



House of Commons
European Scrutiny Committee

**The UK's EU
representation: what
has changed and
how is it working?
Government response
the Committee's
Twenty-Third Report of
Session 2022–23**

**First Special Report of Session
2023–24**

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European Scrutiny Committee

The European Scrutiny Committee is appointed under Standing Order No.143 to examine European Union documents.

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First Special Report

The European Scrutiny Committee published its Twenty-Third Report of Session 2022–23, [The UK's EU representation: what has changed and how is it working?](#) (HC 123), on 24 October 2023. The Government response was received on 18 December 2024 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government response

The Government welcomes the Committee's report of 24 October on the UK's EU representation and is grateful to the Committee and to those who have provided evidence.

The Government has considered the evidence, findings and recommendations carefully and its responses to the issues raised in the report are set out below. Responses have been provided to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations.

Recommendation 1: We agree with the Ambassador on the importance of transparency for the development of a strong and open relationship between UKMis, the UK's elected representatives and the wider public. We therefore recommend the publication of UKMis activities on its website, including updates on UK-EU relations where possible. (Paragraph 13)

1. The Foreign Secretary and FCDO are responsible for: coordinating UK/EU policy; the UK's network of bilateral relationships across Europe; and the resourcing and structure of UK Posts around the world. The UK Mission to the EU is part of the FCDO's Global network of posts and its work is conducted in line with direction from UK Ministers. UK Ministers are responsible for updating Parliament on significant developments in the EU-UK relationship.

2. Websites on the [Gov.uk platform](#) carry information and announcements related to HMG engagement with the EU. The Government also publishes guidance for the general public on travelling and doing business in the EU. These pages follow the same format for all FCDO Posts globally. The UKMis Comms Team make regular use of social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn to highlight UK Government work in Brussels.

3. The Overseas Territories are significantly affected by being excluded from the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, including the imposition of tariffs on seafood for the Falkland Islands and issues with fishing for Anguilla.

Recommendation 2: The Government should continue to try and get coverage for the OTs through a similar Agreement. (Paragraph 48)

4. The Overseas Territories are a much-valued part of the whole UK family and we continue to do all we can to protect their interests. During negotiations of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), the European Commission did not agree to negotiate a future relationship that included the Overseas Territories. The UK sought to change this position, but the Commission declined to engage.

5. Nevertheless, while the Overseas Territories are not part of the TCA, we continue to use our diplomatic resources and influence to support and facilitate their engagement with the EU as requested by the Territories. For example, we support the Overseas Territory Governments to access EU markets and the opening of local offices in Brussels (Bermuda and Gibraltar both have representations in Brussels.)

6. The UK, working side-by-side with the Government of Gibraltar, is committed to concluding a UK-EU treaty in respect of Gibraltar as soon as possible. The UK is steadfast in its support for Gibraltar and will not agree to anything that compromises sovereignty.

7. Those Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories from which we took evidence expressed broad satisfaction with the UK Mission and Government engagement on EU matters since Brexit. The Crown Dependencies have urged the Government to respect them in implementing the TCA differently, based on their small economies. (Paragraph 49) 5. Whilst there is broad satisfaction from the devolved administration in Wales with the UK Mission's engagement on the ground in Brussels, it has expressed concern over a perceived lack of communication from the Government when proposing new laws that involve diverging from EU-standards, specifically devolved areas. (Paragraph 50)

Recommendation 3: To facilitate better working between the Government and the devolved administrations working on matters that relate to the EU and EU standards, we recommend that the Government should significantly improve communication with the devolved administrations, particularly in areas touching on devolved competences, where appropriate structures should be put in place. We recommend greater use is made of the newly established structures agreed in the Review of Intergovernmental Relations for this purpose. (Paragraph 51)

8. Despite foreign and trade policy being reserved matters, the Interministerial Group (IMG) on UK-EU Relations was established to give the devolved administrations the opportunity to comment on the TCA and Withdrawal Agreement (WA) in view of their important role in implementing both agreements. FCDO officials meet regularly with their devolved government counterparts to discuss developments in UK-EU relations.

9. At an IMG meeting in September 2023, ministers from the UK and devolved governments had a detailed discussion on how to maximise the effectiveness of the TCA ahead of the annual calendar of Specialised Committee meetings. IMGs are also held ahead of Joint Committee and Partnership Council meetings under the WA and TCA respectively.

10. UKMis officials are in regular contact with their counterparts in the devolved administrations' offices in Brussels and regularly meet for discussions across a wide range of topics of mutual interest.

Recommendation 4: The Government should implement a formal structure for consulting the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories on EU-related issues that can be fed into UKMis. (Paragraph 52)

11. The UK Government has an established practice of consulting the Crown Dependencies and the Overseas Territories on matters that affect them including EU-

related issues. For the Overseas Territories, engagement is conducted on a bilateral basis, via the UK-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council, and through the UK Overseas Territories Association.

12. For the Crown Dependencies, the UK has also committed, in the 2007–8 Frameworks for Developing the International Identities of the Crown Dependencies, not to act internationally on the Crown Dependencies' behalf without prior consultation and to consult them ahead of Partnership Council meetings. All UK Government departments are responsible for their respective policy areas towards the Crown Dependencies and engage directly with the Crown Dependencies as required.

13. The UK Mission's work is not restricted to the UK's institutional relationship with the EU under the Withdrawal Agreement and the TCA. The UK Mission also works on other topics with an EU dimension, like foreign policy and defence. This work, however, is not publicised to any significant extent and there is little understanding of where it fits with the Mission's priorities. (Paragraph 61)

14. The EU is a geopolitical entity that has interactions, links, and agreements with a variety of international organisations; reducing the size of the UK Mission could negatively impact the ability of the UK to effectively exert influence in favour of its own geopolitical interests. (Paragraph 62)

Recommendation 5: Government should clarify how non-TCA related issues, such as PESCO, fit with the rest of the UK Mission's work. This information should be available to the public, where appropriate. (Paragraph 63)

15. The Government manages the UK's relationship with the EU in order to protect and promote UK interests. Outside the areas covered by the TCA there are issues of mutual concern such as international trade, technology, climate change, health, economic growth, foreign policy, security and defence. On such issues, the Government can co-operate with the EU, either bilaterally or through multilateral forums, to deliver our shared values and priorities. The response to the war in Ukraine is an example of this mutually beneficial co-operation.

16. As noted in the response to Recommendation 1, UK Ministers update parliament on significant developments in the relationship including on defence and security. Engagement between UK Ministers and EU representatives is also covered on the [Gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk). The UK Mission to the EU supports and implements Ministerial decisions and direction, and supports Ministerial engagement with EU counterparts.

17. The Government values the work done by parliamentary select committees on the range of European issues, including the EU-UK relationship. Select committees make regular visits to Brussels, with the support of the UK Mission to the EU.