



07 May 2025

The Rt Hon Nick Thomas-Symonds MP
Minister for the Cabinet Office, His Majesty's Paymaster General
Cabinet Office
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Dear Mr Thomas-Symonds,

Inquiry into the UK-EU reset

In January, the European Affairs Committee launched an Inquiry into the UK-EU reset. We will be publishing a report with our conclusions and recommendations later this year. In advance of the 19 May Summit between the Prime Minister and the Presidents of the European Commission and Council, this letter sets out some key points which have emerged from the evidence we have taken so far. All the oral and written evidence is on our website.

On 28-29 April, I and a number of Members of the Committee visited Brussels. As the only Committee in Parliament directly responsible for scrutiny of the UK-EU relationship, we felt it was important to meet key stakeholders and discuss the UK-EU reset. We held meetings with senior officials from the Commission, Council and European External Action Service, with MEPs and representatives of the UK's devolved administrations and of British business, and with defence and security experts.

Our EU interlocutors were strikingly positive about the prospects for the UK-EU Summit on 19 May. Many emphasised that the geopolitical context, with Russia's continuing aggression in Ukraine and the new uncertainties in transatlantic relations, created an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen the UK-EU relationship. We heard repeatedly that, in many areas, the UK was now the EU's closest partner, sharing the same values and interests in a rapidly changing world.

The Summit will be dealing with a wide range of trade, economic and people-to-people issues which are of strategic importance to both sides. We recognise that, in these areas, the decisions taken on 19 May will mark the start of a process involving detailed negotiations. We will cover all these policy areas in detail in our final report. In this interim letter, we wish to concentrate on the UK-EU Security and Defence Partnership.

On the basis of the formal evidence we have received, together with our informal discussions in Brussels, the evidence suggests that a key issue for the 19 May Summit will be whether the UK and EU can develop a strategic framework for European defence and security cooperation which would enable them to work together as equals.

While military cooperation in support of Ukraine is happening in the 'Coalition of the Willing' format, most of our witnesses considered that a Security and Defence Partnership with the EU would be essential to enable the UK to participate in the EU's new SAFE defence investment fund and the European Defence Industrial Programme. We also heard some scepticism about whether a formal UK-EU agreement was necessary—given that non-EU states could already act in concert with the EU on foreign and security matters—or sufficient, given that UK participation in EU mechanisms would not make the UK an equal partner in the development of future European military capabilities. We consider it vital that the Government sets out a clear position on these issues at the 19 May Summit.

Witnesses also told us that:

- Given the scale and urgency of the task of strengthening European defence capacity and resilience, the focus should be on outcomes rather than institutional formats.
- The scale and pace of the security and economic upheaval facing both the EU and the UK should encourage both sides to seek ambitious and forward looking engagement.
- Deepening the UK-EU relationship in defence and security policy is in the strategic interest of both sides. The EU has adapted extensively since the Russian aggression in Ukraine. It should be prepared to take an equally bold approach towards the UK, its most important European strategic neighbour and ally.

In our evidence from UK practitioners about ways of easing UK-EU cooperation in criminal law enforcement and judicial cooperation, the most prominent theme was a wish for greater automation and simplification in their joint working with EU and Member State colleagues and systems.

More specific priorities identified included:

- Re-establishing UK access to real-time alerts
- An EU-wide agreement to enable alert-sharing via the I-LEAP system
- Simplification of the process for cooperation with EU partners in criminal investigations
- Greater ability to exchange large datasets for intelligence-sharing purposes
- UK participation in the Prüm II Regulation
- The ability to lead operational taskforces in Europol
- Mutual recognition of judgements with respect to asset recovery
- The streamlining of forms involved in mutual legal assistance and extradition
- Recognition of European Arrest Warrants in UK legislation.

We note recent press reports that the EU has indicated that the UK will continue to be excluded from the Schengen Information System II (which allows the sharing of real-time data on persons and objects of interest). We hope that the Government will return to this issue.

We look forward to receiving an update from you on the outcome of the 19 May Summit at the earliest opportunity, and to an oral evidence session with you before the Summer recess covering all the issues raised by our Inquiry.

I am copying this letter to the Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, Home Secretary, and Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories, FCDO.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Ricketts'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Lord Ricketts, Chair of the European Affairs Committee