



A new start for UK-EU relations under Labour government

The election of a Labour government, led by Sir Keir Starmer, presents an opportunity to reset and strengthen the UK's relations with the European Union. A new essay '[Where might UK-EU relations be under a Labour government?](#)' by John Peet argues that to seize this opportunity, the UK must address the domestic causes of Brexit and present a compelling offer to an EU that has moved forward in its absence.

The piece identifies four key reasons why most voters supported Brexit in 2016. These are:

1. When Winston Churchill said "We must build a kind of United States of Europe" in 1946, he never imagined the Union to include Britain. This has shaped the negative view through which the European project is seen in the UK
2. The historical and widespread belief across the political spectrum that Europe would always be a zero-sum game of winners and losers.
3. A general lack of knowledge and understanding of the entire European project and how it operates.
4. Strong anti-EU sentiment in many British tabloids.

These underlying reasons will all have to be addressed to secure a long-term future for closer UK-EU relations.

A different challenge is that many in the EU now see Brexit as largely done and dusted and have no desire to embark on large-scale renegotiation. The EU has a reputation for being a tough negotiator when it comes to trade. It is almost always the bigger partner in such negotiations and when it comes to any talks with third countries, the EU will always look to its own interests.

But changes since 2016 Europe could open up new chances for the UK to start looking for a more congenial position in Europe. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine the need for a stronger European defence has become clear – and many Labour voters want to see closer relations with the EU. While Brexit was hardly mentioned in Labour's manifesto, the party has correctly recognised that the place to start in forging closer relations with the EU is in foreign policy, defence and security.

To improve UK-EU relations, the Labour government must also push harder for improvements in the current Brexit deal, educate its own MPs and the wider public about the EU, and build closer links with sister parties. This will take time, but doing so would put Britain on the path of significantly closer integration with the EU than we have today.

Notes for editors:

For further information on the new research and to request an interview with John Peet [@JohnGPeet](https://twitter.com/JohnGPeet), please contact Octavia Hughes in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or +44 (0) 20 7233 1199.

The Centre for European Reform is a think-tank devoted to making the EU work better and strengthening its role in the world. The CER is pro-European but not uncritical.

Follow us on X: [@CER_EU](https://twitter.com/CER_EU) on BlueSky: [@centreeuropeanref.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/centreeuropeanref.bsky.social) on Threads: [@cer_eu](https://www.threads.net/@cer_eu)