

EU-UK Relations

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Last updated: 25 May 2026

TCA Review (2026 Scheduled Review)

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement's five-year review clause is active in 2026. Key points of renegotiation:

Auto tariffs cliff edge

- From January 2027, stricter rules of origin for EVs take effect — batteries/components sourced from outside UK/EU will attract 10% tariffs
- UK and EU scrambling for a "technical workaround" to soften the impact (Politico, March 2026)
- Major automakers on both sides face significant cost exposure

Fisheries

- The most contentious issue. Annual quota negotiations remain tense
- France has played hardball — Macron linking fishing access to the wider reset (Politico, May 2025)
- UK position: maintaining larger share post-Brexit. EU position: linking fishing access to other concessions

SPS checks

- Veterinary/SPS agreement talks ongoing but not yet concluded
- Labour has signalled willingness to negotiate a bilateral SPS deal to reduce border friction — a key ask from UK food and farming sector

CBAM alignment

- UK has introduced its own Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
 - Discussions ongoing about alignment or mutual recognition with the EU CBAM
 - No formal agreement yet
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Windsor Framework Implementation

Current status: The Framework is now largely bedded in operationally:

- "Not for EU" labelling now visible in Northern Ireland supermarkets (Asda first major retailer to implement)
- Green/red lane system for GB-NI goods movement operational
- Parcel delivery scheme opened for GB-NI consumer goods
- Stormont brake mechanism remains unused but exists as a safety valve

Northern Ireland political stability:

- Power-sharing at Stormont has held but tensions persist
- DUP returned to Executive after Windsor Framework deal, but hardline unionist sentiment remains
- No major political crisis as of May 2026 — the framework has removed the immediate trigger for collapse

Further tweaks needed: The Framework is broadly stable but business groups continue to report friction on GB-NI agri-food movements. Some unionist figures argue the brake is insufficient.

Labour Government's Approach (Starmer's Reset)

Starmer's EU reset strategy described as "ruthlessly pragmatic" (BBC, April 2026). He has repeatedly said the reset "does not mean reversing Brexit" but pursuing closer sectoral cooperation.

Defence/Security Pact (May 2026)

The flagship deliverable of the reset. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas stated "fishing shouldn't block a defence pact" (BBC, May 2025 — still live into 2026). A UK-EU security treaty is being negotiated covering military mobility, joint procurement, and intelligence sharing.

Youth Mobility Scheme

- Starmer has signalled openness to including youth mobility as part of the deal
- EU has demanded this as a condition (Politico, Dec 2024 — "Fish, the court and youth access: EU's demands")
- Labour internally divided — TUC chief Paul Nowak urged Starmer not to rule out mobility measures (Politico, May 2025)

Veterinary/SPS Agreement

- Talks ongoing. Seen as "low-hanging fruit" for reducing trade friction without reopening Brexit
- Would reduce border checks on agri-food products

Financial Services Equivalence

- Being pursued on a piecemeal basis
- UK seeking greater equivalence decisions from the EU
- Memorandum of Understanding on financial services regulatory cooperation in place

Horizon/Copernicus Re-entry

- Completed under early Labour government (2024-25)
- UK re-associated with Horizon Europe and Copernicus programmes
- Now operational with UK researchers able to bid for grants

Political Headwinds

- **Labour local election losses (May 2026):** Politico reported "Labour losses rattle EU reset" (11 May 2026)
- **Reform UK gains** under Farage have created political pressure on the reset
- **Labour leadership contest** speculation (Streetering, Burnham) has put Brexit back under political spotlight (BBC, 17 May 2026)
- **Makerfield by-election** being framed as a proxy battle on EU relations

Public Opinion Shift

- Polling consistently shows majority public support for closer UK-EU relations

- David Miliband argued UK needs "national consensus" over rejoining EU (Guardian, 23 May 2026) — reflecting new political acceptability of pro-EU discourse
 - Starmer stated Brexit "significantly" hurt British economy (Politico, Dec 2025) — a landmark admission from a sitting PM
 - EU Parliament President Metsola called for "exorcism" of ghosts in UK-EU ties (Politico, Feb 2026)
 - UK seeking closer EU ties driven by Trump/Iran war context and strained UK-US relations
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Other Notable Developments

- **New EU ambassador to UK:** Jukka Salovaara (Finnish diplomat) appointed May 2026 — signals EU's commitment to reset
 - **Extra border checks suspended:** EU border checks at Dover suspended amid heatwave delays (Guardian, 23 May 2026) — operational challenges of post-Brexit border persist
 - **Quitting ECHR debate:** Rights chief warned quitting ECHR would "group Britain with Russia" (Politico, May 2026)
 - **Macron state visit:** Accepted invitation from King Charles for July 2025 (occurred) — symbolic reset moment
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Sources

- Politico Europe — "Labour losses rattle EU reset" (11 May 2026)
 - Politico Europe — "EU Parliament chief Metsola calls for 'exorcism' of ghosts" (Feb 2026)
 - Politico Europe — "Fish, the court and youth access: EU's demands" (Dec 2024)
 - Politico Europe — "Starmer admitted Brexit 'significantly' hurt UK economy" (Dec 2025)
 - BBC News — "UK EU Minister outlines 'ruthlessly pragmatic' reset strategy" (Apr 2026)
 - BBC News — "Kallas: fishing shouldn't block defence pact" (May 2025)
 - BBC News — "Makerfield by-election: proxy battle on EU relations" (May 2026)
 - Guardian — "Miliband: UK needs national consensus on rejoining EU" (23 May 2026)
 - Guardian — "Extra EU border checks suspended at Dover amid heatwave" (23 May 2026)
 - Politico Europe — "UK wargamed AI-driven NATO conflict with Russia" (2026)
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Revision #1

Created 2026-08-21 11:41:52 UTC by Admin

Updated 2026-08-21 11:41:52 UTC by Admin