CAN EUROPE SURVIVE BREXIT?

Dr. Rimantas Daujotas[1]

Introduction

This essay will address the topic of the future of the European Union (EU) after Brexit. In particular, this essay will analyze how the EU may change and develop when the United Kingdom (UK) departs the Union, what are the possible power shifts within the EU and their implications to the EU's defense and security.

The EU is still one of the biggest powers in the word with extensive military and trade capability[2]. Definitely, presence of the UK in the Union provided the EU with significant leverage and power globally[3]. Therefore, Brexit will most certainly have substantial material influence to the EU as a whole and it's future in international arena. Brexit will impact the internal relations between the remaining Member states and also the external relationships with other regional powers. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to analyze how the departure of the UK will impact the EU – will the EU will be weakened and be placed on the brink of survival or if Brexit will have a totally different effect – more cooperation and strength.

While taking into account that the EU is a Union of 27 Member States, which have their own national preferences, state-centrist approaches and different defense and security agendas[4], Brexit makes these issues even more significant.

The (neo)realist theory

With so many complex issues involved, Brexit and the EU's future may be analyzed through different international relations theories[5]. However, while this essay aims to address the various

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[1] Rimantas Daujotas is international disputes partner at Motieka & Audzevicius PLP in Vilnius, Lithuania. Rimantas has extensive experience in international arbitration and litigation disputes, in particular, ones arising under bilateral and multilateral investment treaties and high-value commercial agreements. Rimantas serves as a consultant or representative to company claimants and respondents as well as government claimants and respondents. Rimantas is advising global companies, foreign governments as well as international law firms. http://rdaujotas.com/en/

[2] Manners, Ian. "Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?" *JCMS: Journal of common market studies* 40.2 (2002): 235-258; Bretherton, Charlotte, and John Vogler. *The European Union as a global actor*. Psychology Press, 1999; Hyde-Price, Adrian. "'Normative'power Europe: a realist critique." *Journal of European public policy* 13.2 (2006): 217-234.

[3] Hill, Christopher, Michael Smith, and Sophie Vanhoonacker, eds. *International relations and the European Union*. Oxford University Press, 2017; Friman, H. Richard. *Politics of Leverage in International Relations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

[4] Koops, Joachim Alexander. *The European Union as an integrative power: assessing the EU's' effective multilateralism'with NATO and the United Nations*. Vol. 16. Asp/Vubpress/Upa, 2011.

[5] Oliver, Tim. "Theory and Brexit: can theoretical approaches help us understand Brexit?." *LSE Brexit* (2017); Jackson, Richard, Georg Sørensen, and Jørgen Møller. *Introduction to international relations: theories and approaches*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2019.

power shifts within the EU and it's security implications, this essay will take on the question of Brexit and the EU's future with realist and neorealist theories.

The realist and neorealist theories will be helpful to understand the power relations that will take place after Brexit. Realist theory provides a state-centric approach[6] and the neorealist theory[7] tends to focus on the military (economic, troops, nuclear weapons) and trade capabilities (networks of preferential trade agreements) of states. These attributes will have the most influence to the EU after Brexit. For that reason, the (neo)realist theory will be more explanatory than any other.

Brexit will influence the remaining EU Member states economically and may also influence the formation of new coalitions within the EU. From the realist perspective, the remaining EU Member states would act in calculated, rational ways to maximize their national interest[8]. Therefore, the basic axioms of neorealism – the distribution of power, polarity and national interest[9] will help to understand how the rest of the EU may look after Brexit.

First, as argued by neorealists, distribution of power within certain state system is one of the main attributes to understand how and why states will interact in their relationship with one another. Neorealist theories try to explain how the international system works and tries to predict possible global outcomes. According to Kenneth Waltz, a "system is composed of a structure and of interacting units"[10]. Therefore, change of power relations and variations thereof may explain the various patters that may follow.

The notion of distribution of power is of particular relevance in the Brexit and the EU debate. Most certainly, departure of one of the most powerful and influential members of the EU will cause changes in the distribution of power among the remaining EU powers.

Second, the other notion of neorealism is polarity. Neorealists often try to explain the distribution of power by comparing and weighing powerful states to the remaining states in the system[11]. Neorealists distinguish and analyze power relations between three types of polarity – unipolarity, bipolarity and multipolarity[12]. According to neorealists, unipolarity prevails when a single state in the system is markedly superior and relative to all other states[13].

The notion of polarity is also very relevant when analyzing the EU's state structure after Brexit. One of the main questions is whether the EU Member state system will eventually become bipolar

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[6] Morgenthau, Hans Joachim, Kenneth W. Thompson, and W. David Clinton. "Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace." (1985); Carr, Edward Hallett. *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: Reissued with a new preface from Michael Cox*. Springer, 2016.

[7] Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of international politics*. Waveland Press, 2010; Mearsheimer, John J., and Glenn Alterman. *The tragedy of great power politics*. WW Norton & Company, 2001.

[8] Oliver, Tim. "Theory and Brexit: can theoretical approaches help us understand Brexit?" *LSE Brexit* (2017).

[9] Buzan, Barry, et al. *The logic of anarchy: neorealism to structural realism*. Columbia University Press, 1993; Herz, John H. "Political ideas and political reality." *Western Political Quarterly* 3.2 (1950): 161-178.

[10] Waltz, Kenneth Neal. "Theory of international politics." (1979).

[11] Deutsch, Karl W., and J. David Singer. "Multipolar power systems and international stability." *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations* (1964): 390-406; Doyle, Michael W. "Liberalism and world politics." *The American political science review* (1986): 1151-1169.

[12] Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of international politics*. Waveland Press, 2010; Nexon, Daniel H., and Thomas Wright. "What's at stake in the American empire debate." *American Political Science Review* 101.2 (2007): 253-271.

[13] Wohlforth, William C., et al. "Testing balance-of-power theory in world history." *European Journal of International Relations* 13.2 (2007): 155-185; Mearsheimer, John J., and Glenn Alterman. *The tragedy of great power politics*. WW Norton & Company, 2001.

with the strongest states in the center, such as France and Germany, or it will become unipolar system with Germany alone taking the lead.

Eventually, another significant notion analyzed by neorealists is the national interest[14]. Naturally, realists and neorealists, emphasizing significant power structures, will look to the national interests of states with reference to their capability[15]. In this case, it important to take into account that the EU is not a traditional state, but rather a combination of sometimes very different national interests. The EU Member states differ deeply with respect to their national interests and their capability. Therefore, in order to ensure their national interests, weaker or less capable states may resort to forming alliances within the EU to off-balance the stronger states, such as Germany and France. Consistent with standard neorealist theory, "the great concentration of power in one state will force other states to make every effort to restore power"[16]. On the other hand, neorealist Waltz argued that alliances are ineffective in a state of bipolarity, because major state in any case has enough power to ignore the powers of its allies[17].

Therefore, while applying these concepts of neorealism, it is important to analyze how the power relations will actually evolve after Brexit in the EU – what sort of system may form and how the remaining Member states will try to balance the global powers, such as China, US and Russia.

Power shifts within the EU after Brexit

Before Brexit, the UK was one of the major global powers both globally and within the EU[18]. The UK was also a global foreign policy player who acted as intermediary between the U.S. and the EU[19]. The UK was also a major net contributor to the EU's budget and is also a permanent member of UN's Security Council.

Therefore, with departure of the UK, there will be new space and role to be filled with new leaders in the Union. Being the major economic power in the union[20] Germany is likely going to take more role in the EU's budget, while France, being strong militarily[21], may become the security and

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[14] Dueck, Colin. "Neoclassical realism and the national interest." *The Realism Reader* 272 (2014); Williams, Michael C. "What is the national interest? The neoconservative challenge in IR theory." *European Journal of International Relations* 11.3 (2005): 307-337.

[15] Ginsberg, Roy H. "Conceptualizing the European Union as an international actor: Narrowing the theoretical capability-expectations gap." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 37.3 (1999): 429-454; Kluth, Michael Friederich, and Jess Pilegaard. "Balancing beyond the horizon? Explaining aggregate EU naval military capability changes in a neo-realist perspective." *European Security* 20.1 (2011): 45-64.

[16] See Waltz, Kenneth N. "Evaluating theories." *American Political Science Review* 91.4 (1997): 913-917; See also Layne, Christopher. "The unipolar illusion: Why new great powers will rise." *International security* 17.4 (1993): 5-51.

[17] Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of international politics*. Waveland Press, 2010. Liska argues that it is impossible to speak of international relations without referring to alliances. See Liska, George. *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependance*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962.

[18] Morris, Justin. "How great is Britain? Power, responsibility and Britain's future global role." *The British journal of politics and international relations* 13.3 (2011): 326-347.

[19] Marsh, Steve, and John Baylis. "The Anglo-American "special relationship": the Lazarus of international relations." *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17.1 (2006): 173-211.

[20] Bulmer, Simon, and William E. Paterson. "Germany as the EU's reluctant hegemon? Of economic strength and political constraints." *Journal of European Public Policy* 20.10 (2013): 1387-1405.

[21] Salmon, Trevor C., and Alistair JK Shepherd. *Toward a European army: a military power in the making?* Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

foreign policy power in the EU. Thus, it may be argued that departure of the UK may increase the already dominant influence of Germany and France. As predicted by Mearsheimer, Germany is posed to become the dominant European state, because it will want to become the regional hegemon[22].

Even before Brexit, with a population of nearly 82 million, Germany is the largest Member state. Germany's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is well ahead of the other large states in the EU. It represents almost a third of the Eurozone area GDP. Germany's economic strength may even influence formation of a state of unipolarity, because Germany potentially has enough power to ignore the powers of other Member states[23].

Furthermore, it is important to consider that while the UK was still in the Union, it could have balanced Germany's power. In that regard, other weaker Member states, such as the Dutch and the Nordic states have also relied on the UK to advance their interests in the Union[24]. Thus, with departure of the UK, the middle-sized member states will not have enough power to oppose Germany and France. Therefore, it will be seen if Germany will try to impose its power upon the weaker states, risking further fractures in the Union or, conversely, will use its power enforce the principles of co-operation and consensus, strengthen the Eurozone and EU institutions, which will hold the Union together even stronger.

Considering the strength of both Germany and France, departure of the UK may also give effect to formation of bipolar system, or the so-called Franco-German axis[25]. Macron has already advanced the idea of a "European renaissance" and had put forward new reform ideas aimed at further integration of the Member states and stronger Union[26]. Macron and Merkel have also issued a joint initiative of a "conference on the future of Europe"[27].

As indicated by Waltz, bipolar systems are superior to multipolar systems because they are able to provide greater stability and thus greater security[28]. While considering a possible Franco-German axis, it may be argued that Franco-German power in the EU may reduce the number of conflicts and disputes between the remaining Member states. Franco-German lead may also enable the Union to operate more easily and effectively.

On the other hand, if there is no Franco-German alliance formed and Germany would be reluctant to take the lead role in a possible unipolar EU system, then a multipolar system could possibly

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[22] Mearsheimer, John J. "Back to the future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War." *International security* 15.1 (1990): 5-56.

[23] Hyde-Price, Adrian. "'Normative power Europe: a realist critique." *Journal of European public policy* 13.2 (2006): 217-234; Posen, Barry R. "European Union security and defense policy: response to unipolarity?" *Security studies* 15.2 (2006): 149-186.

[24] Josef Janning, Almut Möller. Untapped potential: How new alliances can strengthen the EU. Policy Brief. 21st June, 2019. European Council on Foreign Relations, ecfr.eu.

[25] Biscop, Sven. "All or nothing? The EU Global Strategy and defence policy after the Brexit." *Contemporary Security Policy* 37.3 (2016): 431-445; Taggart, Paul, et al. "Responses to Brexit: Elite Perceptions in Germany, France, Poland and Ireland." *Sussex European Institute. Accessed February* 27 (2017): 2019.

[26] Rym Momtaz. Macron calls for big EU changes in 'European Renaissance' French president sketches out ambitious vision ahead of election. 3/4/19, www.politico.eu

[27] Christina Goßner, Claire Stam and Philipp Grüll. Merkel and Macron show unity ahead of all-important EU summit. 30-06-2020, www.euractiv.de

[28] Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of international politics*. Waveland Press, 2010.

evolve. Multipolarity, as argued by Mearsheimer, would be "prone to instability"[29]. Therefore, it can be argued that for both Germany and France and for the Union as a whole, there is a need to either have Germany as a leader or a Franco-German axis for the Union to remain stable and unified in the future.

However, as far as internal Union matters are concerned, neorealist postulate that if there is a unipolar or bipolar system developed, smaller Member states will want to balance Franco-German power by forging new regional groupings and *ad hoc* coalitions to influence the Union's orientation[30]. That, however, considering their weak relative power to that of Franco-German power, smaller Member states may lack capability to do so.

Capability and national interests

Lesser capability of the weaker Member states and their national security concerns may play as incentive to take into account mutual considerations of security and acknowledge the need to have Franco-German power in respect of threats of other global powers.

Security and defense is a shared concern of all smaller and weaker Member states. With departure of the UK, which still is one of the main military actors in European continent with significant intelligence and diplomatic capabilities, the EU will need to collaborate more closely to ensure collective security.

It must be noted also that the UK's departure is happening at the time when the EU is already facing significant security challenges, such as Russian and Chinese influence[31]. The EU is already weak geopolitically and stands between the dominant hegemons of the 21st century: the U.S. and China[32]. In addition, the EU still does not have strong military capability and UK's departure weakens it even more. On the other hand, the UK has always challenged the idea mutual defence policy in the EU[33]. Therefore, the UK's departure may open ways for the remaining EU Member states to coordinate mutual security and defence policies more swiftly and effectively.

Although different EU Member states may have differences in internal Union policies and different national interests, however, their security and defense interests are mutual. Thus, from the realist perspective, the remaining EU member states would need to act in calculated, rational ways to maximize their security and defense interests while working together. In the realist view, as argued by Morgenthau, the most important manifestation of the balance of power is in the relationships

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[29] Mearsheimer, John J., and Glenn Alterman. *The tragedy of great power politics*. WW Norton & Company, 2001.

[30] Erik Brattberg, Kinga Brudzińska, Bernardo Pires De Lima. Contending European Views on a New Post-Brexit Balance, March 25, 2020, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, carnegieendowment.org.

[31] Van Ham, Peter. *The BRICS as an EU Security Challenge*. Clingendael Report, September, 2015; Sverdrup-Thygeson, Bjørnar. "The bear and the EU-China-US triangle: transatlantic and Russian influences on EU's "pivot to Asia"." *Asia Europe Journal* 15.2 (2017): 161-172.

[32] Mario Esteban and Miguel Otero-Iglesias along with Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova, Alice Ekman, Lucrezia Poggetti, Björn Jerdén, John Seaman, Tim Summers and Justyna Szczudlik. Europe in the Face of US-China Rivalry. A Report by the European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC). January 2020, www.ifri.org.

[33] Salmon, Trevor C., and Alistair JK Shepherd. *Toward a European army: a military power in the making?* Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003; Biscop, Sven. "All or nothing? The EU Global Strategy and defence policy after the Brexit." *Contemporary Security Policy* 37.3 (2016): 431-445; J-D. Giuliani, "Defence: Europe's awakening", European issues 474, Fondation Robert Schuman, May 2018.

between one nation or alliance and another alliance, because alliances are purposed to defend from the strong and this is the typical method to preserve balance[34].

In that regard, the EU's defense and security may even be strengthened by the departure of the UK. This, paradoxically, will increase the EU perception of the need to have stronger EU security and defense alliance in the weaker and smaller states, in particular, ones which relied on UK's support[35]. Manifestation of the latter is a push for a greater military and defence cooperation between the EU and its member states defence through a European Defence Action Plan[36], the joint defence fund[37] and the Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and Defence (PESCO)[38]. If all of these initiatives and plans are successful, then the EU, as a whole, may become one of the strongest military powers globally and a substantial arm of the NATO.

Conclusions

Therefore, considering the issues discussed above, it may be argued that Brexit may, paradoxically, strengthen, but not weaken the EU.

On the one hand, departure of the EU will cause substantial power shifts within the EU. Germany, in particular, with its economic power may take on the leadership and drive forward even greater mutuality and cooperation of the remaining EU Member states. The middle-sized and weaker remaining EU Member states will not have enough power to oppose Germany and France, which would eventually lead to more stability within the Union. A German-France axis may also help to ensure greater stability and thus greater security.

On the other hand, departure of the UK may also have significant benefits for the EU in the context of security and defense. With UK's opposition to mutual security policies gone, the remaining EU Member states may advance their plans for a deeper cooperation and maximize their security and defense interests. Even more, the UK's departure may give way for formation of one of the strongest military powers globally and balance the power of regional powers, such as U.S. and China.

Finally, it can be argued that Brexit may be the necessary shock for the EU, which will help the remaining Member states to realize the benefits in having an even stronger alliance, with further integration and less opposition to change.

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[34] Wright, Quincy. "The escalation of international conflicts." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 9.4 (1965): 434-449.
[35] Whitman, Richard G. "The UK and EU foreign, security and defence policy after Brexit: integrated, associated or detached?" *National Institute Economic Review* 238 (2016): R43-R50; Herolf, Gunilla, Bengt Sundelius, and Alyson JK Bailes. *The Nordic countries and the European security and defence policy*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
[36] Sweeney, Simon, Neil Winn, and Smith Simon. "EU security and defence cooperation in times of dissent: analysing PESCO, the European Defence Fund and the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) in the shadow of Brexit." *Defence Studies* (2020): 1-26.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Dunn, Jonathan. "The European Union's Permanent Structured Cooperation: Implications for Transatlantic Security." *Strategic Forum*. No. 302. National Defense University Press, 2020.

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