



By: *Harvey Morris*

The marmalade factor: the UK, EU and Trump's war of choice



As war continued to rage across the Middle East, some of the UK's shrillest political voices have been engaged in a bitter battle to preserve the nation's marmalade.

The conflicts are not unrelated. Donald Trump's war of choice has pushed the 'special relationship' to the brink, prompting Keir Starmer's government to seek closer ties with a European Union that Britain turned its back on a decade ago.

Tentative steps in that direction have attracted the ire of Brexiteers who warn of the price the country might be forced to pay by faceless bureaucrats in Brussels. Hence, their campaign to conserve Britain's much-loved orange conserve, or at least its name.

An Express headline that "Starmer's 'completely bonkers' EU reset risks key food being re-named in latest betrayal" gives a flavour of the debate.

The pro-Brexit daily was reflecting the ire of "furious MPs" over reports that, under EU rules the government was plotting to accept in order to boost trade, the traditional spread would be forced to rebrand as "citrus marmalade".

The surreal spat was a reminder of the level of debate that preceded the 2016 Brexit referendum when the likes of Boris Johnson were warning of such EU outrages as a purported ban on bent bananas.

Starmer's Labour Party was elected to office in 2024 after a campaign in which all mention of Brexit was virtually taboo, a concession to traditional supporters who had voted to leave.

Since then, in the context of a weakening economy and challenges such as the Ukraine war, Labour had already tentatively moved to expand ties with Brussels and its EU partners.

A closer partnership with Europe

In his most pro-EU comments as prime minister, Starmer this month specifically linked his desire for a closer relationship with Europe to the impact of Trump's war in Iran.

"It is increasingly clear that as the world continues down this volatile path," he told an April 1 press conference, "our long-term national interest requires closer partnership with our **allies in Europe** and with the European Union."

At an event principally aimed at rejustifying his decision to stay out of Trump's war, Starmer said a forthcoming summit with the EU would consider closer economic and security cooperation.

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The aim was to build a partnership that reflected shared values and interests "for the dangerous world that we must navigate together".

His remarks followed those of **Rachel Reeves**, the chancellor, who said two weeks into the Iran war that Brexit had done deep damage to the UK, stranding it between powerful trading blocs amid the retreat of globalisation.

Labour ministers have yet to abandon a manifesto pledge not to seek to rejoin the EU customs union or single market, let alone to revisit the decision to quit the bloc.

However, the current hostility of the Trump administration, including the president's personal insults towards Starmer and the UK armed forces, may be pushing the debate in that direction.

Rule-takers rather than rule-makers

Ahead of local and regional elections next

month, an unpopular government may also be gambling on a tilt to Europe to attract back the majority, including a new generation of young voters, who now regret the 2016 Brexit choice.

The UK and EU have already taken steps towards a **post-Brexit reset**, involving issues such as student mobility, and are looking to potential deals on UK participation in the European electricity market and the EU's regional cohesion policy.

But the UK side can expect to be up against some hard-nosed negotiators, who will no doubt remind the British that they are rule-takers rather than rule-makers in a post-Brexit Europe.

Hence the marmalade furore.

A storm in a jam jar

Last week, word spread that a proposed UK-EU food deal would require British suppliers to abide by a new rule that extends the definition of **marmalade** to non-citrus preserves.

Spurred by revelations of the scandal in the pro-Brexit press, Conservative shadow foreign affairs minister Priti Patel was among those who expressed their outrage when she posted on X:

“Labour is now attacking the great British marmalade! No idea Keir is so desperate to fit in with his EU pals and unpick Brexit, he's now looking to rename British marmalade to align with the EU.”



Hands off our marmalade! - Richard Tice

Reform UK, the former Brexit party, weighed in with its business spokesman Richard Tice demanding “Hands off our marmalade!”

The backlash was enough for the government to step in to quell what one headline described as a storm in a jam jar. A government source told the press that the current UK labelling of ‘orange marmalade’ already complied with EU rules.

The government source pointed out that marmalade on UK supermarket shelves is already usually labelled as “orange marmalade” or “Seville orange marmalade”, which they suggested was in compliance with the EU rules.

“The only ‘**marmalade madness**’ is the Tories and Reform boiling over with rage about jar labels that won't need to change,” the source told The Independent.

Eurosceptics have not abandoned the fight

The Eurosceptics have not abandoned the fight. In their latest foray, they have leapt on reports that a Brexit reset might force Labour to abandon a pledge to ban imports of foie gras on animal welfare grounds.

According to the pro-Reform GB News: “This has come with a growing list of concessions that critics say were never put to voters.”

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Now that the ruling party has shed some of its Brexit pudeur, steps towards a closer relationship look inevitable. How far that goes will depend on a range of factors, including the future state of ties with the US.

In the short term, there is little prospect of the present government pushing for the UK to

rejoin the EU, despite polls suggesting a solid majority of the electorate would now back that option.

Voters might then look forward to a more rational debate than the one that marked the run-up to the 2016 referendum and avoids vacuous spats over marmalade, foie gras and bent bananas.