off the fruits of the internal market. Wider dynamic alignment with EU rules is incapable of being delivered unless the UK accepts the principle of freedom of movement and agrees to make some substantial budgetary contributions to the EU. Unlocking the European internal market in goods, services, capital and labour is the key to the country's economic revival. The latest respected estimates suggest that Brexit shrunk the size of the UK economy by 6-8%; investment is lower by 12-18%; productivity is down by 3-4%.¹³ Self-evidently, reversing economic decline means reversing Brexit.

Some British politicians hanker after a half-way house in which the UK could muddle on enjoying most of the benefits it once had as a member state but with fewer costs and obligations. But all existing models of EU partial membership are to a degree unsatisfactory for the UK. Nor, beyond the customs union, are they readily on offer from Brussels. The EU will not entertain another delicate Swiss-type agreement with Britain (which in any case includes freedom of movement); the European Economic

Area agreement with Norway and Iceland is way out of date; and other forms of association agreement, such as that with Ukraine, are designed for countries poorer and less secure than Britain which actively seek closer integration in preparation for full membership.

As evidenced in the immediate post-referendum period, no form of associate membership in which blind acceptance of EU regulations, in whose say the UK would have no vote, would seem to be appropriate for the British economy or acceptable to the British parliament. The economic argument stacks up: membership would improve the terms of trade, secure supply lines, encourage investment, enhance science and technology, boost employment and productivity, and lower the costs of borrowing. Rejoining the Union would put British ministers, officials and MEPs back in the rooms where decisions on standards and regulations are made in Brussels and Strasbourg. British judges would be welcomed back to the EU Courts in Luxembourg. And British citizens would regain the status of EU citizenship, easing travel restrictions and widening life opportunities.

Compounding the economic logic for full EU membership is the case, now overwhelming, for closer political cooperation in the interest of mutual security and common defence. Here, at last, is an argument that Starmer seems to be comfortable with. His government already has more than enough material it needs to begin to make a convincing justification for triggering Article 49.

And there is a potentially large majority in the House of Commons, and for that matter in the House of Lords, behind a decision by the government to make a new membership application. The obvious mechanism would be a meaningful vote on a White Paper that spelled out the whole argument. Such a White Paper would be the key reference point for the elaboration of the Commission's Opinion.

In a Commons vote, most Labour MPs would swing with relief behind their otherwise beleaguered prime minister. The Liberal Democrats (72 MPs) would back the initiative, as would the Scottish Nationalists (9), Greens (5), and Plaid Cymru (4), as well as at least three from Northern Ireland, and one or two assorted Independents. And the

Conservative Opposition (116) would split. There is a quiet rump of Remainer Tory MPs, such as former Foreign Secretary and Chancellor Jeremy Hunt, who could hardly contemplate alignment with the anti-European far right if instructed to do so by the Tory leader, Kemi Badenoch. One recalls that the decisive vote to back Edward Heath's accession bid in October 1971 was won when 69 Labour MPs, led by Roy Jenkins, crossed the floor: the time has come to return the compliment.

A referendum is a risky and rancorous device, particularly in a Britain without constitutional rules to govern their use. The electorate at least deserves to be served up a serious proposition on which to divide itself.

The Tory far right and Nigel Farage's Reform party will struggle to make their case at Westminster; they will instead be preparing to stir up nationalism and xenophobia across the country. They know that it is practically impossible for any government to take the UK back into the EU without putting that decision to another referendum.

The last referendum in 2016 was held on a prime ministerial whim, which backfired, and, as it turns out, settled nothing for the long term. Next time, the referendum should be called only to endorse a properly considered act of parliament that ratifies an accession treaty, when all the facts are known. A referendum is a risky and rancorous device, particularly in a Britain without constitutional rules to govern their use. The electorate at least deserves to be served up a serious proposition on which to divide itself. A sense of durable settlement will be important. EU membership will only work well if a solid majority of the British people feel they can truly belong in a united Europe.

Building confidence

An open question remains, therefore, over how best make the case for ending Brexit to the UK electorate. Security and defence may offer a more politically persuasive route than economic argument alone. The emergence of the EU as a military power to be reckoned with will do the prospect of British membership no harm. A successful EU operation to help secure Ukraine's survival would be popular.

A valuable confidence building measure, therefore, would be to **involve the UK in a new treaty of**

European security and defence. This would be an intergovernmental treaty open for signature, now that Viktor Orbán has left us, to all 27 member states of the EU and the EU institutions, plus the UK, Ukraine, Iceland, Norway and Canada.

The treaty's main stated goal would be to operationalise Article 42(7), including by establishing a European military headquarters capable, where necessary, of assuming the joint command and control system of NATO. The treaty would establish a governance mechanism to

direct and promote joint arms procurement, thereby bypassing the fragmentation reinforced by Article 346 TFEU, which exempts the arms industry from the normal public procurement requirements of the single market. The aim would be to rationalise national defence investment programmes by identifying and closing capability gaps, including in cyber warfare.

The new treaty would seek to go further than the EU's limited provisions for Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence (PESCO).¹⁴ A European security council established under its remit may even formulate a collective European response to the US National Security Strategy, issued to great alarm in November 2025. Like the Schengen Agreement, the treaty would commit to integrate its functions into the EU treaties proper when circumstances permit.

A second viable area of collaboration between the UK and EU before any future accession would be **capital markets integration**. This has long been a frustrated ambition of the Commission and was strongly supported by the recent Draghi and Letta reports on EU productivity and competitiveness. At present, the fragmented state of the EU's capital markets inhibits their growth and raises transaction costs, especially for SMEs. The City of London remains Europe's largest pool of liquidity and financial services, and its resources and assets are badly needed to bolster the effort to break down barriers to the single market in savings and investment. Switzerland should be another participant in such a transnational initiative.

Even outside the economic and monetary union, the UK could show it is willing to contribute to the completion of one of the EU's central pillars: **the banking union**, a task that was left unfinished at the time of Brexit.¹⁵ On the cusp of the AI revolution, where ramping up investment in innovation is critical, Europe should delay no longer — and Britain could play a leading role if it chooses to do so.

Likewise, the UK and the EU now find themselves in much closer agreement than previously over **the broader**

economic agenda. The von der Leyen Commission has spawned a programme designed to reinvigorate and complete the single market. A central element of the latest 'One Europe, One Market Roadmap' is simplification of the EU's often laborious and over-complicated rules.¹⁶ The UK should embrace this reform agenda: simplifying single market rules, removing more barriers to intra-EU trade, reducing energy prices, advancing decarbonisation and driving the AI and digital transformation.

Under Margaret Thatcher, the UK was instrumental in building the EU's internal market. Her successors should reclaim that leading role.

Given the sensitivity in Britain about the trafficking of migrants in small boats across the Channel, the EU's **new asylum and migration pact** should bring reassurance. After years of doubt, in 2026 the EU has finally put in place a system that combines tougher external border controls for irregular migrants with burden sharing for asylum seekers and better legal routes for the immigrant workers the European economy needs. With membership, the UK would play a critical role in making the new system effective, rejoining Frontex and Europol.¹⁷

Britain's application to rejoin the EU should be designed to give its former and future partners a clear idea of what kind of member state it intends to become. Under Margaret Thatcher, the UK was instrumental in building the EU's internal market. Her successors should reclaim that leading role.

The constitutional question

Whether the UK or Ukraine is first to cross the EU's membership line — perhaps they will do it together — nobody should underestimate the impact such enlargement will have on the Union's constitutional development. It is humdrum to argue that the EU must not expand its membership without undertaking radical reform of its system of government. But neither of these processes has been taking place: enlargement has stalled since 2013 and the EU's institutions have rejected reform ever since the Treaty of Lisbon came into force in 2009. Chief among the hypocrites is the European Council, where a whole generation of national leaders has come and gone refusing to pursue the logic of pooling national sovereignty in the Union and investing in its success.

Great opportunities to reform have been missed: the financial and sovereign debt crisis, which almost scuppered the euro, could have led to the creation of a genuine fiscal union; the immigration crisis called out for an effective, enforceable common asylum and immigration policy; Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 should have sparked a revival of common European defence; overcoming the effects of the pandemic was the perfect time to launch genuine EU supranational eurobonds backed by a reformed EU budget; even Brexit might have spawned, but didn't, a rigorous self-examination of what was not working well in Brussels.

These failing years have seen the stresses and strains of a polity destined to become a federal union still struggling to emerge from the chrysalis of a confederal system. The institutions are half-formed: the European Central Bank is not a bank of last resort; the European Court of Justice is not a federal supreme court; the executive Commission is not a proper government; the European Parliament remains in thrall to national political parties, many of them eurosceptic. The European Council and Council of ministers still seem trapped by the defeat of the constitutional treaty in 2005; weak governments, battling unpopularity back home, cling to national vetoes in defiance of all common sense and to the detriment of Union efficacy.

In this litany of failure, the UK has played more than its fair part. So the question of what kind of member state it will be the second time around is a deeply serious one which any ostensibly 'pro-European' government needs to answer. The time for Britain to prepare for renewed membership is now.¹⁸ It has taken the hostility of Trump and Putin to shake the EU out of its political torpor. The beneficent transatlantic alliance is no more. Europe must act by and for itself. Will the British be willing participants in this effort or curious bystanders?

We can be sure that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, should he become a full member of the European Council, will push for greater integration. What about Keir Starmer – or, more likely, his successor? There is no point in the UK joining an organisation which is not working well. Equally, it can hardly be in the interests of the Union if the new British are to behave in the same irritating way as the old British when it comes to reforming the EU constitution in a federal direction.

The EU itself needs to address these issues more squarely. In September 2023, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen promised MEPs that she would issue a number of '**pre-enlargement**' papers that reviewed the common policies and the operational system of the Union in the

light of taking in new member states. These papers have yet to emerge; such a long gestation period suggests the Commission's eventual contribution to the debate will be either very good or very bad.

Meanwhile the EU is running headfirst into a battle over the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) intended to set EU spending from 2028-2035. Every seven years these tortuous budgetary negotiations end with exhaustion, and everyone swears "never again!" – before going on to block institutional reform. An early indication of von der Leyen's resolve will be if she urges the European Council to trigger Article 312(2) TFEU. That change would see the Council drop unanimity in favour of a **qualified majority vote for the adoption of the new MFF regulation**.

Another welcome signal would be for the European Council, cloth-eared on constitutional matters, to replace its simplistic discussions about removing the veto on foreign policy – in effect, the most sensitive area of national sovereignty – with a more sophisticated review of what needs to be done to speed up internal decision-making. Leaders could be well served in this reflection by an **independent (that is, non-institutional) group of experts**. Key to any EU treaty amendment would be to lift the national veto on the use of the general passerelle clause (Article 48(7) TEU).¹⁹ The European Parliament also needs to become more agile; encouragingly, a recent report on the impact of enlargement, led by MEP Sandro Gozi, sets out some useful proposals for constitutional reform.²⁰

Nobody need underestimate how difficult it is for the EU to undertake radical reform of its own system of governance. That is why many favour advance across a more limited field by smaller groups of like-minded member states.²¹ Britain's return to full membership would be much facilitated if, at an early stage, its government were to throw its weight behind the reformers and abandon its previous eurosceptic stance.

It's Britain's choice

In Britain, the campaign to rejoin continues to build, with Neil Kinnock, the former Labour leader and Vice-President of the EU Commission, prominent among its supporters.²² Keir Starmer is evidently sincere when says he wants Britain back "at the heart of Europe". But it is impossible to square that sentiment with continuing attachment to his eurosceptic red lines. The prime minister cannot bring himself to take the big decision to halt the country's economic decline and heal social divisions by addressing the central predicament of post-Brexit Britain.

The local and regional elections on 7 May badly wounded the prime minister. Labour lost many votes to the Greens, who want to rejoin the EU, while the Conservatives lost

votes to Farage's Reform UK. Starmer is under heavy pressure to resign. A Labour leadership contest would be electrified by controversy over renewed EU membership.

Another EU-UK bilateral summit meeting is foreseen for the summer. That would be the place for Starmer, or a more purposeful successor, to announce a plan to reverse Brexit. Endless British dithering on the edges of Europe will soon become very damaging, especially as Trump's war in the Middle East and Putin's war in Ukraine show no sign of ending. If Britain truly belongs in a liberal democratic and united Europe, it must make up its mind shortly about how it means to get there – and stay.

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- ¹ Protocol No. 15 on certain provisions relating to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
- ² Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 139.
- ³ Protocol No. 20 on the application of certain aspects of Article 26 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to the United Kingdom and to Ireland; European Union, Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice.
- ⁴ European Council, "[Letter by President Donald Tusk to the members of the European Council on his proposal for a new settlement for the United Kingdom within the European Union](#)", 2 February 2016.
- ⁵ Best for Britain, "[EU membership vital for UK economic security, business leaders urge](#)".
- ⁶ Treaty on European Union, Article 1.
- ⁷ Macek, Lukas (2026), [The French referendum on EU accession: a ticking time bomb that needs defusing](#), Paris: Institut Jacques Delors.
- ⁸ See, for example, Duff, Andrew (2026), [Unlocking enlargement and building common defence: next steps for the European Union](#), Brussels: European Policy Centre; and Duff, Andrew (2025), [Ukraine and the United Kingdom: how the EU should address the challenge of enlargement to the east and west](#), Brussels: European Policy Centre
- ⁹ European Council, "[Informal meeting of heads of state or government, 23–24 April 2026](#)", 24 April 2026.
- ¹⁰ What UK Thinks: EU, "[Post-Brexit poll of polls](#)"; National Centre for Social Research.
- ¹¹ McKiernan, Jennifer, "[Reeves argues for deeper trade partnership with EU](#)", *BBC*, 11 February 2026.
- ¹² Of the voluminous running commentary on Brexit, see especially: <https://chrisgreymbrexitblog.blogspot.com/2026/05/>.
- ¹³ UK in a Changing Europe, "[Brexit's impact on the UK economy](#)", December 2025.
- ¹⁴ Blockmans, Steven and Meijer, Karste, "[Pioneers Wanted](#)", *Verfassungsblog*, 28 April 2026.
- ¹⁵ European Commission, "[Capital markets union](#)", Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.
- ¹⁶ Council of the European Union, "[European institutions agree roadmap to achieve 'One Europe, One Market' by end of 2027](#)", press release, 24 April 2026.
- ¹⁷ European Commission, [Migration and asylum](#).
- ¹⁸ It may prove to have been a mistake for the Starmer government not to have had the courage to set up a Royal Commission on the future of UK European policy, as I first suggested here: Duff, Andrew, "[The Case for a Royal Commission on Britain and Europe](#)", *Verfassungsblog*, 22 August 2025.
- ¹⁹ For example, as I have recommended here: Duff, Andrew (2023), "[Five Surgical Strikes on the Treaties of the European Union](#)", *European Papers*, Volume 8, 2023, Number 1, pp. 9-17.
- ²⁰ European Parliament (2025), [European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2025 on the institutional consequences of the EU enlargement negotiations](#), Strasbourg, P10_TA(2025)0247, 2025/2041(INI).
- ²¹ Emmanouilidis, Janis A. et al (2025), [A Test of Times: Permacchange through enlargement and EU reform](#), Brussels: European Policy Centre.
- ²² Nixon, Simon, "[The Overwhelming Case for Rejoin](#)," *Substack: Wealth of Nations blog*, 2 May 2026.

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