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Futures

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/futures

How Brexit affects EU external action: The UK's legacy in European international cooperation

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

EU external relations
 Development policy
 International cooperation
 Brexit
 Differentiated integration
 New-institutionalism
 Awkward states

ABSTRACT

What exactly Brexit means for British engagement in European external affairs and development cooperation, is highly unclear, while its potential impact is considerable. After the general election in the UK on 8 June 2017, uncertainty regarding the direction, process and timing of the Brexit negotiations and the risk of a disorderly separation have risen further. The government position of a ‘hard Brexit’ seems no longer to be carved in stone. Yet, given the expected – total or partial – withdrawal of a major EU member state, like any area of EU politics, also European development policy faces a number of challenges: short-term problems regarding existing legal obligations, looming budget shortfalls and the securing of business continuity as well as the longer-term realignment of EU development policy following the departure of the United Kingdom. There is also the problem of the UK's succession in international treaties and mixed agreements in which both the EU and the member states are partners, such as trade agreements and memberships of international organisations, global development financing and representation in multilateral forums or negotiations. By qualitative interpretative analysis, and tracing the leave-process, this article discusses possible scenarios and their consequences of Brexit for UK and EU cooperation with developing countries and their implications within the wider context of EU external action. The analysis builds on new-institutionalism and connects to theories of differentiated integration, framing Brexit as a phenomenon of regional *dis*-integration and contributing to the development of instruments for studying such phenomena. While, at this point of time, conclusions are speculative in nature, a strategic foresight would advise to protect development policy as far as possible from the trade-offs of the negotiation gamble and place common goals and values beyond dispute.

1. Introduction

In her letter to European Union (EU) Council President Tusk, British Prime Minister (PM) Theresa May stated that the United Kingdom (UK) “wants to make sure that Europe remains strong and prosperous and is capable of projecting its values, leading in the world, and defending itself from security threats” (UK Government, 2017a). Shortly before, on 27 March PM May had reassured staff at the Department for International Development (DfID) that Britain would not shrink from its international commitments. What precisely this means for British engagement in European external relations and international co-operation, is still unclear. Also, the Brexit White Paper presented by the British government in February failed to establish clarity regarding substantial issues, as did the paper on the “Great Repeal Bill” and the “European Union (Withdrawal) Bill” of 13 July 2017 itself (UK Government, 2017b; UK Parliament, 2017). Merely three weeks after handing over the notification of the British withdrawal from the Union to the European

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2017.07.002>

Received 8 May 2017; Received in revised form 3 July 2017; Accepted 11 July 2017

Available online 17 July 2017

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Council on 29 March and officially triggering the negotiations under Article 50 TEU, PM May called for a general election in Britain, held on June 8, 2017. The heightening of the tone, including accusations of Brussels trying to influence the elections, corroborates the suspicion that she did so mainly for party-political reasons, using the Brexit momentum to strengthen her position in UK politics – a rationale, that in the end, turned against her. The Conservative Party lost the majority in Parliament and forged an alliance with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) of Northern Ireland. Observers speculate how long Theresa May can withstand the pressure and stay as Prime Minister and leader of her party.

No policy field remains unaffected by Brexit, and the realm of EU external relations is certainly no exception. It will be hit directly by the loss of one of Europe's two military powers, its second economy and its third largest member state measured by population size. The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is bereaved of one its most resourceful and influential partners, substantially contributing to EU military and civilian missions. Also, EU development policy faces important challenges: short-term problems regarding existing legal obligations, looming budget shortfalls and the securing of business continuity as well as the longer-term realignment of EU development policy following the British departure. There is also the problem of the UK's succession in international treaties and mixed agreements in which both the EU and the member states are partners, such as trade agreements and memberships of international organisations, global development financing and representation in multilateral forums or negotiations.

Before engaging in strategic foresight on the likely impact of Brexit (introduction to this special issue), the first task is one of understanding and “making sense” of the process, the substance and the context. To do so the chosen approach is largely discursive, building on existing literature as well as on information available through official sources and the press. The analysis of this information needs to accommodate and account for several uncertainties linked to the direction of the upcoming negotiations. The starting point is constituted of the following three observations that stand out when examining the state of Brexit-affairs in EU external relations.

First, Brexit reduces the influence and shaping power of both sides, the UK and the EU. Currently, the issues of security, migration, citizens' rights of foreign residents and, above all, trade dominate the Brexit debate. The form and conditions for further involvement of the UK in EU external affairs have yet to be defined. Overall, EU-UK co-operation will become less structured, less predictable and more strongly subjugated to British national and trade interests. The weakening of Europe's posture and of the CFSP, of its diplomatic and military capacity as well as its economic power may result in a series of negative reciprocal effects for international security, development co-operation and multilateral processes.

Second, the external security agenda plays a pivotal role in the Brexit negotiations as well as in British politics, and has already been instrumentalized as a bargaining chip to achieve concessions from the EU. Concomitantly, the political forces that gained the upper hand in the UK during the Brexit referendum give rise to fears that a shift in political culture and a reduction in the commitment to the “spirit of sincere cooperation” and the significance of multilateral cooperation in British politics could come to pass. Even if the general elections on 8 June did in the end not strengthen the government's Brexit mandate and critics vocally oppose full withdrawal from the Union, Downing Street confirmed its intention to pursue a “hard” negotiation line vis-à-vis Brussels. Thus, which form the UK withdrawal will finally take is more unpredictable than ever.

Third, the centre piece of an EU-UK relationship is an agreement on trade in goods and services, and the effects of Brexit will clearly be felt in international commerce, between large trading powers as well as with developing and emerging economies, presenting these with uncertainties as well as specific challenges and problems. It may also empower them to weigh-in on the leave process, in as much as the situation presents opportunities to improve existing trade and partnership agreements, and to adopt innovative approaches to economic development and investment policies. Brexit and any new options that emerge from the departure could be viewed as a reform incentive for the EU to enhance the coherence of trade and investment policies with development cooperation as well as other related policy areas. Benefits from more effective co-operation at EU level could partially compensate for the loss of the UK.

Departing from these considerations the article will, in the next section, present the two-fold research approach of understanding and scenario-building. Based on these, the remaining sections will consecutively follow the leads of the negotiation process, the substantial issues and the wider political context to assess the likely impact on the EU's external policy dimension. While, at this point of time, conclusions remain highly speculative in nature, the analysis aims at contributing to developing the instruments for studying phenomena of regional disintegration.

2. Research approach

As much Brexit is uncharted terrain for the EU and UK politics, it is for research. Scholars do not have a toolkit readily available to analyse what is occurring directly in front of their eyes. Brexit is full of ‘unknowns’, and to develop foresight what it entails, it is necessary to analyse what the negotiations hinge upon, how they unfold, and what their key drivers are. To this end the research design builds on neo-institutionalist theories of politico-organisational change in complex governance systems (Hall, 2010; Lindblom, 1959; Olsen, 2007; Pierson, 2004). In such a perspective, transformation can occur as disruptive and critical shocks (*dis*-integration), incremental, path-dependent and adaptive change (“muddling-through”) or profound reform and re-orientation. To be able to anticipate how post-Brexit EU-UK relations, in particular in the external policy domain, will evolve and what they might look like, we therefore need to develop the instruments enabling a deeper understanding of the process, the substantial issues as well as the context in which to interpret actions and the official discourse of the EU and the UK government. Organisational analysis of how Brexit is prepared and executed, how administrations deal with it, which alternatives they consider and options they ponder, whether and in what ways it is factored into political as well as organisational decision-making, and finally which sectors, policies and activities are concerned, may be of critical importance to understand the process as well as the to predict the outcome (Henökl, 2015;

Henökl & Trondal, 2015). To gauge how Brexit affects European development cooperation, and thereby EU external affairs, international partnerships, regional integration policies and global governance more widely, the article discusses possible consequences of Brexit for UK-EU co-operation in the EU's relations with developing economies.

More precisely, the central research focus is to analyse how EU development cooperation policy, as an example of an area of mixed competences between member states and the EU level, where the European Commission (EC) has the double function as a donor in its own right as well as a coordinator of the member states' development cooperation (DC), will be affected by the trade-offs of the negotiation gamble, and where this leaves the EU's and the UK's commitment to common goals and values. Against the background of what is known thus far about the positions on both sides, this article engages in foresight on how a future of EU-UK relationship in foreign assistance policies might look like; and aims to draw up possible scenarios for such a post-Brexit EU-UK cooperation, following the three change patterns, outlined above: scenario 1: total rupture and no involvement at all (dis-integration); scenario 2: selective involvement in some initiatives and arrangements, e.g. trust funds, creation of a UK-EU aid coordination forum (muddling-through); and scenario 3: continuing a strong UK engagement via existing EU DC instruments (reformed partnership). These are, of course, 'ideal-types' of Brexit, and combinations and overlaps between them may occur.

To flesh out these scenarios, the analysis is informed by theories of differentiated integration (DI) and explores how these resonate with the findings in the subsections on the key-drivers of the Brexit-process, its substance and context. Since the 1990s, DI features prominently in contemporary research on European integration (Leuffen et al. 2013; Leruth & Lord, 2015; Schimmelfennig et al., 2015; Warleigh-Lack, 2002, 2015). However, whereas DI is interested in the conditions under which states stick to policies and decision-making reflecting various forms of differentiation in regional integration, there are limitations when addressing the question of leaving an entrenched governance system altogether (Adler-Nissen, Galpin, & Rosamond, 2017; Menon & Salter, 2016; Rosamond, 2016; Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2017; Vollaard 2014). Most recently, scholars tentatively defined "disintegration" as the "general mode of strategies under which a member state withdraws from participation in the process of European integration" (Leruth, Gänzle, & Trondal, 2017). The present study of Brexit puts the emphasis on the degree of differentiation with regard to several UK/EU dis-integration scenarios and their expected outcomes respectively. The "hard Brexit" scenario, which had been the working hypothesis at least until the June general elections in the UK, could be conceptualized as extreme case of DI, namely "undifferentiated dis-integration", whereby one partner of regional integration seeks to fully disintegrate from, i.e. to permanently opt-out of and definitively quit, virtually all structures of integration and to transfer power and competences from the regional (EU) level back to national government.

As such a radical transformative process unfolds, it affects both partners, the UK and the EU. While the disruptive change in the form of the permanent and total differentiation of the UK from the EU will complete and enshrine Britain's role as an "awkward partner" vis-à-vis European integration (Gänzle & Henökl, 2017; Murray & Brianson, 2017; Oliver, 2017; Smith, 2017; Stegmann McCallion & Brianson, 2017), it is not clear how this will impact the European Union. The concept of awkwardness was originally created by George (1998) in his analysis of the UK's overall relationship with the EU. In prolongation of the research on British awkwardness, the present article, mainly by qualitative interpretative analysis, aims at tracing the UK's leave-process, identifying key-drivers and summarizing its expected consequences in the case of EU cooperation and foreign assistance policies, according to the three ideal-type scenarios identified above.

3. The process: Brexit as "directed by Hitchcock"?¹

If indeed it had been "Hitchcock who directed Brexit", as Donald Tusk remarked in a humorous tweet, it would hardly have been directed without a plot – nor plotted without direction. One year past the UK-referendum and weeks after delivery of the notification, nothing indicates the strategy of a mastermind behind what is happening. With the goal and the course of negotiations in total obscurity, the EU has been forced to wait "until the dust in the UK settles" (Juncker, 2017) before being able to deal with the – everything but negligible task – of coping with and to organizing the leave process.² The departure adds volatility amidst a situation of global turbulence (Ansell et al., 2017; Burrows & Gnad, 2012). Since Theresa May's speech at Lancaster House on 17 January 2017, and confirmed with the passing of the Brexit Bill in Parliament on 14 March, it had at least been clear that the UK was intending to leave the single market and the customs union in the process and to negotiate a tailor-made agreement based on the UK's demands. With the June election, the "what kind of Brexit" question appears to be on the table again, not to mention how to prepare and execute it. At the date of writing, it is not foreseeable how long May can stay as PM and if the minority government supported by DUP will last, which in turn leaves a theoretical possibility of another change of direction as far as the Brexit negotiations are concerned.

According to Article 50 of the EU Treaty (TEU), an agreement between the EU and the UK has to be signed within two years from triggering the exit clause, i.e. by 31st March, 2019. If the negotiating period is not extended by unanimous vote of the member states in the Council, there will be less than two years available, just about 18 months as the divorce agreement needs to be ratified by the European Parliament and the parliaments of the 27 EU states (Renwick, 2017). The time to avoid a disorderly break-up without a contract will be even shorter given that substantial talks started only after the formation of a new government in London. It is unlikely that all points can be settled comprehensively and in a manner satisfactory to both sides in this timeframe. In the short term, the two-phased procedure suggested by the EC anticipates to focus on the core-issues of EU-UK relations, residents' rights and the Brexit-bill to

¹ According to President of the EU Council Donald Tusk. see: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/shortcuts/2017/apr/19/brexit-how-alfred-hitchcock-would-explain-britains-politics-donald-tusk-snap-election>.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/09/uk-shock-election-result-may-hamper-brexit-talks-eu-leaders-warn>.

reach a transitional agreement on Brexit. For the overwhelming majority of questions, as is standard practice with major negotiations, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Conflicts are bound to arise: whilst the UK wishes to already begin parallel trade talks with third-countries, Brussels regards this as taboo so long as the UK legally holds membership status. In view of these divergences and the intricacies of the matter, it is hard to predict how long it will take before an EU-UK trade agreement – as the core of the future relationship – is in place.³ The time horizon for a comprehensive settlement of open issues is assumed here to be between 5 and 10 years.

In the current minimum cooperation scenario, London announced that the country intends to continue working closely with the EU on security and defence matters, while it is determined to go it alone on almost everything else. Also, May's trigger-letter underlined the "deep and special partnership" the UK seeks to maintain after leaving the Union, and becoming its "closest friend and neighbour" (UK Government, 2017a). Increasingly, and in the EU context especially, foreign policy is closely linked to the whole array of transnational public policy, such as development cooperation, trade and investment policy, multilateral negotiation processes, ranging from security and crisis management, global economic governance, climate change to research and technology, education, health, gender and other sectoral policies – as is the case of the EU DC and the European neighbourhood policy (Henökl, 2018).

Discussions on whether and how strongly sustainable development should be coupled to security and migration policy are highly controversial. Evidently, the political framing of the transformations taking place in and around Europe are reinforcing the linkage between these topics. The effects can be seen in a step change regarding asylum and migration policy, in the securitisation of border management and the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), in the lowered ambitions for democracy promotion, and in the instrumentalisation of partner countries as outposts of a new European *realpolitik*. The EU-Turkey refugee deal is a current and strikingly obvious example of how lacking in credibility, vulnerable and ultimately dependent this strategy has left Europe.

3.1. "Go whistle" versus "the clock is ticking"

Although it will be difficult for Britain to escape the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the disintegration process, the UK government wants to avoid being "trapped" in EU law, and refuses any further entanglement in EU regulations and institutions. This complete differentiation scenario may at times be in contradiction with London's desire to continue co-operation with European partners on issues regarding foreign and security policy, and countering terrorism – an important topic in the UK especially after the attacks in London and Manchester. Regardless of Brexit, both the UK and EU face significant common threats from radicalization, violent extremism and organized crime. As cooperation in this area is mostly intergovernmental, the UK would be able to partake, although coordination will become more loose, less structured and, therefore, less predictable.

Being a "normative power" (Diez & Pace, 2011; Manners, 2002), for the EU there are close connections between foreign policy, external and internal security issues, intelligence, police and judicial cooperation as well as multilateral development co-operation. Inter-linkages exist in the area of humanitarian aid, when addressing the root causes of insecurity and migration or as regards strengthening the resilience of societies in third countries, but also in the areas of border protection and management, security sector reform, judicial assistance or police missions. Evidently, the EU and the UK will have to continue to cooperate in these matters after Brexit. From a pragmatic viewpoint, they are therefore well-advised not to treat the multilateral cooperation chapter as merely winding up a legacy, but instead to build a solid basis for constructive collaboration during the forthcoming negotiations.

The launch of the official Brexit negotiations coincides with a series of key political decisions; just after the French elections, the EU began talks on the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021–2027, including the reorganisation of DC instruments. Parallel to this, exploratory discussions have also begun on the future of EU relations with the countries of the African Caribbean and Pacific group (ACP) in view of the end of the Cotonou Agreement in 2020 and the legal implications for the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) (Keijzer & Bartels, 2017). Brexit is already casting a shadow over these processes. In addition to Europe's dwindling influence in the world, the weakening of the EU's market power, its foreign policy, humanitarian and military capacity and therefore its negotiating weight are also being felt negatively.

There is an immediate question facing the EU and its partners with regard to the legal continuity of the EU's 1191 bi- and multilateral international treaties, such as trade agreements, memberships of international organisations, accords on development and sectoral policies like aviation, energy, agriculture and fisheries or legally binding agreements on visa and human rights issues.⁴ For treaties only signed by the EU, it will be sufficient to notify third parties that from Brexit-day onwards there will be 27 instead of 28 states to which this treaty is applicable. More problematic are those areas where the EU does not have exclusive competence and therefore mixed agreements involving EU and the member states were concluded. However, territorial clauses confining the applicability of the agreements to the EU member states are included in most of these agreements.

The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties between States and International Organisations (VCLT) is generally considered as reflecting customary international law and a reference for settlement of questions on international treaties without specific denunciation or withdrawal clauses: "These exit provisions [...] authorise one party acting unilaterally or all parties acting collectively to end their obligations under an international agreement, but only when either a right of withdrawal may be implied from the nature of the treaty, or when the parties intended to admit to that possibility (Article 56.1). [...] This] 'allows for continuity (not succession) of the EU as a party to an international agreement when one of its member states withdraws from the EU' (Van der Loo & Blockmans

³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/11/jean-claude-juncker-doubts-eu-will-remain-united-brex-it-talks/>.

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/world/agreements/SimpleSearch.do>.

2016, w/o p.). If the EU respects the procedure according to Article 56.2 VCLT and issues a pre-notification 12 months ahead the UK leave-date, the EU itself does not have to withdraw from the agreement, and the territorial restriction to the EU-27 applies.

4. The substance: assets and liabilities

In the area of development cooperation, a realist scenario of UK policy strategy after Brexit has been characterized as being “in the UK’s best interests to set up new economic and political alliances beyond Europe [... whereby] the UK’s diplomacy and international cooperation would be as important as it is now. [...] However, trade would shape the way external policies, including aid, are implemented. In other words, the patterns of British aid allocation would be altered [... and] bilateral aid programmes focused on economic sectors and infrastructures, and framed under commercial agreements” (Olivié & Perez, 2017). This equally resonates from the Conservative Party’s for UK election manifesto, planning to “create a network of Her Majesty’s Trade Commissioners to head nine new regional overseas posts. These commissioners will lead export promotion, investment and trade policy overseas” (Conservative Party, 2017).

Another unknown concerns the UK’s shares in assets and liabilities in EU external relations, including infrastructure and equipment (such as EU Delegation buildings, vehicles etc.), the country’s involvement (with manpower, resources, knowledge and information) as well as reputational and ideational investment in the design, financing and roll-out of EU programmes. Complete (1) and partial (2) withdrawal scenarios equally signify the loss of access to the EU’s diplomatic and development network via the EU Delegations which may limit the UK’s outreach, influence and actorness. A full British drop-out directly affects the MFF post-2020 (and potentially also the present MFF where payments have not yet been disbursed) with the expected decline in the development cooperation budget of 14%, as well as contributions to the EU Trust Funds and to the external operations of the European Investment Bank (EIB). The UK is currently the EIB’s biggest investor, with 17% of EIB capital, and “Brexit is causing instability and uncertainty for this institution” (Price 2016: 505). UK participation to the EIB is a case in point for just how easy it is for multilateral cooperation to become collateral damage in the Brexit tussle: according to media reports, the UK government could follow the advice of the pro-Brexit association “Lawyers for Britain” and threaten to demand repayment of the British share of the capital of the European Investment Bank (EIB), 10.2 billion euros.⁵ This would naturally have a negative effect on the EIB’s external operations – with direct consequences for current programmes, project financing and the EU trust funds.

At the same time, by leaving EU development instruments also Britain risks reduced outreach and impact as a donor and norm entrepreneur (Lightfoot, Mawdsley, & Szent-Iványi, 2017). Price (2016: 505) predicts that “[t]he reorientation of aid from multi-lateral to bilateral channels threatens to diminish the UK’s position in global development as well as requiring a significant increase in administrative capacity and a long process of bureaucratic reform.” Both EU and UK face a tangible loss of expertise and negotiating clout, e.g., with regard to the future of the Cotonou-agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP). 41 of the 78 ACP members are Commonwealth countries and the UK is already chomping at the bit to swiftly conclude its own free trade agreements with these and other former colonies. Very tellingly, Whitehall officials in early 2017 discussed a plan to establish an “Empire 2.0” among a number of African states formerly under British rule.⁶ This is probably as unhelpful as the foolish war-talk over Gibraltar’s sovereignty by British politicians and it shows just how irrational the discussion has become.⁷ Similar examples are the threat that Britain could establish itself as a tax haven for foreign investments at the EU’s doorstep, intended to increase pressure on other EU member states⁸; or the idea to link the exchange of intelligence, security information and police data to the access to the single market, as hinted at in the UK’s notification letter to the EU Council (UK Government, 2017a).

Even if opinion is divided on the direction which globalisation ought to take as well as on burden sharing for maintaining peace, security and prosperity, there is at least agreement on the need for cooperation on these issues following the UK’s departure. From a pragmatic perspective, all sides should actively seek a constructive role in EU external action for the UK, despite all the wrangling over the divorce settlement, quotas and tariffs, in order to avoid dealing with the European development cooperation chapter as if we were simply winding up a legacy. One possible option to keep the UK involved in a scenario 2 (intermediary) or 3 (maximal engagement) type arrangement would be to turn the African Peace Facility (APF) into an independent off-budget instrument. Whereas it is unlikely that Britain would be willing to co-fund the European Development Fund (EDF), the APF-option could enable the UK to continue funding after leaving the EU, since the UK will most likely not sign up to become a contracting partner to a follow-up EU-ACP agreement. The UK sees advantages in concluding its own free-trade agreements with the members of this group. An alternative would be to look for a solution similar to the agreements with Norway and Switzerland, which both contribute to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. A further option would be to create an instrument along the lines of the EEA and Norway Grants scheme, where funds are provided to strengthen bilateral relations with 16 EU countries and reduce economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area. This independent instrument resourced and steered by Iceland, Liechtenstein and, most notably, Norway to back EU cohesion policies could be a model for continued UK engagement in EU DC.

⁵ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-european-union-brexit-martin-howe-david-davis-boris-johnson-article-50-a7625261.html>.

⁶ <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ministers-aim-to-build-empire-2-0-with-african-commonwealth-after-brexit-v9bs6f6z9>.

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/02/britain-and-eu-worse-off-without-brexit-deal-says-michael-fallon>.

⁸ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-eu-chancellor-philip-hammond-welt-am-sonntag-uk-tax-haven-europe-a7527961.html>.

DC funding (% of GNP)	EU member state
< 0.15%	Czech Republic; Greece; Hungary; Poland; Slovakia;
0.15% > 0.5%	Austria; Belgium; Ireland; Italy; Finland; France; Portugal; Slovenia; Spain
0.5% > 0.7%	The Netherlands
=/ > 0.7	Denmark; Germany; Luxemburg; Sweden; UK

Source: OECD Development Assistance Committee, 2016. Only takes account of EU countries that are OECD-DAC members (excluding Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Romania).

Fig. 1. Official Development Aid levels for EU and OECD-DAC members, 2016.

4.1. Development policy – a footnote to the Brexit dossier?

The UK has traditionally been a pioneer in the field of Official Development Aid (ODA) and in 2013 was the first G7 member to achieve the 0.7% goal (share of ODA in GDP) and secure this by law (Fig. 1). After being questioned by conservative MEPs, PM May defended such commitment on 21 April 2017.⁹ Whether or not this might change in the light of the current political climate remains yet to be seen. Given the contentious issues of citizens' rights for foreign residents, legal and financial liabilities as well transitional provisions and a longer-term framework for the future EU-UK relations, notably an agreement on trade in goods and services it is to be feared that development policy will be treated as a mere negotiating pawn. Altogether DC does currently not figure high on the British political agenda. The economic development strategy presented by the Department for International Development (DfID) in January 2017 appears to be an attempt to justify the continued existence of the ministry after Brexit (UK Government, 2017d). The strategy proposes a new approach to fighting poverty with a stronger weighting for the promotion of private sector growth and employment in developing countries. Following a statutory amendment in the House of Commons, DfID is set to invest some 7.5 billion euros in African and South-East Asian companies via 'CDC Group', its development financing instrument (DFI).¹⁰

With a total annual ODA budget of 8 billion pounds (approx. 9.4 billion euros), the UK is responsible for ca. 15% of European DC funding. The contribution to the European Development Fund (EDF) in particular stands at a high level, with 4.48 billion euros for the funding period 2014–2020. At 14.7% of the total amount of the 11th EDF, it is higher than the contribution of the UK to the overall budget of the Union, at 11.7% (2013). The total amount of EU-DC payments from London amounts to around 1.5 billion euros per year. Although DfID gave a positive assessment to European DC in its November 2016 Multilateral Development Review, the government is looking for options to move some of these funds to other channels in the scope of multilateral co-operation programmes, such as the World Bank, the UN system, GAVI, Global Fund or the Commonwealth Secretariat (UK Government, 2017c). DfID is a fully-fledged ministry with directly delegated mandate from the Parliament, independent from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Nevertheless, central steering in the name of national interest and overarching governmental policy priorities cannot be ruled out in the UK case: According to a 'Command Paper' by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer presented to Parliament in November 2015, the aid policy of the future should undergo a 'geographic re-focus' and adopt a 'cross-Government approach', with more aid administered by other Government Departments to serve four strategic priorities, namely security, resilience, economic growth and extreme poverty (Henökl, 2016).¹¹

Currently debates in the UK indicate that the country intends to focus on co-operation with Commonwealth nations in the future, even though commerce with these nations represent only 9% of UK foreign trade.¹² 42 of the 53 Commonwealth states are also part of the ACP partnership, representing the majority of this group. The existing Cotonou Agreement with the ACP countries ends in 2020 and the future of this cooperation format is unclear. It is currently unlikely that the UK will participate in a new EU-ACP partnership, which serves to further weaken the position of the EU in the negotiation of a new agreement.

Statements by UK government officials and the reappointment of Development Minister Priti Patel – who is very critical of EU DC and even called for the abolition of DfID prior to taking office – indicate that post-Brexit DC and UK foreign policy as a whole will be more directly subjugated to trade, investment and security interests (Lightfoot et al., 2017).¹³ According to the current UK doctrine, the opening of markets and liberalisation of trade are seen as the best path to economic development (Lightfoot et al., 2017, p. 5; The Economist, 2017; UK Government, 2017d).¹⁴ However, there is still dispute as to whether full trade liberalisation, propagated by leading Conservative politicians such as Trade Minister Liam Fox, is the right approach for all developing countries. It is suspected that other hidden agendas could play a role in this radically liberal approach. For example, Langan (2016) reveals the interests of the agricultural industry and finance lobby with regard to this point: these two economically and politically highly influential players use the National Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (NAFSN) to facilitate conditions for private foreign investors and their property

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/21/uk-aid-pledge-remains-and-will-remain-says-theresa-may>.

¹⁰ <http://www.cdcgroup.com/Who-we-are/Key-Facts/>.

¹¹ H.M. Treasury and Department for International Development (2015). UK aid: Tackling global challenges in the national interest, UK Chancellor the Exchequer, 23 November, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478834/ODA_strategy_final_web_0905.pdf.

¹² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eu-brexit-commonwealth-free-trade-meeting-2018-uk-london-chair-a7625791.html>.

¹³ See also: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/oct/25/priti-patel-warns-aid-organisations-must-provide-value-for-money-or-face-cuts-development-secretary-post-brexit>.

¹⁴ <http://www.economist.com/node/21716101>.

rights. Researchers, NGOs and the press openly refer to the strategies applied to represent the financial interests of investors in some African states as “land-grabbing” (European Parliament 2015; Oram, 2014).

UK development funding has already incurred a direct loss through the fall in Sterling, which has lost about 14% of its value against the US Dollar (US\$) and the Euro since the Brexit vote in June 2016, affecting the purchasing power of British development funds for recipients in third countries. In 2016 the value of UK ODA fell in US\$ terms, because of the loss of value of the Sterling against other currencies. As a matter of fact, the depreciation “has caused problems for DfID, because commitments and expenses are often fixed in foreign currency, such as in the case of the UK contributions to the EU development funds. For this reason, these have been more expensive in pound terms” (Maxwell, 2015). In the medium term, there is the question whether and how the UK could continue to contribute financially to the EU DC after the end of the current funding period in 2020. At present, the likelihood of this happening is not great, as Downing Street is resolutely striving to uncouple and disentangle British and European financial interests (Price, 2016). As a consequence of the increasing budgetary pressure on the UK treasury, it is possible that London will offset its contribution to EU DC against the purported exit bill of 60 to 100 billion euros.¹⁵ For the time being, UK assets and liabilities are being determined but it is clear that this is a highly contentious matter. Just before the adoption of the EU’s official Brexit-negotiation guidelines by the European Council Meeting on 29 April the EU’s position has been “that an orderly withdrawal requires settling the financial obligations undertaken before the withdrawal date”.¹⁶

5. The political context

For making sense of how the UK departure affects EU external relations, the political context in which to interpret actions and discourse of EU and UK governments is of importance, to gauge how Brexit intersects with political and socio-economic circumstances in Britain, the EU and internationally. As the EU shows unity and has adopted a firm line for the negotiations on 29 April 2017, it increasingly looks as if the UK has difficulties to “get its act together”. Ultimately, Brexit is going to turn into a tough test of resilience for both Britain and the Union. Obviously, the UK withdrawal is very untimely, coming as it does in the middle of considerable turmoil, causing a situation which could hardly be trickier for the EU. European unity is being challenged both internally and externally, and the legitimacy of the EU is being fundamentally questioned. Key driver for this sentiment is that many citizens believe that the Union has failed to keep its core pledges. As the need for reform can no longer be ignored, national governments will now have to decide on the options for the future of the EU, recently outlined in a Commission White Paper presented by Jean-Claude Juncker on 15 March 2017 (European Commission, 2017). Even if the perspective of a multi-speed Union or an “ever more differentiated Europe” (Leruth, 2017) is the most likely outcome, it is not clear what such a variable geometry would mean for EU external action. Current moves towards a full European Defence Union equally point to the option of a more differentiated EU foreign and security policy with flexible opt-out or opt-in arrangements. A maximalist scenario would mean close association of the UK in defence, security and external affairs. The likelihood of Brexit scenarios 1 (minimalist) or 2 (intermediary), however, would lead us to expect this new relationship to be largely unstructured and primarily interest driven, loosely coordinated on a case-by-case basis. The UK would emphasize the security relationships with its long-standing partners mainly via NATO, with possible *ad hoc* participation in EU security missions. An alternative could be to sign a cooperation agreement with the UK on civilian crisis management, along the lines of the agreements between the EU and the US, Chile and Australia as well as other states (Murray and Brianson, 2017). Whether or not included in a post-Brexit EU-UK partnership agreement, Britain certainly has some leeway to negotiate the conditions for participation in EU military and civilian crisis management missions under the CFSP.

5.1. Shrinking or revitalized power Europe?

In security terms, the EU is a minor actor, remaining largely a spectator at the margins of international high politics, whereas the UK’s posture still harbours the residuals of a great power attitude. On the occasion of her visit to US President Donald Trump in January 2017, which was the first of a foreign Head of State after his inauguration, PM May announced that “together, the US and the UK will lead the world again”.¹⁷ Even though he has in the meantime expressed himself differently about the EU, in the early days of his Presidency Trump very openly voiced his ambivalence towards European integration at several occasions and publicly heralded Brexit as a “great thing”.¹⁸ As a consequence, a post-Brexit EU cannot exclusively rely on the traditional transatlantic ties and needs to aim at strategic independence, with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel giving priority to an emerging integrated security governance space in Europe.

The EU as international actor that has frequently been described as a “civilian power”, “ethical power” or a “normative power” (Aggestam, 2008; Manners, 2006; Stavridis, 2001). EU external relations extend far beyond foreign, security and defence policy, and encompass a wider variety of areas including development cooperation, neighbourhood policy, trade, environment, energy, immigration and asylum policy, border management, police and justice policies are all currently part of EU external action. Virtually, in all fields of transnational public policy the UK’s pull-out from the “European diplomatic space” will be felt and will have to be dealt

¹⁵ UK tax burden will soar to highest level in 30 years’ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/feb/07/ifs-warns-steep-cuts-tax-rises-40bn-black-hole-uk>; see also: HMS Treasury 2017; Latest figures reported in Financial Times, 4 May 2017.

¹⁶ ‘EU Non-Paper on key elements likely to feature in the draft negotiating directives’, retrieved from: <http://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-wants-uk-to-pay-brexits-costs-in-euros/> [10 06 2017].

¹⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/25/theresa-may-america-britain-will-lead-together-brexit-election/>.

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/15/trumps-first-uk-post-election-interview-brexit-a-great-thing>.

with (Henökl, 2014).

While the negotiations of a trade agreement between the UK and the EU will take the centre stage of attention, the form and degree of cooperation in EU foreign and defence policy as well as international development cooperation clearly play a subordinate. Worse, judging from a number of political statements it is to be feared that the external domain is used as a bargaining chip in order to put pressure on the EU member states. This has transpired from the rather blunt threat in May's farewell letter conditioning the exchange of police and intelligence data on access to the EU's single market.

Europe's "market power" (Damro, 2012) and thereby its soft and normative power are directly affected. The budget-hole of roughly 10–11 billion euros will be felt by net contributors as well as by net beneficiaries, even if it is at this point of time still uncertain how exactly the decline will be dealt with.¹⁹ The UK leaving also challenges the EU's position as the world's leading donor. Under the total disintegration scenario (1), European development funding may decrease by up to 3% and the EU could lose between 10 and 13% of its world aid share. According to a recent impact study, the EU's engagement in its neighbourhood will be hit by Brexit with a cut of up to 4% (Olivíé & Perez, 2017).

5.2. Consequences for international trade and impact on developing countries

In the scope of the World Trade Organization (WTO), of which the UK would be a simple member following scenario 1 type of EU withdrawal, there are clear regulations binding the country in its dealings with other trading partners. Favoured trading conditions afforded to one party must also be granted to all others, with exceptions for developing countries, regional free-trade areas and customs unions. Under WTO rules, a privilege granted by one party only extends to other states who reciprocate that privilege, while in a multilateral reciprocal relationship the same preference would be extended to the group that negotiated a particular privilege. The divorce agreement to be negotiated between the EU and UK could limit the leeway available to London when offering trade preferences – with uncertain consequences for developing economies. In addition, such WTO renegotiations are highly complex and involve a large number of other actors. The requirement for unanimity of all 164 WTO members could result in other positions and claims being put on the table, which would entail a long drawn out process.

It is therefore important for the UK to gain the support of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and work towards achieving a consensus. Following withdrawal, agreements under community law will lose their validity for the UK. For treaties only signed by the EU, it will be sufficient to notify third parties that from Brexit-day onwards there will be 27 instead of 28 states to which this treaty is applicable. So, while the LDCs will continue to enjoy preferential access to the European single market, this will have to be regulated for trade with Britain, with competition for the "best deals" and the risk of a new era of reciprocal trade concessions cannot be ruled out. The departure from the customs union in scenario 1 also affects legal certainty in trade with other developing countries and places the UK in the position of requiring new bilateral agreements to be signed with third-countries after withdrawal. The necessary negotiation of such agreements and their implementation would themselves represent a major administrative burden for the partner countries. One factor of uncertainty is therefore whether the UK will at least temporarily adopt the EU framework or look to achieve its own – which would create non-tariff trade barriers for developing countries. Regional integration, for instance in West Africa, could suffer from such bilateral negotiations and the priority expected to be given to the Commonwealth nations. There is also the fact that British imports from developing countries are relatively low, at around 39 billion euros a year, compared to total imports to the UK, at around 641 billion euros. There is a real danger here that development interests could lose out against those of companies and consumers and certainly negotiating a free trade agreement with the US or other powerful economies will be afforded considerably more attention and resources.²⁰ The example of EU-US negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which at present are frozen, teaches how time consuming, demanding and controversial such a process is likely to become (Siles-Brügge & DeVillie, 2017).

Under scenario 2 (intermediary) and 3 (maximalist engagement), Brexit-opportunities include the possibility that the UK could lead the way to the next generation of trade deals, introducing a new, generous preference scheme for all LDCs (or a newly-defined, expanded LDC group), possibly more balanced than the "everything but arms" approach of the EU and therefore one that EU DC could learn from. The swift drafting of adequate rules of origin for products from developing countries and the complex terms regarding value chains is particularly significant here. A similar question concerns the UK's approach to product standards, particularly phyto-sanitary standards. If a new framework is established, third-countries could face the difficulty of having to adjust to two different sets of rules for exporting to Europe, representing a significant additional hurdle for these states, having already invested heavily in building capacity to respect EU regulations and fulfil technical requirements. In the medium term, the UK is to continue applying the EU laws in a "Great Repeal Bill" until separate British regulations can be drawn up (UK Parliament).

In scenario 1 (undifferentiated disintegration), new regulations will also be required for EPAs. In addition to the question of validity and applicability of the agreements, the unilateral withdrawal of a EU member state also gives rise to very specific problems, particularly as regards the import of agricultural produce: for example, how should the scheduled concessions in the form of import quotas be treated where the withdrawal of the UK means that approximately 15% of goods destined for that country no longer have a market. These product-specific quotas have to be renegotiated for all countries and each of the concessions. The question of whether the remaining EU 27 simply "inherit" the concession certificates under the common trade policy of the former EU 28 on a one-to-one

¹⁹ <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7886/CBP-7886.pdf>.

²⁰ See data on the EU-UK-US trade volume: [http://bruegel.org/2017/01/trade-flows-between-the-us-uk-and-eu27-what-goes-where/?utm_content=buffera4bd1&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer+\(bruegel\)](http://bruegel.org/2017/01/trade-flows-between-the-us-uk-and-eu27-what-goes-where/?utm_content=buffera4bd1&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer+(bruegel)).

basis or call for partition with the UK is also significant with regard to imports from Commonwealth states: major exports for these include tea and cut flowers (Kenya) and the textile sector (Bangladesh). Belize, Mauritius, Fiji, Gambia and Sri Lanka are also all strongly dependent on the British market.

6. Conclusions: the worst of two worlds?

Brexit – as the permanent and, depending on scenario, more or less differentiated dis-integration of the UK vis-à-vis Europe – will cement Britain's role of an “awkward partner”, a concept that described the UK's reluctance to be part of European integration ever since its beginning, when Britain joined the European Economic Community in 1973 (and voted to remain in the EEC in 1975). After some 40 years of ambiguous relations between the island nation and “the continent”, Brexit is the most obvious case of regional awkwardness in a long history of strained relations between London and Brussels. Never before has a EU member state voted to leave the club; never before has a member state obliged its partners to grapple with what complete or partial differentiation and even secession from the EU should mean for the EU's single market, and other instances of European integration, such as the freedom of movement or its external relations. Among these policy areas, development cooperation takes an important role as an instrument of soft power, to build and maintain global networks and to secure access and influence.

Where do the above discussions leave our scenarios? Given the current state of negotiations and the hardening of positions on both sides, a scenario 3 Brexit with strong and continued UK engagement in EU external and development policies can at present be ruled out. As it stands, scenario 2, a partial and differentiated involvement of the UK seems more likely after EU-27 displayed joint resolve and agreed on a tough line of negotiations that are intended to prevent cherry-picking on the side of the UK and send a clear signal for any potential future exit candidates. Clearly, under scenario 1 (dis-integration), the effect of Brexit, if and when it happens, would be reform to strengthen European unity and integration to wither off the current crisis. Most likely, this could occur by allowing for more flexibility facilitating a more differentiated Union to avoid further disintegration of Europe. After the UK's departure and a reinvigorated Franco-German leadership, also discussions about a political and social union are back on the agenda to resuscitate EU integration, including differentiated governance structures for security and defence, Schengen and the Eurozone, including a progressive alignment of fiscal policies.

In the areas of external relations and development policy, Brexit impact will be very tangible and confront the remaining member states which considerable additional challenges and resource gaps. The EU as a global actor is weakened by the symbolic and material losses incurred. Simultaneously, also the UK is likely to suffer from its liminality as well as decreasing international influence and shaping power on EU policies. Beyond the exit-bill there will be a political price to pay in terms of participation, coordination, agenda-setting, social capital or “network power” (Hafner-Burton et al., 2009), and outreach. Furthermore, lowered predictability and increasing uncertainty will be felt – by Europe, Britain as well as their international partners. To manage the awkwardness of its new role as an EU outsider, the UK could adopt a middle-power strategy, using multilateral cooperation and development aid to secure influence and outreach. Britain may try to exploit its liminal position for offshore balancing and to promote its interest through targeted material or idealational investment in collaboration on specific policies with selected partners.

Setting a precedent of sorts, Brexit, so far, may appear to be a negative example of how to prepare, negotiate and implement a process of regional dis-integration by an individual partner. It confirms and congeals Britain's role as an ever more awkward partner of European integration, and will most likely serve as a deterrent for other potential candidates. Still, in several member states, Euroscepticism is a force that fundamentally threatens the EU. In parallel, Brexit has an effect of re-Europeanization of domestic politics, making the EU and its deficiencies a salient topic again. As a remedy for a crisis-ridden EU, the work on “a social pillar” has become a central concern for policy-makers in Brussels. Putting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, social justice and the equitable distribution of opportunities at the heart of a common vision for Europe, internally as well as externally in dealing with its partner countries, is precisely in the interests of those member states in which scepticism is most pronounced.

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