

France UK Summit 2023

On Friday, French President Emmanuel Macron will host UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, for the 36th Franco-British Summit. This is the first bilateral summit between their two countries in five years.

H/Advisors public affairs specialists in London, Paris and Brussels have put their heads together to give us an overview of what we might expect from the summit.

What to watch for at the UK-France summit this week:

The March 10th UK-France summit will benefit from a thawing of the previously chilly relations related to disagreements over Brexit and migration.

The two countries' broad alignment on the Ukrainian crisis, together with the recent EU/UK agreement to settle the dispute over Northern Ireland's status has strengthened Mr Sunak's stock of trust in EU capitals, including Paris, and this should make a number of practical agreements possible at the summit. However, something being possible and being agreeable do not always go hand in hand in politics.

The top issue will be security & defence:

The broad strategic defence alignment between the two countries outlined back in 2010 by David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy has never come about. Differences remain, notably on the involvement of the EU in Defence and Security policy, on the global leadership role of the United States, and the extent to which European (and national) defence industries should be favored. However, President Macron has always regarded it as essential, post-Brexit, to keep the United Kingdom involved as a central player in European security.

Within that framework, some possible outcomes from the summit on security & defence include:

- An agreement to coordinate the supply of arms and military training programs to Ukraine;
- An agreement to update and re-energize the Franco-British Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF).

Other security & defence-related topics likely to be discussed include:

- A new cooperation framework for police data sharing. Particularly, the prospect for the UK to regain access to the Schengen Information System and to the European Arrest Warrant.
- UK participation in the European Defence Fund (EDF), the European Defence Industrial Development Program (EDIP), and also and the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA).
- Restoring cooperation on Indo-Pacific strategy following the creation of the AUKUS pact in 2021, which excluded France.
- Russia's growing influence in Africa, and particularly the Sahel.



A second top theme for discussion will be migration:

Mr Sunak set the tighter control of cross-channel asylum-seekers as one of his five key priorities for 2023. We think his success on the Northern Irish question will make President Macron more willing than before to help seek a definitive agreement, but within limits.

Possible summit outcomes on migration include:

- Agreement on allowing UK police or Border Force officials to work in France alongside their French counterparts, albeit without powers of arrest.
- More intense intelligence cooperation and work between police forces to combat the people smugglers.

Other migration-related topics likely to be discussed include:

- Potential means for UK to return asylum-seekers to France, potential legal channels for asylum-seekers in France to claim refugee status in the UK, and potential quota agreements. However, we consider any explicit agreement on such issues to be unlikely.

A third important area of discussion will be energy and climate:

Both governments have cited energy cooperation, particularly in nuclear power, as a priority for the summit. The impact of the war in Ukraine on energy prices adds additional impetus for greater cooperation in this domain. In addition, although the UK has traditionally relied on interconnectors from France to supply part of its energy needs, the UK's National Grid has recently been supplying some of France's needs as its nuclear plants undergo maintenance work.

Possible summit outcomes on energy & climate include:

- Further cooperation to strengthen both countries' energy security and resilience.
- Discussion of installing a new interconnector, although that would involve a shift by President Macron away from the longstanding French strategy that France should be a supplier of energy to Europe rather than a transit country.
- Discussion of EU/UK cooperation on emissions trading and carbon border adjustments

Other energy and climate-related topics likely to be discussed include:

- The appropriate response to the US Inflation Reduction Act, although we consider France will seek to situate any response at EU rather than member state level.

There is a lot on this 2023 agenda for both governments to agree upon. However, many in industry would also like to see future summits leverage the ambitions that both countries have regarding tech and the services sector for example. Could we see the next agenda explore the competitiveness of both countries from a tech perspective? The UK has stated ambitions to be "the next Silicon Valley" and Macron champions reforms for the growth of a European unicorn. Could a future summit look towards fostering a UK/FR tech hub? Will these summits be able to foster such ambition?

Authors

Agathe Gauthier
Paris

Helena Walsh
Brussels

Sir David Lidington
London