

PRESS RELEASE

A decade after the Brexit referendum: What ten years of public opinion data reveal about EU-UK relations

On 23 June 2016, British voters chose to leave the European Union, sending shockwaves across the continent. A decade later, the United Kingdom, the European Union and the wider world have all changed profoundly. Against the backdrop of renewed debates about the UK's relationship with the EU, the Bertelsmann Stiftung presents public opinion data collected over the past ten years. The findings suggest that Brexit has neither triggered wider fragmentation within the EU nor driven British and European public opinion permanently apart. Instead, they point to a shared preference for pragmatic cooperation.

Gütersloh/Berlin, June 22, 2026 –Drawing on ten years of survey data, the analysis covers public attitudes towards the consequences of Brexit, EU membership, democratic satisfaction, perceptions of Europe's future and prospects for EU-UK cooperation.

In the aftermath of the referendum, the debate centered on whether other member states might follow the UK's example and leave the Union. But fears of a "domino effect" never materialised: Since then, no other country has chosen to leave. Likewise, expectations that other member states might do so in the future have collapsed. By March 2026, only 21 per cent of Britons and 18 per cent of EU citizens still believed that other member states would follow Britain's example and leave the EU. That is less than half the level recorded in March 2018.

The result of the Brexit referendum was narrow: Only a slight majority of 51.89 per cent voted to leave the EU. Since June 2016, however, such a majority has failed to reappear. Asked how they would vote in a referendum on EU membership, over the past ten years more than 50% of Britons have consistently said they would vote to stay. The most recent figures, from March 2026, again show a stable majority for Remain, at 57 per cent.

Moreover, the populist promise that people would be better off after Brexit proved false. Shortly after the referendum, Britons were relatively optimistic about their future outside the EU. A decade later, this early Brexit optimism collapsed. In March 2026, only 41 per cent of Britons said they felt positive about their personal outlook for the future; a decline of 27 percentage points. Just 46 per cent were satisfied with the way democracy works in the UK, down 14 percentage points. Only 25 per cent said that the UK was moving in the right direction, which is a drop of 15 percentage points. And only 23 per cent said their economic situation had improved over the previous two years, down 21 percentage points. Overall, early Brexit optimism has given way to a wave of pessimism in the UK.

Florian Kommer, Europe expert at the Bertelsmann Stiftung, says: "In 2016, many believed the Brexit referendum marked the beginning of the end for the European Union. A decade later, the picture looks very different. Public opinion does not make policy, but it does define the

space in which politics can move. Our findings suggest that this space for EU–UK cooperation may be wider today than is often assumed.”

More broadly, the data suggest that Brexit has not created a lasting psychological divide between British and European public opinion. Ten years on, Britons and continental Europeans increasingly appear to share common concerns and expectations when thinking about Europe and its future. By March 2026, support for a stronger EU role in world affairs stands at 66% in the UK and 71% across the EU. Around half of both Britons and EU citizens say they would speak positively about the EU. 47% of Britons and 49% of EU citizens are satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU. The share of respondents who believed that the EU is moving in the right direction is also almost identical.

Finally, the data indicate that many Europeans distinguish between deeper political integration and European cooperation. While support for further integration has weakened in both the UK and the EU, support for EU membership, confidence in the Union’s future, and backing for a stronger European role in world affairs remain robust. This points to a growing preference for practical cooperation over debates about deeper integration.

Jake Benford, Bertelsmann Stiftung’s UK expert, argues: "In an increasingly unstable world, European citizens recognise the value of solidarity and cooperation even when they disagree about the depth of political integration. Brexit may have changed the institutional relationship between the UK and the EU, but it has not eliminated their shared interests. The danger is that political institutions remain trapped in the logic of the past while citizens have moved on, increasingly aware that fragmentation comes at a price: less security, less resilience and less influence in the world. Political leaders would do well to take this growing public pragmatism into account in the pursuit of a closer relationship."

Additional information

eupinions is a European opinion research tool developed by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and conducted by Nira Data. eupinions regularly surveys citizens in all 27 EU member states on European issues. The surveys for this analysis were conducted between July 2015 and March 2026 in the EU and the United Kingdom. Details of the survey methodology are included in the publication. **For more information, please visit our website: www.eupinions.eu.**

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