

Industry Forum January Newsletter

2026: Liberation year

Last month we observed the pantomime on the world stage and this month, we have started a new year with a reality TV show in Davos, and darker events in Minneapolis. It's beyond our pay grade to speculate on when normality might return, but we can hope. Meanwhile, we note a real cause for celebration: the liberation of ideas and actions in the world outside of the chaos in Washington. Europe is acting with more independence, standing up to US bullying on Greenland, and gradually taking over military support for Ukraine; Canada is doing trade deals with China; India, the world's most populous nation, is rapidly growing in economic importance, and the EU has signed the Mercosur agreement with Latin America to create the world's largest free trade area. These are signs that at least some world leaders are showing bold leadership to prevent the world slipping further into disorder, and safeguard vital business and trade activities.

In January the Industry Forum has already held a great roundtable on working more closely with India, and we also went outside our usual subject matter to discuss whether the UK now needs a system of proportional representation to safeguard political and economic stability. In February we will have a meeting to discuss the conclusions of our two-year look at the big military, democratic and economic threats facing Europe: we will also discuss organising a conference on this subject later in the year. Also, in February we will be meeting to discuss the implications of a circular economy for nature and business. Many more meetings are in the pipeline, and we are please to be welcoming new members joining the Forum.

Europe on the Brink



13 February 2026

Panel discussion

Speakers:

***Dr Matthew Harries, Research and Campaigns Director,
Labour Movement for Europe***

Dr Denis MacShane, Former Europe Minister

***Dr Jonathan Leader Maynard, Senior Lecturer in International
Politics, Department of Political Economy, King's College
London***

Brendan Donnelly, Former Director, Federal Trust

Radical policy changes by the US Trump administration are undermining the pillars that have supported European defence, and democracy since 1945. They have exposed vulnerabilities which European leaders are struggling to address initially by strengthening their military capabilities. It is clear that the continent needs to thoroughly rethink its military dependence on the US, decide how to combat external political interference, and re-energise its industrial strategy - quite a tall order. During 2024 and 2025, Industry Forum researchers have been considering such issues and published the summary paper, 'Europe on the Brink' in December 2025. This meeting brings together European experts and Industry Forum members to discuss the conclusions and recommendations set out in the paper. They will give their views on the paper followed by Q&A.

Representing nature and business in a circular economy



24 February 2026

Speaker:

Mary Creagh MP, Minister for Nature

For a long time, the effect of business activities on nature was largely ignored on economic or commercial grounds. This short-sightedness is now largely recognised by governments and businesses, and attaining a circular economy and long-term sustainability are given higher priority. Nevertheless, problems remain. Damage to nature can be hard to predict and difficult and time-consuming to rectify. This can occur because legal responsibility for damage is unclear or regulators lack enforcement powers. Reuse of materials can be both good for the environment and good for business, but recycling procedures are frequently inadequate. This meeting, led by Mary Creagh CBE MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Nature) will discuss such issues, government plans, and business priorities.

Date for your diary:

- 10 March - Increasing trade in plants, agricultural products, food and drink with Dame Angela Eagle, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs
- 22 April - Industry Forum Spring Reception with keynote speaker Dame Chi Onwurah, Chair of Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee.

Meetings in planning include:

- 'Decarbonising homes - making it happen' with Martin McCluskey MP, Minister for Energy Consumers
- 'Working closely with Europe' led by Stella Creasy MP, Chair of Labour Movement for Europe
- Industrial Strategy Implementation
- Restoring trade with Germany
- International relations and defence diplomacy
- Improving our digital infrastructure would be a win/win for businesses and the economy
- Crypto opportunities and threats for the UK
- Policy priorities for safe and sustainable, high-quality buildings
- An integrated plan for the UK road and rail networks
- How mobile infrastructure investment can boost UK growth

These are all major topics which we hope to cover in some depth at meetings and possibly policy workshops.



Big Change Research Programme

2025 projects

The big decisions facing Europe in the Trump II era

A summary of our findings and recommendations from this study was published on our website in December 2025 under the title 'Europe on the Brink'. We will hold a meeting to discuss this paper on 13th February and we are planning a conference on this subject later in the year.

Could proportional representation combat the threat of populism?

The 2024 UK general election gave the winning Labour party a flattering proportion of parliamentary seats at the expense of some of the four smaller parties. Analysis indicates that in the present environment of a five-party national system, there is a real possibility that the current first-past-the-post electoral system could produce a populist Government with a small proportion of the popular vote, perhaps around 30%. Proportional representation could avert such an outcome and be fairer to all parties and electors. We discussed whether proportional representation

might also lead to economic benefits at a meeting led by Anna Dixon MP on January 20th and will be publishing our research findings in February 2026

2026 projects

We are now planning our summer 2026 research programme. We are looking at big subjects that will stretch our student researchers. Some subjects that we are considering are: What is the real value of NHS universal health care? How does the UK build a sustainable, secure energy supply system? How can Europe compete with the US innovation? What digital infrastructure does the UK need to meet its economic and regional needs? Are good public services compatible with economic competitiveness? We will choose two or three topics for 2026.

If you are interested to suggest topics or to participate in summer research projects for 2026, please contact jwyer@industry-forum.org

Our most recent Industry Forum events were:

Could proportional representation bring economic benefits?



20 January 2026

***Speaker:
Anna Dixon MBE MP***

Alert! Dangers ahead for business! This was the unmistakable message from this week's Industry Forum roundtable on the potential benefits of proportional representation for the UK economy. Anna Dixon MBE, MP for Shipley, a long-term advocate of electoral reform, opened the meeting, which was attended by Industry Forum business members, academics and, as guests, a number of campaigning organisations including Make Votes Matter, Best for Britain and Labour For a New Democracy. The key new factor in British politics is that the old duopoly of power between the Labour and Conservative parties has dissolved into a complex multiparty system. The big risk for business is resulting economic instability as the first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system turns UK national elections into a lottery. In 2024 Labour were big winners of this lottery with far more seats than their vote share. Next time the winner could be a minority government committed to reversing trade agreements, political alliances and infrastructure investment plans. Such a possible outcome can, even now, paralyse business planning and investment and undermine government growth plans. An alternative system of proportional representation could better represent voter wishes and would moderate policy swings. With the recent example of the severe damage to the UK economy caused

by Brexit, this is clearly an issue that UK businesses need to take seriously. Radical change is always hard, but with the current economic and military threats to Europe, and the need for greater European unity, the case for bold action to reform our UK voting system appears strong.

Working more closely with India



15 January 2026

***Speaker:
Seema Malhotra MP
Minister for the Indo-Pacific and Minister for Equalities***

There is potentially a glittering prize for India and the UK in the fast-changing world of 2026 - this is to forge a new and deep commercial relationship. To explore this prospect, the Industry Forum kicked off our New Year programme with a roundtable on 'Working more closely with India,' led by Seema Malhotra MP, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Indo-Pacific. Members and guests attending included business people, academics and diplomats. The discussion ranged over issues and opportunities for building on the existing strong UK/India bonds and the recent trade agreement. It is clear that the FCDO is becoming more commercial and working closely with the Department for Business and Trade to strengthen UK focus on the whole, fast-growing, Asia Pacific region. The UK has important strengths in being stable and trusted in a trade environment subject to volatile supply chains, tariffs and sanctions. UK business people are enthusiastic about the Indian market but need to understand better how government trade and investment plans link to UK industrial strategy. They would also appreciate more government-led trade promotion activity, and guidance on some of the tricky sanctions issues relating to the current geopolitical situation. There is a vast amount to do, and some urgency, to turn opportunities into concrete plans in sectors such as energy, automotive, professional services, recycling and much more. We plan more meetings on these topics.

New members welcome

The Industry Forum was established in 1993, and has held over 500 meetings with

top policy-makers since then. It is one of the most experienced, and well-networked, business policy think-tanks in the UK. If you're not already a member, and would like to help shape our agenda, host events, and receive invitations to all meetings, get in touch by email at info@industry-forum.org, or give us a call to find out more on 0207 434 0090.



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