A renewed agenda for European Union – United Kingdom cooperation Common Understanding

Brussels, 19 May 2025

I. Introduction

1. In view of the United Kingdom - European Union summit of 19 May 2025, the European Commission and the United Kingdom explored areas with the potential to strengthen bilateral cooperation between the European Union and the United Kingdom (1). This Common Understanding between the European Commission and the United Kingdom sets out the conclusions of those exploratory talks. We will proceed swiftly on the undertakings set out in this document, in accordance with our respective procedures and legal frameworks. We will respect each other's decision-making autonomy.

2. In order to strengthen the bilateral relationship, we stress the pivotal importance of the two main agreements that underpin our relationship: the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Windsor Framework, and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. We reaffirm our commitment to their full, timely, and faithful implementation.

3. We note the political agreements leading to full reciprocal access to waters to fish until 30 June 2038 and extending energy cooperation on a continuous basis.

II. Security, defence, and development cooperation

Security and defence

4. The European Commission and the United Kingdom share the view that it is in the mutual interest of the EU and the United Kingdom to strengthen their cooperation on security and defence.

5. The conclusion of the Security and Defence Partnership reflects this ambition. The Partnership represents a framework for dialogue and cooperation on security and defence. It will help the EU and the United Kingdom boost cooperation in areas such as: supporting Ukraine; security and defence initiatives, including on defence industry; mobility of military materiel and personnel; space security; regular high-level dialogues and strategic consultations; peacebuilding and crisis management; cyber issues; countering hybrid threats and resilience of critical infrastructure.

6. In view of the Security and Defence Partnership, the United Kingdom and the European Commission should swiftly explore any possibilities for mutually beneficial enhanced cooperation created by the SAFE instrument, once adopted, in accordance with their respective legal frameworks.

Cooperation on maritime security and safety

7. The European Commission and the United Kingdom will seek to enhance cooperation in the following areas relating to maritime security: ship and port facility security (in particular related to the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code), maritime cyber security, security aspects of maritime autonomous surface ships, International Maritime Organization maritime security initiatives and other relevant maritime security related topics.

8. The United Kingdom and the European Commission will endeavour to deepen their cooperation in the area of maritime safety in relation to accident reporting, including mutual sharing of accident investigation reports. In addition, cooperation in the context of the International Maritime Organization should be intensified.

Development and disaster cooperation

9. The European Commission and the United Kingdom will establish a regular dialogue in the area of

development cooperation.

10. The United Kingdom and the European Commission will seek to enhance cooperation in the field of international disaster and humanitarian response.

Health Security

11. The European Commission and the United Kingdom will explore the potential to enable exchange and cooperation on health security, including the detection of, preparedness for, and response to emerging health threats, to prevent and mitigate against future pandemics and health crises, including within the framework of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement health security provisions to maximise cooperation on health security. Health security, biological and chemical security should be part of regular exchanges at all levels, in appropriate fora, with a view to protecting public health.

III. Putting people at the centre of the European Union – United Kingdom relationship

12. The United Kingdom and the European Commission share the view that it is in the mutual interest to deepen our people-to-people ties, particularly for the younger generation.

13. Therefore, the European Commission and the United Kingdom should work towards a balanced youth experience scheme on terms to be mutually agreed. The scheme should facilitate the participation of young people from the European Union and the United Kingdom in various activities, such as work, studies, au-pairing, volunteering, or simply travelling, for a limited period of time. It should provide a dedicated visa path and ensure that the overall number of participants is acceptable to both sides.

14. Furthermore, the United Kingdom and the European Commission should work towards the association of the United Kingdom to the European Union Erasmus+ programme. The specific terms of this association, including mutually agreed financial terms, should be determined as part of that process in order to ensure a fair balance as regards the contributions of and benefits to the United Kingdom. The association should be in accordance with the European Union Multiannual Financial Framework and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

15. The European Commission and the United Kingdom recognise the value of travel and cultural and artistic exchanges, including the activities of touring artists. They will continue their efforts to support travel and cultural exchange.

16. The United Kingdom and the European Commission will continue their exchanges on smooth border management for the benefit of their citizens, including the potential use of eGates where appropriate. They note that European Union citizens can use eGates in the United Kingdom and that there will be no legal barriers to eGate use for British Nationals traveling to and from European Union Member States after the introduction of the European Union Entry/Exit System.

IV. Strengthening our economies while protecting our planet and its resources

17. The European Commission and the United Kingdom share the view that it is in their interest to strengthen their economic relations and generate prosperity as follows:

Energy cooperation

Exploring the participation of the United Kingdom in the European Union's internal electricity market

18. The United Kingdom and the European Commission share the view that close cooperation on electricity is in the interest of both the European Union and the United Kingdom.

19. The European Commission and the United Kingdom should explore in detail the necessary parameters for the United Kingdom's possible participation in the European Union's internal electricity market, including participation in the European Union's trading platforms in all timeframes. Meanwhile, the current electricity trading arrangements will continue to apply.

20. Regarding its territorial scope, any agreement should be appropriately articulated with the provisions of the Windsor Framework. Any agreement should be based on a balance of rights and obligations and ensure a level playing field. In this context, it should define the relationship between the United Kingdom and European Union rules on the electricity market, as well as on State aid, the promotion of renewables and the protection of the environment, in so far as they relate to the electricity sector.

21. Accordingly, any agreement should include dynamic alignment with European Union rules where relevant, giving due regard to the United Kingdom's constitutional and parliamentary procedures and respect the role of the Court of Justice of the European Union within an arbitration-based dispute resolution mechanism, and an appropriate United Kingdom contribution to decision-shaping.

New technologies

22. The United Kingdom and the European Commission welcome continued technical regulatory exchanges on new energy technologies such as hydrogen, carbon capture, utilisation and storage and biomethane.

Working towards a Common Sanitary and Phytosanitary Area

23. The European Commission and the United Kingdom share the view that a functioning sanitary and phytosanitary area would address many of the issues raised in respect of the movement of agri-food products.

24. The United Kingdom and the European Commission should work towards establishing a Common Sanitary and Phytosanitary Area by way of a European Union-United Kingdom Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement (hereafter 'SPS Agreement').

25. Regarding its territorial scope, the SPS Agreement should cover the European Union and the United Kingdom in respect of Great Britain (2). This would result in the vast majority of movements of animals, animal products, plants, and plant products between Great Britain and the European Union being undertaken without the certificates or controls that are currently required by the rules within the scope of the SPS Agreement for such movements. These same benefits would be extended to the movements between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, through the interplay of the Windsor Framework and the SPS Agreement, so long as the SPS Agreement is fully implemented. The continued application of the Windsor Framework would provide for Northern Ireland maintaining its privileged unique dual access to both the European Union Single Market and the United Kingdom internal market.

26. In terms of its material scope, the SPS Agreement should cover sanitary, phytosanitary, food safety and general consumer protection rules applicable to the production, distribution and consumption of agrifood products, the regulation of live animals and pesticides, the rules on organics as well as marketing standards applicable to certain sectors or products.

27. Within the scope defined above, the SPS Agreement should ensure the application of the same rules at all times by providing for timely dynamic alignment of the rules applicable to and in the United Kingdom acting in respect of Great Britain with all the relevant European Union rules, giving due regard to the United Kingdom's constitutional and parliamentary procedures; and where necessary to ensure the European Union's level of food, sanitary, and phytosanitary safety, through the immediate application of the relevant European Union rules.

28. The United Kingdom should be able to take targeted action to protect its biosecurity and public health, in the same way as Member States under European Union law. In addition, the SPS Agreement should include a short list of limited exceptions to dynamic alignment. An exception could only be agreed if: (i) it does not lead to lower standards as compared to European Union rules, (ii) it does not negatively affect European Union animals and goods
being placed on the market in the United Kingdom in respect of Great Britain, and (iii) it respects the principle that only animals and goods compliant with European Union rules move into the European Union.

29. The SPS Agreement should be subject to a dispute resolution mechanism with an independent arbitration panel that ensures the Court of Justice of the European Union is the ultimate authority for all questions of European Union law.

30. To ensure that it can put forward its view, the United Kingdom should be involved at an early stage and contribute appropriately for a country that is not a member of the European Union to the decision-shaping process of European Union legal acts in the fields covered by the obligation to dynamically align. The European Commission should consult the Government of the United Kingdom at an early stage of policy-making. These rights would not extend to participation in the work of the Council or its preparatory bodies.

31. The United Kingdom should have appropriate access to relevant European Union agencies, systems and databases in the areas covered by the SPS Agreement.

32. The SPS Agreement should provide for an appropriate financial contribution from the United Kingdom to support the relevant costs associated with the European Union's work in this policy area.

33. The SPS Agreement should be subject to a joint governance mechanism.

Working towards linking Emission Trading Systems of the European Union and the United Kingdom

34. The European Commission and the United Kingdom share the view that a functioning link between carbon markets would address many of the issues raised in respect of trade and a level playing field and would give effect to Article 392(6) of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. This link should not constrain the European Union and the United Kingdom from pursuing higher environmental ambition, consistent with their international obligations.

35. Therefore, the United Kingdom and the European Commission should work towards establishing a link between carbon markets by way of a European Union-United Kingdom agreement linking the United Kingdom Emission Trading Scheme (UK ETS) and the European Union Emission Trading System (EU ETS).

36. Regarding its territorial scope, this agreement should be appropriately articulated with the provisions of the Windsor Framework.

37. The agreement to link the UK ETS and EU ETS should create the conditions for goods originating in our jurisdictions to benefit from mutual exemptions from the respective European Union and United Kingdom Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms subject to compliance with the relevant provisions of European Union and United Kingdom legislation.

38. In terms of material scope, the agreement should cover all aspects of the functioning of an ETS link.

39. The sectors falling in the scope of the ETS linking agreement should be clearly defined to avoid risks of carbon leakage and competitive distortions. Among others, this scope should include the sectors of electricity generation, industrial heat generation (excluding the individual heating of houses), industry, domestic and international maritime transport and domestic and international aviation. The agreement should provide for a procedure to further expand the list of sectors to be covered by the linking agreement.

40. Within that scope, the agreement should ensure the dynamic alignment of the United Kingdom with the relevant European Union rules underpinning the functioning of the ETS link, giving due regard to the United Kingdom's constitutional and parliamentary procedures.

41. The United Kingdom cap and the United Kingdom reduction pathway will be guided by the United Kingdom's Climate Change Act obligations and Nationally Determined Contributions. They should be at least as ambitious as the European Union cap and the European Union reduction pathway.

42. The agreement should provide for an appropriate financial contribution from the United Kingdom to support the relevant costs associated with the European Union's work in this policy area.

43. The agreement should be subject to a dispute resolution mechanism with an independent arbitration panel that ensures the Court of Justice of the European Union is the ultimate authority for all questions of European Union law.

44. To ensure that it can put forward its view, the United Kingdom should be involved at an early stage and contribute appropriately for a country that is not a member of the European Union to the decision-shaping process of European Union legal acts in the fields covered by the obligation to dynamically align. The European Commission should consult the United Kingdom at an early stage of policy-making. These rights would not extend to participation in the work of the Council or its preparatory bodies.

45. The agreement should be subject to a joint governance mechanism.

Provision of services through entry and temporary stay of natural persons for business purposes

46. The United Kingdom and the European Commission will set up dedicated dialogues on the implementation of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, as regards entry and temporary stay of

natural persons for business purposes, including the sponsorship scheme, and the recognition of professional qualifications.

Competition cooperation

47. The European Commission and the United Kingdom recognise the mutual benefit of cooperation in competition enforcement. In this context and in implementing the level playing field provisions of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the European Commission and the United Kingdom welcome the successful conclusion of negotiations for a competition cooperation agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom.

V. Internal security and judicial cooperation

Reinforced law enforcement and judicial cooperation in criminal matters

48. The United Kingdom and the European Commission recognise the importance of ongoing law enforcement and judicial cooperation in criminal matters between the European Union and the United Kingdom.

49. The European Commission and the United Kingdom believe that there is scope for reinforcing cooperation through quicker, better and deeper implementation of Part Three of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and by fully exploiting and building on its potential. To improve this cooperation, the European Commission and the United Kingdom should intensify technical work in the Specialised Committee on Law Enforcement and Judicial Cooperation with the aim to further streamline the cooperation on mutual legal assistance. The European Commission and the United Kingdom will also explore opportunities to enhance the timeliness, efficiency and effectiveness of the provisions of Title VII of Part Three of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

50. The United Kingdom and the European Commission will take the necessary steps to ensure that the pending arrangements underpinning the cooperation between the United Kingdom and Europol under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement are finalised swiftly.

51. The European Commission and the United Kingdom will also encourage Europol and the United Kingdom's National Crime Agency, and their other competent law enforcement authorities, to further develop their cooperation including in the framework of analysis projects and operational action plans within the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats.

52. The United Kingdom and the European Commission will also consider how to increase operational cooperation between the United Kingdom and Europol under the applicable rules, for instance on mutually beneficial exchange of information related to terrorism and other serious crimes.

53. The European Commission and the United Kingdom will explore ways to reinforce mutual and reciprocal exchanges of data on fingerprints, DNA, and criminal records of third country nationals, in the light of technical developments; and acknowledge the requirement in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement to set up automated searching of vehicle registration data. They will also explore extending the exchange of data to facial images for the prevention, detection and investigation of criminal offences.

54. The United Kingdom and the European Commission will examine the difficulties for law enforcement and judicial authorities in one jurisdiction to obtain data from electronic communication and other relevant service providers offering services in the other jurisdiction, and potential solutions.

Judicial cooperation in civil and commercial matters

55. The European Commission and the United Kingdom note the importance of the positive judicial cooperation in civil and commercial law, including family matters. In this context, they welcome that the Hague Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil or Commercial Matters will enter into force for the United Kingdom on 1 July 2025.

Cooperation in relation to drugs risks and threats

56. The United Kingdom and the European Commission agree that the reciprocal exchange of information between the European Union Drugs Agency and the United Kingdom relevant authorities on drugs risks and threats would be beneficial for fulfilling their respective tasks. Therefore, they suggest that the European Union Drugs Agency and the relevant United Kingdom authorities could conclude a working arrangement to that end.

VI. Irregular migration

57. The European Commission and the United Kingdom underline their commitment to deepen co-operation on challenges posed by irregular migration – including action to tackle people smuggling and to deepen information sharing to control and manage migration at our respective external borders – while remaining committed to ensuring international protection for those who need it.

Upstream Migration

58. The United Kingdom and the European Commission will deepen cooperation on the external dimension of migration across key geographies, as part of a whole of route approach. They recognise the benefit of increased mutual sharing of information, country expertise and analysis enabling better coordination. They will also work more closely in multilateral fora, processes and dialogues, including the European Union's Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling, and through exploring United Kingdom participation in the Khartoum and Rabat Processes.

Working together on practical solutions and returns

59. The European Commission and the United Kingdom should work together on practical and innovative approaches to reduce irregular migration. This includes work to share best practices and operational information on key issues like returns to third countries, and to explore possible deterrence mechanisms and other innovative solutions, in line with national, European Union and international law. This would be underpinned by closer cooperation across key networks such as the European Migration Network and agencies, including the European Union Agency for Asylum and Frontex, and respective United Kingdom authorities. They should work together to prevent irregular Channel crossings.

Bolstering United Kingdom and European Union border security including through law enforcement cooperation

60. The United Kingdom and the European Commission should bolster their operational and strategic cooperation to tackle the challenges posed by irregular migration along key routes and at external borders, including through their agencies, law enforcement and judicial cooperation, and information sharing capabilities. This includes through enhanced cooperation with Europol and its European Migrant Smuggling Centre.

Addressing challenges and abuses of visa policy

61. In addition to these enhanced efforts, the European Commission and the United Kingdom will explore closer cooperation to address challenges related to visa policy such as exchanging analysis on visa abuse by third country nationals.

(1) : Unless otherwise provided, the territorial scope of the cooperation envisaged by this Common Understanding will be in line with the scope of Article 774 of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

(2) : In line with Article 520(5) of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the territorial scope of the SPS Agreement could be extended to cover the territories referred to in Article 774(2) of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

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