


Winter 12-14-2018

# It Could Never Last: Why British sovereignty and its influence since 1945 resulted in Brexit

Jeffrey Brandt  
brandt.jm@outlook.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/thes>

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Other Political Science Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [Political Theory Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Brandt, Jeffrey, "It Could Never Last: Why British sovereignty and its influence since 1945 resulted in Brexit" (2018). *Master's Theses*. 1165.  
<https://repository.usfca.edu/thes/1165>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact [repository@usfca.edu](mailto:repository@usfca.edu).

# IT COULD NEVER LAST

WHY BRITISH SOVEREIGNTY AND ITS INFLUENCE  
SINCE 1945 RESULTED IN BREXIT

JEFF BRANDT  
UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO  
NOVEMBER 2018  
MAIS

## ABSTRACT

The EU Referendum of June 2016 marked a watershed moment for the United Kingdom, as it sought to once again reassert its sovereignty and retake its place in the world as an independent state, free from European Union infringement. The British are usually seen as the cussid ones in Europe, stubbornly holding on to their principles and traditions of sovereignty. But why is that? Carefully tracing UK history, particularly from the end of the Second World War to the present day, it becomes understandable why the result of the 2016 referendum should not be quite a surprise. Studying events in Britain post-1945 that helped shape their understanding of sovereignty, framing Brexit as it relates to sovereignty, and a brief analysis of media coverage, gives us a view as to why Britain voted for Brexit and why the British are uniquely so in Europe.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
<b>Section 1: Introduction</b>	5
The long road to the June 2016 EU Referendum	5
Sifting through the political rubble	8
Thesis Objective and Structure	9
<b>Section 2: Literature Review</b>	11
<b>Section 3: Analysis</b>	20
<u>Part 1:</u>	
The United Kingdom and the European Union: A brief history	20
British efforts to join the European Economic Community	22
Britain as a member of the EEC and the EU	31
<u>Part 2:</u>	
The Brexit vote	50
<u>Part 3</u>	
Brexit and the Media	63
<b>Section 4: Conclusion</b>	67

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to give my deepest thanks to God, whose unwavering grace and mercy has allowed me to come this far in my academic career. I recognize that without His goodness, I would not be where I am today. I want to thank my mother for her guidance, my father for his strength, my grandmother for her wisdom, my brother for his example, my sister for her support, and my two nephews for bringing joy to my life. To Oscar, Edgard Josué, and Jonathan, you've been as close as brothers to me. To my Aunt Gloria, your prayers and encouragement are deeply appreciated and not forgotten. To my Uncle Edgard, thanks for your support throughout these long years. Thank you to my advisor, Professor Olivier Bercault, whose support and encouragement throughout this process has been truly invaluable; I very much appreciate you and our stimulating conversations about international politics, and thank you for allowing me to freely speak my mind. A special thanks to two special instructors: Professor Lucia Cantero, your class discussions were always engaging and, yes, I blame you for my obsession with wanting to understand postmodernism better; Professor Lindsay Gifford, your strict standards for academic excellence made me a better student and I thank you for that, as well as for always being readily available to your students. And finally, to the friends that I have made throughout my time in the MAIS program: I wish you the best moving forward and thank you for your friendship.

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### **The long road to the June 2016 EU Referendum**

For years, it was a talking point in the rough and tumble world of British politics; it would stir the base of the Conservative Party, furthering antagonizing them against the emerging superstate forming on the continent and it would galvanize the base of the Labour Party, solidifying their support for the increasingly powerful IGO (intergovernmental organization). Talk of a referendum on British membership of the European Union (EU) can be traced back to the 1970s, when it was actually Labour who was largely against membership and the Tories were in support of it. Most clearly, it affected British politics in the early 1990s, after the shift in party support.

#### *The Tories in government: Thatcher and Major (1979-1997)*

Labour, under then-leader Neil Kinnock, was supporting the continental experiment while the Conservatives were becoming increasingly skeptical. Under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, the Tories became the leading party of British euro-skepticism. Though Thatcher was herself a euro-skeptic, she was in the minority in her own cabinet, constantly opposed by pro-European Tories throughout her eleven years as Prime Minister. In 1990, this tension came to a boiling point, as the charismatic Michael Heseltine stood against Mrs. Thatcher for the leadership of the Conservatives and the premiership of Britain. Mrs. Thatcher would win the first round of votes but failed to win an outright majority, leading to the perception of a weakened position; most of those close to her advised that she should bow out rather than possibly lose to Heseltine. She did so, reluctantly. After three consecutive electoral victories and after eleven successful years as prime minister, Thatcher was thrown out of office by pro-Europeans in her own party.

If Conservatives were hoping that Thatcher's exit would lead to a reconciliation amongst themselves, they would be sorely mistaken. Michael Heseltine would fail to win the leadership contest, falling to the relatively unknown John Major, the Foreign Secretary. Major had the support of Thatcher

and thus, the support of the euro-skeptic wing of the Tories. During the course of Major's time in office, however, Tory euro-skeptics would become infuriated with his inclinations towards Europe. It would become clear that Margaret Thatcher backed the wrong horse and that John Major was no euro-skeptic. He pushed through the Maastricht Treaty, which established European government, despite strong opposition in his party, further splitting the it. 1992's Black Wednesday, the disastrous economic episode that saw Britain crash out of its membership of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), would also contribute to the growth of negative feelings towards John Major within the Tory party and the country in general.

The disaster of Black Wednesday would continue to haunt John Major's government, despite the growth that would follow Britain's exit from the ERM. That, along with Tory blunders that painted them as a party of sleaze, would bring about the end to almost twenty years of Conservative government when a revamped New Labour, led by one Tony Blair, would be swept to power.

*Labour in government: Blair and Brown (1997-2010)*

Tony Blair's government was much more positive towards the European Union, as tensions between Brussels and Westminster would relax over the tenure of Blair's leadership. Blair was so enthused with the EU that he sought to join the Euro currency project, willing to abandon the pound sterling. Here, however, he was overruled by the other powerful figure in Labour: the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. Though Mr. Blair resided in No. 10, and was indeed the most powerful occupier of that place in decades, it was No. 11 that had the final say on this matter. Brown overruling Blair on the Euro did not lead to a falling out with Brussels. On the whole for the remainder of New Labour's time in government, relations between Britain and the European Union would continue to improve and ties would strengthen, though not at the same rate as countries such as France and Italy. When Gordon Brown became Prime Minister in 2007, he continued tying Britain

and the EU together. Most notably, he secured the passage of the Lisbon Treaty through Parliament in 2009, further deepening ties between Brussels and Westminster.

### *A Cast-Iron Vise*

This occurred, however, to the ire of many in the Conservative Party and many in the country; again, as the Lisbon Treaty was being passed, the clamor for a referendum on British membership of the European Union grew. The Conservative Party, in opposition and led by David Cameron, saw an opportunity to capitalize on the country's mood to make a comeback into government. Back in 2007, Cameron offered voters a "cast-iron guarantee" that a referendum on any EU treaty would take place if a Conservative government was in power. Though this was in the context of the eventual 2009 Lisbon Treaty, his words would continuously chase him, as Cameron had to deal with a growing chorus of, not just a referendum on potential future treaties, but an in/out referendum of British membership of the EU. In the 2010 general election, Cameron promoted a change in Britain's relationship with the European Union, though this would not be enough to get him into power. The result of the election would be a hung parliament, where no party had an outright majority. After the initial five days of political intrigue, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats would form a coalition government, ending Labour's thirteen years in power and Gordon Brown's premiership.

During the five years of Cameron's premiership, the EU would become even more of an issue, as the Euro crisis threatened to pull Britain more into the European Union than it had consented to. Because of the difficulties of the Euro crisis, the increasing pressure from the right of the Tory party, and the defeat of the Tories in the 2014 European elections, Cameron was forced to up the ante for the 2015 general election. He pledged to hold a simple, in/out referendum on British membership of the European Union if the country returned him to power with a Conservative majority in Parliament. At the time, this was seen as a desperate Hail Mary attempt to fend off Nigel Farage's UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) and to make a clear distinction between his Tories and Labour, now



led by Jeremy Corbyn. Against all odds, Cameron was indeed returned to Downing Street, along with a parliamentary majority. This was seen as clear message that Britain wanted their say in European Union membership. The issue then became when would Britain get its say.

### *June 23, 2016: The Referendum*

David Cameron announced that Britons would have their say in the promised in/out referendum on June 23, 2016. This would mark the beginning of a monumental exercise of British democracy with the Vote Remain camp and the Vote Leave side ready to decide Britain's future. Interestingly, the lines did not divide neatly among the traditional right/left sides; some Labour areas in the north of England were keen on voting out and certain wealthy Conservative areas in the south of England were set on voting to remain. David Cameron himself was set on keeping Britain within the EU and became a leading figure of Remain, while Boris Johnson, a potential future leader of the Conservatives and longtime friend and political rival of Cameron, supported the Leave side. Jeremy Corbyn was suspected to genuinely support the Leave side, as Labour never came out as a united front endorsing Vote Remain. Gisela Stuart, a Labour member, also supported Vote Leave and worked to have Britain exit the EU.

When June 23 finally came, the majority of the polls predicted that Remain would win. Yet, another political surprise, echoing the 2015 general election, would happen. Vote Leave would emerge triumphant, winning 52% of the vote to Remain's 48%. This left David Cameron in a weakened position and he knew it. The next morning, David Cameron would resign the premiership of the country and the leadership of his party. After an entertaining and interesting leadership contest, his former Home Secretary, Theresa May, would become the new Prime Minister of Britain and leader of the Conservative Party.

### **Sifting through the political rubble**

The forensic examination of the June 23, 2016 EU referendum quickly, and unfortunately, went down an expected avenue: identity politics. The result of the referendum was framed around themes like racism, xenophobia, suspicion, fear, intolerance, and even hate. This is understandable to a degree, given the highly divisive nature of the question posed in the referendum and the referendum itself. However, it became immediately noticeable that an important theme, an important principle, in Britain's history was being overlooked: sovereignty. To reduce such a momentous chapter in British history to one-word political talking points of the day does a disservice to the examination of the Brexit result, one which other strained EU member states may emulate.

### **Thesis Objective and Structure**

This thesis will attempt to show that the foremost factor and motivation for Vote Leave's victory in the 2016 EU referendum was the British tradition, principle, and understanding of sovereignty. While many issues such as immigration did indeed play a role in the result, I will show that these were considered under the umbrella theme of sovereignty, something which has always marked the British as distinct in the European context.

The thesis will be divided very simply into three following sections: two main sections and a conclusion.

Section 2 is a literature review of some of the most recent and relevant inquiry into Brexit. There is a gap in the overall literature on Brexit for an intervention that states that sovereignty, and not identity politics or other politics of tribalism, was the main consideration for the Brexit result. Because sovereignty is considered as such a broad topic, Section 2 will give readers context on the British understanding of sovereignty and shed light on why their interpretation of sovereignty, whether it is parliamentary sovereignty or national sovereignty, has caused so many tensions and difficulties in Britain's relationship with the European Union.

Section 3 is an evaluation of Brexit broken up into three parts; first, an in-depth analysis of the history of the United Kingdom and the European Union—highlighting that Britain was always an odd child out; secondly, an examination of the Brexit vote so as to better understand the outcome in the frameset of sovereignty; lastly, a brief scrutinizing of the media, particularly the BBC, and how it reported in the lead-up of the Brexit referendum and its aftermath, showing in part that the result has been largely misunderstood by being framed around identity politics instead of recovering sovereignty. In Section 3, the historical analysis will be of the utmost importance and historical inquiry will be the primary methodology, as it lays the framework for understanding the British mindset in regards to their sovereignty from 1945 to the present day, with an emphasis placed in the 1980s in what is widely considered the rise of modern Britain. Beginning with Sir Winston Churchill’s “United States of Europe” speech, I will outline that the United Kingdom did not see its future tied alongside Europe in political union and that Britain supported a continental experiment of unity in the hopes of achieving peace, sponsoring the project from afar, reflecting even its own geographical position. However, I will also show how the economic boom that occurred in continental Europe sparked British interests in joining the European community, as Britain was still suffering from a relatively weak economy during the post-war years. This development is key in understanding the British objection to perceived European government from EU institutions, as the British public understood that they would be wanting to join an economic agreement, not entering into any type of political union or governmental structure that would exercise influence from without on issues that were and are from within.

Section 4 will be the conclusion of the thesis.

## SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Literature Review**

The model of Westphalian sovereignty remains the dominant standard on which the international system rests. The sovereignty of the world's many states demand respect from one another, each an equal actor on the international stage, though this equality among states developed much later than when the Peace of Westphalia came to be. While sovereignty is traditionally understood to be absolute, it has had challenges to its efficacy, ranging from indigenous peoples' fight for rights to the growth of intergovernmental organizations.

One example of the latter can be found in the tumultuous relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union. Since joining the EU in 1973, the UK has seen many challenges to its sovereignty coming from the increasingly powerful IGO that, despite what its leaders say, seems to have superstate ambitions. Political debate in Britain for decades has mentioned sovereignty has a key issue, with the pro-EU side saying that pooled sovereignty in the EU enhances British influence and the anti-EU side saying that British sovereignty is being stripped bit by bit by EU institutions, until Brussels becomes the new capital of a European superstate.

The following review of literature confirms that sovereignty is a centerpiece for Britain in the UK/EU debate and it also touches upon the fraught relationship that the United Kingdom and the European Union have experienced since British accession in 1973, straining that sovereignty.

#### *The Importance of Sovereignty*

The West has had a series of significant exercises in democracy, beginning with the June 2016 EU referendum. Wind (2017) opines that doomsdays preachers suggested that Brexit and the US election of Donald Trump would mean the end of the liberal world order as we know it and, thus, the end of the EU. The research she presents suggests the opposite. She interestingly says that not only have Europeans turned their back to populism by voting yes to reforms and pro-EU-parties in recent

elections in member states over the past months, but Brexit and Trump also seem to have given a completely new momentum to the European project. Her article explains why Brexit cannot be generalized to the rest of the continent but is the particular result of a complicated and special British conception of what it means to be a sovereign state in the 21st Century. This begins to show that sovereignty is a strong principle in Britain that has importance in British political, and even daily, life. Recognizing this, Gordon (2016) discusses how the debate about sovereignty has become impossible to avoid in the UK's current post-referendum, but pre-Brexit, constitutional environment. Perhaps this is nothing new, and UK constitutionalism has always been shaped, quite explicitly and to a significant extent, by a captivation with the concept of sovereignty. Yet at the very least, the 2016 UK referendum on European Union (EU) membership has served as the centerpiece around which public and elite exchanges about legal and political dimensions of sovereignty have visibly intensified. In this context, Gordon's paper aims to reflect briefly and critically on the UK's present sovereignty situation, considering the use and the potential abuse of the concept, in debate about national membership of the EU, its relevance to the process through which Britain moves to exit from the Union, and also the potential implications of Brexit for often confused understandings of this idea.

The European Union was created to promote greater politico-economic cooperation in Europe. But, this is another fact that this union calls for such great sacrifices that are posing great threats to the sovereignty and the independence for policy and decision-making for the specific interests of the member states. Therefore, United Kingdom opted to get an exit from this union. Roofi (2016) says that British exit from EU has attained international attention due to its wide spectrum implications and that it has emerged as a significant issue in international politics. Her article adds its contribution to the debate about the current issue of Brexit and its probable political, economic, and strategic impact on UK and EU. In this regard, this paper discusses briefly about the reasons that have led UK to a crossroad of leaving or remaining in EU as the question whether to remain in or leave the EU

had assumed the shape of a crisis for UK. It has divided the UK's political elites and actors as well as its citizens into two opposing opinions. Each of them was trying to strengthen its viewpoint by giving arguments in favour or against the Brexit. The paper provides a brief glimpse over the arguments for or against the Brexit, and in the light of those arguments tries to draw a conclusion about the future prospects of Brexit for both UK and EU.

### *Parliamentary Sovereignty*

The debate about British sovereignty in regards to the increasing influence of the European Union was debated hotly through the decades in Parliament's House of Commons. In their paper, Gee and Young (2015) compare how the term "sovereignty" was used by MPs (Ministers of Parliament) in parliamentary debates on the European Communities Bill in 1971–1972 and the European Union Bill in 2011. In both cases, the language of sovereignty was often a placeholder for deeper concerns about the erosion of the political power exercisable by domestic political institutions. Comparing parliamentary debates separated by almost forty years reveals a shift from concerns primarily about the erosion of sovereignty by the law-making powers of European political institutions towards concerns about its erosion by the courts, and the domestic courts at that. Gee and Young reflect on these concerns to evaluate whether a possible UK withdrawal from the EU would lead to a "regaining" of sovereignty.

Kendrick (2016) talks about how the debate about sovereignty in the Brexit referendum campaign was cast in terms of power, competence, and ultimately freedom to legislate. The proposition that the UK could take back control from the EU was expressly referred to in the context of the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. Paradoxically, Parliament was purported to require an exercise in direct democracy, through the June 2016 referendum, in order to provide the legitimacy necessary for it to reassert its own sovereignty to legislate over matters that fall, or were perceived to fall, within the competence of the EU. (Then-Prime Minister David Cameron was of the opinion that a referendum

would be needed to show either the unity for, or opposition against, remaining in the EU. He was also attempting to negotiate favorable terms for continued British membership of the EU, which he would put to the British people to assess in their vote for either Remain or Leave.) The question of sovereignty, therefore, asked which legal order should actually be supreme: the national or the supranational. This discussion consequently implies issues of territoriality as the “boundary line is the line of sovereignty.” The definitive quality of a sovereign body is the power to tax because it is inextricably linked with the power to govern. Consequently, and unsurprisingly, the debate on sovereignty included a debate on competence in taxation. Kendrick states that a consequence to the issue of territoriality is the issue of harmonization. The latter denotes an eradication of difference between the territories to which it applies and in the context of taxation can consequently reduce individual member state control. Thus, the objections voiced in the debate on sovereignty could be construed as objections to harmonization, especially on the subject of tax. It is the intention of her article to discuss the constitutional theory in the context of tax, and as space precludes a survey of different taxes, her article focuses on the classic example of EU tax harmonization, VAT (value-added tax).

However, Kendrick says the constitutional theory cannot be detached from pragmatic considerations, because there is no escaping the fact that the debate on sovereignty does not occur in a vacuum. In reality, it is the economic expediencies that will be an unavoidable influence on post-referendum policy decisions. Therefore, it is also the intention of this article to address the practical aspects of the referendum in relation to tax, specifically VAT, in addition to the constitutional aspects, while reflecting on the questions of sovereignty and flexibility.

In the immediate aftermath of the June 2016 EU referendum, there was fear of MPs in Parliament being able to overturn the decision taken by the British people to leave the European Union. The fear was based on a perceived disconnect between the general population that voted Leave and the political

elite that was characterized as pro-EU during the referendum. A popular view at the time was that the British people voted in lieu of Parliament, thus the matter was settled. However, Gina Miller, a wealthy Remainer, disagreed. She opined that Parliament still needed to vote on the matter and took her case to the British Supreme Court. Reyes (2017) shows how the Supreme Court clarified the mechanism by which Brexit was to be formally commenced at the end of January 2017 in the landmark case *R (Miller) v. Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union*.

The question presented was whether ministers of Theresa May's government could give notice of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU, "without prior legislation passed in both Houses of Parliament and assented to by Her Majesty, The Queen." The Secretary of State argued that the power to withdraw was part of the royal prerogative exercisable by ministers without prior parliamentary action. However, in light of the far-reaching changes to domestic law that would result from terminating EU membership treaties, the court held that withdrawal "must be made in the only way in which the UK constitution permits, namely through Parliamentary legislation." On the one hand, the Miller decision may be seen as a resounding reaffirmation of the principle of parliamentary sovereignty in British constitutional law. Notwithstanding the facts that a majority of voters supported Brexit and that government ministers ordinarily have the power to terminate treaties without legislative approval or judicial review, formal notice of withdrawal under Article 50 of the EU Treaties could not be given unless and until Parliament so agreed. Yet on the other hand, a comparative analysis of Miller also reveals some significant limitations on parliamentary power, particularly, in the United Kingdom relative to congressional power in the United States, even though Congress is constrained by the Constitution and enjoys no sovereignty over the other branches of government. This essay explores these limitations on parliamentary power and argues that legislative sovereignty is best understood not as an immutable principle laid down in Britain's constitutional history, but rather as an evolving ideal that continues to develop to this day.



Ewing (2017) follows this, addressing the implications of *R (Miller) v Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union* for the legal principle of parliamentary sovereignty. He argues that the strong restatement of the latter is the most significant feature of the decision. The aim of his work is to show how traditional principle in the Dicey tradition has been strongly applied against the competing claims of EU law, the royal prerogative, the referendum and devolution. However, Ewing also argues that the claims relating to parliamentary sovereignty could have produced a different result and that the most compelling feature of the case was the argument that was not forcefully put by the Government, namely that Parliament had already provided sufficient authority for the triggering of Article 50, reasserting that British conception of sovereignty.

### *Popular Sovereignty*

Patberg (2018) says that political theory develops its normative positions on EU legitimacy with a view to what seems possible and acceptable under given political, social, and cultural conditions. Thus, the Brexit vote should give it a pause. In the article, he discusses if and to what extent we can hold on to the claim that the EU is based on a “pouvoir constituant mixte,” (roughly translating into English as “constituent power”) the Habermas notion. In particular, he examines three specific problems that the UK’s decision to leave the EU gives rise to. First, he addresses the analytical challenge of whether “split” popular sovereignty is refuted as a rational reconstruction of the EU. Second, Patberg discusses the normative-theoretical challenge of whether it is a category mistake to refer to (dual) constituent power in the context of the EU. Third, he addresses the political challenge of whether *pouvoir constituant mixte* is prone to confuse citizens and to scare them off with excessive “EUphoria,” a clever nod to the extreme passion among European Union devotees.

### *Exercises of Sovereignty*

A particular arena where British sovereignty has been challenged significantly, as in the case of Abu Qatada, is its relationship with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The relationship

between Britain and the ECHR has been historically fraught. Jay's (2017) article examines this relationship with a view to understanding how the United Kingdom's conceptions of human rights protection, both domestically and in Europe, shape its willingness to comply with ECHR judgments. Her article argues that the UK maintains a sense of a distinctly British—as opposed to European—rights culture, based on principles such as parliamentary sovereignty and common-sense values. In doing so, the article explores an important analytical gap in terms of understanding the relationship between compliance behavior and international law, as current theoretical explanations do not necessarily explain how cultural perceptions of rights and law translate into decisions to comply.

Wellings and Vines (2015) have a different take on the concept of sovereignty. In their article, written pre-Brexit in 2015 they argue that the “referendum lock” enshrined in the European Union Act (2011) and the pledge to hold a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union have eroded the principle of parliamentary sovereignty that they sought to defend. Analysis of the Act and debates about an in/out referendum during the Coalition government's period of office from 2010 to 2015 reveals an unintended consequence: recent debates and policies concerning the European Union have enshrined a populist nationalism opposed to European integration as part of contemporary British political culture.

Their article represents an interesting point of view with which to engage and debate. Though populism can have (and currently does) a negative connotation, it can also be the expression of the will of the people of a particular state or community, something that should not be so casually brushed aside with political cynicism. Rather, an approach realizing the significance of sovereignty can cast more light on understanding the June 2016 referendum result.

### *Economic Sovereignty*

The economics of sovereignty has also been a significant factor in the separation between the United Kingdom and the European Union. It was decried by many euro-skeptics that, as a member

of the EU, Britain was barred from signing bilateral trade agreements. They argued that this stripping of political sovereignty was adversely affecting Britain's economic sovereignty, effectively cutting them off from engaging in trade with the rest of the world. As a result of the vote to leave the EU, the UK has officially begun the process of withdrawing. Withdrawal from the EU is a rather complex and intricate process. Laid out in Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, withdrawal requires the withdrawing state to officially notify the EU of its intention to withdraw. This provision demands that the notification abide by the constitutional law of the withdrawing state. The UK, thus, must withdraw in accordance with its own constitutional measures. As a state without a formal written constitution, the UK, instead, relies on the sovereignty of Parliament. King (2017) says that stark contention quickly arose over Parliament's role in triggering Article 50 and whether it must first approve the referendum results to officially initiate the withdrawal.

The UK Supreme Court recently considered this question, ruling in favor of Parliament's sole authority to approve the referendum that would then begin the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU. Only upon triggering Article 50 may the UK officially begin the process of leaving the EU, thus, slipping into a precarious position, according to King. The UK will then commence negotiations with the EU on an exit deal, involving the creation of a possible subsequent UK/EU trade relationship. EU history reveals that Greenland is one of the few countries that has withdrawn from the EU, which was then known as the European Economic Community (EEC). Greenland's withdrawal, however, according to King, offers no insight for the UK because Greenland entered into a deal with the EU as an overseas territory, an option unavailable to the UK. As a European country with close proximity and unparalleled ties to the EU, the UK is treading in uncharted territory in its desire to leave. King's article begins with an exploration into the UK's original motivation for membership in the EU. It then closely examines the withdrawal process and recent developments in the UK's decision to leave the EU. Finally, he describes possible options for the UK to consider a

future trade relationship with the EU, ending on an analysis of the most suitable options for the UK to seek in its endeavor to detach from the EU.

### SECTION 3: ANALYSIS

When asked in 1967 if he indeed wanted to see Britain enter the Common Market stripped naked, Charles de Gaulle denied it, saying that for a beautiful creature, nakedness was natural enough; for those around her, it was satisfying enough. He continued, “But I have never said that about England.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **Part 1**

#### **The United Kingdom and the European Union: A Brief History**

The United Kingdom and the European Union have been compared to a marriage and, like most couples, they have a long and complicated relationship. Now, as divorce proceedings are underway, it is helpful to look back and see how Britain and the European Union reached this level, parting ways with each trying to gain the upper hand when Brexit (Britain exiting the European Union) concludes.

The European Union’s initial forerunner was the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) founded by the member states of France, West Germany, Belgium Italy, Holland, and Luxembourg, formally established in 1951 by the Treaty of Paris. This treaty would create a common market for coal and steel amongst the six member states with the goal of neutralizing aggressive competition between European nations over these and other natural resources. The four entities which would become the governing structure of the EU were established during this time as well: a High Authority, a Common Assembly, a Special Council, and a Court of Justice. In 1957, the ECSC became the European Economic Community (EEC), established by the Treaty of Rome. Its initial goal was to have economic integration among the same six member states via a common market and customs union.

#### *Britain Apart*

---

<sup>1</sup> Roberts, Nesta. “Emphatic ‘No’ by de Gaulle.” The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1967/nov/28/eu.france> Tuesday, November 28, 1967. 11:51 EST. Date accessed: September 8, 2018.

The United Kingdom and the European Union have always seemed destined to eventually part ways, a type of odd couple in the sphere of international relations. While ever closer union may have been the cry of the European continent at the end of World War II, Britain sought to maintain some distance from that idea. Winston Churchill said as much, unequivocally, in Zurich in 1946 during a speech which would become known as, “The United States of Europe.” His landmark speech is many times cited as an endorsement of British membership of the EU, but that stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of what Churchill was recommending on that day. Seeing the strange dichotomy that Europe personified—one where it was the source “of most of the culture, arts, philosophy, and science of both ancient and modern times,”<sup>2</sup> while also being the origin of the two most devastating wars in human history—Churchill realized that Europe needed to be, in effect, re-created and provided with a structure that could be stable to ensure peace: “a *kind* of United States of Europe.”

Though he saw this as the only viable option for the continent, he did not intend for Britain to take part; this is evidenced in three significant passages in his speech. When saying that regional organizations can help strengthen the United Nations, Churchill states, “There is already a natural grouping in the Western Hemisphere. We British have our own Commonwealth of Nations.”<sup>3</sup> Near the end of the speech, Churchill says outright which countries should take on the responsibility of creating this new Europe: “In all this urgent work, France and Germany must take the lead together.” For both world wars, it was not Britain that was at the heart of events, but rather France and Germany that pushed other countries, Britain included, towards conflict. At the speech’s conclusion, Churchill reiterates the United Kingdom’s separate status from the nascent continental effort, saying, “Great Britain, the British Commonwealth of Nations, mighty America, and, I trust, Soviet Russia—for all

---

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, Winston. “United States of Europe.” Speech. September 19, 1946. Zurich, Switzerland. <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/united-states-of-europe/> Date accessed: September 8, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Churchill, Winston. “United States of Europe.”

indeed would be well—must be the friends and sponsors of the new Europe and must champion its right to live and shine.”<sup>4</sup> Since the European Union’s inception, Britain did not see itself participating in the project, but rather assisting in Europe’s efforts to form a regional organization that would work to avoid future conflicts for themselves.

This is understandable, as Britain still held considerable influence in various parts of the world due to their empire, dissipating though it was. When the British Empire would transition to the British Commonwealth, the island nation still viewed itself as having responsibilities elsewhere and largely saw Europe as a drag on its resources and power, one of the main reasons why it no longer held the baton of the world’s leading country. This attitude can even be traced back to the efforts to appease Adolf Hitler and stop “Hitler’s war.” Britain fought in the Second World War at the level it did because France fell so quickly to the onslaught of the Nazi war machine. World War II’s end was an opportunity for Britain to refocus on its own needs and to recover from all the damage and havoc the war had wreaked on the island itself, as well as Britain’s prestige, from its economy to its international influence.

### **British efforts to join the European Economic Community**

Sir Winston Churchill’s recommendation set out in Zurich would be taken seriously and soon, cooperation between France and Germany (West Germany, to be exact) would lead to war indeed becoming unreasonable and counterproductive among the former foes. Once the ECSC was established, French and West German interests became more aligned and intertwined, much to the relief of Britain itself and the rest of the European continent. Britain, hoping that the rivalry between France and Germany was settled, set focus on its reconstruction. Germany, the vanquished of World

---

<sup>4</sup> Churchill, Winston. “United States of Europe.”

War II, also focused on rebuilding, seeing before it a monumental task of a total reconstruction of its country, from its economy to its cities which were devastated by the Allied Powers.

What happened in continental Europe during the decade of the 1950s, however, would cause Britain to be tempted to abandon what Churchill's vision of a Britain that only supported the European project from afar and stir a desire to also partake of the seemingly exciting and beneficial economic activity happening across the Channel.

### *West Germany's Wirtschaftswunder: Britain's jealousy*

While Britain struggled with a weak economy, rationing, and the high costs of reconstruction, the rest of Western Europe was experiencing an unprecedented economic recovery. In the 1950s, West Germany in particular was experiencing incredible economic growth at a rate of eight percent annually,<sup>5</sup> a faster and larger recovery than anywhere else in Europe. By the start of the 1960s, West Germany had regained the prestige of being Europe's unmatched economic engine, doubling its living standards in only ten years.<sup>6</sup> Britain, by contrast, a country who had actually won the Second World War, was still rationing well into the 1950s.

Perhaps the main reason for the West German "wirtschaftswunder" (or economic miracle) was the unquestionably free-market reforms and the overall capitalist approach taken to recover from the devastation caused by World War II. Konrad Adenauer won West Germany's first election since the fall of Hitler's Reich and his Federal Minister for Economics, Ludwig Erhard, would oversee the effective rebirth of West Germany. Erhard, against the advice of many allies of West Germany seeking to help steer its recovery, began to take an axe to the economic controls the government inherited from the Third Reich and paved a way for the free-market to be unleashed in West Germany. He oversaw the abolition of a massive number of regulations, the banning of price controls and the

---

<sup>5</sup> "Understanding West German Economic Growth in the 1950s." Eichengreen, Barry and Ritschl, Albrecht. Working Papers No. 113/08. Department of Economic History, London School of Economics.

<sup>6</sup> "Understanding West German Economic Growth in the 1950s."

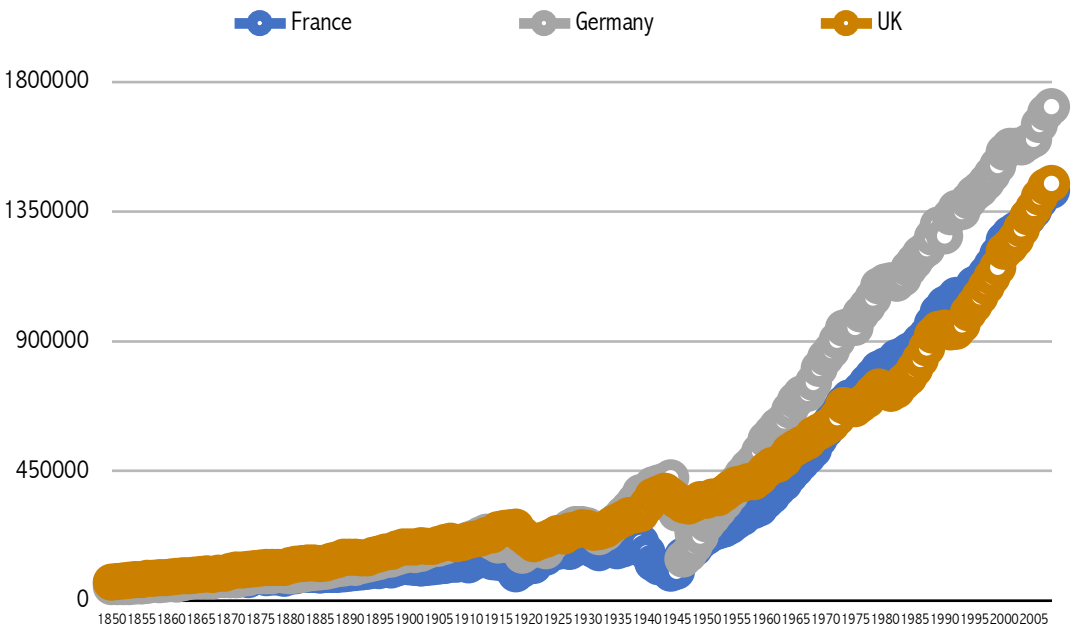


controls over production, and he abandoned the practice of the state effectively funding loss-making industries and companies by cutting any public financial aid, making it clear that these industries had to produce profits or else they would cease to exist, beaten by their market competitors. During this time, industrial production soared, goods were abundant, and wages were increasing consistently, leading to West Germany becoming the world's third largest economic power by the time Erhard left office in 1963.

During these same years, Britain took a different approach altogether and suffered the consequences. Once the workshop of the world and the globe's leading capitalist country, the United Kingdom's economy became one of the most state-owned outside of the communist sphere. This can be traced as far back to the onset of the World War I, when state control over industries was seen as vital to the war effort. At the war's conclusion, the feeling that there needed to be a more permanent regulating influence over the private sector remained, lasting to the beginning of World War II and the establishing of many governmental ministries tasked with coordinating the British war effort in the various aspects of daily life. Again, however, once the war was over, many of these ministries remained, as did the attitude that the economy should be directed from above. Perhaps due to the fact that Britain was victorious in the war, the perception among the British public and elite was the government on this scale was a positive. Thus, almost every aspect of British life was then directed in one form or another by the state, from things as important as heavy industries including ship building, gas, and steel to seemingly unimportant things such as clothing and toys.

This led many in Britain to look over at what was going on across the Channel in the rest of Western Europe, West Germany particularly. How could it be the winner of the Second World War was still struggling to leave the harsh realities left by the struggle, while the country that lost the war and suffered more destruction was not only having a faster and bigger recovery, but having an economic boom? Rather than observe and analyze the economic policies and free-market reforms that Konrad

Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard had implemented, many Britons attributed West Germany’s miraculous economic recovery to being a part of the EEEC. Life in other Western European countries such as France was also better. However, this was mostly due to the West German economic boom that was not only enabling itself to recover, but also allowing France and others to recover quickly as well. Because the countries of the EEC were in an economic pact, all countries could benefit from the West German miracle. It was not so much that the EEC as a whole was constructing a new economic model where all or most of the members were contributing equal or similar amounts of growth, but rather that the West German model and engine of growth was allowing helping the EEC to grow, spurred on by West Germany itself. The graph below, measuring the gross domestic product (GDP) of Britain, France, and Germany from the 1850s into the 2000s illustrates this. By 1945, all countries are experiencing a downturn, an obvious result of World War II’s end, but shortly there afterwards, Germany (again, West Germany at the time) experiences a surge of growth that outpaces both Britain and France. France, though, has the benefit from the 1950s on to share in Germany’s growth because of EEC membership while Britain does not.



Source: Angus Madison, Emeritus Professor  
 Faculty of Economics, University of Groningen (Figure 1)

## *British Accession*

Convinced that the answer to a more robust economy lied in membership with the European Economic Community, Britain decided to pursue joining. While the Churchillian attitude of endorsing the project from afar may have been altered slightly, the principle on which Churchill gave the Zurich speech still applied: British sovereignty.

A relinquishing of sovereignty of any truly significant amount was never expected when the United Kingdom decided to pursue joining the EEC; after all it was not seeking to join any type of political union, but rather a trade zone, an economic area. This trade zone seemed to be paying dividends to the countries that were part of the arrangement and they too had not joined any political union. If what stood in the way of Britain enjoying such robust growth as well was having to join a regional economic bloc, then surely that was a price that could be accepted. In hindsight, perhaps the fact that the EEC had supranational institutions should have served as a warning to the British, but their focus was elsewhere, on economic recovery. Indeed, in 1960, the United Kingdom had tried to do something to better its economic outlook by joining the European Free Trade Association, a rival organization to the EEC that was formed by Austria, Norway, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Portugal, and the UK. However, Britain still sought to join the EEC and in 1961, the United Kingdom submitted its first application to join the bloc. It was vetoed two years later by French president Charles de Gaulle.

It appears that Charles de Gaulle had a better understanding of Britain at the time than Britain did itself. Firstly, de Gaulle was opposed to Britain joining the European Economic Community because he sought to protect France's position within the organization. It was doing very well for itself and the rules and structure of the EEC were very much benefitting France; as West Germany would carry the lion's share of the load for production, particularly in heavy industries, France could relax a bit and worry more about the agricultural side. In this, French farmers were enjoying great advantages

over their European counterparts. Farmers represented more than a fifth of the population in France<sup>7</sup> when de Gaulle came to power in 1958 and de Gaulle knew that agriculture was a particularly French concern. As modernization was underway, it was estimated that three-fourths of French farms were too small or too unproductive to be viable<sup>8</sup> and, with the implementation of the EEC, the market would dictate who the winners and losers in agriculture would be, with France having the danger of being in the latter group. Seeking to protect French farms, de Gaulle saw that two laws were passed to stimulate productivity by providing structural reforms,<sup>9</sup> an Orientation Law, passed in 1960, and Complementary Law, passed in 1962. Between 1958 and 1962, French state spending on agriculture more than tripled<sup>10</sup> and de Gaulle's government faced the reality of extremely expensive subsidies to keep the French agricultural industry afloat at the cost of the productive and profitable sectors of the French economy.

As de Gaulle and the French government looked for possible solutions, it dawned on them that if they could successfully import their agricultural products (particularly grain, as French grain accounted for 46% of total EEC grain production) under a common agricultural policy where French farm products had access to a protected market, French farmers would be in a significantly more secure position. This would not happen without some effort though; while West Germany wanted to see a Common Market limited to industrial goods (something which would have unquestionably been in their benefit and where France would suffer economically because of it), France wanted to see a common agricultural policy that would work to their advantage, enjoying in another sector of the economy the security that West Germany would enjoy for industrial goods. De Gaulle would be able

---

<sup>7</sup> "De Gaulle and Europe's Common Agricultural Policy: The Logic and Legacies of Nationalistic Integration." Keeler, John T.S. University of Washington. *French Politics and Society*. Vol. 8. No. 4. Fall 1990. 62-77.

<sup>8</sup> "De Gaulle and Europe's Common Agricultural Policy: The Logic and Legacies of Nationalistic Integration."

<sup>9</sup> "De Gaulle and Europe's Common Agricultural Policy: The Logic and Legacies of Nationalistic Integration."

<sup>10</sup> The CAP was implemented in 1962. "De Gaulle and Europe's Common Agricultural Policy: The Logic and Legacies of Nationalistic Integration."

to take advantage of West Germany's generally apologetic attitude in negotiations, as Konrad Adenauer was willing to accept economic sacrifices that would affect West Germany for broader cooperation and integration at the European level, wanting to show that this was a new Germany not interested solely in domestic affairs and its own national interest. The Common Agricultural Policy, a system of agricultural subsidies, was introduced in 1962 as Charles de Gaulle successfully saw it become part of the EEC.

Charles de Gaulle's objection to the United Kingdom joining the European Economic Community ran deeper still than just wanting to protect France's position within the bloc, incredibly important though it was; de Gaulle was keenly aware of the cultural difference Britain had in relation to continental Europe. While the rest of Europe was enjoying a chapter of unprecedented cooperation, he knew that British accession into the organization would change the dynamics and that his much fought for Common Agricultural Policy would be in danger of British attempts at reform or of being eliminated altogether. This was informed by his knowing of British traditions and history and that the United Kingdom was a market-oriented country, this despite Britain having one of the largest state-controlled economies at the time; the history of Britain indicated that this strange period in their economy would not last and that it was only a matter of time before it returned to its original free market leanings. Also, he knew that Britain would be difficult to work with as the EEC sought to deepen ties among the member states and that they would most surely stubbornly adhere to principles of sovereignty that would impede deeper integration; unbeknownst to Britain and the majority of the European continent, there was already, among the European political elite, talk of a superstate and of a federal Europe, with Brussels serving as its de-facto capital, in a union structure similar to the that of the United States of America. In 1963, after he vetoed British accession into the European Economic Community, de Gaulle issued a memo on the matter. In it, he states:

“I believe that when you talk about economics—and much more so when you practice them—what you say and what you do must conform to realities, because without that, you can get into impasses and, sometimes, you even head for ruin. In this very great affair of the European Economic Community and also in that of eventual adhesion of Great Britain, it is the facts that must be first considered. Feelings, favorable though they may be and are, these feelings cannot be invoked against the real facts of the problem. What are these facts? The Treaty of Rome was concluded between six continental States, States which are, economically speaking, one may say, of the same nature. Indeed, whether it be a matter of their industrial or agricultural production, their external exchanges, their habits or their commercial clientele, their living or working conditions, there is between them much more resemblance than difference. Moreover, they are adjacent, they inter-penetrate, they prolong each other through their communications. It is therefore a fact to group them and to link them in such a way that what they have to produce, to buy, to sell, to consume—well, they do produce, buy, sell, consume, in preference in their own ensemble. Doing that is conforming to realities.”<sup>11</sup>

Charles de Gaulle saw the United Kingdom joining the European Economic Community as something unrealistic, so divergent did he consider the British from the rest of Europe. He saw Britain as separate from the way the rest of the EEC countries ran their industry, their agriculture, their exchanges, even seeing differences down to the living and working conditions of its people. In noting that Britain had its own network and sphere of influence, echoing Sir Winston Churchill, he continues in saying:

“England in effect is insular, she is maritime, she is linked through her exchanges, her markets, her supply lines to the most diverse and often the most distant countries; she pursues essentially industrial and commercial activities, and only slight agricultural ones. She has in all her doings very marked and very original habits and traditions. In short, the nature, the structure, the very situation (conjuncture) that are England’s differ profoundly from those of the continentals. What is to be done in order that England, as she lives, produces, and trades, can be incorporated into the Common Market, as it has been conceived and as it functions? For example, the means by which the people of Great Britain are fed and which are in fact the importation of foodstuffs bought cheaply in the two Americas and in the former dominions,

---

<sup>11</sup> “French President Charles de Gaulle’s Veto on British Membership of the EEC.” International Relations and Security Network. [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125401/1168\\_DeGaulleVeto.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125401/1168_DeGaulleVeto.pdf) Date accessed: October 19, 2018.

at the same time giving, granting considerable subsidies to English farmers? These means are obviously incompatible with the system which the Six have established quite naturally for themselves.”<sup>12</sup>

De Gaulle’s saying that Britain has “in all her doings very marked and very original habits and traditions,” is most surely a way of saying that Britain has its own sovereign, unimpeded, and direct way of pursuing her agenda and interests, an attitude that would most certainly conflict with the system the six members of the EEC had already established. Following this rationale, he continues:

“One might sometimes have believed that our English friends, in posing their candidature to the Common Market, were agreeing to transform themselves to the point of applying all the conditions which are accepted and practiced by the Six. But the question, to know whether Great Britain can now place herself like the Continent and with it inside a tariff which is genuinely common, to renounce all Commonwealth preferences, to cease any pretense that her agriculture be privileged, and, more than that, to treat her engagements with other countries of the free trade area as null and void—that question is the whole question.”<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps more honestly than most of his European contemporaries, and with a vision that saw what the European Economic Community would surely become, de Gaulle places severe demands on Britain to be able to join the EEC. In a thinly veiled way, he is telling the United Kingdom that to become a member of the EEC carries with it a significant relinquishing of sovereignty, one that would require Britain to “transform themselves” into something that would fit into the EEC structure, even going as far as demanding that Britain effectively abandon ties to their Commonwealth in favor of the EEC. Now admittedly, there is a level of hypocrisy on the part of Charles de Gaulle, but even that is to be expected, and arguably, understood; from within the EEC, he is seeking to protect France’s position and benefits, particularly in relation to agriculture and the Common Agricultural Policy. It can be said that de Gaulle is seeking to protect French sovereignty within the community from any British encroachment; from the outset, it was never an equal dynamic among the six member states

---

<sup>12</sup> “French President Charles de Gaulle’s Veto on British Membership of the EEC.”

<sup>13</sup> “French President Charles de Gaulle’s Veto on British Membership of the EEC.”

of the European Economic Community, with France and West Germany being the most benefitted. Charles de Gaulle was adamant that Britain not join the EEC; he vetoed the 1961 UK application, submitted during the premiership of Harold Macmillan and the Conservative Party, in 1963, and he also vetoed a second attempt, this time during Harold Wilson's premiership with the Labour Party. It was only after Charles de Gaulle had died in 1970 that the United Kingdom was able to successfully apply to the EEC in 1973, under Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath. In European Union history, this is known as the First Enlargement, as Britain, Ireland, and Denmark join the EEC.

### **Britain as a member of the EEC and the EU**

Britain joined the European Economic Community hoping to experience an enormous boost to its economy. For years, images of continental Europeans enjoying vacations in the sunshine with friends on luxurious yachts and frolicking on beaches made their way to British living rooms. It certainly gave the impression that people on the continent were in on some great secret that led to such a wonderful life. How in the world could these countries, some of which were obliterated in World War II, be experiencing such wealth and success while Britain, who won the war, was still suffering difficulties? It seemed that the answer lied in membership of the EEC. However, once in the club, very little changed for Britain's economic outlook.

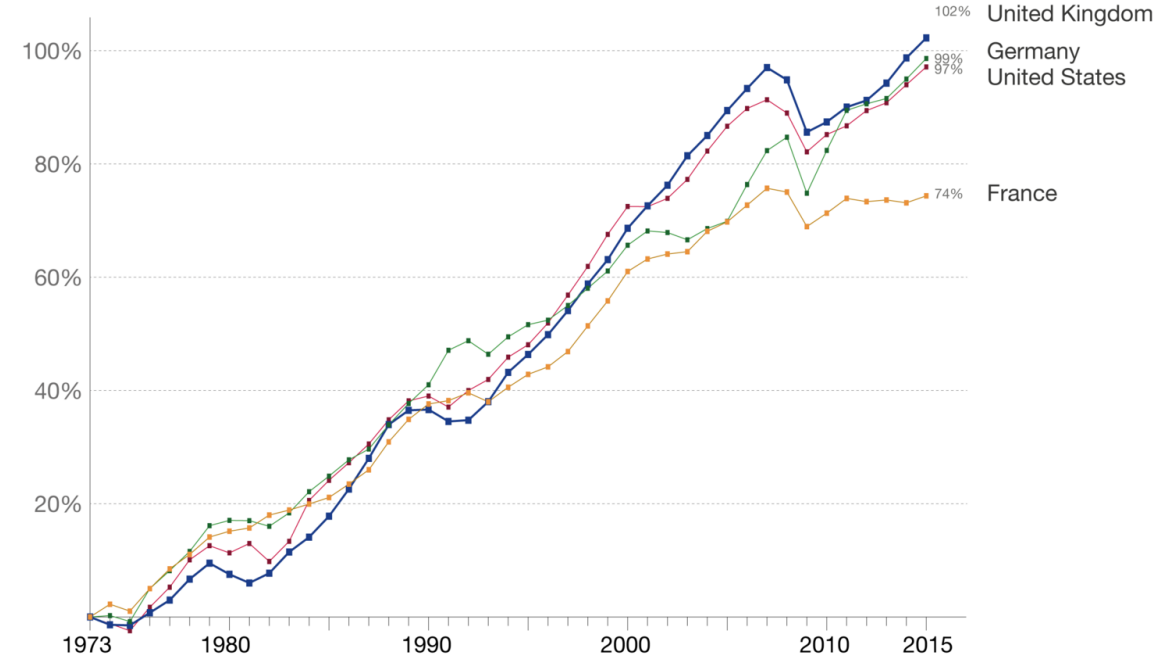
As the graph below shows, after Britain joined the EEC in 1973, it still grew slower than France, Germany, and the United States in the remaining years of the 1970s. The trend actually gets a bit worse during 1979 and into the early years of the 1980s, when the newly elected Margaret Thatcher began a series of radical free-market reforms to the British economy created substantial upheavals and disruptions. There isn't a positive uptick until around 1982, after enough time was given for some of Mrs. Thatcher's reforms to take place and when the British victory in the Falkland's War in the South Atlantic against the Argentine dictatorship of General Leopoldo Galtieri served to buoy British outlook on the economy. In fact, the general positive trend that lasts into the first two decades of the



new millennium (except that slight expected downturn in the early 1990s and the significant downturn due to the 2007/2008 Financial Crisis) begins around 1983 and experiences a sharp incline during the years of the Thatcher government. This positive growth in the British economy, which served to transform it into its current services-focused type, can be directly attributed to the economic policies of the Thatcher government and not EEC membership.

**Growth of GDP per capita since 1973 – the year that the UK joined the EU**

GDP per capita is adjusted for price changes over time.



Data source: The Conference Board Total Economy Database (2016)

Figure 2

Licensed under CC-BY-SA by the author Max Roser.

*The Winter of Discontent: Margaret Thatcher’s Rise to Power*

The Winter of Discontent in 1978 and 1979 proved to be a watershed moment in British history and politics. There were widespread strikes by the public sector unions which were demanding larger pay raises and this led to a domino effect that would have serious consequences in the British economy and politics. The Winter of Discontent began during the premiership of Labour’s James Callaghan, when his government tried to control inflation but his efforts angered the unions and violated the implicit understanding between his government and the public sector by imposing rules that public

sector pay rises be kept below five percent. Previous governments, such as the Labour government of Harold Wilson, had attempted to tackle the growing issue of inflation with little success. Wilson tried to bring inflation under control firstly with a white paper titled, “The Attack on Inflation,” which proposed a limit on pay rises of £6 per week for people earning below £8,500 annually. The TUC (Trades Union Congress) General Council accepted the proposal, but this would have little effect. Under Callaghan, the 5 percent limit was introduced and the TUC voted overwhelming to reject his government’s proposal.

This would eventually lead to a series of strikes that would have a crippling effect on the British economy which was already languishing due to industrial unrest, growing unemployment, and the aforementioned inflation. The situation would deteriorate to the point where James Callaghan told fellow Cabinet ministers in 1974 that, “if I were a young man, I would emigrate.”<sup>14</sup> The strongest wave of walkouts came when, first, the truck drivers took strike action, working for companies as large as BP (British Petroleum) which represented an enormously important part of the economy. In an encapsulation of the poor state of the country in 1979, two of the most noteworthy strikes occurred, one from the waste collectors and the other from the gravediggers, as garbage began to pile up across the country and unburied bodies increased in numbers. The Liverpool City Council was forced to hire a private factory to store the growing number of deceased until they could be buried, with the Department of Environment noting at one point that there were 150 bodies stored at the factory with 25 more being added daily,<sup>15</sup> representing a concern for the public. When faced with the possibility of the gravedigger’s strike going on indefinitely, the Liverpool City Council very seriously considered burying the bodies at sea. This strike was seen in a particularly negative light by the public, as people’s private pain of having lost a loved one was cruelly dragged into a political fight. It only ended once

---

<sup>14</sup> When The Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies. Beckett, Andy. Faber & Faber. 2009.

<sup>15</sup> “National archives: Fear of fights at cemetery gates during 1979 winter of discontent.” Travis, Alan. Tuesday, December 29, 2009. 19:05 EST. The Guardian. Date accessed: October 20, 2018.

the government agreed to the demands of the gravedigger union, giving them the nine percent increase in pay. This action shook British politics to its core, having repercussions for many years to come. In the immediate aftermath, it gave the impression to the general British public that the unions and not the government was actually in charge of the country. What genuine authority did a democratically elected government possess if at the turn of a hat the public sector could call a strike and effectively bring the government of the day to its knees?

Though it was a full member of the European Economic Community, it was evident that the United Kingdom was not enjoying the great success that France and West Germany were partaking in. Britain was the sick man of Europe and it was clear that there needed to be a change, a reassertion of popular sovereignty within the country.

During these years, Margaret Thatcher was the Leader of the Opposition as head of the Conservative Party, the first woman to ever lead a party in the United Kingdom. Unable to bear Britain in decline, she led a strong election campaign to win the premiership once James Callaghan finally called for a general election in 1979. Because of the malaise that had gripped the country, Thatcher was swept to power.

As Leader of the Opposition, Thatcher supported British membership of the European Economic Community, even voting for staying in the organization when a referendum on continuing Britain's association with it was held in 1975. This cordiality with the EEC would not last however, as continuing membership of the Community would clash with Thatcher's domestic agenda. Her government would become the most antagonistic towards the European project in British history, with the sovereignty of the United Kingdom many times being at the center of Thatcher's focus. The following eleven years would become among the most important in British history, as Thatcher's government would help permanently change the British economy, transform the scope and

dynamics of British politics, and bring into question if UK membership of the European project was necessary at all and if it was really serving as a hindrance to Britain realizing its fullest potential.

### *The Thatcher Government: A Consequential Premiership for British Sovereignty*

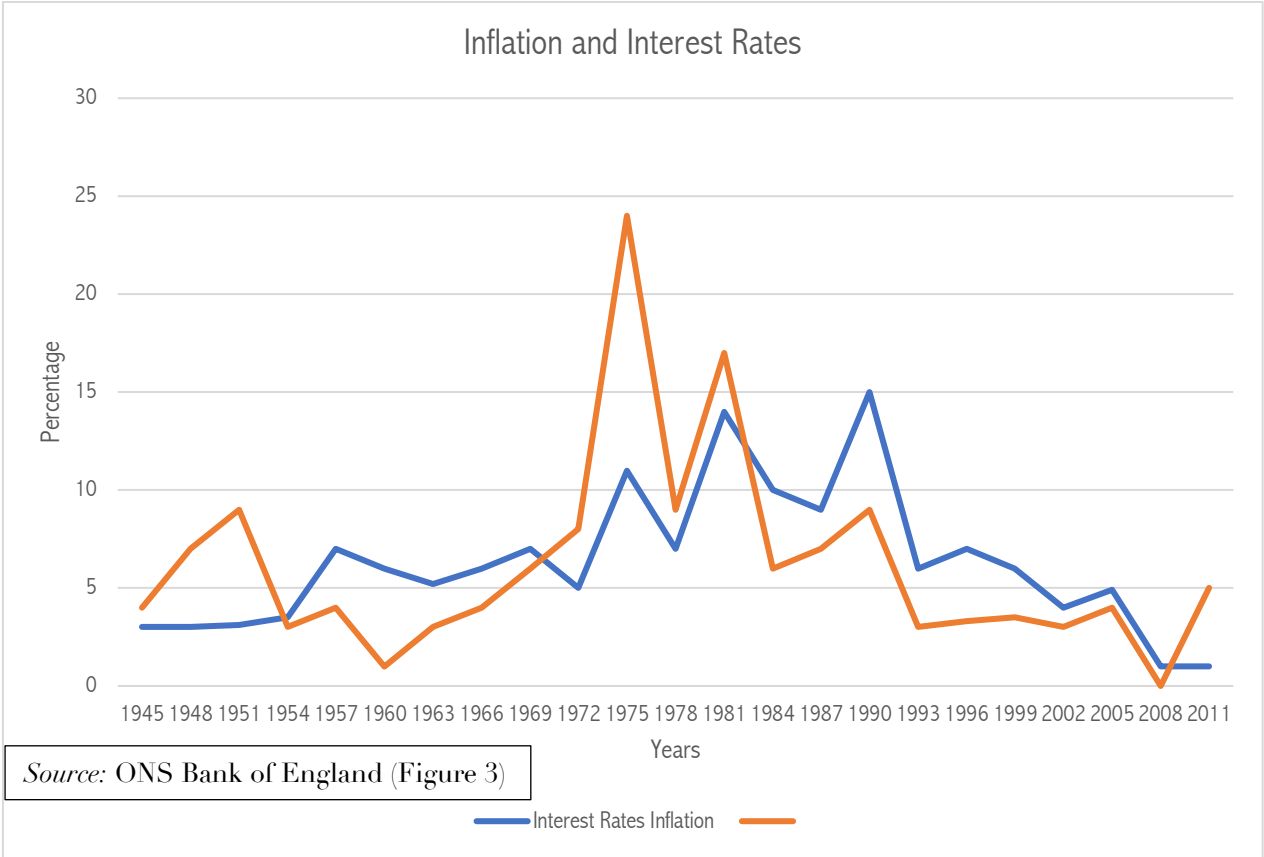
Margaret Thatcher came into government on May 4, 1979 with an attitude quite different than the one she is known for now. When she entered Downing Street as Prime Minister for the first time, she recited the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi on the steps of Number 10: “Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope.” The European Economic Community no doubt hoped that this would have been more than a prayer from Thatcher, as for almost the entirety of her premiership, she would have an adversarial relationship with the EEC. A brief examination of her early years in power reveals why this would occur.

The British economy was flat on its back in 1979 and it was Margaret Thatcher’s objective to bring it back to life. With her Chancellor of the Exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, she set out on a radical economic experiment, called monetarism,<sup>16</sup> with the goal of defeating inflation. This meant cutting the supply of money, thus, meaning the rise of interest rates and lower public spending. The immediate result was a deepening of the economic crisis in British manufacturing with many plants closing, unemployment increasing to two million and inflation doubling in a year to a dangerous twenty-two percent. The medicine that Thatcher was recommending was bitter indeed, a painful transition taking place in the British economy from manufacturing to services. It was needed, however, as the British government was in effect subsidizing failing industries, adding even more to its increasing expenditure. Since a goal of Thatcher’s monetarism experiment was a cut in public spending to help reduce inflation these industries would have to make do. The chart below, ranging from 1945 to 2011, shows that her

---

<sup>16</sup> “Economic impact of Margaret Thatcher.” Pettinger, Tevjan. Economics Help. <https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/274/uk-economy/economic-impact-of-margaret-thatcher/> Date accessed: October 20, 2018.

government’s efforts to tackle inflation in the 1980s were successful. It reaches an eye-watering high of just under twenty-five percent around 1975, during the time of the Labour government’s wrestling with the public sector unions, it experiences an uptick in 1981 due to the disruption of Thatcher’s economic policies, yet enjoys an overall decreasing trend for the remaining time of her premiership until 1990, her final year in office, when there is another uptick to around nine percent.



The cutting of the rate of inflation did not occur in a vacuum. While this was going on in the economic sphere, there was severe unrest in the social sphere, as the public sector unions were vehemently against what was becoming known as “Thatcherism.” Feeling threatened that their lifeline in the form of government subsidies was being cut off, many unions of the failing industries mobilized and protested Thatcher’s actions. By early 1981, Britain was gripped by a recession, hitting the inner cities like Liverpool the hardest. It experienced more than a week of heavy day and night protests, with demonstrators going as far to set parts of the city ablaze in fights with the police. However, Thatcher

viewed cities like Liverpool as exactly the problem she was trying to solve: a city which time had passed by and was now a drag on the British economy that needed either to reform quickly or make way. Even though there was resistance in many parts of industrial Britain, she told her government to press on with her policies.

Margaret Thatcher was luckier than most leaders, as things—particularly early on in her premiership—seemed to favor her. By the end of 1981 and the early months of 1982, Britain was starting to feel the effects of North Sea oil, discovered during the previous Labour governments off the eastern coast of Scotland. As fortune would have it, Thatcher and the Conservatives would be the ones who would enjoy the economic benefits North Sea oil would bring. And as the oil helped fund Thatcher's economics, her political career would be helped along significantly by events in the South Atlantic.

The Falkland Islands, three hundred miles off the coast of Argentina, were colonized by Britain in 1833. The Argentine dictator, General Leopoldo Galtieri, saw an opportunity in 1982 to take the islands long claimed to be a part of Argentina. Seeing a country that had been in decline since 1945, and that had just announced massive cuts to what remained of its armed forces, the Royal Navy in particular, Galtieri arguably drew the reasonable conclusion that Britain would not put up much of a fight, if it all, and snatched the islands for Argentina. This was a momentous time for Britain as the eyes of the world and of the British people looked to see what the response of the British government would be; would Britain, the once proud and most powerful country on Earth, simply take this punch to the chin, or would it halt its decline and stand up for itself on the world stage? After consulting with her military leaders, one of which said that if Britain simply took this insult without any responsive action, it would never be the same country again, Margaret Thatcher decided that the United Kingdom would fight back. This was in stark contrast to what the Foreign Office approach was, looking for a peaceful solution that might have even included ceding the Falkland Islands over to the Argentine

dictatorship. Thatcher found a reliable ally in her quest to mobilize Britain to defend the islands in First Sea Lord Sir Henry Leech, who told Thatcher that the Falklands could be retaken by force and he could have the British fleet ready to sail in forty-eight hours; Thatcher rolled the dice. Britain responded furiously to the Argentine aggressors, their determination to recapture the Falklands illustrated in the sinking of the Argentine warship, the General Belgrano. Its sinking was to be a controversy for long after the war, as when it was sunk, it was heading outside the battle area. Thatcher argued that its pattern would fluctuate, going in and out of the battle area and she determined that it was a threat that needed to be eliminated.

In total, the conflict would last seventy-four days and ended with the surrender of Argentina on June 14, 1982. There were 904 total casualties, 649 Argentine military personnel and 255 British military servicemembers. At the end of it, the United Kingdom would secure its territory in the South Atlantic and a new feeling of self-confidence would envelop the country, as well as Mrs. Thatcher. This episode would serve to be of great importance in shaping its outlook in foreign policy, as British sovereignty came under direct attack and, when responding to its being violated, Britain emerged victorious. For the remainder of Thatcher's time in government, the protecting of the integrity of British sovereignty would be a priority, saying at a celebration of the British Falklands victory: "... we were determined to overcome, and that is increasingly the mood of Britain... What has indeed happened is that now, once again, Britain is not prepared to be pushed around. We have ceased to be a nation in retreat... That confidence comes from the rediscovery of ourselves and grows with the recovery of our self-respect."<sup>17</sup>

*Using the lessons learnt from the Falklands Crisis and the Booming Economy*

---

<sup>17</sup> Speech to Conservative Rally at Cheltenham. Thatcher, Margaret. July 3, 1982. Margaret Thatcher Foundation. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104989> Date accessed: October 20, 2018.

The British victory in the Falklands War served to buoy Margaret Thatcher, her government, and the United Kingdom. In the 1983 general election, the Conservatives were returned to power with an increased majority of thirty-eight seats (339 total seats), resulting in the most decisive election victory since the 1945 general election. Without doubt, that Falklands War served to motivate British support for Margaret Thatcher, but it was stirred by something deeper: a renewal of confidence in the UK. Not only was Britain victorious against Argentina, but the economy was starting to fire on all cylinders as well, providing an even stronger sense of national confidence.

These would help provide the backdrop and frame how Britain, under Thatcher's leadership, would approach its relationship with the European Economic Community.

### *Britain and the EEC: Stubbornly Sovereign*

#### The British Rebate

The six founding members of the European Economic Community adopted the “own-resources mechanism”<sup>18</sup> as the primary way of funding their supranational budget. Until 1970, the budget was funded by agreements among the national parliaments, but the implementation of the own-resources mechanism changed it so that funding was to flow automatically from the national governments to the EEC budget. It would be calculated based on customs duties levied at external frontiers on imports under the common tariff that was introduced in 1968, agricultural resources, and value added tax (VAT).<sup>19</sup> Since Britain's VAT base in comparison with their gross national product (GNP) was proportionally higher than the other member states, and the UK was more willing than the other member states to trade with countries not in the bloc, the own-resources mechanism meant that Britain would contribute at a disproportionately higher rate than the other six member states. Adding further to a sense of unfairness, since more than seventy percent of the EEC budget was used to

---

<sup>18</sup> “Own resources mechanism.” Summaries of EU Legislation. EUR-Lex: Access to European Union Law. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:i34011> Date accessed: October 21, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> “Own resources mechanism.”



bankroll the Common Agricultural Policy, it meant that the United Kingdom would gain very few receipts under the redistributive policies of the EEC, due to the fact that Britain had a small agricultural industry, especially in comparison to France.

Margaret Thatcher was determined to address this issue and change Britain's deal with the European Economic Community. Only a few months after being elected as Prime Minister in 1979, Thatcher had already set her sights on the unfair practice that would take a large portion of British money. In that same year at an EEC summit in Dublin, Thatcher made her first attempt at trying to secure a British rebate, saying, "We are not asking for a penny piece of Community money for Britain. What we are asking is for a very large amount of our own money back."<sup>20</sup> The EEC made Thatcher an initial offer of £350 million, but she declined to accept it.

Five years later in 1984, with the victory of the Falklands and a strong economy serving as motivation, Thatcher would again attempt to secure a British rebate, this time at the Fontainebleau summit. During the first round of negotiations, she demanded a rebate of £730 million, a bold opening gambit. A bit taken aback, EEC leaders responded with an offer of £580 million, but she again declined to accept their offer. It was not until the second offer of £600 million was made by the EEC that Thatcher eventually accepted, allowing Britain to be paid back sixty-six percent of its net contribution from the previous year. This was hailed a momentous victory for British euro-skepticism, as the bloc was known for its extremely strict and rigid rules. The UK rebate sent out the message that it was possible for a member state to fight for its national and sovereign interests and to not be simply steamrolled by the European juggernaut. It also cemented an oppositional type of relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Economic Community, one that would see sovereignty as a cornerstone of many arguments.

---

<sup>20</sup> Thatcher, Margaret. EEC Dublin Summit, 1979. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/17/britains-battle-eu-budget-rebate-margaret-thatcher-handbagged/>

## The Bruges Speech

In 1988, Margaret Thatcher delivered an important speech to the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium, one that has since served as a rallying cry for British euro-skeptics and that is widely considered to have put Britain on the path towards Brexit. Concerned with the moves towards what was appearing to be federalized Europe by the EEC, and by the increasingly powerful bloc that was exercising more and more influence over domestic national affairs, Thatcher sought to reaffirm the idea that the EEC, if anything, should be a body where independent, sovereign states came together to cooperate, not provinces ruled over by Brussels.

It is now known that the speech was originally meant to have been more critical before it was toned down.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, the speech Thatcher gave was meant to be pro-European yet anti-federal, with Thatcher seeking to convey that Europe is a special continent precisely because it is highly diverse, a continent with different cultures, histories, and traditions and that these should not be lost to a monolithic “European” identity that was growing, tied to membership of the EEC rather than the individual countries of the continent. In a much-forgotten section of her speech that underlines willing cooperation among sovereign states, Thatcher says, “Europe will be stronger precisely because it has France as France, Spain as Spain, Britain as Britain, each with its own customs, traditions, and identity. It would be folly to try to fit them into some sort of identikit European personality.”<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, the speech was received by many in the audience, and across the EEC among its supporters, as being anti-European, perhaps signaling that Thatcher was correct in her diagnosis.

Most notably, she sought to defend the United Kingdom from increasing encroachments on its sovereignty by Brussels. In office for nearly ten years at this time, Thatcher had overseen an enormous

---

<sup>21</sup> “Margaret Thatcher’s famous Bruges speech was to have been much more critical before it was toned down.” Dixon, Hayley. The Telegraph. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/20/margaret-thatchers-famous-bruges-speech-have-much-critical-toned/> July 21, 2018. 12:01 AM. Date accessed: October 21, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Thatcher, Margaret. Speech to the College of Europe (“The Bruges Speech”). <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>. September 20, 1988. Date accessed: October 21, 2018.

decentralization of power in Britain, focused on returning power back to individuals, the private sector, and local governments, dismantling the massive size of the state that had stifled British prospects and potential for so long. However, she realized that though she had successfully cut the size of the state in the UK, the EEC had grown incredibly powerful, now with the ability to significantly impact domestic affairs among the member states. Concerned that the EEC was moving perilously close to a highly-centralized model, Thatcher says,

“Indeed, it is ironic that just when those countries such as the Soviet Union, which have tried to run everything from the center, are learning that that success depends on dispersing power and decisions away from the center, there are some in the Community who seem to want to move in the opposite direction. We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level with a European superstate exercising a new dominance from Brussels.”<sup>23</sup>

Margaret Thatcher, despite wanting a positive and productive relationship with Europe, was making clear that it would not be pursued at all costs, and that British sovereignty was an issue that she would fight for with the support of the British people behind her, reinforced with three consecutive electoral victories. Referring to passage of goods and people across countries, and seeming to predict the eventual removing of national borders across a large portion of the EEC, Thatcher stated: “But it is a matter of plain common sense that we cannot totally abolish frontier controls if we are also to protect our citizens from crime and stop the movement of drugs, of terrorists, and illegal immigrants,”<sup>24</sup> in a clear sign that Britain would not be part of such a policy if it was ever proposed or implemented, which it eventually was with the Schengen Area; Britain never became part of it, opting to protect its sovereignty.

“No! No! No!”

---

<sup>23</sup> Thatcher, Margaret. Speech to the College of Europe (“The Bruges Speech”). <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>. September 20, 1988. Date accessed: October 21, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Thatcher, Margaret. Speech to the College of Europe (“The Bruges Speech”). <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>. September 20, 1988. Date accessed: October 21, 2018.

In what would be one of her last stands for British sovereignty against the increasingly powerful European Economic Community, Margaret Thatcher gave a historic performance at a session of Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs), where she savaged the idea of European government, which was now being talked about as a new governmental structure to replace the EEC. Thatcher had long butted heads with the then president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors. Though they were all smiles in public and in front of the cameras, the two were bitter political rivals with complete divergent views on the future of Europe; Thatcher envisioned a Europe of independent and sovereign states coming together to cooperate on issues and concerns whilst always preserving their sovereignty, while Delors intended Europe to become a federal superstate, where European countries became part of a European union, similar in fashion to the model of the United States, to become a superpower on the world stage.

In October 1990, with a recent press conference by Jacques Delors as the backdrop to her comments, Thatcher addressed the House of Commons, saying: "The President of the Commission, Mr. Delors, said at press conference the other day that he wanted the European Parliament to be the democratic body of the Community, he wanted the Commission to be the executive, and he wanted the Council of Minister to be the senate. No! No! No!"

In addition to talk of a potential European governmental structure being established by the EEC, there was also talk of a single currency being set up for the whole of the EEC. When asked about considering the possibility by the Leader of the Opposition, Labour's Neil Kinnock, Thatcher responded by saying, "Perhaps the Labour Party would give all those things up, easily. Perhaps they would agree to a single currency, to total abolition of the pound sterling. Perhaps being totally incompetent with monetary matters, they'd be only too delighted to hand over the full responsibilities

as they did to the IMF, to a central bank.”<sup>25</sup> Thatcher was clear that having a national currency was an expression of sovereignty and said that she thought that the pound sterling had served Britain well and that it had served the world well and that to relinquish it, handing over control to a central bank outside of the United Kingdom with no British popular or sovereign control, was folly.

### *Exit Thatcher, Enter Major*

Politics is seemingly nothing without the drama that accompanies it. As ironic as it is, it was Thatcher’s standing up for British sovereignty against European encroachment that did her in, a victim of a coup within the Conservative Party. Though Thatcher was indeed a strong leader with views towards Europe that were popular among the British people and electorate, they were much less popular among her own party, particularly Tory backbenchers. For all intents and purposes, Thatcher was a revolutionary radical who found a place in the Conservative Party to push forward her vision for Britain. However, many of the traditional grandees within the Tories were appalled by her brand of politics and especially her approach to Europe; these grandees wanted to be a part of the future the EEC was planning and they knew that Thatcher would not allow it if she remained in Downing Street. For a significant portion of her time as Prime Minister, Thatcher was actually in a minority in her cabinet, pushing through the House of Commons her most noteworthy reforms despite stiff opposition among her cabinet members, able to do so by sheer force of personality. Her stand against Delors’ vision of European government would prove too much for Tory backbenchers, and they acted against Thatcher. Michael Heseltine, a rival within her party and former cabinet minister, stood against Thatcher for the leadership of the Conservative Party. Though winning more votes than anyone on the first ballot, she was unable to secure a majority, which weakened her position. When she asked members of cabinet to come speak to her privately, she asked them what they thought. There was a

---

<sup>25</sup> “Euro Moments: Thatcher says ‘no, no, no’ to Europe.” BBC News. May 19, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-27053536/euro-moments-thatcher-says-no-no-no-to-europe>

clear pattern, as most said that they would support her if she decided to move forward, but that they thought she ran the danger of losing to Heseltine, with only one member telling her that she should fight one because she could win. She knew that her time was up and she resigned her office on November 28, 1990, less than two months from her stand in the House. It was, she later said, treachery with a smile on its face.

Though Michael Heseltine wielded the assassin's knife, the crown would not fall to him. John Major, the relatively unknown Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had an astronomical rise through the ranks of power, previously being Foreign Secretary, would enter the contest with Thatcher's blessing and win the Tory party leadership, becoming Prime Minister. Margaret Thatcher was fond of John Major when she was PM, promoting him quickly to prominent positions in government. Many Tory backbenchers who ardently supported Thatcher supported him as well, thinking that he was the champion who would carry her banner forward. This would not be the case.

### *The Major Government: An Unhappy Muddle*

It was not clear what John Major's goals were, other than, one minister said, Thatcherism with a human face. Major failed to set out a definitive relationship with Europe, quickly leading to angst among Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs) and voters. Many Tories were upset that he would speak to Euro-skeptics and say that Britain's sovereignty was paramount and that it should be apart and then speak to Europhiles and say that Britain should be at the heart of Europe. In 1991, he negotiated the Maastricht Treaty (officially, the Treaty on European Union) and saw it through Parliament despite heavy resistance from his own party. This treaty lives on in the minds of British Euro-skeptics because it led to the official creation of the European Union in 1993 and because it is widely considered to be the treaty that establishes European government, as the following significant treaties (Amsterdam in 1997, Nice in 2001, and Lisbon in 2009) amend what is in the Maastricht Treaty. Notably, the Maastricht Treaty created two new functions for the EEC: Common Foreign and

Security Policy and Cooperation in the Fields of Justice and Home Affairs, further harmonizing policies across Europe.

Euro-skeptic fury against John Major would reach a boiling point in September 1992, when what became known as Black Wednesday shocked the British financial system. The ERM (European Exchange Rate Mechanism) was set up in 1979 and then-Chancellor of the Exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, who was staunchly pro-European, wanted Britain to be a part of it. However, Britain declined to join the ERM in 1979. Howe's successor as Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, revered the strong West German deutschemark currency and attributed its low inflationary record to its strength and the management provided by the Bundesbank, the German central bank. For about a year, from early 1987 to early 1988, it was British policy led by Lawson for the pound sterling to shadow the deutschemark. However, this was ended soon after it began because of an argument between Lawson and Alan Walters, Margaret Thatcher's economic advisor, who said that the ERM was nonsense. Lawson resigned as Chancellor and John Major, who was then Foreign Secretary became the new Chancellor. Both he and the new Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, pressured Thatcher and convinced the rest of the cabinet to agree to British membership of the ERM. Thatcher, knowing she was on thin ice with the cabinet because of Europe, reluctantly agreed for British membership, though she carried deep reservations.

In a terrible prelude to what would happen to Britain, on September 11, 1992, the Italian government had its own trouble in the ERM, as its government was trying to prevent the collapse of its entire economy. Traders around the world dumped the Italian lira and its value plummeted. To try and stop the bleeding and to try and keep the lira in the ERM, the Bank of Italy poured in money; the Bundesbank did the same, per ERM rules, but it got to the point to where the Bundesbank could no longer help the Italians, despite ERM rules, due to the great cost. The Bundesbank said it could keep helping if they cut their interest rates slightly, but only if Italy, Britain and others devalued their

currencies. This was not what John Major wanted to do, as doing so might provoke an avalanche of selling the pound sterling. However, the head of the Bundesbank had made comments (that he thought were off the record) that the efforts to stabilize the Italian lira were not satisfactory and that further devaluation among the other currencies—the pound sterling included—might need to devalue.

On September 16, 1992, the comments made by the head of the Bundesbank indeed would lead to an incredible selloff of the pound sterling. With the jettisoning of the Italian lira, and the rumors of a devaluing of the pound meaning that it would be a great risk to hold onto it, people began a frenzied selling of the British currency. The Bank of England (BoE) mounted a quick defense of sterling, as they set to buy a phenomenal amount of pounds. However, the money that the BoE injected would instantly fizz away, billions of pounds worth. At the top of British government, there were crazed discussions of what could be done. After months of refusing to raise interest rates, John Major decided to raise them two percent, to twelve percent, to show the political will to defend the value of sterling to see if it would have the effect of stabilization. This would have a miniscule effect and the run on the pound sterling continued. Norman Lamont, Major's Chancellor of the Exchequer, opined that Britain could no longer remain in the ERM and that the government should announce so. John Major, aware of the political cost of leaving the ERM, attempted one last time to show that the government was standing behind sterling, by raising interest rates yet again, to an eye-watering fifteen percent, to Lamont's frustration. When it was clear that this too would have the same miniscule effect as the rise to twelve percent, the government realized that it was defeated by the markets and that they would have to leave the ERM. However, Major did not want to say so directly, due to ERM membership being such a central part of his economic and foreign policy. He directed Lamont to say that Britain would be "suspending" its membership of the ERM, at the cost of billions of pounds. The rise to fifteen percent would not remain, Lamont reported to the country, and that interest rates would remain at twelve percent.



The debacle that was Black Wednesday only served to further antagonize British Euro-skeptics against the European Union. In the aftermath, analysts would say that Britain targeting currency practices similar to those of West Germany made no sense in the context of the British economy, and that the practice of continental currencies were too divergent from that of the pound for them to be in an exchange rate system. It brought national sovereignty back to the front burner as well; why the need to even be in the ERM if Britain's economy was doing just fine throughout the previous decade? Many wondered why the Prime Minister and many in his cabinet were seemingly so infatuated with the idea of Europe to the point that they would actually risk harming the country's economy to show that they wanted to be a part of it. Black Wednesday added frustration to what many considered the creeping control of Brussels and Frankfurt over domestic affairs usually settled in Westminster, these cemented when Britain's economy would actually recover significantly once free from the ERM, though it was too late for John Major.

#### *New Labour: Blair and Brown*

Though the Maastricht Treaty was passed in 1991, the Conservatives were overwhelmingly returned to power in the general election of 1992. The Tories received the largest number of votes in British electoral history, much to the surprise of many Conservatives who thought that the Maastricht Treaty would sour many Tory voters away from the party. The post-electoral analysis suggested that many voters actually voted against Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party rather than explicitly for the Conservatives; while the Tories under the leadership of John Major were aligning much closer to Europe than before, Labour was seemingly desperate for Brussels control over the UK. While Major might have surprised with the 1992 general election victory, the defeat the Conservatives suffered in 1997 was just as great. Tony Blair, the leader of a rebranded New Labour, was swept to power with a large majority in the House of Commons, finally bringing to an end almost two consecutive decades of Conservative rule in Britain. Blair's government led government with a much more conciliatory tone

towards Europe, as he believed that the European Union was indispensable. So enamored was Tony Blair with the EU that he even wanted Britain to be a part of their new single currency, the Euro. However, he was effectively overruled by his Chancellor, Gordon Brown, a massive personality within New Labour who had a chance to lead the party in 1994. Brown too was a passionate supporter of the EU, but he thought it too risky for the United Kingdom to be a part of the new single currency, having learned the lesson of Black Wednesday. Other than the issue of the single currency, however, Brown supported all of Blair's agenda towards Europe, even a reduction of the British rebate that Margaret Thatcher had negotiated. Blair remained in office until 2007, winning three consecutive electoral victories on the way, until he handed power over to Brown. As Prime Minister, Gordon Brown secured passage of the Lisbon Treaty through the House of Commons. The leader of the Conservatives, David Cameron, had opposed the Lisbon Treaty saying that such a treaty should have had popular support from the British people in a referendum, something Gordon Brown had promised but did not provide; Brown argued that a referendum was not necessary because the government had negotiated in favor of British interests.

### *Britain begins asking for an In/Out Referendum*

It was because of the back and forth with the Lisbon Treaty that clamor for an in/out referendum first began to reach fever pitch; it transferred more power from national parliaments directly to Brussels institutions and this angered many Britons. The European Union had the advantage of having a pro-EU government in the UK that did not want to submit the Lisbon Treaty to a referendum; the French and the Dutch had shot down via referenda the previous incarnation of the Lisbon Treaty a few years earlier and the Irish rejected the Lisbon Treaty in a referendum and they were made by the EU to vote again until they accepted it, a gross violation of national sovereignty. Recognizing that there was political capital to be made, David Cameron began to take a harder approach to Europe. In the 2010 general election, Labour was removed from power and a coalition government (the first since

the Second World War) between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, with David Cameron taking office as Prime Minister. As PM, he sought to walk a fine line of a stauncher attitude towards Europe in defending Britain's national interests while still wanting to be part of the club. In 2014, however, the Conservatives suffered a great defeat at the European elections at the hands of UKIP, who positioned themselves to the right of the Tories in opposition to the EU. Concerned that this would follow the Conservatives to the 2015 general election in the UK, David Cameron knew he had to offer something he would rather not: an in/out referendum on European Union membership if the country returned him and the Tories to power with a Conservative overall majority. He rolled the dice, offered this to the UK, and the country indeed returned him to Number 10 with an overall majority in Parliament. This was a clear message that a frustrated Britain wanted its say on EU membership. Keeping his word, Cameron set the referendum on June 23, 2016, being a prominent leader of the side which wanted to stay in the EU, Vote Remain. The result of the referendum was a victory for Vote Leave, with 51.8% to exit the EU and 41.1% voting to remain.

## **Part 2**

### **The Brexit Vote**

#### *Framing it accurately*

The lead up to the Brexit vote was extremely divisive in Britain. While the Vote Leave side was focused on wanting to return power to Westminster, the Vote Remain side labeled their campaign as racist and xenophobic. In parts of the country, the referendum was being seen through the lens of identity politics, as a reaction against a Britain whose demographics were beginning to change, most notably in the UK's major cities, like London. While immigration indeed was an important motivator for those who voted Leave, it is a mistake to understand it outside of the umbrella of sovereignty, as deciding who gets to cross a border and enter a country is among the most basic rights of any nation.

## *Understanding Brexit: British Exceptionalism*

It seems appropriate to say that the British have always stood slightly apart in European dynamics, this mirrored even in their geographical position relative to the continent; close enough to be a part of it, but just far enough to back out of things it may not want to participate in. Generally speaking, it seems that this too has been their approach with the EU since joining, through all of its incarnations. Britain saw that the single market could be advantageous for it, but it did not want to be a part of the single currency; it did not mind as much being a contributor to the Common Agricultural Policy as long as it got a sufficient rebate; it supported the decision of the Schengen Area states, as long as that did not apply to the UK. Wind (2017) says it this way:

It is hardly controversial to say that the UK is exceptional when it comes to its rather schizophrenic approach to the EU. Moreover, defining British opposition to the EU as part of a British exceptionalism makes it possible to examine this specialness more thoroughly. For the British people, the EU has represented different possibilities. For some the EU was a promise of peace and stability, for others the Single Market's promise of jobs and prosperity was at the center of attention. However, as pointed out by Leonard, none of these readings or possibilities seems seductive enough anymore. The British people today understand the EU both as a heavy bureaucratic machinery and as the cause behind many of the negative changes in their society, like migration, rising housing costs, and inequality.<sup>26</sup>

Wind's analysis is accurate, as these were indeed two of the main complaints leveled against the European Union during the referendum. Precisely because the EU is indeed a heavy bureaucratic machine (see Figure 5 ahead) and because it stripped away certain immigration powers away from member states, Britain included, which has led to other issues such as housing problems, Britons quite reasonably wanted to take back control over their own domestic issues. According to a YouGov poll taken on the day of the Brexit vote, when asked to say which reason, from a list of eight possible

---

<sup>26</sup> "Why the British conception of sovereignty was the main reason for Brexit, and why the British 'leave-vote' may end up saving rather than undermining the EU." Wind, Marlene. CSF-SSSUP Working Paper Series. Centro Studi Sul Federalismo. March 2017.

choices, the most cited reason among Leave voters for voting that way was “to strike a better balance between Britain’s right to act independently, and the appropriate level of co-operation with other countries,”<sup>27</sup> with the second most frequently selected reason being “to help us deal better with the issue of immigration.”<sup>28</sup> This confirms that, yes, immigration was indeed an important motivating factor for Britons who voted Leave, but this was not a solitary factor, but rather one directly tied to Britain’s ability to be able to act independently from the European Union. This frustration, in the British context, can be attributed to the British tradition of sovereignty and how for the vast majority of the UK’s history, it had been able to take unilateral action on matters such as these. While the loss of sovereignty in this matter may have been an acceptable price to pay for some EU member states, the United Kingdom found itself in a position where it no longer could.

### *Understanding Brexit: A Loss of Parliamentary Sovereignty*

Sovereignty is still the subject of much debate among scholars and politicians; what does it mean, where is it truly vested, can it ever be violated, and questions like these have for decades and decades lingered in the halls of government and academia. In the British context, parliamentary sovereignty has traditionally been seen as something that is absolute and that in Parliament rests absolute power over the whole of the United Kingdom. This changed, however, with British accession into the EEC. A landmark decision in *R (Factortame Ltd.) v Secretary of State for Transport*, the House of Lords set out that an Act of Parliament could be superseded by European legislation.<sup>29</sup> In addition, before the *Factortame* decision, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) had previously ruled in *Costa v Enel* (1964)

---

<sup>27</sup> “CSI Brexit 4: People’s Stated Reasons for Voting Leave or Remain.” Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College. April 24, 2018. <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CSI-Brexit-4-People%E2%80%99s-Stated-Reasons-for-Voting-Leave.pdf> Date accessed: October 22, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> “CSI Brexit 4: People’s Stated Reasons for Voting Leave or Remain.” Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College. April 24, 2018. <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CSI-Brexit-4-People%E2%80%99s-Stated-Reasons-for-Voting-Leave.pdf> Date accessed: October 22, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> “‘Let’s take back control’: Brexit and the Debate on Sovereignty.” Ringeisen-Biardeaud, Juliette. *French Journal of British Studies*. XXII-2, 2017.

that a national law had to be set aside if it was found to be incompatible with community law,<sup>30</sup> according to Ringeisen-Biardeaud (2017). These decisions do constitute a precedence of loss of parliamentary sovereignty for Britain and an effective transfer of power from Westminster to Brussels. Perhaps knowing that the issue of sovereignty was becoming a central point for British frustration towards the European project, David Cameron sought to shore up in that area, passing the *European Union Act 2011* in Parliament, which stated that any European Union treaty planning to transfer significant powers from Westminster to Brussels would have to be submitted to a referendum. However, even this would rightfully come under scrutiny. What did “significant powers” mean? Would that interpretation not depend on which party was in power with the Conservatives and Labour disagreeing about what a “significant” transfer of power would be? In 2016, Cameron supported the idea of a “Sovereignty Act” to ensure that legislation enacted by the UK would take precedence over European Union law; this was even put into the Queen’s Speech. However, it was becoming apparent that these attempts to simply reduce EU influence in British affairs were not enough to quell the public’s frustration.

It is then understandable why the issue of sovereignty played so well among Leave voters. The national desire to restore power to the Parliament at Westminster was strongly rooted in a longing to have the people’s House be the one with ultimate democratic authority and legitimacy. Robin Niblett, director of Chatham House said, “The idea of restoring sovereignty appeals to British sensibilities. It speaks to the independent spirit of a small island on the edge of Europe. It speaks to British voters’ pride in their history, their democracy, their ability to govern themselves (and in days gone by, much of the world) without interference from foreign powers.”<sup>31</sup> This perhaps encapsulates perfectly the British desire to be an independent actor on the world stage once again. For a country as consequential

---

<sup>30</sup> “‘Let’s take back control’: Brexit and the Debate on Sovereignty.”

<sup>31</sup> “‘Let’s take back control’: Brexit and the Debate on Sovereignty.”

as Britain has been for most of its existence, to be tied together to a raft with twenty-seven other members is certainly alien. There are things that words and phrases simply cannot capture, and longings that are so elemental that they can only be understood by those that are like-minded. There is indeed something in the British tradition that spoke to voters on June 23, 2016; it was not talk of a better or weaker economy, nor was it the potential loss of access to one of the world's largest markets, and it was not the repercussions to their immigration system should Britain vote to leave or remain: it was about their past, their tradition of sovereignty, their historical ability to decide for themselves what their lot in the world should be. If ultimate authority is not truly vested in Parliament, the British public concluded, it was not worth being a part of the EU.

Parliamentary sovereignty resonated with voters swayed by the arguments of the Vote Leave camp. The Leave campaign cast this in terms of Parliament's power, competence, and freedom and ability to legislate over Britain.<sup>32</sup> For years, there was growing frustration at the confusion over who truly had supreme legislative authority over British affairs; was it the British Parliament at Westminster or was it the European Parliament in Brussels? Since the First Enlargement, the number of laws, regulations, and directives passed from EU bodies down to the member states has grown exponentially, a reflection of the increase in power of the supranational IGO. Kendrick frames the question well, saying, "The question of sovereignty therefore asked which legal order should actually be supreme: the national or the supranational? This discussion consequently implies issues of territoriality as the 'boundary line is the line of sovereignty.'" <sup>33</sup> Territory as the boundary of sovereignty is classically understood to be a correct manifestation; it makes sense that the people within a boundary, a nation-state or a country, should expect that the laws which govern them and affect their lives will be made from a recognized source of power within their territory. This has been repeatedly called into question

---

<sup>32</sup> "A Question of Sovereignty: Tax and the Brexit Referendum." Kendrick, Maria. *King's Law Journal*. Vol 27. No. 3. 366-374. 2016.

<sup>33</sup> "A Question of Sovereignty: Tax and the Brexit Referendum."

in Britain, however. While the British people voted in the 1975 referendum to remain in the single market, they have never given popular consent to be a part of a supranational structure that has legislative, executive, and judicial powers. (The Major government passed the Maastricht Treaty through the House of Commons without giving the British public a say on the matter, and again, it was this treaty which has arguably been the most consequential as it was the one that established European government.) This morphing of the European Union's various precursors has occurred as the regional bloc has continually revised what its *raison d'être* is. Today's EU with its series of common policies stands in a stark contrast to the organization in 1975. The question to ask then becomes how much influence does Brussels exercise over Britain?

According to the House of Commons Library,<sup>34</sup> which concedes that there is no way to make a foolproof calculation, between 1993 and 2014, Parliament passed 945 Acts, of which 231 implemented some sort of EU obligation; 33,160 Statutory Instruments, 4,283 of which implemented EU obligations, were also passed. When these figures are added and then divided by the total number of laws passed, one gets the thirteen percent figure that was many times used by campaigners in the Vote Remain camp. However, if one counts all EU regulations, EU related Acts of Parliament, and EU related Statutory Instruments, about sixty-two percent of laws introduced between 1993 and 2014 that apply in the United Kingdom implemented EU obligations, a staggeringly high number. This begs the question: if Brussels, through its various mechanisms of legal authority, can exercise legislative influence in the UK to the tune of more than fifty percent, who is in charge of Britain? The situation resembles that of a state within the US, with the dynamics between the fifty various state governments and the federal government, rather than a supposedly sovereign and independent country participating in an intergovernmental organization as an equal partner among others. This certainly gives the

---

<sup>34</sup> "Reality Check: How much UK law comes from the EU?" Coleman, Clive. BBC News. June 8, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36473105> Date accessed: October 22, 2018.



impression that the Parliament at Westminster is inferior to the institutions of the European Union in Brussels. And, assuming the figure of sixty-two percent is more or less accurate, the frustrations of Britons who felt that they had diminishing influence over their country's laws is understandable.

#### Siphoning Sovereignty? The structure of EU institutions

The European Union is adamant that its member states have a significant amount of authority in deciding the laws to which the member states must comply with and with the course of the EU, generally. The institution EU leaders point to as the manifestation of this authority is the European Parliament, to which its 751 members are directly elected every five years. However, the EU Parliament does not have legislative initiative, making it a legislative chamber in name only; it can only amend legislation (along with the Council of the European Union), not propose any.

The European Commission acts as the executive arm of the EU, composed of one member from each of the member states. This body, the executive, is the one responsible for drafting all laws of the European Union and it also has the power to propose new laws. This structure has certainly raised eyebrows in the United Kingdom, as another criticism of those who wished to leave the EU is that the MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) that they elect and send to Brussels actually hold very little real power and influence in the legislative process. In addition, members of the European Commission are not democratically elected, but rather selected by the Commission president; the European Parliament can only vote for consent.

The European Council is the group of heads of state of the EU member states. The President of the European Council is considered to be the most powerful political office in Europe and is responsible for pushing forward the work of the European Union. The European Council meets four times a year to outline the policy agenda and discuss ways to make sure their vision is implemented. The current head of the European Council is Poland's Donald Tusk.

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) is located in Luxembourg and is the EU's judicial branch and is responsible for interpreting European law and treaties.

An increasingly powerful institution in the EU is the European Central Bank (ECB) located in Frankfurt, Germany. The ECB controls monetary policy for the eurozone. Because of this, it has come under increasing criticism from member states that have had austerity measures imposed on them by the ECB, notably Italy and Greece. Because Britain opted to not join the Euro currency and keep the pound sterling, it has little to do with managing the currency, however, the UK was still affected by the eurozone crisis due to its funding of the EU.

The charts below breakdown the structure of the European Union, the first generally and the second in more detail. The direct connection, or lack thereof, enfranchised people have to the institutions is telling.

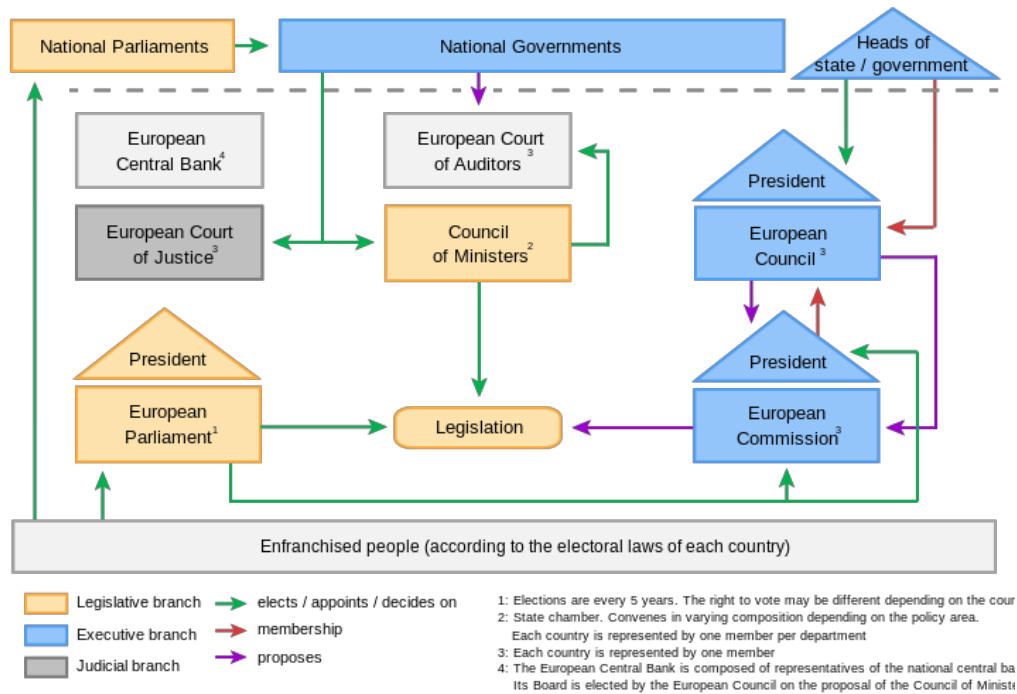
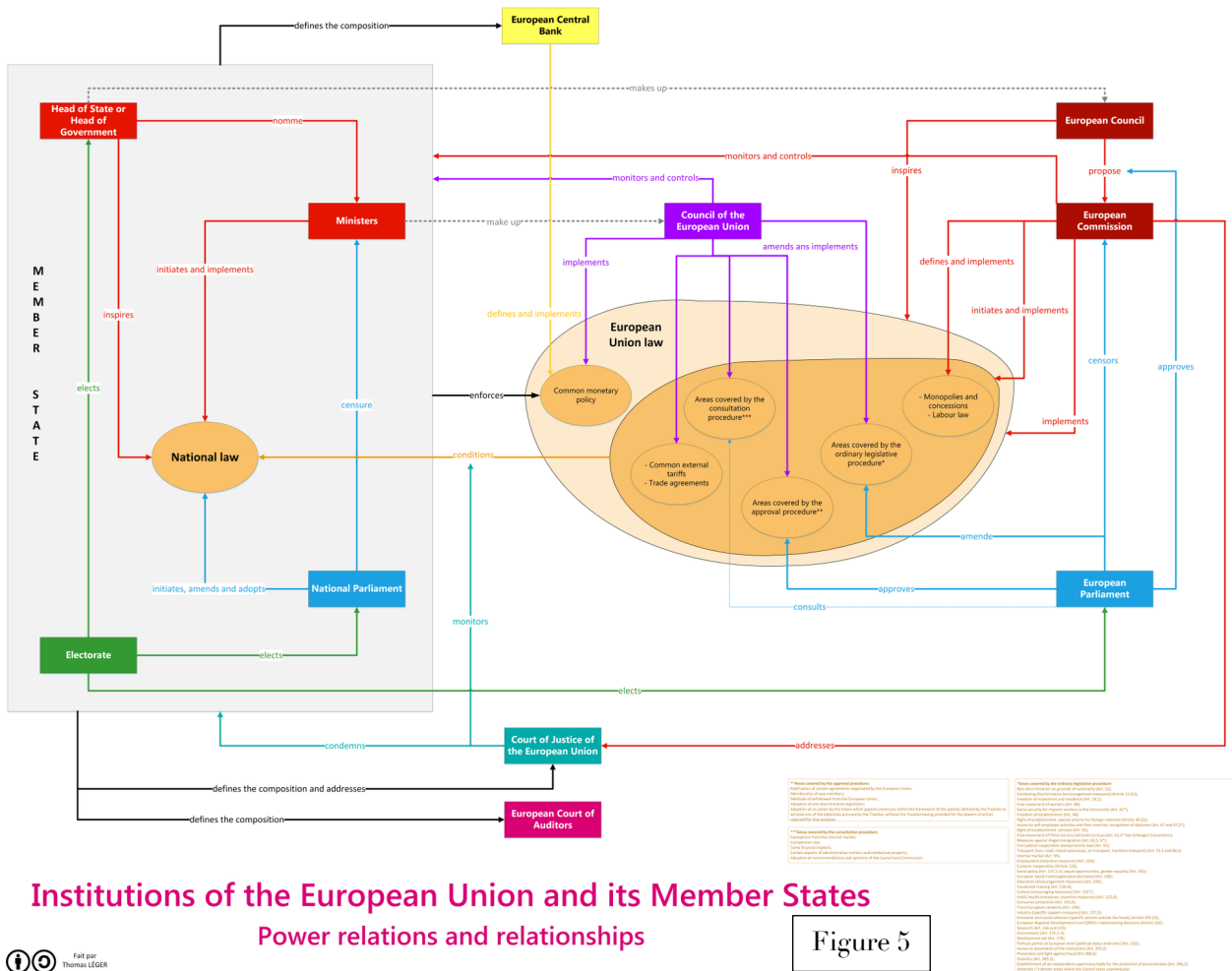


Figure 4



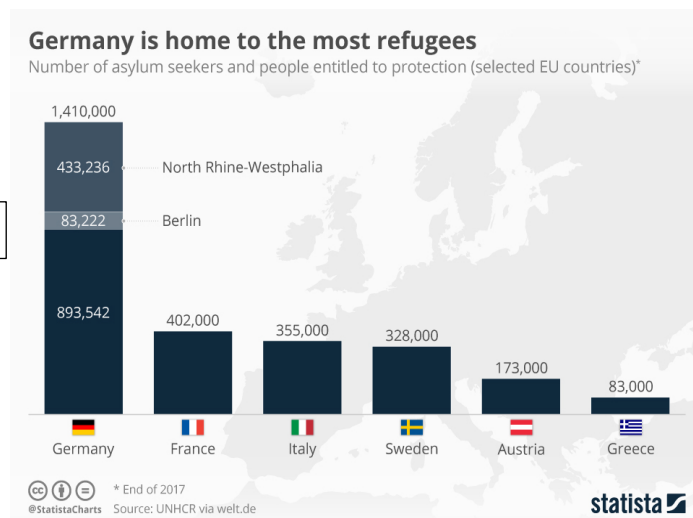
### Understanding Brexit: Immigration

Immigration was without a doubt among the most contentious issues of the Brexit referendum campaign, animating both the Leave and Remain camps. Vote Remain accused the Leave side of using the referendum as an attempt to halt a changing Britain that was becoming more diverse ethnically, racially, and religiously and that their argument of regaining sovereignty was simply a smokescreen for more malevolent feelings of racism and xenophobia motivated by fear and hate. Indeed, immigration was an important matter for those who supported Brexit, but it was not necessarily a concern in and of itself; immigration was inextricably linked to the question of sovereignty. One of the most basic and fundamental rights a country has is to decide who can and cannot enter their borders. While Britain opted out of the Schengen Agreement (a treaty implemented in 1995 which abolishes border

controls and checks among the signatories) and still had a level of control at their border, they could not legally prevent the entrance into the United Kingdom from someone who possesses a European Union passport as a member of the EU.

The public concern in this area in particular was greatly exacerbated by the European refugee crisis that began in 2015. An unprecedented number of people arrived in European Union member states, largely from the Middle East and North Africa; political instability and internal conflict in countries like Syria and Libya contributed to an exodus of people seeking safety on European shores. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), between January 2015 and March 2016, over one million people arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean Sea, as October 2015 saw the largest number of people reach Europe for a single month at 212,454;<sup>35</sup> during this time, the majority came fleeing the Syrian conflict with most of the migrants overall coming from Muslim-majority countries.<sup>36</sup> Germany's Angela Merkel took the initiative and opened the country to migrants, allowing the largest number to at least temporarily settle in Germany, as the chart below shows (through 2017).

Figure 6



<sup>35</sup> "Mediterranean Situation." Sea and land arrivals monthly. Operation Portal, Refugee Situations. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean?page=1&view=grid&Type%255B%255D=3&Search=%2523monthly%2523> Date accessed: October 25, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> "Europe's Migration Crisis." Park, Jeanne. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/europes-migration-crisis> Last updated: September 23, 2015. Date accessed: October 25, 2018.

A concern among a significant portion of the British public was a hypothetical: if Germany would ever eventually grant the refugees and migrants German passport, could they have access to Britain? The answer would be yes. Once granted a passport from any member state in the European Union, an individual has the right to enter another member state. The apprehension of Britons at people who had not been vetted by UK authorities being able to enter their country is tied to the sovereignty of Britain; the UK simply cannot decide on this matter as it is an area of competence of the European Union, surely backed by the ECJ or ECHR (European Court of Human Rights) overruling any Westminster legal action.

Britain being stripped of the immigration controls that the vast majority of countries around the world enjoy was already an issue prior to the migrant crisis. Prior to the Lisbon Treaty, there was concern about migration coming from Eastern European countries that became part of the EU during the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, particularly Romania and Bulgaria. Here, the concern was economic, as cheap unskilled labor from Romanian or Bulgarian migrants could depress the wages of Britons. Again, Britain was prevented from being able to dictate the entrance of who could enter their borders, a loss of the traditional exercise of sovereignty.

Immigration in the British context, intertwined with dynamics with the EU, cannot be observed in a vacuum, as it is inherently tied to their ability to exercise competence in this area; immigration had become such a contentious issue, not because it was happening, but because British institutions could not control whether it was happening or not. Seeing immigration play out as a linchpin issue in the Brexit referendum was to be expected, and its impact was not inconsequential. The effect that immigration had in local communities that had experienced a high rate of ethnic change prior to the referendum highlight how sudden demographic changes can trigger significant political reactions among voters. Goodwin and Milazzo (2017) found that “strong public concerns over immigration, and its perceived effects on the country and on communities, were central to explaining the 2016 vote

for Brexit.”<sup>37</sup> Prior to coming to their findings, Goodwin and Milazzo hypothesized that a possibility for explaining the influence that immigration had in the Brexit referendum was the desire to establish control over the issue. Since the beginning of his premiership in 2010, David Cameron failed to meet the Conservative Party’s manifesto pledge to return net migration to “the tens of thousands a year, not the hundreds of thousands.” Before the referendum took place, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) confirmed that net migration had actually risen to a near record high of 333,000 annually, with a sharp increase in the number of Romanians and Bulgarians entering the UK.<sup>38</sup>

For British voters, they were saddled with a double frustration; first, the European Union was exercising dominance over the United Kingdom on being able to dictate that anyone with an EU passport could not be prevented entry. (Logically, though not probably, this meant the UK was effectively open to the whole of European Union member states being able to legally enter, with almost 500 million people having access to the country, in principle.) Second, their political leaders appeared weak in the efforts to try to change or even address the dynamic between the EU and the UK. Since the Blair government, targets for immigration had been set and year after year, immigration was considerably higher than the targets set out by the government; this would continue through the David Cameron governments as well. Addressing their findings, Goodwin and Milazzo state:

“We also find support for the idea that perceptions of demographic change—and Brexit’s ability to control that change—were associated with support for Brexit. Data from the BES support the idea that the public was cognisant of the changing nature of Britain’s communities. In the weeks prior to the 2016 referendum, 75% of BES respondents indicated that they thought levels of immigration were rising. And, while nearly 6 in 10 Remain voters said they thought immigration was rising, among Leave voters it was more than 9 in 10. Moreover, there was a clear sense that Brexit would provide a measure of control over the issue. Six in 10

---

<sup>37</sup> “Taking back control? Investigating the role of immigration in the 2016 vote for Brexit.” Goodwin, Matthew and Milazzo, Caitlin. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. Vol. 19. No. 3. 450-464. 2017.

<sup>38</sup> “Taking back control? Investigating the role of immigration in the 2016 vote for Brexit.”

respondents thought that leaving the EU would lower immigration into the country, but more than 8 in 10 Leave voters expressed this sentiment.”<sup>39</sup>

Understood in the context of the principle of sovereignty, demographic change is not an isolated variable, as it too is linked to Britain’s ability to control demographic change. Demographic change is part and parcel of developed countries, especially a country like Britain that has a leading global city in London, an international hub of business and culture; the issue is that the demographic change was happening at a rapid pace due to little to no control over immigration and the impact it was having on the country, from its social fabric to the social state. Goodwin and Milazzo continue:

“Most of those who voted for Brexit were aware of these local changes and felt negatively about how historically unprecedented levels of immigration were impacting on the national economy, culture and the welfare state. Furthermore, we demonstrate how citizens who became more cognisant of rising levels of immigration were more likely to switch their vote from Remain to Leave, further underlining the centrality of this issue to the vote. When seen as a whole, these findings suggest that the decision taken by the Leave campaigns to focus heavily on the immigration issue, particularly during the latter part of the referendum campaign, helped to drive public support for leaving the EU while also complicating the ability of Remain campaigners to ‘cut through’ and galvanise support for continuing EU membership. Anti-immigration messages clearly had a stronger emotional resonance among voters who were already concerned about how migration was not only impacting on their country but also, in some areas, producing visible changes within their local communities.”<sup>40</sup>

Character assassinations and purposeful mischaracterizations are unfortunately a part of modern politics, and the Brexit referendum was no exception, especially when it came to immigration. While there is no doubt that the extreme poles reared their ugly heads in the referendum, most concern from the Leave camp were reasonable and understandable, as were those of the Remain side. However, it seems that the Remain camp would constantly demonize and trivialize the concerns of those who wanted to vote Leave by saying that they were closet racists and xenophobes who harbored suspicion

---

<sup>39</sup> “Taking back control? Investigating the role of immigration in the 2016 vote for Brexit.”

<sup>40</sup> “Taking back control? Investigating the role of immigration in the 2016 vote for Brexit.”

and hatred towards those who were entering the country; some Leavers would respond saying that Remainers were elites who lived in a metropolitan bubble, separated from the changing realities that were occurring in communities across the country, isolated and ignorant about the concerns of everyday Britons. The truth is somewhere in the middle, as it usually is. The concern among the British public about a changing country and the ability to be able to control and influence that change was something real and a legitimate distress.

### **Part 3**

#### **Brexit and the Media**

The majority of polls leading up to the Brexit vote were favored for Vote Remain, perhaps famously cemented in people's minds with YouGov's "on the day poll," which reported that Remain had a four-percentage point edge over Leave, fifty-two percent to forty-eight percent.<sup>41</sup> YouGov was not alone in predicting a Remain win; Bloomberg's Brexit Poll Tracker<sup>42</sup> had their final report at 46.2% to 44.3% also in favor of Remain, as did the BBC's EU referendum poll tracker,<sup>43</sup> with their final report of the average of polls as forty-five percent Remain and forty-four percent Leave. The Telegraph also predicted a Remain victory, as their last reported poll<sup>44</sup> on June 23, 2016 was fifty-two percent for Remain and forty-eight percent for Leave, echoing the YouGov poll. So, what happened?

*Was there media bias against Vote Leave?*

#### **BBC**

---

<sup>41</sup> "YouGov on the day poll: Remain 52%, Leave 48%." YouGov UK. <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/06/23/yougov-day-poll/> Date accessed: November 2, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> "Brexit Watch Indicators." Brexit Poll Tracker. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2016-brexit-watch/> Last updated June 24, 2016, 5:45 BST. Date accessed: November 2, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> "EU referendum poll tracker." BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36271589> June 22, 2016. Date accessed: November 2, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> "How right or wrong were the polls about the EU referendum?" Dunford, Daniel and Kirk, Ashley. The Telegraph. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/24/eu-referendum-how-right-or-wrong-were-the-polls/> June 27, 2016. Date accessed: November 2, 2018.



A study conducted by David Keighley and Andrew Jubb of Civitas, a British independent think tank not affiliated to any political party, reviewed how pro-Brexit views had been marginalized in the BBC's news coverage, before and after the referendum. They scrutinized the BBC's output during the leadup to the EU referendum and identified "a range of significant failings, and during the campaign itself, non-adherence to the especially strict editorial guidelines."<sup>45</sup> Keighley and Jubb scrutinize several BBC news programs, among them, *Newsnight*. They report:

"In the build-up to the referendum in early 2016, 40 consecutive editions of *Newsnight* were monitored. A major concern was that in one-to-one interviews about the EU, there were 12 occasions (covering 14 guests), when pro-Remain guests appeared, against only six Brexit supporters. The overall imbalance in all material about the EU towards Remainers was 25-14. Other issues identified were that Kate Hoey – in a very rare appearance by a Labour supporter of Brexit – was asked not about withdrawal but perceived splits in the Leave camp; and EU figures who appeared, such as Guy Verhofstadt, were given a clear opportunity to explain why Brexit was a mistake, with no balancing material from equivalent figures who disagreed. In the formal campaign period, a series of seven referendum specials, though relatively balanced in terms of Leave and Remain guests, culminated in a panel vote of 7-1 in favour of Remain. News-watch analysis showed that the likely reason was that the special programmes were deeply biased. For example, a decrepit war-time North Sea defence platform called Sealand was chosen to represent what the UK outside the EU might look like; and a programme from Boston in Lincolnshire portrayed the immigration pressures it was facing as 'extreme' and unusual, with a heavy preponderance of local and national opinion that immigration from the EU was vital for the British economy. After the vote on June 23, a strongly biased programme wrongly suggested that an Ipsos Mori opinion poll had shown that a re-run referendum would result in a Remain vote."<sup>46</sup>

This unfortunately confirms at least some of the suspicions of those who were Leave supporters. Keep in mind that this analysis is from only one show on one network. Perhaps this is considered a more

---

<sup>45</sup> "The Brussels Broadcasting Corporation? How pro-Brexit views have been marginalised in the BBC's news coverage." Keighley, David and Jubb, Andrew. Civitas. January 2018.

<sup>46</sup> "The Brussels Broadcasting Corporation? How pro-Brexit views have been marginalised in the BBC's news coverage."

egregious offense because the BBC is a taxpayer-funded institution in Britain and it is expected to provide a fair and as unbiased as possible presentation of the important issues facing the country. Biased presentations were not limited to television only. Keighley and Jubb also dissected the BBC's radio coverage of Brexit, particularly of the news program *Newsbeat*. On this they report:

“This survey was of all the editions of BBC Radio 1's *Newsbeat* (the BBC's leading news programme for young people) during the referendum period, when the programme had to adhere to the strict BBC referendum editorial guidelines. The analysis found a surprisingly low level of coverage (bias by omission), and an imbalance of guests which meant that the audience was 1.5 times more likely to hear a Remain supporter than someone from Leave. Of 38 *Newsbeat* reports with guest speakers, 19 (50 per cent) were in favour of Remain, and only five favoured Leave. There was a much greater breadth of opinion in Remain contributions – they came from Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Green party. Conversely, the Leave side featured only Conservatives and UKIP. There were no Leave contributions from the Labour party or wider Left. There was no input at all from the nationalist parties in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Editorially, *Newsbeat* enhanced and amplified the view of those supporting Remain and did not subject such views and alleged related facts to due rigour. Conversely, opinions and alleged facts in favour of Leave were robustly scrutinised, made to look ignorant or contradictory, xenophobic or unfounded. In an immigration special from Wisbech, significantly more prominence was given to views favouring EU immigration, and the ‘fact checking’ sequence was similarly skewed about the economic contribution of EU incomers. Overall, *Newsbeat* gave biased ‘fact check’ assessments. It said that immigrants contribute more cash to the UK than they receive in benefits, and the impact on the UK of current levels of immigration was minimised. Opponents of current levels of immigration were cast as xenophobic and inward-looking, whereas those who approved of immigration were made to appear outward-looking, open and broad-minded.”<sup>47</sup>

This last part of Keighley and Jubb's analysis serves to provide validation of many criticisms of the Vote Leave camp. Their concerns for the sovereignty of the United Kingdom were hardly ever

---

<sup>47</sup> “The Brussels Broadcasting Corporation? How pro-Brexit views have been marginalised in the BBC's news coverage.”

addressed by large portions of the media, but their questions about immigration certainly were. However, they were purposefully cast in a particular light, namely, around fear and suspicion. Large segments of the media made the conscious decision to frame the Brexit referendum around identity politics while shunning any larger issues such as political sovereignty. This is what made the Vote Leave victory such a momentous occasion, because there was a substantial effort on the part of some in the British media pushing a favorable narrative for Remain.

### *Post-Brexit Bias*

The arguably partisan coverage of Brexit did not end when the decision was made to leave the European Union either. Famous networks, from the BBC to CNN, appeared to be in utter disbelief in the immediate aftermath of the vote, with some saying that Britain was poised to enter an economic and financial crisis; CNN's Christiane Amanpour suggested multiple times that the vote to leave was directly linked to xenophobia during a contentious interview with British MEP Daniel Hannan.<sup>48</sup> Furthering delving into the practice of the BBC, Keighley and Jubb state:

“This was a selection by the BBC of 24 separate programmes (and seven programme strands) on Radio 4 which discussed Brexit, mainly broadcast after June 23, but some from before the vote. Overall, there were no attempts in any programme to explore the benefits of leaving the EU, but conversely Brexit came under sustained negative attack. This was reflected in the balance of contributions and comment contained within the items. Only 23 per cent of contributors in the programmes as a whole spoke in favour of Brexit, against 58 per cent in favour of Remain and 19 per cent who gave a neutral or factual commentary. Nine programmes and six features, amounting to 5 hours 20 minutes of programming, were strongly anti-Brexit, contained unchallenged predictions that civil unrest and rioting were now on the horizon and cast the ‘out’ vote in negative terms, inferring that the result had been a consequence of racism and xenophobia. The balance of programme guests in all of these items was strongly – and sometimes overwhelmingly – pro-Remain. The items that were strongly

---

<sup>48</sup> “CNN's Amanpour berates Brexit leader, won't support assertions.” Adams, Becket. Washington Examiner. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/cnns-amanpour-berates-brexit-leader-wont-support-assertions> June 30, 2016. 4:04 PM. Date accessed: November 2, 2018.

anti-Brexit were editions of culture series Front Row, The Briefing Room, six editions of the feature Brexit Street on the news programme *PM*, one edition of *A Point of View*, *How to Make a Brexit* (a one-off documentary about Greenland's exit from the EU), *Farming Today*, *More or Less*, *The Food Programme*, *The Bottom Line* and *Call You and Yours*. In some of these, the range of anti-Brexit opinion was light years from any definition of 'impartiality' and there was no balancing comparable pro-Brexit material."<sup>49</sup>

In addition, from June 24 to December 22, Keighley and Jubb found that the BBC's *Today* program consistently reported in a pessimistic slant about the immediate consequences of the vote to leave. In one measure, of the 366 guest speakers, 192 (more than fifty-two percent)<sup>50</sup> of them were negative about the impact of the referendum's result. Only sixty (16.3%) expressed opinions which were in support of Brexit or that saw the economic outlook as positive and only ten (2.9%) of the business interviews were with people who supported the Vote Leave campaign.<sup>51</sup> This arguably continues to provide a disservice, to the BBC (and the media in general) as well as the British public. Yet another frustration of the British public surfaces, as many thought that the press would have had a serious moment to reconsider their practices in the face of the Brexit victory, yet it appears that they continue with the same practices that perhaps even motivated certain segments of the public to vote in support of Brexit.

#### SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

##### *Sovereignty Matters*

The importance of sovereignty as a principle of the international system cannot be overstated. It is the bedrock upon which the Westphalian system that we reside in rests. In the international system, sovereignty is as close to an absolute as anything can be. Sovereignty is an important part of a state's government, as without it, the rights, freedoms, and privileges of its citizens cannot be protected from

---

<sup>49</sup> "The Brussels Broadcasting Corporation? How pro-Brexit views have been marginalised in the BBC's news coverage."

<sup>50</sup> The Brussels Broadcasting Corporation? How pro-Brexit views have been marginalised in the BBC's news coverage."

<sup>51</sup> The Brussels Broadcasting Corporation? How pro-Brexit views have been marginalised in the BBC's news coverage."

an outside force. Sovereignty implies legitimacy, a social contract between a people and the government that they have established and consent to, to safeguard their liberties, safety and way of life. In international law, sovereignty is understood to mean that a government possesses absolute control over the affairs that occur within their territory. As with most institutions, customs, and practices, there is of course a gray area and occasional and particular exceptions to the rule; in war, a country's sovereignty can be violated; in a humanitarian intervention, such as in a case of genocide (based on the 1948 Genocide Convention), a country's sovereignty can be infringed upon; in agreeing to be a part of intergovernmental organizations, certain amounts of sovereignty can be sacrificed. In terms of associating with an IGO, however, it is usually contingent upon the country that participates in the arrangement to what degree sovereignty is forfeited, usually with the consent of their governed.

### *The United Kingdom and the European Union: Sticking to sovereignty*

It is the principle of sovereignty which makes the European Union such a difficult entity to study and comprehend, as it blurs the lines much further than other regional IGOs, like the OAS (Organization of American States). The EU's first forerunner was not a governmental entity; it was a primarily a trade organization. As various European countries have sought fit to associate themselves with the various incarnations the EU has had, the scope of the European project has grown exponentially as have the competencies of its increasing institutions.

When the United Kingdom joined the bloc in 1973, and when it reaffirmed its wish to remain in the 1975 referendum, the EU was not what it was today, nor did it resemble in the least what it would become. Britain joined the organization hoping to reap similar economic benefits that it saw occurring on the continent and finally get out of the cycle of slow growth that it had found itself in since the Second World War. When the British people voted to remain in 1975, they did not give their popular mandate to be a part of European government, which was finally introduced with the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 after years of heading in an increasingly federal direction and pushed through the House

of Commons with no referendum or other public input. Other countries in the EU did manage to voice their will; France and Holland both rejected the 2005 constitutional treaty via referenda and the Irish rejected the Lisbon in their 2009 referendum. Worryingly, the EU saw fit to effectively ignore these exercises in sovereignty, establishing a disturbing practice. Concerned that the EU was, as Margaret Thatcher warned during her final PMQs, establishing federalism through the back door, Britons wanted to have their say. On June 23, 2016, they did, and they voted to leave the European Union.

### *Final Comments*

By outlining in detail consequential parts of British post-war history, I have attempted to show that the United Kingdom and the European Union were bound to separate, as Britain is a country that is too bound to the principle of sovereignty to be a continuing and willing participant in an intergovernmental organization which asks for far too much of it to be sacrificed. By retracing Britain's post-war history, from Sir Winston Churchill's 1945 "United States of Europe" speech, which saw a European project to be a solution for the continent in which Britain would not participate in, to the Thatcher government, which oversaw a rebirth of Britain in the application and exercise of sovereignty, among other historic events, to the governments of Blair, Brown, and Cameron in which British demands for a referendum could no longer be ignored, I have demonstrated that sovereignty is an essential and fundamental issue for the British people. I have also endeavored to show that Brexit should be understood under the umbrella of sovereignty, and that important issues like immigration should not be separated from its consideration, as this leads to a misunderstanding of the outcome, a folly similar to that made by the press in the leadup to the referendum vote. Also, I presented how parts of the British media, the BBC particularly, have influenced the analysis of Brexit, both before the vote and after it. Concerning this, I argued that attempting to misrepresent the question or concerns and trying to influence a certain outcome through bias is unproductive and leads to mistrust

in the press, even leading to frustration with the system and perhaps encouraging a change of vote for individuals.

As the Brexit proceedings continue under the premiership of Theresa May, much uncertainty remains. The cabinet seems hopelessly divided over a “hard” or “soft” Brexit option; Mrs. May has been accused of squandering the strong hand she inherited in 2016 in weak negotiations with the EU and its chief negotiator, Michel Barnier; the UK seems to be backing itself into a corner as EU demands are seemingly met more than the EU is willing to concede to the UK. Though the British people voted to leave, there is legitimate concern that Mrs. May, who supported Remain in the referendum, might be trying to impair Brexit. This particular sentiment is now heightened due to May introducing the Chequers proposal to Parliament; senior cabinet members, including the second Brexit Secretary in only a few months, have resigned in protest against May. Now, Conservatives are saying the embattled Prime Minister is likely to be challenged soon as some Tory MPs have openly called for a no-confidence vote against her, adding even more uncertainty to the situation. One thing should be clear, however: if history is indicator of the future, Britons will remind their government of their vote on June 23, 2016, 17.4 million strong, and pressure it to act on their sovereign proclamation.

## Bibliography

- Adams, Becket. "CNN's Amanpour berates Brexit leader, won't support assertions." *Washington Examiner*. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/cnns-amanpour-berates-brexit-leader-wont-support-assertions> June 30, 2016. 4:04 PM. Date accessed: November 2, 2018.
- BBC News. "EU referendum poll tracker." <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36271589> June 22, 2016. Date accessed: November 2, 2018.
- BBC News. "Euro Moments: Thatcher says 'no, no, no' to Europe." <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-27053536/euro-moments-thatcher-says-no-no-no-to-europe> May 19, 2014. Date accessed: October 21, 2018.
- Bloomberg. "Brexit Watch Indicators." Brexit Poll Tracker. <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2016-brexit-watch/> Last updated: June 24, 2016. 5:45 AM BST. Date accessed: November 2, 2018.
- Bukhari, Syed Mussawar Hussain. Bukhari, Syed Shahid Hussain. Roofi, Yasmin. "Brexit: A Challenge for United Kingdom and European Union." *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS)*. 2016. Vol. 36. No. 2. 665-674.
- Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College. "CSI Brexit 4: People's Stated Reasons for Voting Leave or Remain." <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CSI-Brexit-4-People%E2%80%99s-Stated-Reasons-for-Voting-Leave.pdf> April 24, 2018. Date accessed: October 22, 2018.
- Churchill, Winston. "United States of Europe" Speech. September 19, 1946. Zurich, Switzerland. *The International Churchill Society*. <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/united-states-of-europe/> Date accessed: September 8, 2018.
- Coleman, Clive. "Reality Check: How much UK law comes from the EU?" BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36473105> June 8, 2018. Date accessed: October 22, 2018.
- Eichengreen, Barry and Ritschl, Albrecht. "Understanding West German Economic Growth in the 1950s." *Working Papers No. 113/08*. Department of Economic History, London School of Economics.
- EUR-Lex: Access to European Law. "Own resources mechanism." *Summaries of EU Legislation*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:134011> Date accessed: October 21, 2018.
- Ewing, Keith. "Brexit and Parliamentary Sovereignty." *The Modern Law Review* July 2017. Vol. 80.



Issue 4. 711-726.

Dixon, Hayley. "Margaret Thatcher's famous Bruges speech was to have been much more critical before it was toned down." *The Telegraph*.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/17/britains-battle-eu-budget-rebate-margaret-thatcher-handbagged/> July 21, 2018. 12:01 AM. Date accessed: October 21, 2018.

Dunford, Daniel and Kirk, Ashley. "How right or wrong were the polls about the EU referendum?"

*The Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/24/eu-referendum-how-right-or-wrong-were-the-polls/> June 27, 2016. 1:00PM. Date accessed: November 2, 2018.

Gee, Graham. Young, Alison L. "Brexit: Regaining Sovereignty?" *European Public Law*. January 1, 2016. 131-147.

Goodwin, Matthew and Milazzo, Caitlin. "Taking back control? Investigating the role of immigration in the 2016 vote for Brexit." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. Vol 19. No. 3. 450-464. 2017.

Gordon, Michael. "The UK's Sovereignty Situation: Brexit, Bewilderment, and Beyond..." *King's Law Journal*. 2016. Vol. 27. No. 3. 333-343.

International Relations and Security Network. "French President Charles de Gaulle's Veto on British Membership of the EEC." January 14, 1963.

[https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125401/1168\\_DeGaulleVeto.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125401/1168_DeGaulleVeto.pdf) Date accessed: October 19, 2018.

Jay, Zoë. "Keeping rights at home: British conceptions of rights and compliance with the European Court of Human Rights." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. 2017. Vol. 19(4). 842-860.

Keeler, John T.S. "De Gaulle and Europe's Common Agricultural Policy: The Logic and Legacies of Nationalistic Integration." University of Washington. *French Politics and Society*. Vol. 8. No. 4. Fall 1990. 62-77.

Keighley, David and Jubb, Andrew. "The Brussels Broadcasting Corporation? How pro-Brexit views have been marginalised in the BBC's news coverage." *Civitas*. January 2018.

Kendrick, Maria. "A Question of Sovereignty: Tax and the Brexit Referendum." *King's Law Journal*. 2016. Vol. 27. No. 3. 366-374.

King, Sheridan. "Contemplating the Future of UK-EU Trade: Post-Brexit Options for a Trade Relationship Between the United Kingdom and the European Union." *Tulane Journal International and Comparative Law*. Winter 2017. Vol. 26. Issue 1. 147-161.

- Operation Portal, Refugee Situations. “Mediterranean Situation.” Sea and land arrivals monthly. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean?page=1&view=grid&Type%255B%255D%253E3&Search=%2523monthly%2523> Date accessed: October 25, 2018.
- Park, Jeanne. “Europe’s Migration Crisis.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/background/eurpes-migration-crisis> Last updated: September 23, 2015. Date accessed: October 25, 2018.
- Reyes, Rene. “Legislative Sovereignty, Executive Power, and Judicial Review. Comparative Insights from Brexit.” *Michigan Law Review*. May 2017. Vol. 115.
- Ringeisen-Biardeaud, Juliette. “Let’s take back control.’: Brexit and the debate on Sovereignty.” *French Journal of British Studies*. XXII-2, 2017.
- Roberts, Nesta. “Emphatic ‘No’ by de Gaulle.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1967/nov/28/eu.france> Tuesday, November 28, 1967. 11:51 EST. Date accessed: September 8, 2018.
- Thatcher, Margaret. Speech to Conservative Rally at Cheltenham. July 3, 1982. *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104989> Date accessed: October 20, 2018.
- Thatcher, Margaret. Speech to the College of Europe (“The Bruges Speech.”) *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332> September 20, 1988. Date accessed: October 21, 2018.
- Thatcher, Margaret. EEC Dublin Summit, 1979. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/17/britains-battle-eu-budget-rebate-margaret-thatcher-handbagged/> Date accessed: October 20, 2018.
- Wellings, Ben. Vines, Emma. “Populism and Sovereignty: The EU Act and the In-Out Referendum, 2010-2015.” *Parliamentary Affairs*. 2016. Vol. 69. 309-326.
- Wind, Marlene. “Why The British Conception Of Sovereignty Was The Main Reason For Brexit— And Why The British ‘Leave-Vote’ May End Up Saving Rather Than Undermining The EU.” *CSF-SSSUP Working Paper Series*. March 2017
- YouGov UK. “YouGov on the day poll: Remain 52%, Leave 48%.” <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/06/23/yougov-day-poll/> June 23, 2016. 10PM. Date accessed: November 2, 2018.

IT COULD NEVER LAST

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by Jeffrey M. Brandt  
November 20, 2018

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

APPROVED:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Capstone Adviser

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
MAIS Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date