

## PERSPECTIVES FROM UK CITIES & REGIONS: CONNECTING TO EUROPE

### CITY-LEVEL STRATEGIES



The urban-rural divide was highlighted as a factor behind both Brexit and the rise of Trump, including the perception of disparities in social mobility between London and the rest of the country.

“There’s a lot of networking that has to happen here, to rebuild ties between urban and rural populations, between cities and the rest of the polity. The failure to do that could ultimately damage cohesion within the UK and within US, as well as between UK and Europe.”

“There’s also a risk that smaller UK cities and towns not already pro-European or outward looking, could get further left behind in terms of openness and connectivity.”

Various city officials shared their cooperation strategies.



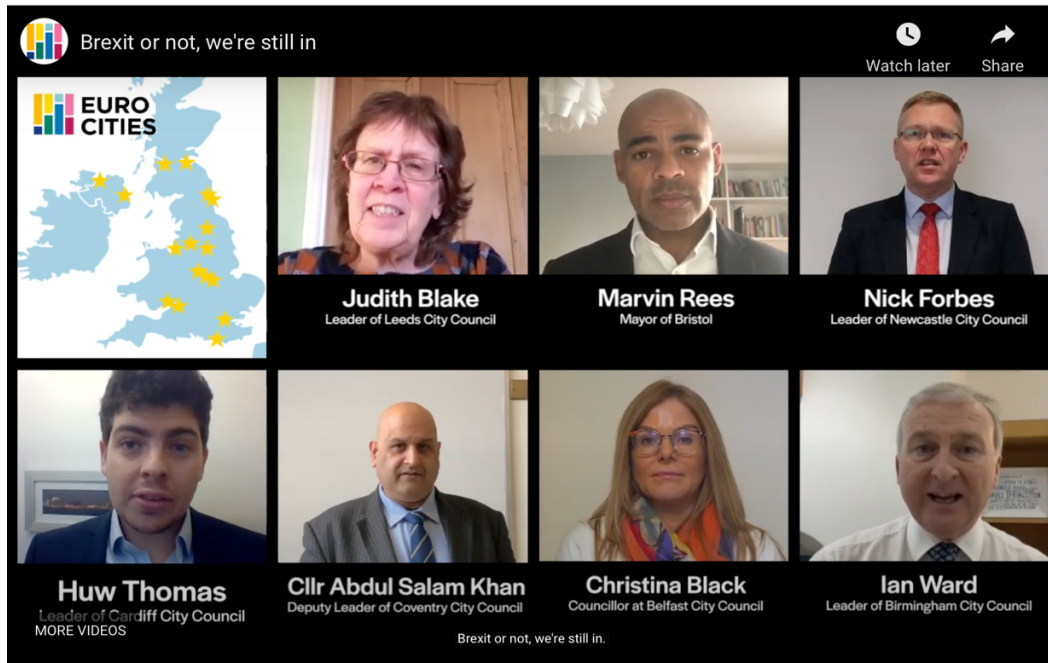
**“We cities need to take control of our own narrative, not let government control it for us. We need to push our own identity, creativity and innovation and our approach to European cooperation - this will shape the way in which we tackle all challenges.”**

“Birmingham has been ingrained and entwined in the whole European fabric for over 30 years. European engagement is part of our DNA and even with Brexit, you can't un-bake a cake. One way or another, cooperation will continue to exist. But it will be different and Brexit has led to a period of reflection. The cake is still there. So how do we make the best use of all of those ingredients and make up for those now lost?”

“It's going to be a challenge because a lot of the tools & enablers that we benefited from as EU members have been removed - those funding programs & instruments that enabled participation in partnerships, networks, projects & all those wonderful things, are gone. We'll have to work twice as hard now.”

“Cities no longer need to rely on nation states to address global issues like climate change and the economic recovery – solutions can also be driven by cities, working not in isolation, but in cooperation with European and global cities.”

## Bristol



“Shortly after the referendum, the Mayor of Bristol along with other Mayors and local partners emphasised that they wanted to see strong connections continue. Their [joint statement](#) of intent through Eurocities has helped overcome a lot of Brexit-related obstacles.”

“Bristol has a **‘one city’ approach**, which brings different partners together within the city from both the public and private sectors to rally around a shared goal – making Bristol a fair, healthy and sustainable city by 2050. This is both a local and European/international approach, guiding our partnerships, and integrating local and international strategies into our development plans.”

**“We need to build relations with other cities to share knowledge and best practice, so as to address common challenges and maintain business links.”**

## UK REGIONS

Our discussions also focused on the impact of Brexit in all nations of the UK and their longer-term future relationship with Europe.

### SCOTLAND

A Scottish Government representative said it currently had two main priorities: handling the pandemic and dealing with the damaging fallout of Brexit.

“We’re heavily dependent on the EU goods market for exports. Half of Scotland’s international exports go to Europe, amounting to £16 billion a year, and a big chunk of that is food and drink which is perishable and spoils quickly. So short term impacts were significant because even with zero tariff barriers and quotas, there’s a whole raft of non-tariff barriers driving up costs and delays, from customs checks to veterinary checks and so on.”

“The bottom line is that the UK-EU deal has basically made the trade between two countries less efficient, while most trade deals in the world are all about making trade more efficient. But having been taken out of the Single Market and Customs Union, you're always going to be left with friction.”

## WALES

Welsh representatives echoed Scotland’s desire for **constructive engagement** with Europe, as outlined in an official open [letter](#) published in January 2021.

“Wales was always in a difficult position after the referendum, since most politicians and ministers strongly supported Remain, but the population narrowly voted to leave. So we always say we accept the outcome, although we regret it, but can we at least have constructive engagement. Our ministers ended up disappointed that Westminster did not come up with a more engaged post-Brexit relationship with Europe.”

“The UK government has a responsibility now to deliver on the deal for all parts of the UK and find a way to work with the devolved governments and local and city authorities to make that happen.”

Close cooperation is needed on climate change, migration and cyber-security, and in support of core values around equality and human rights. “The blueprint for this close relationship will ideally be based on **people and connectivity** – discussing what matters with people in a bottom-up way, and then finding institutional solutions to address that.”

## NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland was in a unique position – remaining entirely part of the United Kingdom, but also staying in the EU Single Market for goods.

“The Northern Ireland protocol has got to remain in place because it's the only solution that the EU and UK could find to minimize the damage of Brexit. And there's now very concerted efforts on both sides to maximise the flexibility with which it will be applied... all of which will have to remain fully compatible with the integrity of the Single Market.”

The retention of the [EU Peace Plus program](#) for Northern Ireland was praised as a sign of European commitment to promote cross-border peace, reconciliation and economic development.

Contributors highlighted three potential frameworks for **positive NI-EU cooperation**.

- 1) **British-Irish relations.**
- 2) **North-South relations** on the island of Ireland.
- 3) **Northern Ireland direct relationship with EU through the UK**

