



## **The UK Election 2024 and UK Foreign Policy on Rebuilding UK-EU Relations**

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### **UK Internal Political Situation and External Relations 2010-2024**

Following the decisive elections held on July 04, 2024, the Labour Party came to power ending fourteen year long Conservative rule in the UK. With the Labour Party's landslide election victory, the UK's political landscape will undergo significant changes in internal and external matters.

The Conservative Party's fourteen-year rule was a challenging period. The controversies on migration, the economy, the Brexit process, and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic pushed the governing Conservative Party into a severe crisis. The Brexit process commenced in 2018 and ended in 2020 under the Conservative government, fractured the political and economic ties with the UK and its EU neighbors which contributed towards political instability in the country. The Conservative Party, from 2016 to 2024 had four prime ministers: Teresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak. Liz Truss became the shortest serving Prime Minister in the UK, which lasted only 45 days. Rishi Sunak took over in October 2022 and hold the office nearly twenty months as the Prime Minister. Sunak pledged to reduce the inflation, grow the economy, reduce government debt, cut NHS waiting lists, and stop illegal immigrants coming to the UK in small boats across the Channel (BBC, 2024). However, Sunak and his government failed to address these issues properly which disappointed the people. It clearly depicted the local government election held in May 2023 where the Conservative Party lost many seats. Prime Minister Sunak called an early election after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) upgraded growth forecasts and reduced inflation in the UK. Further the Labour government was able to control the migration with newly introduced reforms. A key adviser to the Prime Minister Sunak stated that reason for calling an early election.

We've got a solid foundation to say that things are going in the right direction, and the view was that now was the best time to go to the country and say 'here's what we've done, our plan is working, now who do you think has the plan and the capacity to take the bold action to move this country forwards towards a more secure future (McGee, 2024).

## UK Election-2024

It can be said that the 2024 UK election changed the entire political atmosphere. The Labour Party entered the election campaign by presenting programmes for the burning crises in the UK. Keir Starmer led Labour Party launched its election campaign under the slogan of “Change”. The campaign brought three changes to the existing policy/governing structures which caught the attention of the public. As the Labour Party election manifesto states:

Firstly, we stop the chaos, mainly with the aim of political and economic stability, second: because it's time to change, and third: because we have a long - term plan to rebuild Britain. A plan that is ready to go fully costed and fully funded (Labour Party Manifesto, 2024).

Labour party pledged to deal with key internal matters such as economic stability, reducing NHS waiting times, launching a new Border Security Command, energy security, cracking down on anti-social behavior and recruiting 6500 new teachers (Labour Party Manifesto, 2024).

The election results show that the people have given a clear mandate for the Labour Party and its suggested programme. In the 2019 General Elections, the Labour Party had secured 202 seats out of 650 seats in the House of Commons; but in the 2024 elections they received 412 seats sealing the election victory (Cracknell, Richard and Carl Baker. 2024)

The ruling Conservative Party came up with the slogan of “Clear Plan, Bold Action, Secure Future” by focusing on economic development, welfare reforms, national and global security, and illegal migration (Conservative Party election Manifesto). However, the election results showed that people were looking for a change. In 2019 election, the Conservative Party won 365 seats and formed the government; yet in 2024 they were only able to secure 121 seats in the House of Commons. The 2024 elections results were the lowest number of seats that the Conservative Party received in the House of Commons since 1832 (Cracknell, Richard and Carl Baker, 2024: 06). Twelve Senior Tory leaders lost their seats in the election including the leader of the Lower House Parliament Penny Mordaunt and Defence Minister Grant Shapps. The Liberal Democratic Party won eleven seats in the 2019 election, yet this time the number of seats they received increased up to seventy-two seats. Nigel Farage’s right wing populist party, the Reform UK party won its first five seats in the House of Commons. The Scottish National Party’s (SNP) number of seats dropped from 48 seats to nine seats in 2024 election. The Labour Party won thirty-seven seats in Scotland which questions the Scottish independence campaign. The former IRA political wing, Sinn Fein has become the largest Northern Irish party in the House of Commons winning seven seats out of eighteen seats (Cracknell, Richard and Carl Baker, 2024: 07). The Democratic Unionist Party gained five seats in the Northern Ireland (Cracknell, Richard and Carl Baker, 2024: 07).

With the election victory, the Labour government will build relations with the European Union (EU) and there are the key areas that the UK and the EU focus on rebuilding the fractured relations in the post-Brexit era.

## UK – EU Relations

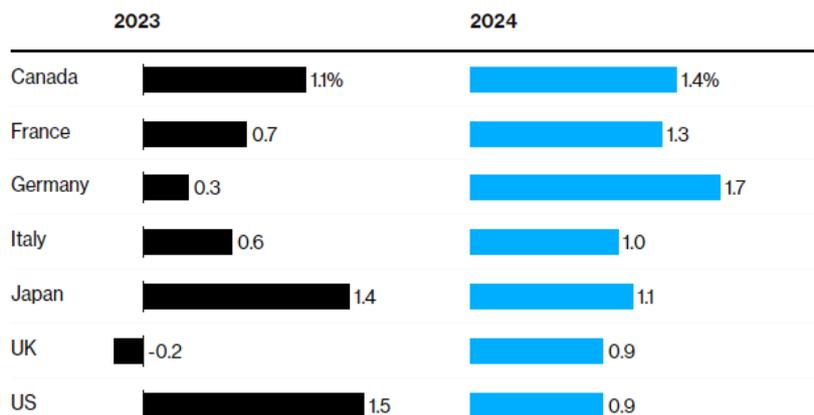
It is challenging but important to build the ties with the EU in terms of economic, political and security matters. The UK cannot be isolated and solve disputes its experiencing. They must set out a proper plan to reach the EU to make its election promises a success. The newly elected Labour government appointed Nike Thoms-Symonds as the UK-EU Relations Minister to play the main role of this important matter showing a clear signal that the UK’s concerns to build ties with Brussels. The first step would be building trust between both parties and putting the foundation to clear the paths in the areas that they are going to focus on, without hurting the interests of the rest of the EU member states.

We will reset the relationship and seek to deepen ties with our European friends, neighbors and allies. That does not mean reopening the divisions of the past. There will be no return to the single market, the customs union, or freedom of movement. Instead, Labour will work to improve the UK’s trade and investment relationship with the EU, by tearing down unnecessary barriers to trade (Labour Party Election Manifesto, 117, 118).

After 52% of British voted to leave the European Union (EU) in the Brexit vote, the UK has been seeking alternative avenues to re-build the EU-UK relations. The data show that the severe declining in the UK’s economy. For instance, between 2019Q1 and 2022Q1 the UK’s real GDP grew by 0.87% (Jun Du, Emine Beyza Satoglu and Oleksandr Shepotylo). In terms of the impact of Brexit on the variety of traded products, the estimated loss of 20-42% of product varieties in UK’s export basket over the 15 months since the start of 2021 (Shepotylo, and Jun Du 2023). The trade war among China, USA and the EU deepens the economic crisis further.

### The UK Will be the Worst Performing G7 Economy Over 2023 and 2024, According to the OECD

GDP growth



Source: OECD, from Donaldson, 2023

The UK has taken many steps in the post-Brexit era to recover the economy and build ties with the EU countries. The UK’s Brexit transition period ended in 2020, and a new framework was set to ensure the UK and EU trade activities. The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), a tariff and quota free trade agreement came into force in 2021 to fill the trade gap created by Brexit. The TCA covers many areas such as environmental protection, climate

change and carbon pricing, social and labour rights, tax transparency. However, the impact of TCA was not sufficient to overcome the damages caused by Brexit. In that context, it is a tough process for the UK government to re-build the relations. Further, the TCA will go through a review process until 2025. This is one of the main challenges ahead that the Labour government must deal with and make sure that they use the platforms to strengthen the trade and other relations with the EU

### **Northern Ireland and UK-EU Relations**

Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and the UK had the same trade rules before Brexit. When the UK left the EU, a new set of rules have to be set up to continue trade between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. The Northern Ireland Protocol came into force in January 2021, which introduced new checks on goods from Great Britain at Northern Ireland ports. However, it was refused by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Later, the UK and EU amended the Protocol and introduced Windsor Framework in 2023.

The former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's *Windsor Framework*, a legal mechanism between the EU and UK, which attempts to enhance relations with the UK and EU. The framework covers three areas.

1. Restoring the smooth flow of trade within the UK internal market by removing burdens that have disrupted East-West trade.
2. Safeguard Northern Ireland Place in the Union
3. Addressing the democratic deficit that was otherwise at the heart of the original Northern Ireland protect.

The Northern Ireland Assembly will hold a "democratic Consent vote" on the continued application of the part of the Windsor Framework which applies EU goods regulations in Northern Ireland. The Labour government must carry out Windsor Framework to wider areas to resetting the UK- EU relations.

### **The European Political Community (EPC)**

In 2022 when the Russia-Ukraine war started the French President Immanuel Macron proposed to establish an informal platform to discuss the contemporary challenges faced by the countries in Europe. The European Political Community (EPC) was introduced in 2022, consisting of 47 European countries. Further, the presidents of the European Council, the European Commission, and the European Parliament also take part in the discussions of the EPC. Initially, the UK was unwilling to cooperate in the process, yet the EPC agreed to provide a flexible platform for the UK where they can participate for the selected areas (Wachowiak, Jannike and Peter Jurkovic. 2024). The EPC offers the UK an avenue to engage with EU partners, and others, without being bound by new institutional obligations.

In the first Summit of the EPC, the UK agreed to re-start the North Seas Energy Cooperation (NSEC). The group consists with eight EU countries and with Norway. In the second summit, the UK agreed to join the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which focuses more on security matters.

After taking oaths as the Prime Minister, Keir Starmer hosted the fourth summit of the EPC and had an opportunity to meet Leaders from the EU member states. The Labour government can use this platform to re-build ties with the EU countries, particularly on re-building security

relations with the EU. The ongoing Ukraine conflict and migration are key reasons that the UK's concern to strength the security deals with the EU. However, this security agreement should not harm the relationship between the EU and NATO.

### **UK-Germany Bilateral Ties – Brexit Reset?**

The UK Prime Minister's official visit to Germany is a part of reset ties with EU member countries. Both leaders, the UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz agreed to improve bilateral relations and agreed to sign a treaty in 2025. The treaty will cover defence, energy security, science and technology (Morton, 2024). Prime minister Starmer stated that "strengthening our relationship with these countries is crucial, not only in tackling the global problem of illegal migration, but also in boosting economic growth across the continent and crucially in the UK – one of the key missions of my government" (Walker, Peter, Lisa O'Carroll and Kiran Stacey, 2024). Germany is the most powerful economy in the EU. It has Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 4.121 billion Euros in 2023, and it is the third-largest economy in the world after the United States and China (Economic Key Facts Germany, KPMG, 2024). By improving partnerships in many areas both countries can fix the broken relationship and achieve political and economic benefits. Mainly it will benefit the UK to recover its fragile economy. As a member of the EU, Germany has restrictions to entre to a trade agreement with the UK, therefore, it will not mean reversing Brexit. However, both countries face common problems such as migration and security concerns after Russia-Ukraine war. In that context, UK and Germany can address these issues with new treaty.

### **Conclusions**

After Brexit, the UK is seeking avenues to re-build its political and economic relations with the EU. The Labour Party received a clear mandate through election and people have approved their plan/programme on building by-lateral and multi-lateral relations with the EU countries. It would provide a platform for both parties to discuss various matters in the political, economic and security sectors. It is very clear that the Labour government is not going to re-enter the EU single market and freedom of movement. The Labour party has pledged to implement the Brexit plan properly. In that context, they must explore alternative paths to build ties with the EU.

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