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2021 Supplement to Politics in the European Union

Fifth Edition

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Introduction

On Thursday 23 June 2016, there occurred one of the most dramatic and potentially most significant developments in the history of European integration: Britain decided to leave the European Union (EU). In a national referendum on whether to remain or leave, on a high turnout of 72.2 per cent of the registered electorate, 51.89 per cent voted to leave against 48.11 per cent who voted to remain. Subsequently, the government committed to implementing the referendum result, a decision that received parliamentary approval by a substantial majority of 498 votes to 118. After a drawn-out process the UK eventually left the EU on 31 January 2020.

How did this unexpected event come about; and what does it mean for the future of Britain and of the EU?

In this supplement to the fifth edition of our book, *Politics in the European Union* [PEU5], we look at the history of Britain's often difficult relationship with the rest of the EU, and the immediate background to the referendum; at analyses of the reasons for the result and the aftermath of the decision; at the process that has to be followed for a member state to leave and at how that unfolded for Britain; the early stages in building a new relationship between Britain and the EU; and at the implications of British exit ('Brexit') for both Britain and the smaller EU that will remain. While Britain left the EU on the 31 January 2020, it was only on the 31 December 2020 that the transition period ended, and a new relationship was embarked on, governed by a Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

History: Britain and European Integration

History is an important part of the explanation of the referendum result. Whereas in other member states there were positive associations to the process of European integration, even when the actual actions of the European institutions caused discontent, the British public was never led to believe anything more positive about the EU—or about its predecessor, the European Communities—than that it might be economically advantageous for the country to be a member. This in turn reflects a difficult relationship: the British were late in joining the European Communities, then renegotiated their terms of entry, even though they had demanded, and generally secured, a whole series of special concessions and opt-outs from common policies [PEU5: Part Two].

Membership, Renegotiation, and the First Referendum

When the European Communities were formed in the 1950s, Britain was invited to join, but declined. The British governing elite believed that Britain was simply a much bigger player in international relations than the six European states that initially participated, and that it therefore did not need to take part. In addition, most British policy makers were convinced that the attempt at unity would fail (George, 1998: 26–7). Eventual membership was based on a reluctant acceptance that Britain's position in the world was no longer that of an economic and political superpower. At the beginning of the 1960s, by which time the European Economic Community in particular had proved itself a success, British policy was reassessed and an application made for membership. Even then, the change of direction was not universally accepted (George, 1998: 32–5); but as France vetoed British entry to the organization in both 1963 and 1967, the question was shelved [PEU5: 126–7]. Britain did not achieve membership until 1973.

Just a few years after the Conservative government of Edward Heath took the country into the European Communities, the Labour government of Harold Wilson renegotiated the terms of entry and then, on 5 June 1975, held a referendum on whether to continue with membership (George, 1998: 71–99). On that occasion, the vote was to remain a member (with 67 per cent in favour), but the campaign divided the country, and was won not on the basis of a ringing endorsement of the ideals of European integration, but on a mundane argument about economic advantage. The whole episode, though, created a precedent. It was the first referendum ever held in the country, which in itself was a massive constitutional innovation, and because it was on membership of the EC, it became difficult to resist future demands for a further referendum on the same issue.

Conservative Divisions on Europe

In 1974/5 and in the early 1980s, it was the Labour Party that was divided on the issue of membership; but as time passed the Conservative Party came to be even more divided. Within the Conservative Party there was a strong attachment to the ideals of national sovereignty, which increasingly seemed to be eroded by the expansion of the range of activity of the European Communities beyond the purely economic into almost every aspect of policy, an expansion marked by the transformation into the EU in 1993 [PEU5: 154–8].

As Leader of the Conservative Party, and as Prime Minister from 1979, Margaret Thatcher played to this sentiment in her rhetoric, and fought a hard and ultimately successful battle to get a rebate on Britain's contributions to the common budget (George, 1998: 148–59) [PEU5: Ch. 8]. Although her discourse on Europe continued to be critical, in practice she accepted the necessity of many of the developments that extended the scope of European integration. In particular, she advocated the creation of the single European market [PEU5: Ch. 19], which she believed to be necessary to British economic success. However, the single market led to proposals for

integration in other policy areas, such as the creation of European social and environmental policies. These policies were designed to level the playing field for fair economic competition between member states, but entailed the extension of EU competences into areas that had previously been the exclusive domain of the member states [PEU5: Chs. 18 and 22].

One area, though, in which Thatcher was not prepared to accede was European monetary union. At the end of 1978, just before she came into office, the Bremen meeting of the European Council had taken the decision to set up a European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) to tie together the values of national currencies, as a first step towards an eventual single currency [PEU5: Ch. 20]. After she became Prime Minister, Thatcher showed a marked lack of enthusiasm for this whole project, and with the agreement on the single market seemed to have reached the limits of what she believed to be acceptable. For most of the other member states, the single market was just a first step, which would need to be completed by a single currency.

At the end of the 1980s, when discussion had already started on movement from the ERM to the next stage of a monetary union, Britain still had not put sterling into the system. Gradually, though, senior Conservative Ministers began to perceive that Britain's voice would not be listened to when decisions were made on the form and timing of monetary union unless a commitment were made to membership of the ERM. The Prime Minister, meanwhile, moved in the opposite direction, becoming more adamantly opposed to the step (George, 1998: 225–8). Despite this, the government surprised everyone with the announcement on 5 October 1990 that Britain would enter the ERM.

It seems clear that although she agreed to this step, which was pressed on her by her Chancellor of the Exchequer, John Major, Thatcher was not happy about it. The issue eventually contributed to her downfall when she broke with the official government line and provoked the resignation of her Deputy Prime Minister, Sir Geoffrey Howe. This in turn led to a leadership election in which Thatcher was replaced by Major.

After Major became Prime Minister in 1990, the government changed the tone of the British approach to Europe, showing some sensitivity to the positions of other member states, using more diplomatic language, and even making a few compromises (George, 1998: 238–40). Although none of this involved a change of fundamental policy objectives, it provoked more or less explicit public criticism from the previous Prime Minister, now Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven, and caused unrest among Conservative Eurosceptic MPs.

Following the April 1992 general election, the government had a majority of only 21, which was eroded further by defeats in by-elections and by the temporary removal of the Conservative Whip from eight MPs who persistently voted against the government on European issues. To ensure parliamentary ratification of the Maastricht Treaty [PEU5: 155–8], Major had to rely on Opposition votes, which weakened his authority in his own party; and he came under constant attack from sections of the press.

Then, in September 1992 amidst uncertainty about the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in several member states, speculative pressure built up on the currencies within the system, as funds were shifted into what were thought to be safer currencies. On 16 September, 'Black Wednesday', sterling was forced to withdraw from the ERM,

in what the Thatcherite elements within the Conservative Party saw as a vindication of their position. It was a big blow for Major. Between then and the end of his premiership in 1997, his government's tone towards the EU grew harsher (George, 1998: 231–74), and his party was riven by division on Europe.

These deep historic divisions within the Conservative Party were an important factor in the decision of David Cameron's government to hold a second referendum on membership. The hope that it would be possible to lay to rest the controversy on the issue that split the party was not the only consideration in making that decision, but it was clearly significant.

Immigration and the EU Constitutional Treaty

Under the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, relations with the EU improved. The social dimension of the single market [PEU5: 150, Insight 8.3], a guarantee of the rights of workers and citizens, was extended; and the government backed the Lisbon competitiveness agenda in 2000 [PEU5: 174–5]. The 2004 enlargement of the EU, which included the accession of several central and east European states in 2004 and 2007 [PEU5: 498–9; 505–8], was endorsed and promoted by the British government. Following the enlargement, Britain granted immediate access to its labour market for citizens of the new member states, whereas most of the existing member states imposed the restrictions that were permitted during a transition period. The government took this step because it had been a champion of enlargement, and also believed that the free movement of labour would help to plug shortages in key sectors of the expanding economy. However, the arrival of large numbers of migrant workers, particularly from Poland initially and later from Romania, became a growing source of public discontent. This was an issue that was exploited by those who were hostile to the EU, and became very important in the demand for a referendum to be held on membership.

In the 2005 British general election, all three main parties promised a referendum on the proposed adoption of an EU Constitutional Treaty [PEU5: 176–8]. This commitment was overtaken by events when voters in France and the Netherlands rejected the Treaty in their national referendums. Subsequently, a replacement Treaty was signed at Lisbon in December 2007 [PEU5: 179–82]. It made many of the changes that had been envisaged in the Constitutional Treaty, but not in the form of a new overarching constitutional document. Because this Treaty was not the Constitutional Treaty but a replacement for it, the British Labour government decided that it could be ratified by a parliamentary vote without a referendum. However, this just added fuel to a movement for a British referendum on membership.

The Build-Up to the Referendum

By the time that David Cameron became Leader of the Conservative Party in 2005, Europe was a deeply divisive issue within his party. He publicly opposed the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by a parliamentary vote without a referendum, and

promised that if he became Prime Minister before the Treaty had come into effect, he would hold a referendum. By the time he did become Prime Minister in 2010, at the head of a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, Lisbon was already operative. That did not stop calls both from within his party and from some very vocal members of the public for a referendum to be held on continued membership.

In 2007–8, a series of banking collapses sparked a global financial and economic crisis [PEU5: 187, Insight 11.1]. In this context, populist parties emerged in several of the member states, many of them offering seemingly simplistic explanations of what had gone wrong, together with simplistic solutions. In Britain, the party that capitalized on these circumstances was the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). It explained increasing hardship in Britain as a consequence of membership of the EU, and in particular the free movement of labour that had led to growing numbers of migrants. Contrary to much of the evidence, these migrants were represented as competing for scarce jobs and public resources and driving down wages (Parker, 2017a). UKIP's proposed solution was withdrawal from the EU.

UKIP's demand for British withdrawal had already proved popular in the 2009 elections to the European Parliament, when the party won 13 seats; and it led to even greater success in 2014, when UKIP won 24 seats and a larger percentage of the vote than any other party. This success worried many in the Conservative Party who were themselves unhappy about what they saw as the creeping spread of EU competences, and who now faced the prospect of another right-wing political party eroding their support. David Cameron, as Prime Minister, had recognized this concern in January 2013 in a speech made at the London offices of Bloomberg, the financial-data company (HM Government, 2013). In this speech, for the first time, Cameron spoke of reaching a 'new settlement' with the EU and holding a 'straight in-out' referendum on the basis of this new settlement.

During the 2015 general election, Cameron committed himself to renegotiate the terms of British membership of the EU, and then to hold a referendum on continuing membership on the new terms. It is possible that he did not expect to win the election given Britain's economic problems, and it is even more likely he did not expect to win it with an overall Conservative majority given the polling evidence. When the Conservatives did win a majority in 2015, Cameron had to honour his commitment to negotiate a new deal for Britain, and then to hold a referendum on the outcome.

A European Union Referendum Act was passed at the end of 2015, making legal provision for a non-binding referendum to be held on EU membership. The franchise for the referendum did not include those aged 16 to 18, despite a proposal by the House of Lords to include that group, and despite the fact that the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 had extended voting rights in that way. Citizens of other EU countries resident in the United Kingdom (except Irish, Maltese, and Cypriot citizens) were not given the right to vote. The Act stated that the result of the referendum was to be decided by a simple majority.

New terms were agreed with the EU on 19 February 2016 (see Insight Box 1). It was on the basis of these revised terms that the referendum was, in theory, to be fought. In practice, though, they were not at the centre of the debate, which concerned fundamental issues of whether Britain should be a member at all, or should follow an entirely different road in the future.

Insight Box 1 A New Settlement for the UK within the EU

New terms were agreed with the EU on 19 February 2016. Four of them concerned issues of migration: an 'emergency brake' allowing any member state experiencing high levels of immigration to restrict the rights of migrants to state benefits for a period of up to four years; some changes to the wording to tighten existing rules allowing a member state to deny a right of residence to an EU citizen who was considered a danger to public safety or public order; the right of member states to restrict the level of child-benefit payments for children who remained in the worker's country of origin, so as to reflect the standard of living in that country; and legislation to restrict the right of residence for an EU citizen's spouse or other family members who did not themselves have citizenship.

Other terms included: building on Lisbon Treaty reforms [PEU5: 222] to introduce a 'red card' procedure allowing 55 per cent of the member states' parliaments (equivalent to 16 member states) collectively to block legislation that they believed breached the principle of 'subsidiarity'; an agreement to exempt Britain from the aspiration expressed in the Preamble to every EU Treaty to achieve 'ever closer union'; and a system whereby member states who were not also members of the Eurozone could object to agreements made between the Eurozone states that the outsiders believed would damage their economies.

See: https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1-2016-INIT/en/pdf

The Campaign

When the referendum campaign began, neither side made much reference to the specifics of the renegotiated terms of membership. The Remain campaign concentrated almost exclusively on forecasting damage to the country's economic performance and prosperity. The Leave campaign focused on immigration and the issue of national self-determination (with their slogan 'let's take back control'), though it also had an economic message of its own, pledging to spend on the National Health Service (NHS) the £350 million per week that it erroneously claimed Britain sent to the EU (Full Fact, 2017).

Inevitably, the campaign came to be centred on personalities (see Shipman, 2016) for a detailed interview-based account of the campaign). Prime Minister David Cameron, supported by his close ally and Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne (who, notably, had long argued against a referendum), led the official Remain campaign, which was called Britain Stronger in Europe. He was opposed by several leading figures in his own party, including his Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, his Secretary of State for Justice, Michael Gove, and, perhaps most importantly, the former Mayor of London, and now Prime Minister, Boris Johnson (on the latter two, see Shipman, 2016: Chapter 9). These became the key figures in the cross-party 'Vote Leave' campaign, which was directed by Gove's former special advisor Dominic Cummings (later PM Johnson's chief advisor) (Shipman, 2016: Chapter 3; Cummings, 2017). There was also a second Leave campaign, called 'Leave.EU', which was effectively a campaign vehicle for UKIP and its leader, Nigel Farage. In Johnson

and Farage, the combined Leave campaign had the support of two of the most popular but also most divisive figures in contemporary British politics.

These personalities between them dominated media appearances during the referendum campaign. According to research conducted by Loughborough University's Centre for Research in Communication and Culture, five politicians—Cameron, Johnson, Osborne, Farage, and Gove—collectively accounted for around 25 per cent of all media appearances on the subject, divided almost equally between the three Leave campaigners and the two Remain campaigners (Deacon et al., 2016).

The Labour Party was largely invisible in the campaign. Officially it supported Remain, but its leader, then Jeremy Corbyn, who had in the past been critical of the EU (Shipman, 2016: Chapter 5), adopted a resolutely low profile. The former Labour Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, led a campaign group called 'Labour In for Britain', which received the official support of Labour head office, but struggled to make its voice heard. Following the referendum, Alan Johnson was highly critical of Corbyn and his team, alleging that they had not properly supported his campaign (Casalicchio, 2016; Shipman, 2016: Chapter 19). With three weeks to go before the vote, the campaign group 'Britain Stronger in Europe' concluded, from focus groups that it had held, that only half of Labour voters actually knew the party supported Remain, with the rest either believing the party was split on the issue or that it supported Leave (*The Guardian*, 30 May 2016).

As for the Liberal Democrats, 'One of the strangest features of the [referendum campaign] was that the most pro-European political party in Britain was nowhere to be seen' (Russell, 2016: 83). The party suffered big losses in the 2015 general election, and as a result lost its position as the third largest party in Parliament to the Scottish National Party (SNP). It was to the SNP, or sometimes to other parties such as the Greens, that the media turned when looking for an alternative to the perspective of the main protagonists in the Conservative Party or UKIP.

Generally, the broadcast media tried to give a hearing to the arguments of both sides. There was, though, some criticism of the BBC for treating arguments from different sides as of equal value regardless of the evidence. This argument was put most cogently by Timothy Garton Ash, who described it as a 'fairness bias' (Garton Ash, 2016).

So far as the print media are concerned, monitoring of the press by Oxford University's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, together with PRIME Research, found that of the nine main national daily newspapers, five supported the Leave campaign. These were the *Sun*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Star*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Telegraph*. Three newspapers were distinctly pro-Remain: *The Guardian*, *Daily Mirror*, and the *Financial Times*. Of these only the *Mirror* has a circulation that compares with that of the Leave newspapers. The other main national daily, *The Times*, adopted a more or less neutral position (Levy et al., 2016).

The significance of this analysis is that 80 per cent of people who regularly bought a daily newspaper bought a title favouring Leave. This was in stark contrast to the UK's 1975 referendum on membership, when the media overwhelmingly supported remaining. Although the circulation of the print media has declined steadily over recent years, older people are more likely to read a daily paper than are younger people (67.9 per cent of over-65s compared to 29.3 per cent of 15–24s) (Levy et al., 2016). The significance of this becomes clear when we turn to the analyses of the result of the referendum.

In addition to the more traditional media, social media was extremely important. Both sides of the campaign adopted digital strategies, including the analysis of 'big data' on social media activity, to profile and then target prospective voters (Mullen, 2016; Cummings, 2017; Cadwalladr, 2017). Most early data analysis agreed that the Leave campaign won the online battle, deploying a highly targeted and more emotive message that prompted far more engagement on social-media platforms (Polonski, 2016). In 2018, the use of social media data during the campaign featured in a much broader controversy related to the unethical (and in some cases possibly illegal) acquisition of such data for use in elections. Allegations surfaced in March 2018 that Vote Leave had exceeded legal campaign spending limits, particularly in the context of conducting this work (Cadwalladr, 2018). Shortly afterwards, the Electoral Commission imposed large fines (by its standards) on both Leave campaigns for breaches of electoral law. The Commission referred some matters to the police for alleged criminal breaches. The police eventually dropped its investigations. While Vote Leave paid one fine of £61,000, a related one was successfully appealed. Fines were also imposed on Remain campaigners for improper reporting of expenditure.

Analysing the Referendum Result

Geographical Analysis

There was considerable variation in the outcomes both by local government districts and by voting regions, which aggregated the results of the districts within the English regions and in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In particular, Scotland and Northern Ireland both voted Remain (62 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively), as did Greater London (60 per cent), which was the only English region to vote that way.

Class versus Values

One popular explanation of the Leave vote was that it was a working-class revolt by those who felt 'left behind'. In an article in *The Guardian* newspaper published before the referendum, and based on conversations with members of the public across Britain, John Harris argued that, 'the foundation of the Brexit coalition is what used to be called the proletariat', who, '[i]nstead of the comparative security and stability of the postwar settlement' experienced '[s]ix-week contracts at the local retail park, lives spent pinballing in and out of the benefits system, and retirements built on thin air' (Harris, 2016).

Not everyone accepted this thesis. For example, the day after the vote, Eric Kaufmann wrote an online Fabian Review Comment entitled 'Brexit Voters: NOT the Left Behind' in which he argued that, '[t]his is not a class conflict so much as a values divide that cuts across lines of age, income, education and even party'. Referencing an internet panel survey by the British Election Study, he argued that voting intentions among white British respondents showed no statistically significant difference between different incomes; but there was a strong correlation between authoritarian attitudes, such as favouring the death penalty, and intention to vote Leave (Kaufmann, 2016).

Alan Finlayson (2016) argued in a blog post shortly after the vote that it could be conceptualized as a series of responses to globalization and the perceived economic and cultural changes it has delivered. On the one hand, those who felt they had lost both economically and culturally from the changes tended to vote Leave (many of the so-called 'left-behinds'). They were joined by a majority of those who were economically comfortable but perceived a cultural loss, and had socially conservative attitudes on issues such as immigration that we might associate with such a sense of loss. Later analysis on so-called 'comfortable Leavers' noted that they experienced a sense of loss—in relation to 'industry, community services or national pride'—that they thought departure from the EU would help to alleviate (UKICE, 2021). The mantra of 'taking back control' was very effective with such groups. On the other hand, and probably unsurprisingly, those who felt they had won both economically and culturally tended to vote Remain. They were joined by a majority of those who might have lost economically but felt either no cultural loss or even a sense of cultural enrichment (for instance, many young people, or poor London boroughs with a high percentage of ethnic minorities). Later data analysis would broadly confirm Finlayson's conceptualization. In short, it is likely that a combination of both class and values mattered in determining who voted which way in the referendum (Burn-Murdoch, 2017; Butcher, 2019).

Multi-Factor Analyses

Sara B. Hobolt (2016) suggested that four factors were likely to have influenced voting: socioeconomic status; sense of geographical identity; attitude to the domestic political establishment; and policy attitudes. She examined the evidence for the influence of each of these using the British Election Study panel survey, which had been followed up by a post-vote survey of the same respondents, showing a high degree of actual voting in line with the previously stated intention.

Hobolt found that the highest correlations were with aspects of socioeconomic status: in particular, those with the lowest levels of education were the most likely to vote Leave, and the tendency to vote Remain increased steadily as the level of educational attainment increased.

Clarke et al.'s (2017) comprehensive book-length account offered support for the importance of socioeconomic status. Based on a long-term analysis of attitudes in the decade preceding the vote, it showed that perceptions of insecurity in modern Britain for the least educated, lowest-income groups had become 'baked-in' by the time of the referendum. Those perceptions had bred disillusionment with politicians, experts, and elites in general, and with the EU in particular. They had also led to widespread hostility towards migration. They noted that such feelings extended far beyond those who had turned to UKIP in the years before the referendum.

Voting age was a significant factor. Those over the age of 50 were more likely to vote Leave (Hobolt, 2016). Another analyst calculated that the splitting-point in terms of age was 45: under that age a majority voted Remain; over it, a majority voted Leave (Curtice, 2016).

Geographical identity also played an important role. Analysis showed that those who expressed a sense of European identity had a 37 per cent higher likelihood of voting Remain; those who felt more British were 5 per cent more likely to vote Leave; whereas those who felt more English were 10 per cent more likely to vote Leave.

Although the effect of identifying oneself as European is large, it applied only to relatively few respondents, and Eurobarometer surveys have consistently shown that 60 per cent of the British public do not think of themselves as European at all, let alone primarily thinking of themselves as European (Curtice, 2016). Other work emphasized the importance of perceptions of Englishness as an independent driver of the choice for Leave (Henderson et al., 2017).

The other form of identity that Hobolt considered—party identity—had negligible impact on voting intentions. Voting in the referendum did not take place along party lines: the vote split supporters of both major political parties. Only the votes of supporters of UKIP, and to a slightly lesser degree the Liberal Democrats, were predictable from party allegiances. In addition, a large number of people who did not vote in the 2015 general election voted in the referendum, and a majority of those voted to leave the EU (Swales, 2016: 20–3). This pattern of not voting in a general election then voting to leave the EU suggests that these were people who were disillusioned with the political elites of whichever party, and wanted to assert their discontent.

Turnout

Although the turnout in the referendum, at 72 per cent, was the highest in a nationwide poll since 1992, it was uneven in terms of the declared supporters of each side (Goodwin and Heath, 2016). One detailed analysis of the result found that, 'people who reported that if they voted, they would support Remain, were significantly less likely to turn out than those who reported supporting the Leave campaign' (Swales, 2016: 19). Of those who said in the run-up to the referendum that they intended to vote Remain, 19 per cent did not vote; for those who indicated that they intended to vote Leave, the figure was 11 per cent (Swales, 2016: 2).

The differential turnout proved to be an important factor in the result of the referendum. It may indicate that the campaign in favour of Remain, which concentrated on the argument that leaving would damage the British economy, was less convincing to its supporters, or less inspiring, than was the alternative message from the Leave campaign to its supporters, which focused on immigration and the need to 'take back control' from Brussels.

Correlating the figures on turnout with other factors, Goodwin and Heath (2016) found that voting was highest in areas with low educational levels and large numbers of pensioners. This is consistent with findings for the national level in the analysis by Hobolt (2016), who highlighted that the strongest correlations for voting intentions were with educational level and age.

The Immediate Aftermath of the Referendum

Political Effects

On the day after the referendum, David Cameron resigned as Prime Minister. A contest for the leadership of the Conservative Party followed, which was eventually won by the Home Secretary, Theresa May.

With the leading Leave campaigners split, the way opened up for May, who had adopted a remarkably low profile in the referendum campaign, especially considering that immigration, one of her responsibilities as Home Secretary, was a key issue in the debates (Harmer, 2016; Shipman, 2016: Chapter 15). It was later revealed that she had received funds from leading donors to the Conservative Party, some of whom had also supported the Remain campaign (*The Guardian*, 4 August 2016). However, if they expected a victory for May to isolate the Leave camp, Remain supporters were perhaps disappointed when she placed a number of leading Leave campaigners in key positions that would involve them in the negotiations, including Boris Johnson as Foreign Secretary, David Davis as Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, and Liam Fox as Secretary of State for Trade.

The emerging consensus among MPs in the aftermath of the referendum, including those who had supported Remain, was that the result would have to be respected. Although the referendum had been advisory, the 72 per cent turnout, which was greater than the 66.1 per cent in the 2015 general election, created a question about whether 'the people' or Parliament was sovereign.

The British Government's Policy

Theresa May had to try to interpret what voters had meant by the referendum result, while at the same time considering what was necessary to manage her divided party. She made clear her preference for a relatively 'hard' Brexit that would, among other things, involve an end to the free-movement migration regime, to membership of the single market and customs union, and to the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in the UK. The so-called 'Norwegian' option of membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) [PEU5: 505 Insight 26.2], or even the Swiss option of bilateral agreements with the EU—possibilities that had been widely discussed during the campaign—were taken off the table.

This policy was refined in her January 2017 speech at Lancaster House (May, 2017), spelling out the government's key negotiating priorities (see Insight Box 2). Her advocacy of a 'Global Britain' approach to trade policy went hand in hand with withdrawal from the customs union, because continued membership would bind Britain to the EU's Common Commercial Policy [PEU5: 460–2] and prevent it from striking its own trade deals with countries beyond the EU. These policy positions took on the status of

Insight Box 2 The British Government's Key Negotiating Priorities

- Britain to exit the single market and customs union
- 'Global Britain' independent trading policy to strike agreements with EU and other states
- End to free movement of labour from EU states
- End to the jurisdiction in the UK of the CJEU
- Avoid 'hard border' between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic
- Guarantee rights of EU citizens in the UK and of British citizens in the EU

'red lines' that could not be crossed, thus creating real problems when, in early 2019, it became clear that the Conservative party did not command a majority in Parliament.

Party-political opposition to the government's evolving 'hard' approach to Brexit was notably absent at first, with the exception of the Liberal Democrats and the SNP. However, tensions between and within the parliamentary parties grew on a number of key issues following the triggering of Article 50 and the commencement of negotiations with the EU.

The Exit Process

Until the Lisbon Treaty came into force at the end of 2009, there was no provision made in the Treaties for a member state to leave. The Lisbon Treaty inserted a new Article 50 into the Treaty on European Union, which laid down a procedure whereby a member could withdraw.

To leave the EU, the British government needed to invoke Article 50, which would set the clock running on a two-year negotiation. In practice, though, the negotiations would have to take less than two years, as any agreement needed the approval of the EU institutions, including the European Parliament.

If by the end of that period no mutually acceptable agreement had been reached, Britain would cease to be a member and its economic relationship with the EU would be governed by the general rules of international trade as laid down by the World Trade Organization (WTO). The one exception to the two-year deadline was if all member governments agreed to extend the Article 50 process.

Initially, the British government tried to insist that the decision to invoke Article 50 lay entirely with the executive under Royal Prerogative; but following a legal challenge brought by private citizens, on the 3 November 2016 the High Court ruled that Parliament had to be consulted before the step could be taken, since withdrawal would involve a fundamental change in the legal arrangements of the United Kingdom (Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, 2016). On 24 January 2017, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal by the government against the ruling of the High Court (Supreme Court, 2017).

In practice, the judgment did not delay the process of Brexit. In late January 2017, the government presented a draft 'European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill', which, in a reversal of normal legislative processes, was followed by the publication in February of a White Paper outlining the government's aspirations for Brexit and any future relationship with the EU. The bill was passed by Parliament with minimal opposition in early March 2017. Proposed amendments from both the Commons and the Lords were rejected. This paved the way for the Prime Minister to notify the EU by letter of the UK's formal triggering of Article 50 on 29 March 2017. The timing of the step seemed motivated more by a wish to quell Conservative backbench unrest than by the government having a carefully considered negotiating strategy (Usherwood, 2019).

For its part, the EU adopted formal negotiating guidelines at the April 2017 European Council (2017). First, the negotiations would follow a phased approach, focusing initially on the terms of withdrawal and then on future UK–EU relations. Second, the four principles of the single market [PEU5: Ch. 19] would be indivisible;

Britain could not 'cherry-pick' by ending free movement of labour while retaining other benefits that were available only to member states. This position was to ensure that there were clear disadvantages arising from withdrawal, in part to deter other states from following this route, which would potentially trigger the EU's disintegration. Third, it was agreed that there would be no negotiations between individual member states and the UK.

In April 2017, Theresa May unexpectedly called another general election on the grounds that she wished to have a stronger mandate—a bigger parliamentary majority—to strengthen her hand in the Brexit negotiations. The election was held on 8 June; but not only did the government fail to increase its majority, it failed to achieve any overall majority, with the opposition Labour Party making unexpected gains. In order to form a government, the Conservatives had to reach an agreement with the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

Negotiations on the terms of Britain's departure from the EU, which had been delayed by the election, began with an inaugural meeting in Brussels on 19 June between David Davis, the British Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, and Michel Barnier, the Chief Negotiator for the EU. At this meeting, an agenda was agreed for what became known as 'phase one' of the negotiations, including: the rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and of British citizens living in other parts of the EU; the financial settlement that the UK would need to make in order to clear its outstanding commitments to the EU budget; and the future arrangements that would apply between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Talks, mainly at the level of officials, continued throughout the summer and autumn of 2017. By October, agreement was largely achieved on guaranteeing citizens' rights, although these rights would be reduced in line with British preferences. On the financial settlement, agreement was held up by the slowness of the British government in calculating what it believed its obligations to be.

The issue of the Irish border proved the most difficult. Although both sides committed to avoid the reinstatement of physical border controls between the two parts of the island, there was no obvious way to avoid all checks.

Nevertheless, the issue was effectively deferred when on the 15 December a meeting of the European Council (Article 50)—i.e. the 27 without the UK—decided that 'sufficient progress' had been made on phase one to allow negotiations to begin on phase two. Notably, in conformity with the principle that 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed', this did not constitute a final agreement on the issues in phase one, which would only be achieved with the approval of a formal Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and the UK. Phase-two negotiations addressed particularly the issues of the transition period and the broad outlines of a future relationship.

Throughout the phase-one talks, Prime Minister Theresa May had regular meetings with the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. She refined her January 2017 Lancaster House policy in speeches in Florence on 22 September 2017, and at the Mansion House in London on 2 March 2018, just after phase-two negotiations had opened. As phase-two talks got under way in 2018, the government's tone seemed to have shifted, favouring the 'softest' possible Brexit within the constraints of the previously established red lines. It wanted to continue to participate in EU programmes to advance science and to promote education and culture; it wanted not only to continue

but to extend co-operation on security and defence; and it also wanted to reach an agreement on trade and economic co-operation that would allow Britain and the EU to be close partners, to their mutual advantage.

In presenting the proposed guidelines for the EU negotiators in phase two, Donald Tusk emphasized that there was no disagreement on finding ways of allowing Britain to participate in EU programmes of research, education, and culture; nor on continuing co-operation on security and defence. On trade, he noted that Theresa May's insistence that Britain would leave the single market meant that the only form of relationship possible was a free-trade agreement. Here again, he said, there was no difference between the EU and Britain on seeking to conclude a deal on trade in goods that would involve zero tariffs. On services, a sector of particular significance for Britain because of its strength in financial services, he indicated the willingness of the EU to engage in negotiations. He added, though, that reciprocal access to each other's fishing waters should be maintained. This was interpreted as an indication that the EU wished to make a bargaining link between the two issues.

At the end of February 2018, the European Commission published a draft Withdrawal Agreement. This conditionally agreed that, should the Agreement be finalized at the time of Britain's exit, the current regulatory regime would apply to the UK during a 21-month post-Brexit transition period. This offered some respite to the business community, which was anxious that Britain could simply crash out of the single market and customs union in 2019.

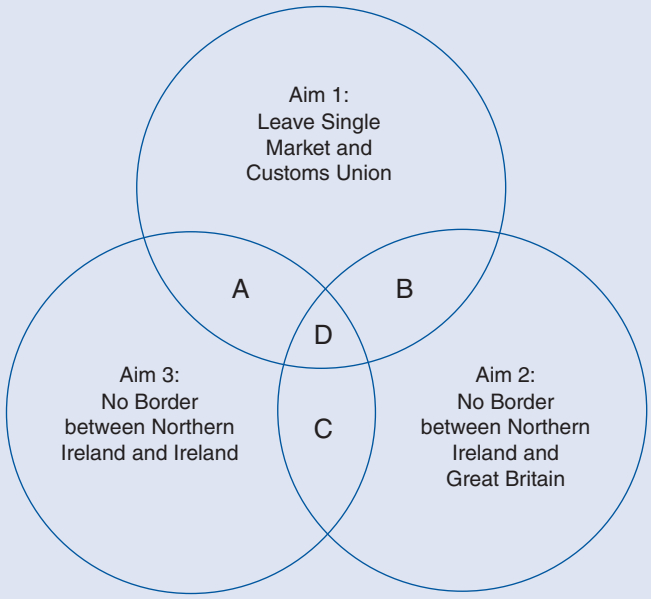
There remained, however, significant points of disagreement and associated gaps in the draft agreement. The main outstanding issues concerned the inter-related questions of the position of Northern Ireland—which, as noted, had not been adequately resolved in phase one—and the degree of regulatory alignment in any future trading relationship following the end of the transition. The fundamental issue for the government was the difficulty of achieving three key aims at the same time: ensuring no border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; removing the UK from the customs union and single market; and ensuring the continued close alignment of Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK (or, no border between Northern Ireland and Great Britain) (see Figure 1).

On the Irish question, the European Commission suggested in the February 2018 draft agreement that, should no other way be found of having a frictionless border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, it might be necessary to create a common regulatory area on the island of Ireland (a so-called Northern Ireland only 'backstop'). That would imply that any checks and controls that needed to be exercised on goods would be on movements between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK (Figure 1, position A). Such a solution was unacceptable to Theresa May and, in particular, the DUP. It would effectively weaken the relationship of Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK, and bring it closer to the Republic, which could be seen as a step towards a united Ireland.

Those advocating continued membership of the single market and the customs union were driven in part by concerns relating to Northern Ireland; membership of both (Figure 1, position C) would resolve the issue, and membership of the customs union at least partially resolve it. But they were driven mainly by concerns about the economic consequences of leaving these arrangements (see below, 'Economic Impact').

Figure 1 The Northern Ireland Trilemma

Source: Adapted from Kelemen, 2018



Within the parliamentary Conservative Party, certain fringe voices continued to campaign for membership of both, while within the Labour Party this was the dominant position among its MPs and its growing membership. In a challenge to the government's position, on 26 February 2018 Jeremy Corbyn made a speech in which he signalled his party's support for a continued customs union with the EU (while stopping short of the commitment to continued membership of the single market that many in his party favoured).

On 6 July 2018, Theresa May convened a cabinet meeting to try to find a compromise negotiating position, but the perceived softening of position towards 'regulatory alignment' with the EU (a shift towards Figure 1, position C) provoked a backlash from some ministers. Reportedly, this was the first cabinet discussion of Britain's post-Brexit trading relationship with the EU (*The Guardian*, 16 April 2019). David Davis, the Brexit Secretary, resigned on 8 July and the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, the following day. Davis was replaced by Dominic Raab, another so-called 'Brexiteer'; Johnson by Jeremy Hunt. These resignations exacerbated divisions among Conservative MPs, fuelling an increasingly tense atmosphere.

On the 14 November 2018, the UK and the EU reached agreement in principle on the Withdrawal Agreement (Agreement 2018). This document—approaching 600 pages of text—spelt out the detailed arrangements for unscrambling the various commitments that the UK had entered into with the EU over the period since 1973 (Peers, 2019). These included budgetary commitments (the so-called divorce bill of some £36bn) (House of Commons Library, 2018); the rights of EU27 citizens in the

UK and of UK citizens in the EU27; the 20-month transition period; the Northern Irish 'backstop'; and arrangements relating to resolving any disputes that might arise. At the same time a much shorter (26-page) and legally non-binding Political Declaration (2018) was approved by the UK government and the EU27 setting out the basic principles of future relations between Britain and the EU.

Despite the conclusion of negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement, the problems over the Northern Ireland backstop remained. Given the phase-one joint commitment to avoid the introduction of any new border infrastructure on the island of Ireland (ruling out Figure 1, position A) and given British government and DUP opposition to checks on goods between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK (Figure 1, position B), the British government had agreed to something closer to an all-UK 'backstop' solution (closer to Figure 1, position C). This required Great Britain to remain in a customs territory with the EU—thereby avoiding customs checks on goods moving between Northern Ireland and Great Britain—and it required Northern Ireland to align its regulation with the EU. For a DUP committed to the union of the United Kingdom, this revised 'backstop' still held out the possibility of an unacceptable and potentially indefinite regulatory divergence between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. For many Brexiteers the proposals for the entire UK to have a temporary shared common customs territory with the EU created concerns that the agreement might indefinitely remove the UK's ability to conduct an independent trade policy. The latter concern prompted the resignation on 15 November of Brexit Secretary Dominic Raab (who was replaced by Stephen Barclay), of another cabinet minister, Esther McVey, as well as five junior ministers. This upheaval marked the start of a period of unprecedented domestic political turmoil.

Between December 2018 and April 2019, divisions within the Conservative Party resulted in: an unsuccessful attempt to remove Theresa May as party leader; three attempts by the government to win a 'meaningful vote' in the House of Commons to pave the way for approval of the Withdrawal Agreement (all failing to secure a majority); open expressions of disagreement on government policy within the cabinet; and backbench MPs initiating a series of 'indicative votes' in Parliament to try to identify the contours of an alternative agreement. In addition, May offered to resign as party leader, a demand of many of the Brexiteers in her party, provided her Withdrawal Agreement was first approved in Parliament.

Central to this political upheaval was the European Reform Group (ERG), a grouping of Conservative MPs led by the former junior Brexit minister Steve Baker, and chaired by Jacob Rees-Mogg. This group was prominent in rallying votes against May's Withdrawal Agreement while liaising with the DUP, who had also remained implacable opponents. Part of May's calculation as of the 29 March 2019 was that the opponents of the Withdrawal Agreement would back down for fear that she might revoke Brexit. Some did, such as Rees-Mogg, but the number of supporters was insufficient.

Under normal circumstances a defeat for the government of 230 votes, as occurred on the occasion of the first indicative vote, would be expected to lead to a general election. However, when the Labour Party tabled a vote of no-confidence on the 16 January 2019, it was unsuccessful because Conservative and DUP MPs had no wish to precipitate a general election that might result in a Labour government under Corbyn being elected.

The parliamentary turmoil was not confined to the Conservative Party. Within the Labour Party there was also significant division. Following its September 2018 conference, Labour's policy was to remain in the customs union, to have a close relationship with the EU single market, and to seek to force a general election over Brexit with the potentially bigger prize of a Labour government, whilst not ruling out a second referendum. This position secured an uneasy truce in a party where a small number of MPs were of the view that the referendum result had to be adhered to, and feared the electoral consequences of calling for a second referendum, while a majority supported a 'softer' Brexit and/or second referendum. However, in mid-February the truce was shattered when eight Labour MPs quit the party in opposition to its ostensibly 'hard-left' ideology under Corbyn, its complicity in Brexit, and allegations of anti-Semitism among Corbyn-supporting local activists. They formed what was initially called The Independent Group (TIG). On the 20 February, three Conservative Remainer MPs joined TIG, which later registered as a political party called 'Change UK—The Independent Group'. However, the party was dissolved just nine months later following a series of resignations and the electoral defeat of all its candidates at the 2019 general election.

Labour MPs had to take positions on the 'meaningful votes' as well as the backbench-led 'indicative votes'. During the meaningful votes, a small number of Labour MPs in Leave-voting constituencies supported the Withdrawal Agreement. However, many MPs and the overwhelming majority of party members sought to strengthen the party conference's commitment to a referendum on the eventual deal.

TIG was not the only party to emerge from the political turmoil surrounding Brexit. Nigel Farage, the former leader of UKIP, severed his links with that party, ostensibly due to its move to the far-right, and, on the 12 April 2019, he launched the Brexit Party. He did so with a view to campaigning for the May 2019 European parliamentary elections—which would take place in the UK as a consequence of delays to Brexit—on a platform of expressing anger that the UK had not yet left the EU.

Outside of Parliament, a campaign for a 'People's Vote' had been launched in 2018. It demanded that any eventual deal be put to a referendum, with an option to remain in the EU. It received support from MPs across most of the political spectrum. In March 2019, a rally in London in support of the campaign attracted one million demonstrators. At the same time, a parliamentary e-petition to revoke Article 50 attracted over six million signatures—the largest such petition in history—before it was debated and defeated in Parliament.

During the course of this domestic upheaval, the CJEU ruled in December 2018 that a member state could unilaterally revoke Article 50. Although this option was not being actively pursued, it did offer a theoretical solution to the stalemate prevailing in April 2019.

Parliamentary opposition to the Withdrawal Agreement and to the prospect of 'no deal' led to an impasse in the spring of 2019 (see Insight Box 3). Following unsuccessful attempts to achieve a cross-party agreement with Labour, that impasse led to Theresa May accepting, on the 24 May, that she would not be able to 'deliver Brexit' and announcing her intention to tender her resignation as Prime Minister (on the 7 June). Two days later, on the 26 May, the results of the European Parliament elections were announced, with the Brexit Party achieving the largest share of the vote (just over 30 per cent) and the pro-Remain Liberal Democrats in second place (with 20 per cent) in the UK.

Insight Box 3 Parliament and the Withdrawal Agreement

12 December 2018: Conservative MPs trigger a vote of no confidence in Theresa May's party leadership, which she wins

15 January 2019: government loses the first 'meaningful vote' on Withdrawal Agreement by 230 votes

16 January 2019: May government wins confidence vote

18 February 2019: seven Labour MPs quit and form The Independent Group, followed by another on 19 February and three Conservative MPs on 20 February

12 March 2019: second 'meaningful vote' lost by 149 votes

21 March 2019: European Council extends Article 50 to 12 April

27 March 2019: backbench MPs initiate a series of indicative votes, but none secures overall majority

29 March 2019: third vote on Withdrawal Agreement lost by 58 votes

1 April 2019: second round of indicative votes but again none secures overall majority

2 April 2019: at a cabinet meeting Theresa May proposes a bipartisan approach, resulting in talks with the Labour Party

5 April 2019: Theresa May writes to European Council President Donald Tusk asking for a further extension of Article 50, to 30 June

10 April 2019: European Council extends Article 50 process to 31 October 2019

7 June 2019: Theresa May resigns as PM

24 July 2019: Boris Johnson becomes PM committed to 'get Brexit done' even if that means 'no deal'

9 September 2019: The 'Benn Bill' is passed, preventing the PM from implementing 'no deal' Brexit

19 October: Boris Johnson (reluctantly) requests a further extension

28 October 2019: European Council extends deadline to 31 January 2020

12 December 2019: General election delivers significant Conservative majority for Johnson

23 January 2020: The European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill becomes an Act of Parliament

31 January 2020: The UK leaves the European Union.

Following his leadership campaign victory, Boris Johnson took over as Prime Minister on the 24 July 2019, immediately committing to 'get Brexit done' by delivering on the end of October departure date, and refusing to rule out a 'no deal' departure in the absence of any new withdrawal deal. However, in early September, MPs effectively blocked that option with the successful passage through Parliament of the so-called 'Benn Bill', named after the Labour MP Hillary Benn, who drafted it along with a group including some Conservative MPs. This established that, should Johnson be unable to succeed where May had failed and get MPs to pass a Withdrawal Agreement (or, alternatively, agree to a 'no deal' departure) by the 19 October 2019,

then he must request a further extension to the UK's departure date. In a sign of increased tensions across Parliament, those Conservatives that backed the Bill had the whip removed (effectively meaning that they could not stand for the party in any future election). Despite his determination to meet the end of October deadline—which culminated in an attempt to suspend ('prorogue') Parliament in September that was thwarted by the Supreme Court—Johnson was ultimately forced to request a further extension to the end of January 2020.

Only a short time after that apparent humiliation, however, Johnson managed, with the support of all the opposition parties, to secure a pre-Christmas general election, scheduled for the 12 December. The unexpected magnitude of the Conservative victory at that election (won with a majority of 80 seats) paved the way for the passing of Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement and, crucially, removed the need for parliamentary support from the DUP.

While Johnson's agreement was in most respects identical to the one that May had failed to pass, the key differences related to the thorny issue of Northern Ireland. The Johnson deal—or, more precisely, the Northern Ireland Protocol within that agreement—abandoned the all-UK backstop (close to Figure 1, position C). Indeed, it was similar in many respects to the aforementioned 'Northern Ireland only' backstop proposal that had been made by the EU in February 2018 (close to Figure 1, position A). This meant that the UK would be able to manage its own tariffs (and trade policy), but also meant there would be at least some checks on goods passing between Great Britain and Northern Ireland in order to avoid checks (and a border) on the island of Ireland. It did not stop Prime Minister Johnson at times asserting that there would be no controls between Britain and Northern Ireland (the 'magical thinking' position—Figure 1, position D). Eventually, the realities of option A had to be faced (below).

The Brexit process was duly accomplished on 31 January 2020 when the UK formally departed from the EU. However, EU rules continued to apply during a transition period that ran until the end of 2020. The UK government had to negotiate a trade deal and new wider set of arrangements in order to ensure an orderly transition to a post-Brexit relationship with the EU. Negotiations with the EU were impacted by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in talks being deferred and then resumed by videoconference. Eventually, negotiations reached a conclusion with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) on the 24 December 2020: just one week before expiry of the transition period. The late agreement date itself resulted in a complex and challenging situation for businesses trading with the EU, which had to work out the implications of the new rules over the Christmas holiday period.

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement

The TCA came into force on 1 January 2021 and established the new trading arrangements between the UK and the EU. It constituted a zero tariff/zero quota free trading agreement of the sort that the UK government under Johnson's government sought to achieve. It governs the arrangements for trade in goods and services, and establishes rules in other areas formerly dealt with via EU single market arrangements, including

aviation, road haulage, fisheries, security, and health insurance. It also provides for continued UK participation in certain EU programmes (for example, related to University research funding).

The achievement of a zero tariff/quota agreement was certainly preferable for British goods exporters than the prospect of trading on World Trade Organization (WTO) terms. But the TCA included 'rules of origin' requirements (relating to the need to prove where goods originate) that would constrain the ability of some firms to re-export goods from Britain to the EU tariff-free. This could adversely impact, for instance, companies in those sectors (such as retail) that have used the UK as a hub for the onward export of goods made elsewhere to the EU.

As was expected, the agreement largely failed to secure continued easy access to the EU market for services, including financial services (Barnard and Leinart, 2021). This is significant for a UK economy in which services constitute 80 per cent of economic activity and that had a significant (£18bn) surplus in services trade with the EU (UKICE, 2020; Ward, 2020).

Like most modern trading agreements, the TCA contains a complex set of 'behind the border' provisions [PEU5: Ch. 24] that relate to EU and UK regulatory policies beyond trade tariffs and quotas. In negotiating the agreement, the EU favoured a situation whereby the UK would broadly align itself with EU regulations in order to establish a 'level playing field' (LPF). This means that the EU wanted to ensure that the UK could not establish rules and regulations—relating to, among others, product, labour, and environmental standards, and subsidizing domestic business (so-called 'state aid')—that would allow UK business to effectively undercut EU business while enjoying relatively unhindered access to the single market, or parts of that market. In contrast, the UK government was reluctant to bind itself to any alignment with the EU that would undermine the prospect of the UK 'taking back control' of domestic policies and ending the supremacy of EU law and the role of the CJEU in enforcing such law [PEU5: Ch. 16].

The TCA constitutes a middle way between these positions. In line with EU wishes, the TCA contains LPF provisions, but the mechanisms that allow for the enforcement of such provisions are less clearly defined than the EU would have liked. In particular, in line with UK preferences, the CJEU will not have jurisdiction in the context of any LPF disputes, and divergence is, according to the TCA, only considered a problem if it demonstrably 'affects trade and investment'. That said, the TCA does provide for the establishment of mechanisms that will monitor the LPF and other aspects of the agreement. It establishes a 'Partnership Council', in addition to the separate committee structure that was established as part of the Withdrawal Agreement. The details of that Council and its various 'sub-committees' and 'working groups' were being worked out at the time of writing in mid-2021, but it was already clear that 'Brussels will still loom large' in UK policy and politics beyond 2021 (Rutter, 2020). Exactly how closely the UK will ultimately remain aligned with the EU in terms of regulatory policy will depend upon the work of those committees, the consequences arising from any divergences, and the nature of any trade deals that are made between the UK and other parties. Given the importance of the EU market, significant economic actors exporting to the EU will continue to align with EU rules and lobby for close legal alignment (Bradford, 2020).

The other area that became particularly controversial in the context of the negotiations—due to its symbolic importance, rather than its economic significance to either side—was fisheries. In this area, the UK managed to secure a greater quota for its fishing industry in the long term, although this fell short of its stated ambition. This was a disappointing outcome for many in the UK fishing industry, who also faced new regulatory barriers in the early months of 2021 when exporting to the EU.

Relations between the EU and UK remained strained in the aftermath of the entry into force of the TCA. This was initially due to wrangling over access to vaccines in the context of the pandemic, which was a major preoccupation on both sides of the Channel. Later, the UK government's resistance to fully implementing the Northern Ireland Protocol contributed to tensions and led some commentators to wonder if the TCA constituted an inherently 'unstable equilibrium' (Menon and Portes, 2021). Certainly, at the time of writing (mid-2021), it remained clear that with the entry into force of the TCA, Brexit was still far from 'done': technical issues and political tensions remained very much alive, and Brexit as a process was ongoing.

Effect on the United Kingdom

After more than 40 years of membership of the European Communities and Union, the UK had naturally become very 'Europeanized' [PEU5: 44–54; Bache and Jordan, 2006]. Brexit therefore implied 'de-Europeanization', or what Radaelli (2020) has termed 'Europeanization in reverse gear'. As intimated above, precisely how much de-Europeanization will take place will depend on the balance that any UK government seeks to strike between establishing close political and economic relations with the EU—currently governed by the framework provided by the Withdrawal Agreement and TCA—and the perceived need to be seen to 'take back control' from Brussels. At the same time, Brexit has ramifications for the positions of Northern Ireland and of Scotland, where there were majority votes to remain in the EU and for devolution arrangements across the UK. There are also special issues relating to Gibraltar. Last but not least, there are the economic ramifications of Brexit for the whole of the UK.

Impact on UK politics

Brexit raised important questions about the British political system and the integrity of the United Kingdom. In short, the period from the referendum in June 2016 to 'Brexit day', 31 January 2020, was one of the most turbulent periods in British political history (as discussed above).

There are enduring legacies in terms of party politics. Although the divide between Leave and Remain had been presaged in the increasing electoral salience of the cleavage between, respectively, more socially 'conservative' and more 'cosmopolitan' voters (Jennings and Stoker, 2017), this tendency was exacerbated following Brexit. The Johnson government has been the clear post-Brexit winner of these trends. Comprised mainly of Leave-supporting ministers and MPs committed to 'getting Brexit done', the party has managed to eradicate the threat (and *raison d'être*) of UKIP/the Brexit Party

and win seats from Leave-voting Labour constituencies in the context of the UK's 'first past the post' electoral system. Indeed, greater numbers of Leave voters supported the Conservatives at the 2019 general election and the 2021 local elections (Curtice, 2021).

At the same time, the strength of a Leave-supporting Conservative government has doubtless contributed to the difficult relations between the government and the EU since the end of the transition period (see 'Trade and Cooperation Agreement' above). Moreover, there are some in the party that want to 'clip the wings' of the judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, because it is held to have obstructed or delayed the process towards leaving the EU.

The Labour Party opposition, having been comprehensively defeated in the December 2019 general election, came to better represent the parliamentary party after its former shadow Brexit secretary, Sir Keir Starmer, was elected in April 2020 following the resignation of Jeremy Corbyn. However, as the 2019 loss revealed, Labour faces a difficult task in terms of electoral politics. If it is to stand any chance of winning a general election, it will need to retain the support of cosmopolitan Remain-supporting voters concentrated in large cities, and win back the support of many socially conservative Leave-supporting voters, concentrated in the once 'red-wall' of constituencies running through the Midlands and northern England, who have deserted the party in recent years. A desire to win back the latter was the likely reason for the party's rather muted critique of the various issues arising from Brexit following the end of the transition period in early 2021. But its poor showing at the May 2021 local elections suggested that a policy tilt towards Leave voter preferences may not prove effective.

In short, Brexit brought to the fore societal divisions between broadly cosmopolitan and communitarian values. The major political parties responded to—and, arguably, helped to cultivate—such divisions. Well after the Brexit vote, and even after Britain left the EU, such divisions remained salient. The fallout from Brexit and the TCA was just one issue that split the public along this cleavage. Broader issues related to race, identity, and migration were also prominent in post-2020 British politics, driven by various forms of media, including the 'echo chambers' of social media. In June 2021, a former government advisor on race accused the government of stoking the flames of a 'culture war' (Mohdin, 2021).

Northern Ireland

From the late 1960s, there was conflict and bloodshed in Northern Ireland, which was largely the result of a sectarian divide between unionist Protestants, who were determined to remain a part of the UK, and nationalist Catholics, who wanted to see Northern Ireland become part of the Irish Republic. In 1998, an agreement—the Good Friday Agreement—was signed between the British and Irish governments, and between the political parties representing the different religious communities in the Province. It established a system of devolved government in which both the unionist and nationalist communities shared power. The EU represented an important backdrop or facilitator of the peace process, inasmuch as it made possible a soft border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, and assisted in the creation of the good relations between the UK and the Republic that led to the peace negotiations.

Following the Good Friday Agreement, a new pattern of working across the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland developed, again facilitated because both Britain and Ireland were members of the EU. In effect a pan-Irish economic unit emerged, with high levels of interdependence. Prior to Brexit, Northern Ireland's leading trade partner was the Republic; and anywhere between 20,000 and 35,000 commuters crossed the notional national border to work every day (Biondi and Raposo, 2016).

In December 2016, the House of Lords' Select Committee on the European Union published an initial report on the effect of Brexit on British–Irish relations, in which it highlighted a range of issues:

- the economic implications for Northern Ireland owing to the level of EU funding;
- the high volumes of cross-border trade and economic interdependence with the Irish Republic;
- the social and political consequences of a 56 per cent Remain vote in Northern Ireland;
- the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, to which the British and Irish governments are co-guarantors, and under which those born in Northern Ireland are entitled to Irish citizenship

In short, 'the uncertain impact of Brexit on these issues threatens to disrupt the fragile political stability now seen in Northern Ireland' (House of Lords, 2016: para. 5).

If Brexit unravelled the economic, social, and political links facilitated by the EU, peace could be put at risk. On the one hand, there was the reality of economic interdependence on the island of Ireland. On the other, the politics of Brexit brought to the surface an identity politics that had at least been subdued among publics and politicians in the Province. While Northern Ireland voted 56–44 per cent in favour of Remain, it is notable that the unionist DUP supported Leave as an apparent statement of 'British' identity, and Sinn Fein supported Remain as a statement of an 'Irish' identity (Gormley-Heenan and Aughey, 2017). Tensions between these governing parties over other issues led to the collapse of the power-sharing assembly in 2017, and this only became functional again in January 2020.

As noted in the discussion of the negotiations above, both Britain and the EU recognized the need to deal effectively with the issues arising for the Irish border with Northern Ireland in relation to Brexit. Both the May and Johnson withdrawal agreements sought to avoid any need for a land border in Northern Ireland, albeit with different resolutions of the Northern Ireland 'trilemma' (see also Figure 1). As noted above, the Johnson deal required customs and regulatory checks on goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In consequence, Northern Ireland is treated as if in the EU's single market even though it is in the UK's customs area. This is a permanent arrangement from 1 January 2021, albeit subject to agreement from the Northern Ireland Assembly every four years thereafter.

A number of problems have arisen from the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland: technical ones relating to trading arrangements between the British mainland and Northern Ireland; political ones in Northern Ireland; and tensions between the UK government and the European Commission.

As with trade from the UK to the EU under the TCA, the short notice between the agreement and its implementation created considerable uncertainty that impacted on trade. In the case of the Protocol it was an entirely new situation to have controls in trade between Britain and Northern Ireland. In order to help this situation, it was agreed to have a transitional period until the beginning of April relating to products where the rules might raise particular problems, such as meat and medicines. There were, indeed, initial problems in supplies from Britain to supermarkets in the Province.

The political tensions in Northern Ireland emerged from the perception in the Unionist community that the Protocol breached the integrity of the United Kingdom. Once it became clear that the push by Johnson's government to 'get Brexit done' would lead to a different approach to the Irish border, the DUP felt that it had been duped (Carroll and O'Carroll, 2019). Unrest among the hardline Unionist community in early 2021, including rioting on the streets, was, in part at least, related to the new reality of a 'border in the Irish Sea'. In April 2021 DUP leader (and Northern Ireland's First Minister), Arlene Foster, announced her resignation, triggered by a party leadership challenge. This development came as a result of the divisive impact of Brexit on the party base, combined with divisions over other issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. The new party leader, Edwin Poots, made early attacks on the Protocol, including a threat of legal action. The danger is that anger at the Protocol will de-stabilize politics in Northern Ireland.

The tensions between the UK government and the EU Commission arose from a combination of the aforementioned technical and political problems. As noted above, the Johnson government has repeatedly sought to play down the extent of controls in trade between Britain and Northern Ireland. But the gap between government reassurance and technical realities have led to tensions between the UK and the Commission. While in early 2021 the UK sought to limit the application of technical controls entailed in the Protocol, the Commission emphasized the importance of implementing the Protocol in order to ensure the integrity of the single market. The UK government's decision in March 2021 to unilaterally extend the aforementioned transitional period on trade controls for certain goods led the Commission to initiate legal proceedings against the government. At the time of writing (June 2021), these legal proceedings were ongoing, as were broader UK–Commission discussions on the implementation of the Protocol.

The Commission certainly shares some of the responsibility for broader tensions relating to Northern Ireland. In late-January 2021, as part of its stumbling efforts to ensure adequate supplies of vaccines for member states, it invoked an emergency clause in the Protocol, which involved imposing some controls at the Ireland–Northern Ireland border. A climbdown occurred within hours, but the episode caused considerable dismay in the UK (as well as in the Republic of Ireland) (O'Leary, 2021).

Scotland

While the impact on Northern Ireland was a direct consequence of the referendum decision, the existence of a problem for Scotland was arguably a consequence of the SNP's interpretation of the implications of the EU referendum result.

Dedicated to taking Scotland out of the Union with England, the SNP had become the largest party in the Scottish Assembly in the 2011 elections. It managed to obtain a referendum on Scottish independence, which was held on 18 September 2014, but a majority of Scottish voters answered No to the question 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' by 55 per cent to 45 per cent. At the time, the SNP accepted the result, but it returned to its demand only two years later, following the result of the EU referendum.

The reason given by the SNP for reviving its demand for a referendum on independence was that in the referendum on EU membership, Scotland voted 62 per cent Remain, with only 38 per cent voting Leave. This allowed the SNP to claim that, even though the referendum had been a UK-wide poll in which the overall result was to leave, Scotland had not voted to leave. As the Scottish independence referendum had been on the basis of either remaining in or leaving a United Kingdom that was then part of the EU, it was the SNP's view that the UK's decision to leave the EU changed the position so fundamentally as to require that the independence question be put again.

On the 13 March 2017, Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland, called for a second referendum on Scottish independence, a call that was rejected two days later by Theresa May, who said that it was not appropriate to be talking about such a referendum when all the government's efforts were being put into negotiating a satisfactory Brexit deal with the EU. Nevertheless, Sturgeon's government continued to argue that the UK should stay in the single market and, failing that, a special arrangement should be found to enable Scotland to stay in. Following electoral success at the 2019 general election (the SNP won 48 of 59 seats in Scotland), Sturgeon stated that, 'Boris Johnson must accept that I have a mandate to give Scotland a choice on an alternative future.' Shortly afterwards, she wrote to Johnson requesting the powers to legally hold another referendum on Scottish independence, but he refused to grant such powers.

The issue of a further referendum on independence became a key theme in the May 2021 elections to the Scottish Parliament. First Minister Sturgeon had been seen to have taken a competent approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic. On occasion, a rather different approach was taken to that adopted by Prime Minister Johnson in relation to the pandemic in England. Johnson's Englishness, his government's pro-Brexit credentials, and limited consultation of the devolved authorities proved useful props for Sturgeon and the SNP to cultivate support ahead of the elections, even though the economic measures to support businesses in Scotland were funded on a UK-wide basis by the Treasury. At the elections, Sturgeon secured a strong position again—the SNP won 64 of 129 seats in the Scottish Parliament—but needed continuing support from the Scottish Green Party, which also supports independence.

Quite how the issue of independence will play out in the new electoral period remains unclear. In the near term, the issue is how to secure a referendum. The Scottish government is only too aware of the danger of holding one against the wishes of the UK government. Moreover, if it were to be successful, independence would be fraught with risks. In the aftermath of the serious economic consequences of COVID-19, it would place a heavy fiscal burden on an independent Scotland. Moreover, implementing the SNP's desire to re-join the EU as an independent state would be far from straightforward. Difficult questions would include: how would

trade work between Scotland and the remaining UK? What kind of border would be required between the two parties if Scotland is in the EU single market? And would an independent Scotland inside the EU be required to join the Euro (in line with current accession criteria)?

Wider Impact on the Devolution Settlements

In addition to these specific questions relating to Northern Ireland and Scotland, Brexit had some significant implications for the future of the UK. The devolution settlements, initiated under the Tony Blair governments assigned to the devolved nations (Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), specified policy responsibilities on matters such as agriculture and the environment. However, the UK government maintained responsibility for European policy. As most devolved policy areas had an EU policy dimension, this limited the extent of practical divergence in policy between the component parts of the UK. Brexit meant that the UK government's reserve power over European policy would be removed and potentially could lead to significantly divergent policies within the UK unless the devolution settlements—for each nation's was different—were re-visited. Theresa May's government, in fact, proposed that powers should be returned from the EU to Westminster, in the first instance, and Johnson confirmed this approach.

Under the so-called 'Sewel Convention' the UK Parliament did 'not normally' legislate on devolved matters without the consent of the devolved legislatures. However, this was not a legally binding but a political convention. This was confirmed by the Supreme Court in 2017 in the context of the abovementioned legal challenge to the process of the triggering of Article 50. While, as noted, this case was primarily about confirming the role of the UK Parliament in triggering Article 50, it also ruled that the 'Sewel Convention' did not oblige the UK government to seek consent from the devolved authorities on this matter. Consent was, however, sought in the context of both the May EU Withdrawal Act in 2018 and the Johnson EU Withdrawal Agreement Bill in 2019. In the first case, the Scottish Parliament refused consent and the Welsh Assembly only gave its consent after some reforms to the Act. In the second case, all three—Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish—devolved legislatures refused consent. The Bill was nevertheless passed, damaging relations between Westminster and the devolved governments (Sargeant, 2020). The repatriation of powers from Brussels to Westminster rather than to the devolved authorities soured their relations with the UK government.

Gibraltar

A British Overseas Territory, Gibraltar, is located on the southern end of the Iberian Peninsula. British negotiators in the EU often had to make special arrangements for the application of EU legislation to Gibraltar, which has a land border with Spain and is subject to sovereignty claims from Madrid. Although this was occasionally the subject of negotiating tensions between Spain and Britain, the Spanish government was

content with the arrangements under the Withdrawal Agreement. That said, the issue returned to the agenda in the context of negotiations on the UK (and Gibraltar's) future relationship with the EU (Dombey, 2020).

Due to the close relationship between Gibraltar and Spain—despite the issue of disputed sovereignty—a different set of arrangements was needed compared to those for Britain. In fact, the proposed arrangements for Gibraltar were described as 'the biggest shift in Spanish-Gibraltarian bilateral relations since Gibraltar was ceded to Britain in 1713 during the War of Spanish Succession' (Gallardo, 2021). Gibraltar would be treated as if participating in the single market and the Schengen zone. The latter step would mean that immigration into Gibraltar (the port and airport), while determined by the local authorities, would be managed jointly with Spain, which would undertake 'Schengen controls' so that the actual 1.2-kilometer-long border would become largely redundant. After four years, Gibraltar, Spain and Britain will review the arrangements, which are not prejudicial to the dispute over the territory's sovereignty. However, the agreement was at first temporary from the start of 2021 until the end of June, and had not been made permanent at the time of writing.

Economic Impact

In January 2018, the outline of a set of government forecasts about the effects of leaving the EU was leaked, and MPs were given access to the full report on which that leaked information was based, in February. This report—entitled 'EU Exit Analysis: Cross Whitehall Briefing', and hereafter referred to as 'the government report'—presented evidence showing that Brexit would leave Britain worse off under three potential scenarios. The impact would be least significant in the context of continued participation in the single market (with GDP 2 per cent lower than it would otherwise have been by 2033), and most significant in the case of a 'no deal' Brexit and reversion to WTO rules (with GDP 8 per cent lower). The third scenario—then termed a Canada-style free-trade deal focused on goods and the closest to the TCA—would leave the British economy somewhere between these two scenarios, with GDP projected to be 5 per cent lower in 2033 (Parker and Hughes, 2018).

Some post-referendum analysis suggested that Britain could, in theory at least, adjust to the economic impact of Brexit by developing new trading relations. The authors of an Open Europe report argued that such relations could be developed with countries like India and China, where they detected that Britain was underperforming. In particular, the report pointed to the strength of the British economy in services, in which international trade was expected to grow more strongly than in goods. However, the report acknowledged that any positive outcomes would be achievable only in the long term, and would be dependent upon numerous and currently unknowable economic and political contingencies (Shankar et al., 2017). Such analysis at least partially supported the preferences of those in the Conservative party championing a hard Brexit, regulatory divergence from the EU, and the pursuit of a so-called 'global Britain' strategy. Such an agenda had been expressed in an earlier book, *Britannia Unchained* (Kwarteng et al., 2012), co-authored by a group of pro-free-market Conservative MPs. Many of those MPs were, at the time of writing in mid-2021, in prominent government positions, including Liz Truss, Secretary of State for International Trade.

In contrast to the Open Europe predictions, the government report concluded that any new third-country trade deals would add very little to the growth of GDP, and only minimally counteract the negative economic effects previously described (Parker and Hughes, 2018). Moreover, critics of a 'global Britain' strategy highlighted that many of the prospective partners targeted by the government for future trade relationships had poor records on human rights and democracy. The unreliability of the United States as a potential trade partner under an unpredictable, and increasingly protectionist, President Trump, was also raised as a concern. While Trump's departure from office in early-2021 allayed certain fears, different concerns arose in relation to President Biden: in particular, would he prioritize a trade deal with the UK?

As of 2021, it was still far too early to reach any definitive conclusions on the economic impact of Brexit or, indeed, to judge the long-term predictions of the government report. Moreover, it had become difficult to disentangle the impacts of Brexit from the sudden impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, as a consequence of repeated lockdowns, had led to a staggering 9.8 per cent fall in UK GDP in 2020.

That said, some experts suggested that uncertainties created by Brexit had depressed economic growth by 2–3 per cent between 2016 and 2021 (Portes, 2021a). And once the TCA entered into force in February 2021, many UK individuals and small firms started to report substantially increased friction in their trading relations with the EU. Certain goods required new and expensive checks of various sorts—including customs declarations—and, in the service sector, many reported that they could not viably continue to do business with (or in) the EU. Given that overall trade with the EU constitutes roughly 50 per cent of all UK trade, such realities threatened to exacerbate an already dire post-pandemic economic situation.

Moreover, since 2016, certain sectors of the UK economy—including social care, construction, and farming—have warned of and reported worker shortages as a consequence of Brexit (Migration Advisory Committee, 2018; Kollewe, 2017). Since 2016 there has been a substantial decrease in overall migration to the UK from the EU. Although EU citizens already resident in the UK could acquire a 'settled' or 'pre-settled' status until the end of June 2021, it is estimated that many resident EU citizens left the UK after 2016 (Migration Observatory). Moreover, at the time of writing, concerns were being raised about the implications of a failure by resident EU citizens to meet the deadline to register their settled or pre-settled status. Particular concerns were raised about the important 'rights gaps' likely to emerge for those failing to secure their status, including an inability to access welfare and work in the UK (O'Brien and Welsh 2021). At the same time, reports were emerging of EU citizens, who had entered Britain following the end of the transition period, being sent to detention centres (Tremlett and O'Carroll, 2021).

The UK's new 'points-based' migration system—which was introduced in 2020 in order to deal with the end of the UK's participation in the EU's free movement regime—makes it far more difficult for EU citizens to come to live and work in the UK. In the short term, a reduction in migrant numbers may alleviate the post-pandemic unemployment situation. But as the economy recovers from the lockdowns, issues of labour and skill shortages linked to Brexit are likely to reappear (Portes, 2021b). If the Home Office extends its 'Hostile Environment' approach to the management of migration to both EU migrants already in the UK (but without a

secure status) and prospective EU migrants, then this will certainly act as a further disincentive to live and work in the UK.

Following Brexit, the government, and in particular, Liz Truss, appeared to be pursuing the aforementioned long-term 'Global Britain' strategy (Menon, 2021). In addition to the 63 EU trade agreements that were 'rolled over' from 1 January 2021, the UK had, as of mid-2021, negotiated a new deal with Japan and Australia, and expressed ambitions to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). While the government emphasized the economic benefits of such deals, many experts noted that they offered, at most, minimal gains when compared with the EU agreements to which the UK had previously been party. The broader claim—also made in the aforementioned response to the Open Europe report—that any gains from such agreements would not come close to offsetting the losses from leaving the single market, was prominent in critical discussions of these deals.

Effect on the EU

The Brexit process quickly led to some significant changes to the EU. However, before considering these detailed points it is worth making some general observations.

First, there was no 'contagion effect' in the near term. Not only did no other member state seek to leave the EU, but some Eurosceptic political parties dropped commitments to do so. For instance, both Sweden's Left Party and the right-wing Sweden Democrats dropped such commitments in 2019 ahead of national elections. The turmoil in British politics following the 2016 referendum and increased support for the EU in other member states were contributory factors.

Second, the EU acted in a remarkably unified way in its negotiations with the UK government in relation to Brexit, strengthening the EU's bargaining position. As Schimmelfennig (2018) argued in his 'differentiated disintegration thesis', the bargaining power of the departing state (Britain) was significantly weakened. The Commission and its negotiating team, led by Michel Barnier, were left in charge by the EU27 states, except when major issues arose, such as agreeing the original terms of reference of the EU negotiating team, agreeing the interim and actual Withdrawal Agreement, and agreeing on extensions to the Article 50 process. Although some differences of opinion emerged—for instance, President Macron favouring a shorter second extension to Article 50 than was actually agreed—all decisions were agreed consensually (Laffan, 2019; Chopin and Lequesne, 2020). The contrast with the divisions in British politics was striking.

In addition to the institutional effects, which took effect on the UK's departure on 31 January 2020, Brexit would have an impact on the balance of internal EU politics (see Krotz and Schild, 2018), on the EU's finances, and possibly the EU's influence in world affairs. How these effects play out is a matter for the longer term. However, the EU was able to reach agreement on its seven-year Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) in 2020, alongside a set of measures to tackle the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, in December 2020, the European Commission

proposed a €5 billion Brexit Adjustment Reserve to cover companies or sectors in the EU, e.g. fisheries, that were adversely affected by Brexit. This proposal was in the later stages of approval in June 2021.

Institutional Effects

The voting rules in the Council of the EU needed to be adjusted to take account of Britain's exit [PEU5: 213–14, Table 12.1], and changes needed to be made to other EU institutions. Apart from the voting rules in the Council, the schedule of presidencies was revised because Britain would otherwise have held this role in the first half of 2018 amidst the delicate Brexit negotiations [PEU5: 273, Table 14.1]. There was no European Commissioner from Britain after Brexit (January 2020). British participation in the European Council and the Council of Ministers also ended following Brexit. In the case of the European Council, on becoming Prime Minister, Theresa May had immediately absented herself from meetings discussing the future of the EU, on the grounds that Britain should not be part of them. Her participation in EU business became largely confined to Brexit agenda items. Participation ended completely with Brexit.

The size of the European Parliament was revised following Brexit, with British MEPs elected in May 2019 serving only until January 2020. The departure of the Conservatives from the European Conservatives and Reformists' group [PEU5: 290, Table 15.2] removed the largest national delegation, and the group took a notable shift to the political right following the UK's departure. Finally, the structures of the CJEU were amended to take account of Brexit.

Financial issues would also arise for the EU post-Brexit. Even after taking account of the Thatcher rebate, Britain remained the second biggest net contributor to the budget after Germany. Without the British contributions, the remaining members would either have to increase their own contributions, by around 5 or 6 per cent each, or cut their spending. These negotiations were finalized in July 2020 as part of protracted negotiations on the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–27, which became linked to the EU's efforts to assemble economic measures to tackle the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ladi and Tsarouhas, 2020). Britain continues to contribute to the EU budget in line with its financial settlement with the EU (estimated at £33 billion overall).

Political Effects

In April 2019, Brexit looked likely to be a singular event rather than one triggering similar developments elsewhere in the EU. Only rarely has Euroscepticism been as 'hard' in other member states as it has been in Britain (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2016; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018). While the EU in general, and its single-currency regime in particular, came in for criticism in several member states, this usually fell short of the active promotion of withdrawal from the EU. It was notable that polling following the referendum suggested that the Leave vote had in fact galvanized popular support for the EU (including, ironically, in the UK) (*The Guardian*, 21 November 2016).

Unity among the remaining member states could conceivably be easier post-Brexit. Britain was the member state that made the greatest use of differentiated integration [PEU5: 231–4], through opt-outs from the single currency, the Schengen zone of passport-free movement of people, and specific aspects of the Area of Freedom, Security, and Justice. Its exit therefore held out the possibility of greater coherence and more consistent policy harmonization among the remaining members.

On the other hand, Brexit was just one manifestation of increased opposition to European integration across many EU states (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018). Eurosceptic, nationalist, and populist [PEU5: Ch. 11] political actors of various kinds were growing in importance throughout the EU before the Brexit vote, and continued to grow after it, precipitating important divisions within the populations of states and between member states. A combination of the global financial crisis, the Eurozone crisis [PEU5: Ch. 11], and a refugee crisis bolstered the political fortunes of such actors. There were no significant signs of other states wishing to leave the EU, but the apparent flouting of the rule of law in Hungary and Poland brought new 'awkward partners' into EU politics.

The political consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the EU remain to be evaluated. However, by contrast with the Eurozone crisis, where there were disagreements about who was to blame, and a consequent rise in Euroscepticism, the EU's responses to the COVID-19 crisis seemed less fractious (Ladi and Tsarouhas, 2020). Also significant in these measures was the revived role played by France and Germany working together. However, whether or not that was a consequence of Brexit, Germany and France face key elections later in 2021 and in spring 2022 respectively, and these will be more important than Brexit for the relationship's future as a motor of the EU, especially with Angela Merkel retiring as German chancellor.

Security and Foreign Policy

Brexit undoubtedly has implications for the EU's political clout in the increasing turbulence of global politics. Along with France, Britain is a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations. Although the two states always guarded their right to vote according to their own perceptions and priorities, they at least took into account their interpretation of the interests of the EU as a whole. In addition, Britain lent the EU influence in the world through its military strength as the world's fifth-largest military spender. It is also a key player in the efforts to counter international terrorism.

Unclear about the extent of Britain's post-Brexit alignment with EU policy, in 2016, the 27 states pressed ahead to strengthen the Union's security role through differentiated integration. In the context of developing its EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy, 25 member states agreed to pursue 'Permanent Structured Cooperation' (PESCO) to enhance capabilities [PEU5: Ch. 26]. In the meantime, the UK government continued with its 'global Britain' approach, with very little reference to the rest of Europe in its integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy (HM Government 2021). The Johnson government may have many shared interests with the EU-27, but they are overshadowed by the symbolism of pursuing an independent foreign policy, suggesting that the EU's efforts at PESCO have been vindicated.

Considering these integrative and disintegrative dynamics together, the EU has reluctantly accepted the UK's departure, developed its policies on that basis—not least the financial framework for 2021–27—and is watchful with regard to the UK becoming an economic competitor. Ongoing disputes in relation to the TCA, for instance with France on access to fishing grounds, has led to the EU deferring any agreement allowing for London's financial services sector to secure 'equivalence', thereby facilitating trade with the EU.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The vote in the British referendum to withdraw from membership of the EU shocked Europe and the rest of the world. Perhaps the result should not have been as surprising as it seemed to be. A history of the place of the European issue in British politics shows that it has always been contentious: a political rhetoric that was critical of the EU developed even among politicians who supported membership; it divided the main political parties; and there was strong hostility in some of the most widely-read newspapers. All this came to a head in light of the negative effects on many voters of the global financial crisis from 2008, and rising criticism of intra-EU migration.

If the Brexit vote revealed a divided nation, then the process via which the UK left the EU revealed a Parliament that was every bit as divided. Theresa May's decision to call a general election in 2017 in order to increase the Conservative majority and strengthen her negotiating hand badly backfired when the party lost its overall majority and became reliant on the DUP. This meant that although she managed to negotiate an agreement with the EU, the majority required to get that deal through Parliament repeatedly eluded her government. When Boris Johnson replaced her as Prime Minister, he also failed to find the necessary support for his slightly amended agreement, and his willingness to countenance a 'no deal' Brexit at the end of October 2019 was thwarted by Parliament. The December 2019 general election finally brought an end to the impasse. Where May failed, Johnson managed to secure a sizeable majority on the back of his promise to a Brexit-weary population to 'get Brexit done'.

This paved the way for the passage of an EU Withdrawal Bill, and Britain left the EU at the end of January 2020, albeit it remained in the EU single market and customs union for a further 11 months. During that period, Britain and the EU negotiated an agreement, the TCA, that established the basis for future economic relations between the two parties. However, that agreement—negotiated quickly and in the context of a pandemic that became the priority on both sides of the Channel—contained significant gaps, for instance on financial services. Just months after its entry into force, serious tensions emerged on the application and implementation of the agreement, most notably relating to Northern Ireland. Moreover, the substantive governance mechanisms for implementing and interpreting the agreement were still being worked out. At the time of writing (mid-2021), Brexit was, then, still far from 'done'.

Three potential future scenarios seemed possible: one involving close regulatory alignment with the EU, and two involving divergence. The first option would limit ongoing conflict with the EU by making it far easier to implement the TCA and the Northern Ireland Protocol. It would also be the most popular option with the many important economic stakeholders that never wanted Brexit, and certainly not departure from the single market. However, politically this would be a tough sell for a Prime Minister and government that had placed so much importance on the idea of 'taking back control' and, latterly, 'regulatory divergence'.

In terms of the two strategies that would involve divergence from the EU, these pointed in different directions. On the one hand, the electoral politics seemed to encourage an approach that would be more economically interventionist, catering to the interests of the Conservative party's new Leave-supporting voters in former 'red-wall' constituencies. As noted, these voters wanted the government to 'take back control' and address the perceived negative economic and cultural effects of globalization and, by extension, Europeanization (Finlayson, 2016). Government rhetoric around 'state aid' and 'levelling up'—as well as its willingness to unleash economic support during the pandemic—appeared to support this agenda.

On the other hand, and as also noted above, the post-Brexit preferences of many of those currently in senior posts in government—and of a minority of Leave supporters—pointed in a very different direction: towards rapid deregulation in line with a 'small-state' ideology. The continued deployment of a 'global' or 'unchained' Britain discourse, its integrated foreign policy review, and, more concretely, the shape of the emerging free trade agreement with Australia, seemed to support such an agenda.

At the time of writing, the broad government agenda for Brexit was best described as ambiguous. That ambiguity had long been 'cultivated' by Johnson and his Brexiteer allies in order to stitch together 'a disparate coalition' of public support (Menon, 2021). But it was also becoming clear that such ambiguity would, sooner or later, prove unsustainable. The hard policy choices facing the government meant that it could not indefinitely support contradictory visions of Brexit.

FURTHER READING

A great deal of literature has been published on Brexit in a very short space of time, and more is being published all the time. These recommendations should not therefore be regarded as a definitive list but as a starting point. For a concise overview that puts Brexit into historical context, see A. Menon and L. Scazzieri, 'The United Kingdom: Towards a Parting of the Ways', in S. Bulmer and C. Lequesne (eds.), *The Member States of the European Union*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 257–79. For understanding why people voted as they did, *Brexit: Why Britain voted to leave the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) by H. D. Clarke, M. Goodwin, and P. Whiteley, is particularly useful. Two books that provided a good overview of the issue but early in the process are: G. Evans and A. Menon, *Brexit and British Politics* (London: Polity, 2017); and K. A. Armstrong's *Brexit Time: Leaving the EU—Why, How and When?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), which is particularly strong on explaining the technical and legal challenges of Brexit. The *Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit* (2019), edited by P. Diamond, P. Nedergaard and B. Rosamond, includes chapters on a broad range of issues pertaining to Brexit. Special issues of the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (Volume 19, Issues 3 and 4) and the *Journal of European Public Policy* (Volume 25, Number 8) cover a good range of relevant issues. The website of the 'UK in a Changing Europe' (http://ukandeu.ac.uk/) has a wealth of useful resources and up-to-date commentary, along with valuable testimony from participants in the Brexit process. On the referendum campaign, T. Shipman's *All Out War: The Full Story of how Brexit sank Britain's Political Class* (William Collins, 2016) offers a detailed account. Students might also be interested in *Brexit: The Uncivil War,* a Channel 4 television dramatization focused on the Vote Leave campaign (although we cannot vouch for its accuracy!) (https://www.channel4.com/programmes/brexit-the-uncivil-war). For a broader history of Britain-EU relations, D. Gowland's *Britain and the European Union* (Routledge, 2017) is a good starting point.

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