



23rd of April 2025

Dear Nick,

We write as Labour Parliamentarians who believe an improved UK-EU relationship is essential to getting swifter growth for our communities and our country, and who are optimistic about the possibilities of the UK-EU summit on the 19th of May for the UK economy, our businesses and our young people.

As certainties about globalisation, trade and tariffs break down at a remarkable speed, we are reminded how our stability, prosperity and security depend on having deep and resilient partnerships with like-minded nations, based on free and frictionless trade, shared values and political trust.

The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) negotiated by the last government under Boris Johnson – and cheered on by Nigel Farage – has failed the UK by increasing bureaucracy, making it harder to do business with the world's biggest trading bloc, and adding to the cost of living. The weak deal has cost the UK economy more than £100 billion in lost business opportunity and has hit small and medium-sized exporting firms particularly hard. The current Conservative leader has admitted there was no proper plan for Brexit.

The UK government has made clear its intent to the British people and our EU partners of resetting our relationship in the national interest. Now the UK-EU summit next month represents a powerful moment to build on this with ambitious, practical steps that deliver improved trade, security and opportunity.

Strengthening our defence and security by deepening our collaboration

Vladimir Putin's aggression represents a continuing risk to peace across the European continent. At the same time, the new US approach requires all European countries to contribute significantly more to our own defence. Achieving deeper UK-EU defence collaboration is in the urgent interests of the UK and our European partners alike.

Working together across the continent – as we already do through the UK-European programmes of BAE Systems, Airbus, and Leonardo among others – we can spread the burden and opportunity of our shared needs. Europe-wide defence collaboration and funding will help create new British and European jobs and growth.

Europe is facing an existential challenge and the UK is committed to playing its full role in the defence of our shared European continent. It is in all our common interests to decouple deeper UK-EU defence collaboration from other policy areas that might stand in the way of this.

To strengthen security by tackling people smuggling, the summit should resolve to increase intelligence sharing, building on the bilateral deal between the UK and Germany in December 2024 to tackle organised criminal gangs. A joint UK-German operation has since led to the arrest of 13 suspected people smugglers and seizure of 21 boats.



Boosting growth by breaking down barriers to trade

It is right that the priorities set out in the Labour election manifesto are front and centre of any negotiation. A Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) deal to reduce border checks for food exporters would be of great economic benefit, not least to fishing and seafood businesses, and a mutual recognition agreement for professional qualifications would boost our crucial services industry.

With the primary mission of this government being to drive growth, we can go further. A fundamental omission from the TCA was a mutual recognition agreement (MRA) on conformity assessments. The EU now has an MRA on conformity assessments with Canada, meaning that a Canadian business can get its products marked as safe for use in both Canada and the EU by the same testing facility in Canada. Developing a similar MRA between the UK and the EU would mean UK businesses would have no less status than Canadian businesses, reducing cost and complexity for UK and EU firms alike

A coalition of 19 business groups, including the CBI, MakeUK and TechUK, called for a mutual recognition agreement on conformity assessment earlier this month to “support export-led growth, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises”. We urge the UK and EU negotiating teams to go for growth, demonstrate flexibility and strike an MRC deal that would significantly reduce the barriers to trade for exporters on both sides of the channel.

To help reduce customs barriers, and as advocated by the Business and Trade select committee, the government should rejoin the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean (PEM) Convention on rules of origin, which already benefits other non-EU countries such as Switzerland, Norway and Iceland. This would provide greater flexibility for UK manufacturers, removing some of the complexities around rules of origin without rejoining the EU’s customs union, and particularly benefiting the automotive, chemicals and pharmaceutical sectors.

We also support steps towards regulatory alignment with EU regulations where this is in the national interest and where to not do so would continue to burden British businesses, such as our chemicals industry, with huge costs and regulations at a time when our priority must be growth.

Creating new opportunities for young people

We should work to end to the 90-day restrictions for touring artists and to create new opportunities for British young people to work and travel in the EU, and vice versa. The UK already has visa-based youth mobility schemes with a dozen countries across the world, including Australia and Canada, but we lack one with our nearest neighbours. We want to see a new and bespoke youth visa scheme for UK and EU citizens aged under 30.

As with all of the UK’s existing schemes, we believe this should be time limited and subject to a cap on numbers. A bespoke scheme would extend new cultural, educational, and economic opportunities to young people in the UK without returning to free movement.

Ready for change

Current polling shows that the British people see benefit in having a closer and stronger relationship with the European Union.



The Conservatives cannot defend their poor deal. Neither they, nor Reform, will acknowledge the damage now being caused to our businesses, to our wider economic interests and to our working people.

The summit on the 19th of May creates a significant opportunity for the government to build a stronger, safer country and for our European partners to strengthen their own prosperity and security.

We urge our government and the European Union to show ambition, flexibility and trust and to rise to this moment of possibility together.

Yours sincerely,

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Gregor Poynton MP
James Naish MP
Pam Cox MP
Phil Brickell MP
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Andy Slaughter MP
Anna Gelderd MP
The Lord Bach
The Lord Barber of Ainsdale
Dr Beccy Cooper MP
Ben Goldsborough MP
The Baroness Carberry of Muswell Hill CBE
The Baroness Crawley
Damien Egan MP
Danny Beales MP
Emily Darlington MP
The Rt Hon. the Lord Foulkes of Cumnock
Fred Thomas MP
The Baroness Goudie
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