

IN PERSON EVENT

# Summer University 2026

## Shaping our future to 2040



CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD



THUR 3 SEPT 2026 – FRI 4 SEPT 2026

The Ideas  
Network  
2030



Wilfried  
Martens Centre  
for European Studies



Hanns  
Seidel  
Foundation

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# Introduction

On 3 and 4 September 2026, the Ideas Network 2030 brought speakers, policymakers and delegates together at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, for its Summer University - two days set deliberately apart from the news cycle to ask a harder question: what will the world look like by 2040, and what should the centre right do about it.

Co-hosted with the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the event drew figures including Lord Hague, Markus Ferber MEP, Neil Shastri-Hurst MP, Klaus Welle, Sir Paul Collier, Sir Simon Clarke and David Goodhart, alongside policy specialists from across Britain and Europe.

The programme was built around five linked themes - geostrategy, digital transformation, the economy and trade, sustainability, and the next generation - and the sessions returned repeatedly to the connections between them rather than treating each in isolation.

Discussions ranged from the structural forces reshaping global power and Europe's defence posture; through the competitive stakes of artificial intelligence and digital governance; to the economic reforms needed to close the growth gap with the United States; the politics of an affordable energy transition; and the demographic and generational shifts remaking electorates on both sides of the Atlantic.

What emerges across the sessions is less a single conclusion than a shared diagnosis: the assumptions that underpinned European security and prosperity since 1945 are under real strain, the challenges involved are tightly interconnected, and the response will depend on political will as much as resources.

The report that follows sets out, session by session, the arguments made, the disagreements surfaced in discussion, and the ideas participants judged most worth carrying forward - offered as a foundation for the network's ongoing work toward a Vision 2040 agenda.



# 01

## Welcome and opening remarks

Thursday 3 September 2026

14:00–14:15 · Auditorium

### Speakers:

James Elles

Damian Green

Tomi Huhtanen

Michael Richter

### Moderator:

## INTRODUCTION

The Summer University opened with a welcome from the Ideas Network 2030 and short statements from the two partner organisations co-sponsoring the event, the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and the Hanns Seidel Foundation. Its purpose was to set out why the network exists, what the two days were for, and what the partnerships behind it are meant to achieve. It was framed less as an argument than as an invitation, though the partner statements carried more substance than an opening usually does.



## KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS

1

The network exists to promote new centre-right thinking, and specifically to look beyond the immediate horizon. Those practising politics day to day find it very difficult to raise their eyes to the themes that will dominate political and social debate over the next two decades; the network exists to do that on their behalf. The Summer University is the culmination of a series of meetings held through the year.

2

Long-term partnership across borders is the method, not a courtesy. The stated approach is to build durable relationships with think tanks and organisations on the centre right in the United Kingdom and across Europe and beyond, and the two co-sponsors were introduced in those terms — as partners of long standing rather than funders of a single event.

### From the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

3

Meetings of this kind produce ideas that travel. A sequence was traced from a partner meeting the previous year, at which it was argued that European defence carried three undiscussed taboos, that nuclear deterrence had not properly entered the debate, and that there was a mismatch in planning for full escalation between Russian and European forces. In the months that followed, the mobilisation and conscription debate opened in Germany, France published a new nuclear document, and China signalled to Russia against nuclear escalation.

- 4** On Ukraine, the argument advanced ran deliberately against the prevailing framing. Where European discussion had settled on Ukraine as a heroic nation requiring support, the position taken was that this is not the whole truth and in some respects the reverse: Ukraine needs support, but Europe needs Ukraine's capabilities more. That view was later echoed at commissioner level in Brussels, where it was said that Ukraine matters more to European defence than the United States does — described in the room as a dramatic statement.
- 5** A concrete proposal emerged from that work: that Ukrainian veterans could be mobilised, in the event of a pause in the conflict, to replace American troops in the Baltic states as the United States withdraws. A senior European foreign minister made a comparable point some weeks later. No causal claim was pressed, only that the ideas had circulated and recurred.
- From the Hanns Seidel Stiftung**
- 6** The centre-right disposition is a symbiosis of past and future rather than a choice between them. The formulation offered was tradition and technology together — a healthy attitude to the past without believing that every problem is solved by turning back the clock, and an openness to the future without utopianism. This was contrasted with a progressive left held to treat the past as simply discredited.
- 7** The pillars of the programme are inseparable. Technology, economy and defence must be thought about together, because the moment defence is considered alone the question becomes how it is financed and how innovation is achieved. Ukraine was cited again, this time for the observation that innovation cycles there now run over weeks rather than decades, and that outcomes turn on will and intelligence as much as numbers.
- 8** No country represented in the room can meet these challenges alone. With delegates present from Britain, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Poland and elsewhere, the closing appeal was to synergy between middle powers, and to treating the event as a point of departure — an occasion to exchange views and find future collaborators, in a setting where people can speak openly.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

No Q&A was recorded for this session.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The session ended by handing over to the opening keynote. Its function was to establish the frame for everything that followed: that the two days were about long-term trends rather than current headlines, that the work is done in partnership across European borders, and that the value of the gathering would lie in what participants took away and acted on afterwards. The partner statements had already begun that work, setting out positions on European defence and Ukraine that later sessions would return to and, in places, contest.



# 02

## Future shock: World towards 2040

Thursday 3 September 2026

14:15–15:00 · Auditorium

**Speakers:**  
Lord Hague

**Moderator:**  
Damian Green

### INTRODUCTION

This was the scene-setting keynote for the whole programme, given on the opening afternoon and followed by fifteen minutes of questions. It set out to answer the following questions: what kind of period is the world living through, and what does it demand of centre-right politics? The argument was that the turbulence of the last decade is structural, not incidental, and that the ideas raised over the following two days should be tested against it.



### KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS

- 1** The organising device was to read recent history as a book with chapters. The Cold War decades formed a chapter that could be called danger; from around 1990 to about 2015 came a chapter of excitement, in which liberal democracy appeared to have settled the argument and deals with Russia looked possible.
- 2** From about 2015 a third chapter began, and the case made was that it should be called danger and excitement together — a combination that is historically unusual and hard to hold in mind at once. The period is plausibly the most exciting humans have lived through and the most dangerous since 1945. Local research was offered as evidence of the upside: fusion producing net energy, plastics recycled from carbon dioxide in the air, quantum computers communicating without physical connection.
- 3** That the shift is structural, not personal, was argued from experience. A decade ago British and American foreign policy were near identical, and the Iran nuclear agreement took two years of trust-building helped by Russia and China. None of that holds now, so a rapid equivalent deal was called unrealistic.

- 4 Five super-cycles were identified as now coinciding and named as the real drivers: geopolitical, economic, demographic, climatic and technological. Individual leaders were described as manifestations of these forces rather than causes, so the turbulence will not lift when particular figures leave office.
- 5 On demography, this was said to be the fastest period of change since the Black Death, with birth rates plunging almost everywhere. Europe was predicted to fall from around eight per cent of world population to six, and Africa to rise from eighteen to twenty-five, over the next twenty-four years.
- 6 On technology, AI was described as changing every other technology, with the warning that nobody holding a temporary technological advantage has ever resisted using it — the industrial revolution allowed two per cent of the world's population to rule a quarter of its surface.
- 7 A distinctive centre-right response was then set out force by force: higher defence spending with innovation alongside it; reform of international institutions rather than abandonment, with new norms on AI governance; a grip on debt through welfare and pension reform; market-based climate solutions rather than denial; a constructive national identity rather than hostility to migration; and leading on technology while refusing to let a few corporations dominate it.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

- 1 The first question asked whether the breakdown of multilateral arrangements gives Britain and Europe a chance to redesign international institutions for the 2030s. The reply backed a globally led effort on AI governance, but warned that it needs the United States and China, that technology will outrun governance, and that such institutions historically follow a shock rather than prevent one.
- 2 Asked what the eighteenth century offers, the answer drew parallels: turmoil as the industrial revolution took hold, more total ways of waging war, and the overthrow of established systems. What followed was a freer-trading century in which a rising power lived alongside a declining one — but only after twenty-five years of upheaval.
- 3 Britain's position as a supposedly declining middle power was raised. The response accepted that soft power has been damaged, citing the loss of a development budget once at 0.7 per cent of GDP, but held that research strength remains exceptional, with three of the world's top ten universities. The missing element was capital.
- 4 On European deterrence, the formulation offered was capability multiplied by willpower. Capability means using procurement to sponsor innovation and scale domestic firms rather than buying cheaper abroad. Willpower means visible collective response — recent drone incursions were said to warrant a NATO answer, not a national one — and resilience, with the Nordic countries praised for telling their populations that a passport carries obligations.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The session closed on the speaker's own summing-up: a large responsibility falls on the centre of politics, because there is a visible shortage of ideas on the left and because on every one of the five drivers the populist right would take matters in the wrong direction. Delegates were invited to test the framework, extend it if they preferred, and ask in each case what a coherent response looks like.

Thursday 3 September 2026

15:30–16:15 · Auditorium

**Speakers & panellists:**

Ajit Jaokar

Joanna Kulesza

Michael Richter

**Moderator:**

Frank Nigriello

**INTRODUCTION**

The third session of the afternoon turned from geopolitical framing to the pace of digital transformation. The question it set out to answer was not what artificial intelligence will be capable of by 2040, but whether the United Kingdom and the European Union are thinking strategically enough about where they intend to lead.

**KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS**

- 1** Adoption is moving faster than institutions are adjusting. Official statistics were cited showing use of AI by UK businesses with ten or more employees rising from 12 per cent in 2023 to approximately 35 per cent by mid-year, with around 56 per cent of firms surveyed reporting improved productivity through faster analysis, automation of routine tasks and better use of skills.
- 2** Capability was assessed against markers rather than dates — such as understanding language and reasoning. General intelligence at roughly human level was described as already arriving in many fields, distinct from the superintelligence of popular imagination, with systems solving mathematical problems open for a century. The acceleration was attributed to recursive self-improvement, models writing and improving their own code, though it was conceded that opinion divides into camps and nothing here is settled.
- 3** The social consequences were presented as visible rather than speculative, with research described on communities forming sustained emotional relationships with conversational systems and a low-integration, ageing society examined as a test case. A related argument held that skill and knowledge are no longer tied to institutions, and that non-developers need different routes into the technology.

**4** On regulation, the case made was that new law is largely unnecessary: regulating AI means regulating its everyday impact, and international law already applies. It was affirmed at UN level in 2015 that international law governs online conduct as it does offline, and Charter provisions on the use of force apply whatever the technology — covering autonomous systems in the war in Ukraine as much as disinformation and deepfakes. Pressure for a new treaty was read as partly a wish for a seat at a newly created table.

**5** The competitive position was set out bluntly. Frontier models are almost exclusively American or Chinese, compute is becoming the next commodity, and data centre investment on the scale committed elsewhere is not happening in Europe; one large European economy's trade with China was described as moving from near balance a decade ago to a deficit of more than 100 billion. The constraints were called homemade: talent is abundant and over-represented in the American technology sector, but capital sits in low-interest savings, pension allocations to venture capital are a fraction of the American rate, and energy costs are too high. Since the gap is measured in months rather than years, it was argued Europe could still lead on implementation rather than accept a binary world.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

**1** The dominant question was retention: young people leaving education today dream first of America, and the panel was asked what would make them stay. The response tied the loss to demography and argued that Europe must be made good to work in, not merely pleasant to look at, since it will never match American energy costs.

**2** A second question contrasted public debate on either side of the Atlantic, suggesting European discussion fixes on the regulation of AI without reflecting on what the technology can already do, and that the 2040 horizon distracts from the next five or ten years. A later intervention asked whether current investment is a bubble, and whether the language of threat was crowding out discussion of what should be built now.

**3** The strongest formulation of a European offer came in reply: human-centred AI, meaning Europe — the UK and Brussels alike — will protect your data, keep a human in the loop and put the individual rather than the company at the centre of technology and regulation. This was presented as the only credible alternative, not a claim to leadership.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The session landed on agency rather than prediction: the outcome is not determined; the constraints holding Europe and the UK back are largely self-imposed and reversible, and the governance answers may already exist in international law if there is political will to apply them. The tension left standing was between the claim that implementation and human-centred regulation amount to a sufficient strategy and the concern that the people needed to execute it are leaving.



# 04

## Defence and Security

Thursday 3 September 2026

16:15–17:05 · Auditorium

### Speakers & panellists:

Neil Shastri-Hurst MP

Aliona Hlivco

### Moderator:

Andreas Wüst

## INTRODUCTION

The fourth session turned from the geostrategic picture to defence itself: what threats the United Kingdom and the European Union expect to face on the road to 2040, and what they demand of European defence policy. A presentation was followed by a response on the transatlantic and Ukrainian dimensions, then discussion with the room. The question underneath was whether the West will pay for the security it says it wants.



## KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS

- 1** The problem had two halves: an external threat markedly more serious, and two decades in which governments of both parties drew down the peace dividend and under-invested. Russian activity is no longer confined to Ukraine but reaches a persistent presence in the Channel and regular testing of NATO.
- 2** In July of this year the Royal Navy spent 21 days shadowing Russian activity in UK waters and the Atlantic, and activations to monitor Russian vessels rose by a quarter over the first seven months. Submarine activity near undersea cables and pipelines was called an equally serious concern for an island nation.
- 3** This was presented as a European rather than a British problem: cyber-attacks, disinformation and campaigns exploiting the space between peace and war, alongside a press investigation reporting newly built launch infrastructure at ten Russian sites within range of NATO territory. Russian power should not be exaggerated, but a weakened adversary remains dangerous.

- 4 A "NATO first" posture was supported, provided it becomes more than a heading: a stronger European pillar, bound to the United States but less dependent on it for capability. The state of the forces made the point concrete: at one stage this year only three of six air-defence destroyers were operational, frigate numbers had fallen, and the last batch of the preceding frigate class was ordered in the 1990s, its replacements not until 2017.
- 5 The current defence investment plan was credited for measures including uncrewed systems but faulted for offering no funded route to NATO's 3.5% of GDP commitment, nor an interim 3% by 2030. A state calling national security its first duty cannot fund defence from what is left after every other priority.
- 6 Support for Ukraine should be measured in ammunition, air-defence systems, industrial output and enforced sanctions rather than in the warmth of receptions, with more pressure on the shadow fleet. Joint work on drones, electronic warfare and land-based interception was called instruction rather than charity: cheap systems destroy expensive ones, and industrial depth is itself a capability.
- 7 It was argued that Ukraine has shifted from recipient of security to provider of it, in a war now fought across cyber, information, intelligence and increasingly space. Ukraine was the first country to establish unmanned systems forces, followed by Russia and then the United States; the value lies less in building drones than in deploying them, and Europe was urged to integrate Ukraine into its security architecture.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

- 1 The first question pressed on procurement: if spending rises sharply, what stops the money being wasted? The reply accepted the premise, noted that sclerotic procurement is confined neither to one country nor to defence, and pointed to industry and AI, firmer contract enforcement, and exiting failing contracts.
- 2 The discussion turned to selling defence spending against competing claims — health, education, economic transformation — and to political courage. The public has not been asked to think about threat or national resilience for generations, it was argued, and the whole-of-society approach of northern European states is a better model than the current siloed one. Governments look over their shoulder at the next election, but a security-first government would take unpopular decisions.
- 3 Sanctions were questioned on the grounds that they drive adversaries into deeper alignment, particularly with China. The reply was that they remain a real lever and should be tightened on Russia and on those financing its war effort, while conceding the approach needs to be more sophisticated.
- 4 Closing exchanges covered capability development where American cover cannot be assumed: a weak investment environment, and the need for a strategic signal from the centre before private capital follows. A question on Africa drew the argument that deprioritising development was a misstep — where the West withdraws, others offer infrastructure in exchange for critical minerals.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The session landed on one proposition: the threat picture is understood well enough; the binding constraint is political will. Rebuilding forces, funding an industrial base, protecting infrastructure and sustaining Ukraine were presented as one task with one price, payable now or later. The last word was that Ukraine's accumulated experience is a European asset to be absorbed quickly.



Thursday 3 September 2026

17:10–17:55• Auditorium

**Speakers & panellists:**

Klaus Welle

**Moderator:**

Jan Jires

**INTRODUCTION**

The Thursday afternoon breakout on European defence ran before the dinner address. It opened on the point that the call to strengthen Europe's defence is near-universal while the phrase means different things to different people: stronger national militaries inside NATO's European pillar, an integrated system centred on the Union, or something wider taking in Britain and Ukraine.

**KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS**

- 1** The old division of labour is finished. NATO does defence, Europe does autonomy was called outdated. Offered instead was an ecosystem of six pillars whose roles are still shifting — a transition, not a new equilibrium.
- 2** Burden shifting, not burden sharing. Conventional defence is becoming Europe's primary responsibility and America's secondary one, to be complete within this presidency, one report putting the moment at 2027 and press reports citing wartime provision in key weapons categories falling by half to two-thirds. What goes is not only money but a rapid reaction force of 100,000 deployable in ten days, satellites, intelligence and doctrine.
- 3** Procurement arithmetic is the heart of the problem. Orders take about three years, so what is bought now arrives around 2029, while the American reduction happens now. Investment is uneven; one national budget was given as roughly 83 billion last year and above 120 billion this year.
- 4** The more money there is, the more national the spending becomes, forgoing economies of scale. Strategic enablers serve everybody rather than one country and should be financed in common. Defence markets should be opened to each other, a Franco-German mutual opening named as the unlocking move.

- 5 A defence union is being built from the base upwards. Its base is policy areas once closed to military use — roads, harbours, research, civil protection — reopened as military mobility, alongside a 150 billion programme for strategic enablers and a defence commissioner. The unfinished business is operationalising the Union's mutual assistance clause: who meets, who decides, against which budget lines.
- 6 Ukraine is capability, not a beneficiary. With the American presence shrinking and European procurement not yet delivering, the only credible answer to the gap was Ukraine: 800,000 soldiers, combat experience, mastery of drone and missile warfare. A defence pact was proposed, with a joint rapid reaction force of 50,000 Ukrainians and 50,000 Europeans.
- 7 Hybrid attacks are the opening phase of war, classified in Russian doctrine as stage zero rather than something short of war. Unless a reciprocal cost is inflicted the activity continues and enlarges; it doubles as reconnaissance.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

- 1 What becomes of European defence if the coming elections go badly, France and Poland named. The answer declined to predict outcomes but insisted external and internal challenges are linked: dividing societies forces dealings country by country rather than with a bloc. A published account was cited claiming a quarter of a major energy company's value funded influence operations.
- 2 Whether burden shifting really locks Europe into American technology. The reply was that this is moot: planned deliveries have not materialised, industrial production has fallen from around thirty to about ten per cent of the American economy, and the doctrine is prioritisation: the Western hemisphere first, Asia second, the Middle East third, Europe fourth. Missiles and interceptors spent on Iran are not available for Europe, so America cannot deliver what Europe is being told to buy.
- 3 Willpower, and whether societies can be inoculated against disinformation. The floor argued capability without willpower is worthless, proposing cross-national youth and resilience schemes with incentives, not compulsion. The reply noted a generational shift towards geopolitics and backed conscription.
- 4 Whether the problem is one man. It is not: Russia's logic was said to be territorial expansion over five centuries. A demilitarised Nordic archipelago was named the cheapest way to break the principle that NATO territory is inviolable, and a simulation cited in which a ceasefire is followed six months later by a Baltic attack.
- 5 Vetoes and qualified majority voting. Unanimity has already produced its own alternative in ad hoc groupings of large states — a nineteenth-century model serving smaller countries least of all, and one holdout lets an adversary decide. The remedy proposed was a European Security Council in force once fifteen states ratify, open to Britain, Ukraine and Norway, deciding by qualified majority.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The session ended on the refusal to define European defence as NATO and not the Union, or the Union and not NATO. The sixth pillar was left deliberately short — economy, technology, energy, demography and a sense of what is being defended — flagged as the subject of that evening's dinner address. The sharpest note was timing: with American potential heavily committed to Iran and the Middle East and European orders not yet arriving, the phase of maximum vulnerability is now, and no adversary need wait until Europe is ready.

Thursday 3 September 2026

17:10–17:55 • Breakout room

**Speakers & panellists:**

Caroline Kennedy-Pipe

**Moderator:**

Tomi Huhtanen

**INTRODUCTION**

A breakout strand held under the Chatham House Rule, in the late afternoon alongside the other Thursday breakout session. It took the most recent round of American strategy publications as its starting point and asked what the transatlantic relationship becomes as a result, and what the alliance must be able to do beyond 2030. A short framing and one opening statement were followed by open discussion.

**KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS**

- 1** The American shift has altered relations not only across the Atlantic but also within Europe. The framing offered was that it has changed how continental Europe and the United Kingdom relate to each other, and that whether the United States is now opponent or friend cannot be separated from questions of trade and economics. The recent strategy documents were read not as an ending but as a settled strategy that Europe must answer.
- 2** The high north was presented as the pressure point. The Arctic was described as increasingly contested, with Chinese as well as Russian activity, and the polar treaty arrangements said to be coming up for reconsideration. A sharp increase in Russian submarine activity was reported in the gap between Iceland and the United Kingdom — the route to the Atlantic, and the waters carrying the physical links to North America.
- 3** The schism over NATO is real, but dependence is the binding constraint. Open questioning of whether the treaty commitment is necessary was described as a genuine break with European allies, though complaints about national caveats on European troops were said to predate the current presidency. Either way, a European force digging in against a Russian attack would still depend on American intelligence, as the withdrawal from Afghanistan showed. The nuclear deterrent was described in the same terms: nominally independent, with the underlying research and servicing sitting in the United States.
- 4** Uncrewed systems were treated sceptically: numbers still matter. Drawing on Ukraine, the case made was that mass remains decisive as Russian forces advance incrementally, and that uncrewed systems are tactically significant but not war-winning. Counter-systems were said to be certain to arrive; the systems themselves fail in low temperatures, need good visibility, and are less precise than claimed. The warning was against being seduced by the technology.

- 5 The relationship has to be managed rather than repaired. Friendship was framed through Aristotle's three types, the highest grounded in virtue, and the question posed was how such a friendship survives the present turbulence. The practical conclusion was that insults will have to be absorbed and the configuration kept intact, with the precedent of past conflicts in which Britain sent no troops but supplied intelligence and training.
- 6 Where the rhetoric is inflamed, the institutional layer still works. Intelligence sharing was said to have continued through the political noise. Europe was described as having many friends in Congress who cannot express themselves forcefully, and the productive route as cooperation between legislatures and business on both sides, using the separation of powers rather than lobbying the executive. A congressional resolution supporting the partnership was mentioned as drafted and then stalled.
- 7 Russia's long-term position was described as structurally weak. Infrastructure across Siberia was said not to survive the next twenty-five to thirty years well, compounded by climate change and demographic decline: sanctions can be evaded, a population cannot be replenished. Such states were said not to decline gradually — repression holds everything down until it does not, and collapse comes overnight.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

- 1 Whether the United Kingdom's position genuinely differs from the continental one. The moderator pressed on whether closeness to Washington gives the UK different options, and what that means for finding a common line. The answer offered was that the times defeat planning, with concern expressed that the current president is closer to Moscow than to any European capital.
- 2 Greenland and the risk of a linked crisis. A scenario was floated in which Russian movement against a Baltic state prompts an American move on Greenland, alongside a report of considerable American activity there already, and the argument that acquisition need not be overt — airstrips, healthcare and other soft-power instruments would do the same work.
- 3 Financing, and what Europe can control. The recurring stumbling block was where defence money comes from. The suggestion made was to stop waiting for Washington and take agency as middle powers, deepening trade partnerships across the Pacific and the Commonwealth and linking them to existing blocs. Partners in Asia were reported to be asking where Britain has gone.
- 4 Whether Europe now needs Ukraine more than Ukraine needs Europe. Ukraine was said to have moved in European perception from a heroic nation requiring support to an asset — combat experience, a drone industry, forces prepared to fight as others will not. The counter-point raised was that several neighbouring states see Ukrainian integration as a threat to their own interests.
- 5 Ukraine as a proxy conflict, and the China question. The room asked where the war ends and who disarms, given the external actors funding units on the Russian side. Separately, why American strategy towards China appeared to have softened when hostility to Beijing had been the one bipartisan constant — the suggestion being that this is tactical and will reverse once Ukraine is settled.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There was no formal summing-up: the session ran out of time and the last exchanges were cut off, so the position below is drawn from the closing contributions. The room landed on a guarded optimism — that the relationship will have to be navigated rather than fixed, that NATO solidarity should be protected while Europe works out which American capabilities it could replace, and that capacity has to be built quickly, because the period of rearmament and maximum uncertainty is also the period in which adventurism is most likely.

Thursday 3 September 2026

19:20–22:30 · Auditorium

**Speakers & panellists:**

Klaus Welle

**Moderator:**

Damian Green

**INTRODUCTION**

The session was the dinner address, delivered to the whole party in the Hall before the meal. It ran as a single argument in seven parts, from the shocks reshaping the international system, through what they mean for Europe internally, to the answer proposed. It asked whether the order Europe has lived in since 1945 still holds, and if not, what should replace Europe's assumptions about its security and prosperity.

**KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKER**

- 1** The first shock is a long pattern resumed, not a single event. The war against Ukraine was presented not as an aberration but as a return to five hundred years of territorial expansion — the process by which a small city state became the largest land mass on earth. The warning was against treating it as an episode that will pass.
- 2** The second and third shocks are demotion and dumping. It was argued that the United States has moved Europe down to its fourth priority, with the Western hemisphere first — Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, Canada, Greenland — a return to nineteenth-century American practice. China, meanwhile, was said to be using Europe to offload its surplus production, choosing the weaker of the two large markets because Europe has an economic problem. Together, the three shocks were said to mean the political order built after 1945 is finished.
- 3** What replaces it looks like the nineteenth century. The organising idea was the weaponisation of everything — refugees, raw materials and trade can all be used as weapons — alongside an open contest for choke points, the Panama Canal and the Strait of Hormuz named and the Strait of Malacca a possible next. Where the assumption after 1945 was that the cake grows for everybody through cooperation, gains were said now to come from taking rather than building: a zero-sum world, or simply, nationalism is back.

- 4 Europe is not immune, because the same pressure is internal. What was called a revolt of the lower middle class has produced parties across Europe that over-represent lower-income voters, less-educated workers and the unemployed — roughly thirty per cent of the electorate in Europe and the United States alike. The formula offered: populism is the method, nationalism the content — "social nationalism", the word order deliberate, because the force comes from social grievance welded to national identity.
- 5 Majoritarian systems are the more exposed. Thirty per cent can take everything in a two-party system, and one recent general election turned thirty-four per cent of the vote into more than sixty per cent of the seats; under proportional rules the same share buys far less. External and internal challengers were also said to be well connected, evidenced by which parliamentarians volunteered to observe the referendum after the occupation of Crimea.
- 6 Defence is the most urgent necessity, because sovereignty without it is an abstraction. If you cannot defend yourself you are not sovereign — a legal construction, nothing more. The old division of labour, one organisation doing defence and another economics, is gone. The Europeanisation of the alliance is being accelerated from the American side, weapon systems are being withdrawn, and a posture review was said to point towards possible complete withdrawal later this decade. Ukraine was called decisive for European defence and must therefore be firmly integrated into the European security architecture, in another framework if the existing one cannot take it.
- 7 The answer proposed was power, speed and scale. Sovereignty was said to be worthless without a growing economy, competitive technology, secure energy, a working democracy and decision-making that can actually decide. Europe was called weak on all three counts: founders scale in the United States because it has a genuine internal market and a capital market that finances expansion, and without that they will build elsewhere.
- 8 The political consequence is a question of who can be worked with. A landscape of roughly three thirds was sketched: new right, traditional left, centre. The plea was to distinguish the constructive right from the destructive right rather than treat everyone beyond the centre-right as identical, since those parties insist on their differences and behave accordingly.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The address closed on the United Kingdom, flagged as its most delicate part: ten years after the referendum, this is not yet the final settlement, and the form of the future relationship remains open. Two proposals were cited as evidence the question is live — a recently published scheme for a European confederation taking in Ukraine, Norway and the United Kingdom, with market access for goods and common defence, and a standing proposal for a European Security Council of the Union's member states extended to those same three, since the continent's security must be defended together. The moderator closed with a brief, light rejoinder and sent the room to dinner.



Friday 4 September 2026

09:00–09:40 · Auditorium

**Speakers & panellists:**

Markus Ferber MEP

**Moderator:**

James Elles

## INTRODUCTION

The Friday morning opened with a keynote on the European economic and financial outlook, turning the programme from geostrategy and digital transformation towards economy and trade. It asked why the Union has fallen behind on growth, and whether simplifying regulation goes far enough for a dynamic economy in the 2030s.



## KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKER

- 1 Europe's problem is not diagnosis but delivery. The mid-1990s expectation was convergence with American living standards through the single market; instead the gap widened. There is no shortage of reports and action plans — the hard part is implementing what is already known.
- 2 The Draghi report on European competitiveness, presented in September 2024, put around 70% of the GDP-per-capita gap with the United States down to lower productivity. Germany's 0.3% productivity growth last year against wage rises of 4.5% shows an economy distributing more than it creates. American gains were credited largely to artificial intelligence — the Americans build the product, the Chinese copy it, Europe regulates it.
- 3 Europe cannot turn invention into scale. Between 2008 and 2021, 147 European-founded companies passed a billion-dollar valuation and 40 later moved abroad; none founded from scratch in fifty years has reached a €100 billion market capitalisation. Firms meet fragmented markets, scarce growth capital and regulatory complexity just as they need to expand.
- 4 Energy was treated as a production factor, not an environmental question: electricity at two to three times American prices, gas at four to five, a direct competitiveness problem for energy-intensive industry, and such weaknesses compound year on year.

- 5 The assets are under-used: 450 million people, a skilled workforce, world-class universities, large private savings, a sixth of global GDP. But the single market is real on paper, not in practice — exporting to Asia can still be easier than selling to a neighbour.
- 6 Simplification is a genuine change of direction that does not go deep enough: a 25% cut in administrative burdens and 35% for SMEs by 2029, twelve omnibus packages by June, some €18 billion in claimed savings — figures met with scepticism. Firms also pay for uncertainty and meet legislation as one combined cost, while each omnibus works inside a single directorate general.
- 7 Europe has capital but does not put it to work. EU households saved around €1.39 trillion in 2022 against roughly €840 billion in the United States, yet a third of their financial assets sit in cash and deposits against some 11% in America, and listed shares at 5% against 31%. Bank resolution shows the same drag: 54 steps stand between the national and European bodies that must wind up a failing bank over a weekend.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

- 1 The reset of UK–EU relations was said to feel like Groundhog Day: no cherry-picking on one side, red lines on the other, an endpoint neither will like. The structural reply was that financial services were left out of the withdrawal negotiations because no free trade agreement anywhere contains a financial services chapter.
- 2 Mutual dependence was the case for cooperating anyway: the Union has no equivalent for certain specialist insurance markets, particularly shipping and export cover, and London clearing was claimed to be three times cheaper than Frankfurt. Both sides lose the same listings and bond placements to New York and Asia. The real contest is Europe against America and Asia.
- 3 The room pressed on whether there is a regulatory sweet spot, the Brussels effect having once made European rules global by default. Rules matter, the answer accepted, but banning things before their possibilities are discussed guarantees failure. Europe's real asset is the quality of its industrial and health data, with no tools to exploit it — and data protection, now digital sovereignty, have produced 27 national answers rather than one.
- 4 On defence, asked about the prospect of a German military larger than the French and British combined, the answer was fiscal. Defence spending now sits outside the deficit ceiling, but that room is limited where deficits are already high, and rising bond yields feed into 21 national bond markets rather than one, hitting France and Italy hardest.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The close was political rather than economic. Youth unemployment stood at 15.5% across the Union in June, and above 20% in several member states, alongside labour shortages. Long stagnation — a decade in Italy, a seventh year in Germany — makes distributional conflict harder and, with age-related spending crowding out education and infrastructure, feeds movements offering simple answers to difficult trade-offs. The closing appeal was for UK–EU cooperation beyond foreign affairs and defence, into economic policy.



Friday 4 September 2026

09:40–10:40 · Auditorium

**Speakers & panellists:**

Sir Paul Collier

Peter Hefele

**Moderator:**

Vinay Raniga

**INTRODUCTION**

The last plenary of the Friday morning asked what would actually raise growth in Britain and Europe by 2040, and whether growth is the right target at all. It paired a diagnosis of British over-centralisation with a European argument about productivity, technology and the political cost of change.

**KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS**

- 1** Britain was called the most over-centralised country in the developed world, with the warning that on this course it will not stay one. The risk-rating gap between investing in a provincial English city and in London was said to equal that between British and Nigerian debt, though those cities together match London's population.
- 2** The case for devolution rested on tacit knowledge: which vocational skills a place needs cannot be decided in Whitehall, which does not know the local labour market. Rebuilding local government skills is the precondition; the Victorian town halls were cited as evidence the capacity once existed.
- 3** Whitehall itself was called vastly overstuffed and vastly under-skilled: fast-stream recruits arrive with economics degrees and no operational knowledge, then are asked to design railways. France was the contrast, where civil service entry runs through a specialist grande école.
- 4** A contributive welfare model was proposed to replace the needs-based one: everyone owes a duty to contribute to a common purpose and has an equal voice in setting it. The present system was said to reward declaring oneself unfit for work over continuing to look for it; cross-party cooperation with metro mayors was floated as the route to reform.

- 5 British firms are sold off far too readily, it was argued, and pension funds and insurers should be required to hold far more UK assets. The reasoning: people are citizens before consumers, with duties as well as rights. Globalisation was declared over.
- 6 Growth was said to be politically uncontroversial only until you ask for what, for whom and where. Productivity matters more than headline GDP because it lifts real incomes, and a country can grow at the macro level while former industrial regions and rural areas do not.
- 7 Demography offers no quick fix: even if fertility rose now, the workforce effect would not appear until the late 2040s. AI was said not to be a magic wand and to generate no productivity by itself: the bottleneck named was internal management capacity to absorb it, not capital or technology.
- 8 The hardest problem was political legitimacy: creative destruction is real, but destruction comes first and creation later, and the gap between them is where politics struggles and resentment forms. The social market economy was meant to give people a net to move from, not to shield every existing structure.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

- 1 The contributive argument was welcomed, but the room pressed on framing: pair it with the social market economy and with something like contributive entitlement, so the emphasis falls on participation rather than the wealth of the very rich. It also drew a complaint about a tax code that is the world's longest and yet raises too little.
- 2 The most persistent question was whether shifting capital to the regions damages what already works, given that London and the South East fund the welfare state. The reply drew a Bogotá comparison: a capital growing without limit faces staggering infrastructure costs, so pushing growth outwards serves its own interest. It was called bad for London too: crowding, rough sleeping, preposterous rents.
- 3 The floor extended the point: graduates left the West Country half a century ago and never returned, so this is neither recent nor purely northern, and governments talk of levelling up while championing an Oxford-to-Cambridge corridor still in the South East.
- 4 Transport was the concrete test: a fraction of the HS2 spend could have linked the great cities of the North, augmenting northern potential rather than detracting from London — strategy rather than a zero-sum trade. From the platform, intra-regional transport was preferred to a flagship line.
- 5 Cultural difference was raised as underexamined: a spending culture in Britain against a saving culture on the continent, and a tradition of incremental improvement rather than disruptive invention. The answer defended incremental innovation as less visible but more durable, citing regional ecosystems of applied universities and firms that give people a reason to stay.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Asked to name the single thing that would move the needle, the platform answered devolution, unqualified, because over-centralisation sits underneath everything else. The second was that the coming generation wants to be treated as citizens, not clients of the state. It closed on an illustration: a metro mayor seeking money for a local bus service was told by the Treasury to apply to Transport for London.



# 09

## Conservative policy priorities / next generation (breakout)

Friday 4 September 2026

11:00–11:55 • Auditorium

### Speakers

Sir Simon Clarke  
Alex Burghart MP

### Moderator:

Penelope Lenon

## INTRODUCTION

Session 9 ran as two parallel breakouts on the Friday morning; this was the strand on Conservative policy priorities. Two short openings were followed by an exchange between the contributors, then questions. It asked why young voters are not choosing the centre right, and what would have to change.



## KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS

- 1 A youth offer cannot be separated from the wider economy. The old pitch of work, a house and a pension was called honest but no longer true: since 2008 the median family has grown poorer while working, property has moved out of reach, and half of each cohort now leaves university in debt.
- 2 The consequence was put as arithmetic: at the last general election the age at which a voter became more likely than not to back the party was 64, and of six million votes cast about a million would be dead by the next. The young were still not to be treated as a special case.
- 3 Economic foundations were the precondition for everything else: cheaper electricity, a reassessed net zero timetable, more North Sea oil and gas, budget savings to cut tax and deficit, and level-headed deregulation — against £100 billion a year in debt interest on a debt near £3 trillion.
- 4 Housing and entitlements were treated together under generational fairness. The stamp duty commitment was welcomed as a signal, but only if matched by building far more, brownfield first and with a harder conversation about the home counties; welfare and the triple lock were called unavoidable questions.
- 5 Welfare cuts were tied to labour demand: they work only if paired with measures that create vacancies, chiefly lower employer taxes. National insurance and minimum wage changes were held to have damaged willingness to hire younger workers.

- 6 Two growth arguments were pressed: that financial services are an under-supported global strength, 2008 having contaminated even the case for the City; and that AI, life sciences and the Oxford–Cambridge corridor are the obvious opportunity. AI was also said to be collapsing graduate hiring, removing the visible route to success on which the party's appeal rests.
- 7 On energy there was an explicit recantation: the earlier commitment had been too hard and too fast, with chemicals and plastics named as casualties. The alternative was "firm power": wind and solar retained, more nuclear and, for longer, gas, with a paper cited in the room claiming savings near a third of a trillion pounds by 2050 while still reaching 80 per cent clean power below today's price.
- 8 On positioning, no rival theory of government was emerging from any domestic opponent. The party is no longer disliked — said to be least often voted against tactically — but is neither relevant nor fashionable; restoring relevance was the stated task.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

- 1 The room asked how falling birth rates change politics, as fewer voters have grandchildren and the base ages. The reply resisted the idea that childlessness breeds short-termism, locating the problem in the shrinking share of the population in work; such disputes turn bitter only in a zero-sum economy.
- 2 Climate framing drew the strongest challenge: young people vote on the issue and the party reads as close to denial, so why not lead with the economics of cheaper bills? Search interest in solar panels was said to have spiked twice, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and at the start of the war in Iran — evidence that people adopt clean technology to cut bills rather than out of environmental concern. The answer was that the party does not deny climate change, but that support cannot be won by bankrupting the country or by a hair-shirt strategy nobody else copies.
- 3 Asked whether the war in Ukraine had opened the party up on Europe, a strong trade and defence partnership was needed but had objections that the current reset means accepting rules without a say. The handling of the European defence procurement instrument was criticised sharply, its six-billion-pound access price called deliberately unacceptable.
- 4 It was asked whether policy work could be lifted to a 2040 horizon, linking the five themes set out in the opening plenary rather than treating them separately. This was accepted: 2029 may look very different, with AI capability said to double every six months.
- 5 On moral argument, the high ground was said to follow from being straight about problems and solutions rather than repeating what polls well. The floor added that radicalism has historically attracted the young, that the keenest appetite for welfare reform is among struggling workers, and that digital campaigning had been weak.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The session closed with thanks and no summing-up, straight into lunch. It landed on a sequence rather than a set of youth policies: fix energy costs, the fiscal position and the housing and jobs markets first, since no offer to the under-40s is credible until the route from work to capital is visible again.



# 09

## Sustainability: can clean energy be cheap energy? (breakout)

Friday 4 September 2026

11:00–11:55

### Speakers

Sam Hall

Berthold Schilling

### Moderator:

Frank Nigriello

## INTRODUCTION

Session 9 was a breakout in the sustainability strand on the Friday morning. The group was small, so it ran as a seated discussion rather than a platform panel. It asked whether clean energy can also be cheap energy, and what an honest account of its cost would look like.



## KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS

- 1 The short answer was yes, but with a trade-off neither side likes to state. Industrial electricity prices are among the highest in the developed world, and most of the rise was attributed to the policy costs added to bills to fund the transition, with a smaller share from gas prices, left exposed by import dependence to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the war in Iran.
- 2 Wind and sunlight are free at the margin, but the infrastructure is not, nor are the system costs it imposes: backup for still, dark periods, and new grid to carry generation from remote coasts to where demand sits. The trade-off is not unique to renewables: gas brings import dependency, nuclear heavy upfront capital and a record of overrun.
- 3 The honest position, it was argued, is to name that cost rather than disguise it; promises of painless green growth were cited as claims that discredit the case. The comparison offered was defence spending - nobody wants to commit billions absent a threat, but where the threat is real it is insurance against greater damage later.
- 4 On instruments, the preference was for market-based approaches over prohibition or blanket subsidy. Bans on combustion engines and domestic boilers were held up as the wrong model, as was funding the transition through ever more debt. Emissions trading was preferred as technology-neutral, leaving each business to decide whether and how far to decarbonise.
- 5 Carbon revenues should return to those who paid them. Most is currently absorbed by general funds or national budgets, which was described as not what the instrument was for; reform should send the bulk back to industry and households as investment capital.

- 6 Much of the available saving lies in how the transition is built, not whether it happens. Streamlined planning, zonal pricing instead of a single national price, an end to burying transmission cables, and steering new capacity to where the grid and demand already were all offered as ways to cut the bill without cutting ambition.
- 7 Cost allocation between industry and households drew the clearest contrast between the two systems discussed. Sparing industry rather than households was judged more rational, since households cannot relocate and industry can, and closures cost the state tax revenue and welfare. Expensive industrial power was also flagged as a risk to data centre and AI investment.
- 8 On party policy, a current review has dropped the 2050 commitment, proposed repealing the governing climate legislation, and called for fewer renewables with more nuclear and gas. The underlying concerns were treated as serious — the framework ranks emissions above cost and pushes ministers towards bans and mandates — but abandoning targets entirely was judged wrong, and no alternative has been stated.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

- 1 The room asked whether leadership is retreating from climate policy for short-term political advantage, importing a transatlantic habit of disparaging anything unpopular. The reply was that cost of living is consistently the top voter concern while the environment has only sporadically reached the top five, so the retreat amounts to fighting on the strongest ground. The argument still to be won is the causal one — that green policy is why bills are high — a link polling was said not to support.
- 2 Framing drew the strongest response. The transition was first sold through guilt and prohibition when it should have been sold through innovation and obligation, with a warning against letting the pendulum swing back towards narratives that offer no feasible alternative. Investors were described as wanting a stable framework above all.
- 3 It was questioned whether industry in an already deindustrialised economy can carry much of the burden, or whether the load falls on consumers and emerging data centre demand. A related exchange asked whether the populist right separates nature from climate: the answer was yes, local nature being far less polarised, with solar land use the friction point.
- 4 The sharpest challenge was that security had barely been mentioned. The case put was that across Central and Eastern Europe diversification is the primary argument, the grid is dual-use critical infrastructure, and offshore wind is backed across party lines. The response distinguished operating from capital imports: a closed pipeline stops supply that day, whereas installed turbines keep generating for years.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The session ran over its slot and was closed with thanks rather than a summing-up. It landed on a shared view that the costs are real, should be stated openly, and are best contained through cheaper delivery and market instruments rather than by abandoning the goal. Security framing was left unanswered.



Friday 4 September 2026

13:00–13:50 · Auditorium

**Speakers**

David Goodhart

**Moderator:**

Vinay Raniga

**INTRODUCTION**

The session was the last substantive slot of the programme, after lunch on the closing day. It asked what forces underpin the centre-right and populist parties in Britain and Europe, and what the split on the right now means in practice.

**KEY POINTS MADE BY SPEAKERS**

- 1** A new education-based value divide now sits on top of the old socioeconomic one. On one side is a large group — put at 25 to 30 per cent, not a small metropolitan elite — with achieved rather than ascribed identity, mobile and comfortable with social change; on the other, people whose identity rests on what they cannot change and who feel change more sharply where they live.
- 2** The mid-1990s to 2016 was characterised as an era of metropolitan openness, its social base the growth of the professional and managerial class, now some 40 to 45 per cent of those in employment. Political economy was substantially continuous across the period whatever the governing party, which gives the "uni-party" charge some validity.
- 3** Power dispersed away from elected politicians in those years, a principal driver of the backlash. Bank of England independence and the Equality Act 2010 bookended the New Labour period: authority moved to expert bodies, regulators and judges. The complaint that politicians can no longer decide is among the most resonant populist pitches, for Trump and Farage alike.

- 4 Since 2016 the backdrop has been provincial insecurity, and the revolt is cultural rather than economic. The pushback came in Brexit and Trump's first election, but the credentialled group still dominates the institutions. What is resisted is immigration, loss of national sovereignty and the further reaches of modern progressivism, which a left-of-centre government, governing inside a politics it built, is poorly placed to answer.
- 5 The 2019 realignment was a real shift, then squandered. It moved voters in the lower half of the income distribution rightwards, a diluted version of American politics, and produced a large majority that has since vanished. Brexit and Covid were unprecedented tests handled poorly; a party that was in truth two parties, and its leader's character, did the rest.
- 6 The split on the right is now the central practical problem. With the right-of-centre vote divided roughly down the middle between the Conservatives and Reform, a repeat of 2019 is far harder, and some arrangement — at minimum standing aside where one is clearly ahead — was thought likely and better than none. A party further to the right was judged, on balance, to help Reform's respectability.

## ISSUES RAISED IN Q&A

The moderator opened by asking whether "populist" is just a slur thrown by whoever is losing. The reply: nearly all politicians are populists on the academic definition, hostility to elites is now universal including among elites.

- 1 Whether the constraints that produced the backlash can be unpicked. A questioner, objecting to the suggestion that moderate Conservatives might be comfortable in the Liberal Democrats, asked whether repealing the legislation that ties politicians' hands offered an elegant retreat — net zero already, equalities law next. The answer argued for reforming the parts of equalities law that pursue equity rather than equal treatment, while calling wholesale repeal bad optics.
- 2 Whether 1997–2010 really represented continuity. It was objected that public-sector employment growth and tax credits created a client state that is very hard to roll back, and that Reform does not challenge this at all. That was largely conceded, the continuity claim narrowed to political economy and indifference towards deindustrialisation and regional inequality; the exchange then ran into contested claims about public-sector opinion and overseas-trained doctors.
- 3 European versus national identity, and how the less mobile group exerts power. It was put that the populist dividing line between national and European identity is false, identity being multi-layered. The response was that attachment to Europe as a substitute for the nation state has failed while sub-national attachment strengthens, and that the less mobile group is politically inert almost by definition, speaking through voting, polls and, increasingly, direct action at asylum hotels.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The last question asked whether failing integration in Britain and continental Europe means the trend can only run further towards populist parties. The answer disagreed: refugee inflows are falling as enforcement tightens, and the Geneva Convention was expected to be rewritten so that asylum cannot be claimed in the country of choice. Immigration remains the main source of populist anger, bound up with a sense that elites are indifferent to rapid demographic change; but if it comes under control, the open question is where that anger goes — net zero the likeliest candidate, family policy the more speculative.

# 11

## Closing Plenary Session

Friday 4 September 2026

13:50–15:00 · Auditorium

### Moderator:

Frank Nigriello

## INTRODUCTION

Session 11 closed the Summer University. The draft AI summaries of the preceding sessions were read from the main screen; the floor was invited to add what had struck it and to name one idea worth taking away. The exercise was framed openly as a compression, with bullet points to encourage discussion with fuller summaries on the companion app (some missing owing to a technical hitch). It asked what the two days had produced that the network should act on.



## KEY POINTS MADE DURING THE DISCUSSION

- 1** The structure of the opening address was found to map onto the network's own five pillars — geostrategy, digital transformation, economy and trade, sustainability and demography — demography being the least worked on. What was drawn out was not the pillars but the linkages between them.
- 2** That interconnection was pressed as the leadership problem of the coming decade: competence is needed across all five at once, yet it was put to the room that no leader knows enough about even one, let alone the consequences of their being tied together.

- 3 The single issue named above the others was an international framework for governing artificial intelligence, relayed as a question privately called bigger than any other. It returned in the close: shared values for a shared AI future need a transatlantic dialogue widened into an international understanding.
- 4 "Resilience through reinvention", taken from one of the summaries, was proposed as a motto for centre-right and Christian democratic thinking, alongside Bismarck's line that to avoid a revolution you should carry it out yourself. A constant capacity to renew, it was argued, belongs to the centre right rather than to progressives.
- 5 The demographic case was pressed as the most pertinent of the opening session. World population peaking near ten billion, with about four in ten people African, was set against China falling from 1.4 billion to around 800 million, making development policy the instrument for arresting migratory flows.
- 6 Transatlantic realism drew the sharpest intervention. Europe is now fourth in American strategic priorities, where a decade ago identity of view was assumed and never discussed, and the risk that Russia moves into Western Europe without an American response has not registered with the public.
- 7 Energy was reframed from the floor as national security rather than green politics. Where diversifying supply is treated as a security matter, the grid as critical infrastructure and energy technology as dual-use, major investment has drawn support from left and right alike. The further from the Ukrainian border, it was added, the less risk is seen.
- 8 Asked for one idea to take away, the floor offered how closely UK and continental challenges and solutions now track each other; the value of alternative alliances, including the Pacific; a call for future editions to bring regional perspectives, particularly Africa, into the programme; and a complaint that the European AI debate is static, with the 2029 elections expected to turn on it.



Friday 4 September 2026

Auditorium

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**Speaker:** James Elles

Dear Friends,

As we close the Summer University 2026, I would like to start by thanking all those who have made the event possible

\*Our speakers with their superb insights looking ahead;

\*Our co-organisers – the Wilfried Martens Centre and the Hanns Seidel Foundation - with their consistent good advice and support

\*Our hosts here at Corpus Christi College who have gone out of their way to meet our requirements

\*And our magnificent team coordinated by Ian for which nothing has been impossible to achieve.

The Ideas Network 2030 brings together those aligned with the centre right of British politics, together with a diverse range of stakeholders, interested in examining long term trends and their impact on the economy, politics and society.

This event has been under preparation for many months, building on the online sessions we have been running since last September on key issues affecting our future. Networks are processes not platforms, enabling different themes to be blended for greater and more effective use.

Our aim was always an ambitious one, looking ahead to the 2030's, when our current world is difficult to predict sometimes from day to day! So, we have focused over the last couple of days on looking at trends underway towards 2040 in the areas of Geostrategy; Digital Transformation; Economy and trade; Sustainability and the next Generation.

Warmest thanks for the excellence of our speakers who have lit up the future landscape for us, identifying themes to focus on in the months ahead. Three examples are:

**Defence and Security:** Focus on priorities for European Defence and Transatlantic Partnership

**Economy and Trade:** Focus on Devolution and Growth

**Digital Transformation:** International AI Governance

Nothing is more illustrative of the AI age than seeing it in action: all the discussions from this week are available as draft AI summaries for everybody attending to read on a custom-made platform built with AI specifically for this reunion, thanks to our colleague Alex Ash. They will be open to comment until lunchtime on Friday 11 September before being circulated more widely.

For the year ahead, we will continue to build our activities using these summaries to organize events which will help develop long term policy partnerships, creating a Vision 2040 exercise in the process.

In doing so, we will open the network to individuals and organizations to participate as members in our activities, involving them in shaping our future together.

As we have found out over the past 2 days, shaping our future to 2040 is a huge challenge. The main issues touching on geostrategy, digital transformation, the economy and sustainability are increasingly linked together as the world becomes a more complex place.

We believe in the power of ideas. In the memorable words of Victor Hugo, "You can resist the invasion of armies, but you cannot resist the power of ideas!"

Many thanks to you all for coming and your great contributions, and a safe journey home.



## **ORGANISERS OF THE SUMMER UNIVERSITY 2026**

### **The Ideas Network 2030**

The Ideas Network 2030 was founded in 2018 by stakeholders who think seriously about long-term trends. It provides a genuine forum to meet, debate, exchange ideas, and identify what matters most for policy and public life in the UK and Europe. The Network is working with local, national and European stakeholders across politics, business, academia and society to drive change and nurture ideas. For the Summer University we are cooperating with European partners, the Martens Centre and the Hanns Seidel Foundation.

**Find out more at [www.ideasnetwork2030.com](http://www.ideasnetwork2030.com)**



The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, established in 2007, is the political foundation and think tank of the European People's Party (EPP). The Martens Centre embodies a pan-European mindset, promoting Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded political values. It serves as a framework for national political foundations linked to member parties of the EPP. It currently has 30 member foundations and one permanent guest foundation in 25 EU and non-EU countries.

**Find out more at [www.martenscentre.eu](http://www.martenscentre.eu)**



The Hanns Seidel Foundation is a German political foundation aligned with the Christian Social Union. It promotes democracy, peace and development through various programmes. For almost 50 years, the Hanns Seidel Foundation has been involved in international cooperation and supports around 90 projects in 75 countries worldwide.

**Find out more at [www.hss.de/en](http://www.hss.de/en)**

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