What's Taking so Long? *The Real Dispute over Brexit*

Ostensibly Indifferent: The E.U.'s Take on Brexit

By Avinash Sholevar, President, 8/24/2019

David Cameron, the now-ridiculed coalition leader of the British government when Brexit was announced, stated "We have the character of an island nation – independent, forthright, passionate in defense of our sovereignty." (McDonald)

And since then, these characteristics summarize what the British government has been fighting for. Mr. Cameron, among other reasons, announced Brexit as a means to tighten borders for the United Kingdom as refugees flock to the rest of Europe and to strengthen the British national identity.

Yet, as attention remains on whether or not the House of Commons will deliver a 'deal Brexit' or 'no-deal Brexit,' the European Union seemingly waits in near-indifference over the vote. Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, recently remarked "We are prepared for any outcome, we can say that, even if we do not get an agreement. But at all events I will make an effort to find solutions - up until the last day of negotiations." (Reuters)

Although Merkel preaches indifference with the rest of the European Union, the reality shows that the 27 other members of the European Union want the United Kingdom to remain a member.

One of the most contentious points in the Brexit deal concerns the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. Currently, there is free trade between them, as Northern Ireland and Ireland are part of the European Union. Yet, a term of former Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal was a 'customs border' between them, requiring all commuters and travelers between the nations to go through customs.

This extra barrier could delay trade and commuters attempting to travel into the United Kingdom, costing it millions of pounds and thousands of jobs.

Within the United Kingdom, this term of May's no-deal deal is causing even more turmoil. Northern Ireland, the recipient of many of these commuters, may stay in the European Union in order to continue to benefit from open borders while England, Wales, and Scotland leave, effectively severing its ties to the United Kingdom. Further, Wales, an agricultural powerhouse, struggles to voice its concerns over agricultural exports and the lack of a free trade agreement.

As a "no-deal" Brexit looks more and more likely, the European Union, despite clamoring for a deal, seems to be making it abundantly clear that they are willing to break up the United Kingdom in order to keep at least some of it as member states. Ideally, by threatening to break up the U.K., the member states are essentially giving them a clear referendum on where the union

stands. They are giving them a choice whether to dismantle the kingdom and leave or to stay in the E.U., and stay united. Under all consideration, that is not much of a choice.

Former E.U. President Donald Tusk said there was “special place in hell [for] those who promoted Brexit without even a sketch of a plan of how to carry it out safely.” In response, Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's point man, tweeted: "Well, I doubt Lucifer would welcome them, as after what they did to Britain, they would even manage to divide hell."

Those are not the words of a neutral body.

What the U.K. sees in Brexit
By Jake Singer, former Head of Outreach, 8/24/2019

Brexit. When one hears this now-ubiquitous term, topics such as trade, borders, security, and immigration come to mind. There are a multitude of points of view on the matter; even among those in the United Kingdom, the reasons for leaving the European Union vary significantly.

On June 23, 2016, Theresa May called for a popular vote on the topic of Brexit. The response was close: 51.9% of people had voted to leave the European Union. Voter turnout was 71.8%, with more than 30 million people voting. With this tight vote began the long, drawn out debate over leaving the European Union (Wheeler, Brian, Paul Seddon and Richard Morris).

As of now, the biggest issue with Brexit is that, within the United Kingdom, different areas have different feelings regarding the choice to leave. Wales has declared their support for leaving the European Union (E.U.), as has Britain, but both Scotland and Northern Ireland have stated countless times that they want to remain. This poses an issue because Britain wants to leave the EU, but there is a possibility that the United Kingdom splits up in doing so.
There have been conversations taking place indicating that Northern Ireland would remain a part of the United Kingdom. The country of Ireland, with which it shares a border, would stay a part of the EU. Boris Johnson's plan would create a customs border between the two Irish countries. The problem is, critics say that this will “reopen” wounds long scabbed over. The issue of a border between these countries has been heavily debated for a very long time, and at one point, was in effect. In 1998, tensions ended as the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland was dismantled. At the end of the day, there are many possible negative implications if the UK were to leave the EU (Amadeo).

There are multiple factors constituting the UK’s desire to leave the EU, the main two being migration and trade. Much like the United States, the United Kingdom has attacked the ease of intra-EU travel for some time. There has been an unexpectedly high level of migration throughout the EU, which affects jobs, housing, and the ideological makeup of the countries.

Many blue collar workers have started to lean toward Britain's independent party because they feel threatened by the "right-wingers" who believe that immigrants are coming in to their country and are competing with them for jobs (Boyle). Any citizen of a country in the EU can move to and work in the UK without needing a work visa. Some would say this is an issue because jobs are being taken by those who are coming to the various countries to work, while the original citizens of these countries stay unemployed. On the other hand, the workforce is being filled with more qualified an educated employees, even if they are from other countries.

In addition, policy is in the making for immigrant workers to receive welfare benefits from the UK (Beckerman), which further complicates the issue. Some believe that immigrant workers should receive welfare benefits because they work just as hard as any other person, but others believe they shouldn't because they were not born in that country, and therefore the migrant workers are taking away from those who were 'there first.'
The other reason for the UK to leave the EU has become more prevalent recently with the replacement of Theresa May with Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Boris has repeatedly advocated to leave the EU due to trade restrictions. Many UK citizens believe that if the UK were to leave the EU, they would be able to strike trade deals with nations outside of the EU, and away from E.U. regulations (Hutton). They believe this will boost Britain as a market, benefit the economy, and lead to less government expenditure in GDP. This reasoning is relatively sound, but at the same time, the E.U. already has strong trade agreements with the from the United States to China. Leaving the E.U. could allow the UK to make deals with smaller countries, but could this pose issues with countries that already have deals with the E.U.?

At the moment, the U.K. does not have any individual trade agreements with other countries. If the U.K. leaves the EU, they would be forced to negotiate new trade agreements with other nations individually. At the end of the day, they hope to have the same agreements that the European Union has with the various countries around the world, just separate from the E.U.

Bibliography

(1)
Amadeo, Kimberly. “Brexit Consequences for the U.K., the EU, and the United States” The Balance. The Balance, August 5, 2019. https://www.thebalance.com/brexit-consequences-4062999.

Boffey, Daniel. “Boris Johnson to Head to Paris and Berlin in Bid to Break Brexit Deadlock.” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, August 16, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/aug/16/germany-will-urge-eu-allies-to-hold-firm-on-no-deal-brexit.

“Donald Tusk: Special Place in Hell for Brexiteers without a Plan.” BBC News. BBC, February 6, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-47143135.

McDonald, Karl. “David Cameron's Bloomberg Speech in Full, Six Years on – What He Said as He Announced the Brexit Referendum.” inews.co.uk, January 23, 2019. https://inews.co.uk/news/brexit/david-cameron-bloomberg-speech-full-brexit-eu-referendum-date-six-years/.

“Merkel: We're Prepared for Any Brexit Outcome.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, August 18, 2019. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-britain-germany-merkel/merkel-were-prepared-for-any-brexit-outcome-idUSKCN1V80GI.

(2)
Boyle, Catherine. "Just What Is the UK's Problem with Europe?" CNBC. May 27, 2015. Accessed August 19, 2019. https://www.cnbc.com/2015/05/27/why-would-the-uk-want-to-leave-the-eu.html.

Brian Wheeler & Paul Seddon & Richard Morris. "Brexit: All You Need to Know about the UK Leaving the EU." BBC News. May 10, 2019. Accessed August 19, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887.

Beckerman, Charlie. "Why Britain Wants To Leave The EU." Bustle. June 12, 2019. Accessed August 19, 2019. https://www.bustle.com/articles/168688-why-does-britain-want-to-leave-the-eu-understanding-the-brexit-beef.

Hutton, Robert. "The Roots of Brexit." Bloomberg.com. March 20, 2019. Accessed August 19, 2019. https://www.bloomberg.com/quicktake/will-uk-leave-eu.

Brunsden, Jim. "Brexit Timeline: Key Dates in the UK's Divorce from the EU." Financial Times. June 26, 2019. Accessed August 19, 2019. https://www.ft.com/content/64e7f218-4ad4-11e7-919a-1e14ce4af89b.

Amadeo, Kimberly. "New PM Boris Johnson Promised Brexit by October 31, No Matter What." The Balance. August 05, 2019. Accessed August 20, 2019. https://www.thebalance.com/brexit-consequences-4062999.