



Brexit: The Future of Regionalism and Security Implications

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Abstract

The present article discusses the implications of Brexit for European security policy. Since its inception, European integration has been geared to the establishment of close economic and political ties between the countries of Europe and the elimination of war and enmity between the European peoples, above all, the longstanding enmity between Germany and France.

The United Kingdom has had an easy membership since its accession to the European Economic Community in 1973. Founded in 1955 and established on the principles on liberal democracy, market economy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, the European Union has ensured the most enduring period of peace in European history. Brexit, by contrast, stands for isolationism, protectionism and reactionary nationalism, a trend the growing support for which is similarly to be seen in many countries within the European Union as witnessed in the world-wide wave of emergent populism.

As a nuclear power, the United Kingdom contributed significantly to the establishment of a stable order both within European Union and NATO in the aftermath of the Cold War in 1989/90. However, in light of Brexit and Donald Trump's election as President of the United States, future European policy-making must do more to guarantee geopolitical security within the region, and learn to rely less than hitherto on the postwar transatlantic partnership with the United States.

Whereas a significant majority among government representatives in France and Germany regard the United Kingdom's planned exit from the European Union as an opportunity to accelerate moves towards a common European security and defense policy, little progress has so far been made to harmonize defense spending within the European Union framework in accord with joint European Security Strategy. Though the idea of combined European armed forces is not set to become reality for the foreseeable future, greater cooperation between European armed forces does, indeed, provide opportunities to boost efficiency and potential rationalization.

Unlike ASEAN, which is far more heterogeneous than the European Union, subsidiarity has a particularly important role to play here; what this means is that public undertakings should be as closely as possible regulated and tailored to the citizen, such as at the level of local authorities or states. Only when a specific problem cannot be dealt with at the local level, is the next highest level empowered to regulate it. Brexit also shows us that counteractive measures must be implemented for countering growing tendencies towards regionalism, and that such measures are to be implemented with the greatest possible degree of unanimity.



About the Author of this Issue

Carsten Körber, born in Zwickau in 1979 (former German Democratic Republic), has been member of the German Bundestag since 2013. He is member of the Budget and Auditing Committees, and a deputy member of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Energy.

Körber graduated in political science and business administration (MA) at Chemnitz University of Technology. From 2002 to 2012, he assisted and directed the constituency office of a Member of the German Bundestag for Saxony. He became head of the Economic Development Office of the city of Zwickau in 2012, from which time he has also been pursuing his professional work as freelance business and management consultant.

He has been member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) since 2002, Chairman of the Mülsen local branch of the CDU since 2005, and First Deputy Chairman of the Zwickau state branch of the CDU since 2012. He was member of the municipal council from 2009 to 2015, and Deputy Mayor of Mülsen until 2012.



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Analysis

Preliminary Remarks

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Discussion on foreign affairs within Germany centre predominantly on major issues, such as the United States and Russia, Putin and Trump, and pay little attention to ASEAN. As I am sure you are aware, in Germany, the focus is primarily, if not exclusively, on China. I was greatly encouraged when the subject of this conference was brought to my attention, and wish to express my cordial thanks for inviting me to Indonesia. You have afforded me the opportunity to broaden my horizons with respect to Asia. The present paper provides an overview of the European perspective on the topics under review.

Since we have already considered the European refugee crisis, I shall confine myself here to one of the most challenging issues currently confronting the European Union, namely, the first exit, commonly referred to as “Brexit”, from the European Union by one of its member states, the United Kingdom. The specific topic on which we shall be focussing our attention in this context is the Future of Regionalism and Security Implications.

Allow me to begin by way of a brief historical overview of European integration.

Early visions of a united Europe began emerging within academic circles already over the course of the 19th century. After the First World War, the pivotal catastrophe of the 20th century, proposals for integration among European countries began to assume a more tangible form. However, in the crisis-torn, nationalist-driven interwar period such visions again remained at the level of theory. After the Second World War, which saw the death of at least 60 million people, the European continent – like much of Asia – had been reduced to ash and rubble. And yet it was this catastrophe which was to bring new momentum to the idea of integration. The establishment of close economic and political ties between the countries and peoples of Europe was intended to forever banish enmity and the threat of new wars, especially the archaic hostility between Germany and France. The slogan “never again war!” took on a distinctive significance particularly with the start of the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, and it was in this political climate that the European Union was founded in 1955.

The United Kingdom’s relationship to Europe has always been fraught by difficulty. “Us against them” runs the motto which has defined British policy towards Europe ever since the United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community in 1973, with which membership it has struggled ever since.

The process of gradual disintegration of the British Empire began in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, an era during which the United Kingdom sought with increasingly intensity to define its new foreign-policy role. The two major priorities for the British were the nurturing of the special relationship with the United States and close ties with its former colonies, the Commonwealth. Engagement in Europe was pursued relative only to these two priorities. EEC membership was regarded merely as a means to further economic interests and the extension of political influence on the Continent. Once having joined the EEC, the United Kingdom very quickly acquired a reputation as the “awkward partner” who constantly expressed misgivings about the deepening of political integration, and who found it extremely difficult to fit into the Community’s political and legal framework.

In my view, the European Union is first and foremost a community of shared values. Whereas, in my understanding, the common economic area which culminated in the single currency, is merely an offshoot of



this community of values, some see the European Union as a purely bureaucratic construct serving exclusively economic ends. This view is short-sighted, since it was the catastrophe of two World Wars which forged the common European bond. The unification of Europe has guaranteed seven decades of peace, the longest period of peace in European history. Liberal democracy and the market economy, respect for human rights and the rule of law constitute the common principles on which the European Union is founded.

Brexit, by contrast, represents isolationism, protectionism and reactionary nationalism. Brexit is, you might say, the antithesis of everything for which the European Union stands.

The year 2017, I am convinced, will thus go down as a key year in the history of the European Union. Either the Europe we know today will disintegrate or, as I hope, we will emerge all the stronger from the crisis, the worst we have experienced to date.

Among many countries of the European Union, we are currently witnessing increasing support for a return to national solutions, often defined by the new forms of populism, which are gaining ground throughout the world. Of course, Brexit is unambiguous case of such support for a return to the nation state solution.

The two questions with which we are presently concerned are firstly, how to respond to and deal with this growing nationalism and, secondly, the ramifications of this development with respect to security? Thus, the implications of Brexit's foreign-policy are such that the European Union may well experience a massive loss of influence in the international arena.

After the Cold War in 1989, the United Kingdom contributed significantly to the establishment of a stable order in Europe.

Today, Donald Trump's election as US President, among other things, means that Europe must once again do more to ensure its own geopolitical security, a circumstance which marks a significant shift away from the post Second World War situation of overreliance on our transatlantic partner, the United States.

The security landscape in Europe has been fundamentally transformed in recent years as a consequence of Putin's foreign policy and, above all, his use of hybrid warfare, which has not only contributed to destabilisation of the Ukraine, but called into question the entire existing edifice of European security.

The European Union and NATO are, of course, different organisations. However, should the European Union consolidate its common security and foreign policy, the absence of the United Kingdom as a military heavyweight will be felt: France and the United Kingdom are the only nuclear powers within the European Union. Whereas, the United Kingdom will, of course, maintain its position as an important member of NATO, the remaining member states of the European Union will be obliged to take steps to fill the ensuing gap in the European security architecture.

Furthermore, the fact that the United Kingdom is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council is clear by brief glance at defence budgets. While Germany invests a mere 1.4% of its GDP on defence, the United Kingdom invests 2.7%, the highest expenditure among member states. Whereas Europe spends an average 1.7% of GDP on defence, America and Russia each spend approximately 4%.

The question is whether Brexit will tend to advance or impede chances of structured security cooperation within Europe including European defence integration, an issue which prompts widely varying prognoses.



With the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union – notwithstanding its avowals that “[Britain's] security is fundamentally tied to the continent,” as Defence Secretary Michael Fallon announced, the remaining European Union member states may, in the future, expect to lack not only an important military ally, but also a partner with significant financial power. The United Kingdom, one of the biggest contributors to the European budget presently provides seven billion euros per annum. Furthermore, while the United Kingdom has provided military capabilities and participated in numerous European operations and missions in the past, thus demonstrating its will to support the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy militarily, the same cannot be said of its political commitments in other areas.

In what ways, then, is the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy likely to develop after Brexit?

Whereas the total population of Europe amounts to 500 million, compared to the United States' population of just over 300 million, the combined military budget of the European Union amounts to just under quite half that of its transatlantic partner. Whereas, in 2016, Europeans allocated 275 billion dollars for defence spending, the United States spent 611 billion dollars, a budget the present Trump administration plans to increase by a further 50 billion in 2017. Such figures suggest that measured against United States, the European Union achieves approximately ten to fifteen percent, *de facto* a mere fraction of military efficiency.

What are the causes for this discrepancy? Each country maintains its own armed forces along with their respective complex infrastructures. The European approaches to the coordination of military spending is extremely limited. Investment decisions are determined by national interests. As a result, in Europe key defence hardware, such as the tank, shipping and aircraft are of largely different types, consequently unnecessarily increasing expenditure in development, procurement and logistics.

In view of the above-outlined considerations, the question which thus presents itself is how to compensate for the deficits to the architecture of European security as have been incurred by Brexit? One option would be the implementation of European armed forces as based on an integrated approach, both with respect to capability and force, strategy and deployment; the success of such centralised integration would result in considerable savings and greater efficiency.

The key prerequisites for such architectural restructuring would be centralised political decision-making at the European Union level that would include core expertise, a common European defence budget and a European general staff. This would require the willingness among member states and their respective electorates to transfer all key powers in the field of security and defence policy to European institutions. However, this is unlikely, even in the long term; such a transfer of power, for example, would encounter massive resistance within Germany since it would entail conferring to the European level decision-making powers for the deployment of German service personnel abroad; and the same reticence would similarly hold for almost all other European Union countries.

If, in the future – even without the United Kingdom – the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy aspire to promote peace and security in the world to the extent it has in the past – while also contributing to a Europe capable of defending itself on the basis of advanced military integration – then the other European member states would have to be willing to close the gaps incurred by Brexit with respect to funding, and the provision of personnel, technological expertise and military capability. It must be emphasized, however, that solutions to such deficits would not necessarily entail the contribution of greater funding by remaining members, but rather more efficient allocation of available funding.



At the same time, the remaining members would be obliged to assist in compensating for the Brexit-induced decline in the United Kingdom's stabilising influence on security-related developments. However, many doubt whether the remaining member states of the European Union would, indeed, be willing to take the necessary action. The United Kingdom's withdrawal of its fiscal and personnel support for European security structures, would doubtless trigger calls – especially on the behalf of France in view of its fiscal situation and current pressure on its armed forces – for Germany to act on the declarations of its willingness to assume greater responsibility with respect to security policy, and to “step into the breach” left by in the wake of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union.

But in what ways is ASEAN to learn from all this?

While Europe's current population is 500 million, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has a population of 600 million! Taken together, ASEAN is the sixth-biggest economy in the world. The region is certainly more diverse than Europe, not merely economically, but also with respect to its political systems, thus making it extremely difficult to establish the kind of consensus necessary for joint decision-making.

The importance of regulating public tasks responsive to possible public needs is thus evident. As ASEAN is far more heterogeneous than is the European Union, subsidiarity plays an especially important role. Subsidiarity means that public tasks should be regulated and tailored as closely as possible to the requirements of the citizen – for example, at the level of local authorities or states. Only in cases in which a specific problem is impervious to solutions at the level of local authority should the next highest level be mandated to regulate it. The European Union should only assume responsibility for matters about which it is better capable of regulating with greater efficiency than individual member states.

Brexit also shows us that action must be taken to counter growing regionalism, and that it should be done with utmost unanimity. Whereas, it is true, the European Union may debate consumer protection *ad infinitum*, it took a mere four minutes at the most recent European Summit for all 27 Member States to concur on guidelines for the exit negotiations with the United Kingdom, which are expected to last two years. In this context, I agree completely with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble: “Britain must not have any advantages after it leaves that other countries don't have.”

I would like to conclude by stating that integration leads to peace, and peace leads to prosperity. This best sums up the experience of the European Union's 60-year history. In my view, what is true of Europe is also true of ASEAN. Europe shows that its peoples – for all their differences – may live together in peace. Is this not a model for all regions of the world?

Thank you for your attention!

Remarks: The opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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