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Franco-British Business Conference: UK and France Must Turn Strategic Alignment into Delivery in a More Volatile World

London, June 2026 – Senior business leaders, policymakers and investors gathered at the Franco-British Business Conference 2026 today against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical uncertainty, accelerating technological change and growing pressure on Europe to strengthen its economic resilience and competitiveness.

Discussion pointed to a world shaped by more frequent supply shocks, energy price volatility, rising defence requirements, accelerating technological disruption, weaker growth prospects and increasing uncertainty for business investment. Participants repeatedly argued that institutions, infrastructure and delivery systems are struggling to adapt at the same pace as geopolitical and technological change.

Against this backdrop, participants concluded that the central challenge for the UK and France is no longer identifying shared priorities, but building the industrial, technological and institutional capacity to deliver them at speed.

Across sessions on energy, defence, artificial intelligence and industrial strategy, a common diagnosis emerged: strategic alignment between the UK and France is strong, but execution remains the critical test.

Audience polling reinforced this conclusion. In the defence session, participants identified procurement complexity and supply chain fragmentation as the biggest barriers to industrial delivery. In the AI discussion, nearly half of respondents said investment in infrastructure — including data, compute and energy would do most to accelerate adoption. In the energy session, grid capacity and infrastructure emerged as the leading constraint on competitiveness.

The Conference also highlighted the growing convergence between economic competitiveness and economic security. Across discussions on energy, defence, AI and industrial strategy, speakers argued that grids, data centres, supply chains, defence production capacity and critical technologies should increasingly be viewed as strategic assets. Competitiveness and security are no longer separate policy agendas.

Emmanuelle Bury, President of the French Chamber of Great Britain, said:

"We are meeting at a time when war in Europe, energy volatility and global disruption are testing the resilience of our economies. But the message from this Conference is not one of pessimism. Our economies have adapted, our businesses remain resilient, and the Franco-British relationship has a critical role to play in what comes next.

"Sovereignty does not mean isolation. It means the capacity to act, to invest and to deliver with trusted partners. That is why the relationship between the UK and France matters so

much. We are not here simply to celebrate friendship, however important that friendship is. The world is changing too quickly for either country to succeed alone. Our strength comes from combining sovereignty with partnership, and ambition with execution

In the energy discussion, speakers argued that the challenge is no longer only how to generate clean power, but how to deliver reliable, affordable energy at scale. Grid capacity, infrastructure delivery, demand-side management and skills were identified as decisive factors in industrial competitiveness. Speakers also stressed that electrification, rather than decarbonisation targets alone, is increasingly becoming the practical pathway to competitiveness, energy security and industrial growth.

The defence panel focused on the gap between political intent and industrial execution. Speakers highlighted procurement speed, interoperability, SME participation, software, drones and AI as central to the next phase of Franco-British defence cooperation.

The AI panel concluded that artificial intelligence is not failing technologically, but stalling operationally. Business leaders argued that Europe does not suffer from a shortage of technological innovation. The greater challenge is deployment, adoption and scaling new technologies across organisations and industries.

The closing fireside chat on industrial strategy reinforced the need for policy consistency and clearer choices. Speakers from both governments underlined the importance of strategic sectors, investment certainty, economic security and closer UK–France cooperation in areas such as energy, defence, advanced manufacturing, AI and digital sovereignty.

In a closing CEO conversation, EDF UK Chief Executive Simone Rossi argued that Europe's challenge is increasingly one of execution rather than ambition. Drawing on the experience of delivering major nuclear infrastructure projects, he highlighted workforce capability, modular construction, supply-chain development and proportionate regulation as essential conditions for delivering the infrastructure needed for future competitiveness.

The Conference concluded that the next phase of UK–France cooperation will be judged less by declarations than by delivery. Participants identified practical collaboration on infrastructure, supply chains, AI deployment, defence industrial capacity, skills and investment as areas where the Franco-British partnership can generate measurable economic and strategic impact.

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