

Forum: BREXIT: How did we get here and where are we going?

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The following is preliminary briefing note I prepared for local community activists.

How we got here

The development of the European Union (EU) was only one of several 20th C initiatives designed to foster international relations in response to changing geopolitical forces

De-colonialization

Gradual independence achieved by colonies led to the demise of empires. The response of the British Empire was the establishment in 1926 of the British Commonwealth of Nations, formalised in 1931, formally constituted in 1949 and known today as the Commonwealth

WWI 1914–1918 & WWII 1939–1945

Attempts to maintain international peace and security led to the establishment of the ineffective League of Nations in 1920 after the end of WWI. This was replaced by the United Nations in 1945 after WWII and continues today

Growth of the Cold War Between the USA & USSR After WWII

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) treaty was signed in 1949 between 30 European and North American countries as an intergovernmental military alliance and continues today

Birth of European cooperation after WWII to support reconstruction & provide a buffer zone for the USA in cold war politics

1951 Treaty of Paris set up the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) between Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands & Luxembourg

1957 Treaty of Rome set up the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and the European Economic Community (EEC [Common Market])

1972 European Communities Act was the UK Act of Parliament that ratified UK membership of the 3 European Communities (ECSC, Euratom, EEC). The Treaty of Accession was signed by Ted Heath, Prime Minister (PM) as the Conservative Government was in power. Membership was hotly debated in the UK General Election (GE) of 1974. Under Harold Wilson the Labour Party gained a majority to form the government in part because

of a manifesto commitment to renegotiate the terms and hold a referendum.

1975 First national referendum in the UK. 65% turnout: 67% voted Remain; 33% Leave.

Subsequently other amendments were agreed in the following years aiming to strengthen economic, social, and political ties between European Countries the most significant being:

1992 The Maastricht Treaty on European Union that attempted to negotiate tensions between members states seeking closer integration and those wishing to retain greater national control.

It has been argued that at the end of WWII there was an unprecedented social pact between labour and capital in European countries devastated by war. This led to some form of nationalisation necessary to rebuild and the provision of mandatory universal welfare services provided by the state of which the UK is the most notable example. On the other hand, the European project that began in 1951 has been driven by specific economic and institutional interests and from the 1980s onwards has increasingly pushed state assistance towards targeted populations and away from universalism. Following the global financial collapse of 2008 popular support for the EU project has fallen all over Europe

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330227871_The_1945_European_Social_Pact

Brexit 2016–2020

Both the Conservative and Labour parties have had internal divisions about membership of the ‘Common Market’ since the UK first joined in 1972. Sovereignty and the free movement of labour have been frequently raised as problems.

In broad terms the right wing of the Conservative Party has been against the increasingly stringent social, employment, judicial and environmental protections required of member states. The left wing of the Labour Party, on the other hand, has been against the dominant neo-liberal economic restraints within which member states have had to conduct their economies.

The Conservative PM, David Cameron, was first elected in 2010. The Conservatives gained a majority largely because the global financial collapse of 2008 was blamed by many on the incumbent Labour government. Cameron promised to hold a referendum on EU membership if the Conservatives were re-elected in the GE in 2015. They were re-elected but Cameron resigned as PM after the referendum of 2016 and decision to leave the EU. Internally the Conservative party appointed Theresa May as PM and later Boris Johnson who finally faced the electorate as PM in 2019 GE that was won by the Conservatives on the manifesto of ‘Get Brexit Done’

Of course, the geopolitical context in the 21st C differs from that which led to the inception of the EU. The fall of the USSR, growing economic strength of China, and increasing importance of the Middle East in global politics alters the potential role of Europe. In addition, it has been argued that euro-scepticism became a dominant and powerful right-wing project funded by elites that manipulated a range of citizen dissatisfactions not rooted entirely in EU membership.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/09/brexit-grassroots-movement-elitist-takeover-2016-referendum>

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2017/07/31/the-referendums-of-1975-and-2016-illustrate-the-continuity-and-change-in-british-euroscepticism/>

Where are we going—immediate consequences

A simple guide

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/28/brexit-from-fishing-quotas-to-free-movement-ending-10>

At first glance deal overall

Better than no deal but leaves worker's rights and environmental protections at serious risk of erosion

<https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/the-brexiteu-uk-trade-deal-a-first-analysis>

The economy, customs, and trade

Most commentators anticipate an economic contraction compounded by the impact of the pandemic

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-25/u-k-investing-class-sounds-warning-as-post-brexite-reality-bites>

Free movement of labour has ceased with consequences for the service sector that currently form 80% of the UK economy. Professional qualifications obtained in the UK will no longer be valid in the EU

<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-brexite-deal-and-services/>

Automobile industry—Better than no deal but there are still substantial costs from the mandatory documentation required and the long-term tariff implications regarding electric cars

<https://cardealermagazine.co.uk/publish/comment-the-brexite-trade-deal-and-what-it-means-for-the-uk-automotive-industry/211920>

Northern Ireland—NI will maintain an open border with Eire consequently the customs barrier will be between Great Britain and NI

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9102/>

Although some suppliers do not anticipate food shortages others have argued this is inevitable

<https://theconversation.com/brexite-deal-or-no-deal-food-bills-are-about-to-get-a-lot-more-expensive-152327>

Post—parcels to the EU will now require a customs declaration

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/uk-news/post-office-parcel-warning-eu-19532915>

Justice, data, and security

The UK (apart from NI) will no longer be subject to the European Court of Justice; will lose automatic right to key databases and Europol, and

social media users will now be subject to US rules on privacy

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/55252388>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-55328376>

<https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/commentary-and-opinion/brexite-trade-deal-its-good-and-bad-for-lawyers/5106867.article>

Travel and holidays

British travellers will face longer queues at passport control and must have at least 6 months left on their current passport for it to be valid. New passports will be blue.

Stays are limited to up to one 90-day period in 180 days

European Health Insurance Cards (EHIC) are valid until they expire and although a new scheme is promised this has not yet been developed

Mobile roaming charges will increase

Driving abroad requires you take your logbook, driver's licence, and a green card from your insurers

Pet travel—pets now require an Animal Health Certificate (AHC) from a vet no more than 10 days before travel and will last for 4 months. Pets must be microchipped

Duty free shopping will change—increased limits on alcohol and tobacco, no duty-free electronics, clothing etc

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46627083>

Studying abroad

Erasmus scheme for students to study in the EU has closed apart from Northern Island. Another scheme (Turing) proposed but not yet developed

<https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/uk-students-will-no-longer-be-able-to-participate-in-erasmus-programme/>