



| BertelsmannStiftung

Centre for British Studies  
Großbritannien-Zentrum



## The UK in Europe

### Prospects of resetting relations with the EU and bilateral partnerships

**Berlin, 26-28 June 2025**

Joint conference by  
Bertelsmann Stiftung  
German Association for British Studies (AGF)  
Centre for British Studies (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

#### Call for Papers

The UK's decision to withdraw from Europe's political and economic center coincided with an intensification of geopolitics and systemic rivalries in international relations, potentially launching a new era of fragmentation and protectionism that will revolve around security and resilience. For the EU, Brexit has meant the loss of a politically, diplomatically and economically resourceful security actor, just as Brussels and key member states face new pressures to defend liberal values in a threatening international environment. For the UK, Brexit has resulted in an ambivalent and uncertain position between rivalling superpowers, with limited political and economic links to the EU's economic weight and resources-system. The result is a troubling rift between two core members of the political West at a time when European unity is more relevant than ever. While the EU seeks enhance its links to the UK in the areas of energy, security, resilience and people-to-people contacts, the recently elected Labour Government has pledged to reset the UK's relations with its European neighbours – yet without returning to the Single Market, re-entering the Customs Union or returning to Freedom of Movement. Rather, Keir Starmer seeks to foster cooperation on security, defence, illegal immigration, terrorism and organised crime, and to increase the UK's international clout by deploying its soft power and cultural assets.

Trump's victory in the US raises the stakes of European unity by further splitting the Western world. The withdrawal of US security guarantees for Europe, likely US confrontation with China on matters of

trade and security, and a general lack of predictability on Ukraine accelerate the need for a common European approach, showing up more sharply than ever the need for new answers on where the UK belongs in the new European framework. The UK's reset points to a pro-European course, but Labour's cautious approach vis-à-vis the EU has resulted in an equally cautious response from Brussels. US overtures to the UK, not least to divide the EU, further complicate the UK's European reset, tempting Westminster to chart an unsustainable transatlantic course.

Beyond the prospect of closer relations with the EU, the UK has fostered bilateral cooperation with countries, such as France, Ireland, and Poland, including a British-German defence agreement. In August 2024, Starmer and Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a bilateral cooperation treaty covering peace and security, law enforcement, irregular migration, energy security, climate and nature policy, development policy, transport and infrastructure, research and innovation as well as people-to-people contacts, education and cultural exchange.

The joint conference of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the Association for British Studies and the Centre for British Studies brings together policy-makers, political scientists and think tankers to discuss the UK's new role in a rapidly changing European framework, covering the resetting of relations between the UK, the EU, Germany and beyond. It presents topical insights and different perspectives to improve our understanding of the multilateral and bilateral links, strategic partnerships and networks that define these relations. For this purpose, we invite papers that focus on the multitude of dimensions that underpin the UK's role as a European security actor, including

- Foreign policy and security cooperation
- Economic and trade
- Energy and environmental policy
- Immigration, asylum policy and law enforcement
- Mobility, higher education and culture

Please send an abstract (maximum 300 words and 5 keywords) by 7 March 2025 to [marius.guderjan@fu-berlin.de](mailto:marius.guderjan@fu-berlin.de)

Due to budget limitations, please also indicate whether you require financial support or whether you have access to funding to cover your travel expenses.

We also encourage early career researchers to submit an abstract for this conference. If you are currently working on your PhD thesis or you completed your PhD in 2024/25, we will provide funding to cover your expenses.

We are looking forward to an exciting event and stimulating discussions.

### **The organising team**

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