

The Irish Border Issue of Brexit

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Contents:

Introduction	4
The Road to Brexit	6
The History of the Northern Irish “Troubles” and the Peace Process.....	16
Problems and Consequences Brexit has Created in Northern Ireland	23
Conclusion.....	33

Illustrations:

Figure 1. *EU Referendum Results*. “Results,” EU Referendum Results, accessed November 11, 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results. 10

Figure 2. *Leave Voting by Socio-Demographic Characteristics*. Source: ECMS Pre-Referendum Survey, June 2016. Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley, *Brexit*, 155..... 12

Introduction

The United Kingdom only had three national referendums during its history, from which two were concerning membership with the European Union. The United Kingdom joined the European Union – or named the European Economic Community (EEC) at that time – in 1973. The first-ever national referendum of the country was two years later, in 1975, held on continued membership with the Community, which was supported by the whopping two-third of the pollsters with a 64 per cent turnout rate. In 1975 it was perfectly clear that the people of the United Kingdom wanted to stay inside the EEC.

However, nearly thirty years later, this strong commitment to Europe has changed. In 2016 the country was almost equally divided into two parts: into those who believed the European Union was a major, irreplaceable advantage for the United Kingdom, and into those who believed in the direct contrast. It was even entirely conceivable that the division that was created by the preceding referendum campaign would be one of the major sources of problems. However, the negative aftermath of Brexit was caused by an entirely separate factor, strictly speaking, by the unique situation in Northern Ireland and its related history.

The troubled history of Ireland has the English at its centre. The tension stems from a distant history when a massive influx of English started to settle down in the country as early as the 12th century. Conflicts cannot be avoided when two different nationalities with different cultures, identities, religions and languages live so closely together. Moving forward in history, Ireland was eventually annexed by the United Kingdom with the Act of Union in 1801. While the Irish gained their independence back, Northern Ireland remained the hotbed of conflict. In the country, Protestants are living along with the Catholics, more precisely the English who preserved their identities through the centuries are living with those who identify themselves as Irish. After the end of the period of the Troubles – from the late 1960s to the end of 1990s – with the signature of the Good Friday Agreement, there was finally moderate peace after a history full of hardships.

However, Brexit has undeniably interrupted this peace process that was finally achieved with the Agreement. Even the campaign preceding Brexit was an extremely difficult period for the whole United Kingdom and its citizens. But what presumably nobody anticipated during this campaign, was the impact Brexit would have on Northern Ireland, and most importantly, what extent of influence would Northern Ireland have in Brexit. In fact, this basic premise – which can be assumed by anyone with a minimum knowledge of the nation's history – was almost completely left out of the campaign, or at least not emphasised at all. Six years have

passed since the 2016 referendum on Brexit and it has still not been finalised, as the various types of problems occur in a seemingly endless succession concerning the border in Northern Ireland. Undeniably, Brexit had and still has a negative impact on the United Kingdom, most notably it seriously jeopardises the hard-won peace in Northern Ireland by creating societal, political and economic unrest.

As the issue is still relevant and ongoing, there is no definitive result on it. It is also important to emphasise that as the timeline of the problem gets closer and closer to the present time, the available variety of sources become increasingly narrower, eventually getting limited to mainly news articles. However, despite this, there is still ample information available to carry out an in-depth research on the subject and to evaluate it. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive presentation of key information, events and periods that have played and are playing a role in the current situation in Northern Ireland.

Chapter 1

The Road to Brexit

This chapter aims to provide a general picture of the public mood as well as of the circumstances in the United Kingdom before, during and shortly after the 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum. To fully understand this paper which argues for the negative aftermath of Brexit on the United Kingdom, most notably in Northern Ireland, it is absolutely imperative to provide a comprehensive overview of the circumstances of the actual referendum, just to mention some prominent examples, the campaign preceding it, what reasons led to it, who voted in it, and what impact these had on the country in the early stages of the post-Brexit period.

Euroscepticism has been present in the country since about the time it joined the EEC. However, starting from around the 2000s the pressure on political parties in Britain to call for a referendum on membership with the European Union was continuously growing. Finally, the decision was made under the government of Prime Minister David Cameron – who was actually in favour of membership – from the Conservative Party, and a referendum was finally announced on 23 June 2016.¹

However, it is important to know that it was not only after the Brexit vote that the problems arose, and these were not only limited to Northern Ireland. The pre-Brexit campaign had already created huge division and chaos in the United Kingdom as a whole. Preceding the 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum, the country was divided into two broad camps, the one which lobbied to remain inside the European Union, thus the name “Remainers,” facing the Eurosceptic “Leavers,” who believed the United Kingdom was better off outside the Union. As for the actual referendum campaign, the Remainers considered that the United Kingdom was “Stronger In” the European Union, while the Leavers wanted to “Take Back Control.”²

In Northern Ireland particularly, in 2016, the Remain campaign was supported by the Alliance Party, Green Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party while Vote Leave was supported by the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party.³ The Alliance Party

¹ Reality Check team, “David Cameron: EU referendum claim fact-checked,” published September 19, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-49753420>.

² Harold D. Clarke, Matthew Goodwin, and Paul Whiteley, *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 13-15, 31.

³ Ibid, 14, 16.

also had its own website where their position was further explained. The party supported EU membership as they believed being part of the Union was a benefit for the country, and that Brexit created harm which was otherwise handled and regulated through the Good Friday Agreement, and “any form of Brexit poses significant problems for Northern Ireland,”⁴ and it was even described as “self-sabotage.”⁵ On the Leavers side, the Democratic Unionist Party, for example, explained their pro-Brexit position in their official statement in 2016 by then-leader Arlene Foster. The statement said that the party “has always been Eurosceptic in its outlook”⁶ and that the renegotiations with the European Union by David Cameron did not bring any change to the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Union.⁷ In addition to this Sammy Wilson, the Chief Whip of the Party, apart from sharing his view about the futility of renegotiations, also added that “being part of the EU is bad for the United Kingdom.”⁸ He explained that the European Union was “an economic block which is stagnating”⁹ to which the United Kingdom was tied when there were other trade partners. He also added that democracy had been damaged in the United Kingdom because of the EU membership, as well as that the country was a “net contributor” to the Union.¹⁰

How the above-mentioned problems were perceived by the two parties supporting Leave or Remain gives a good picture of the political scene at the time. It illustrates of what all the parties collectively represented from both sides, and therefore what people believed in and supported who voted for Leave or Remain. Apart from this, it also demonstrates how polarised the country had become by 2016, as the views of the two sides were almost diametrically opposed.

Reading works of literature on Brexit both during and on the campaign, it can be argued, that the impact and variety of problems Brexit could have created in Northern Ireland due to

⁴ “Brexit,” Alliance Party, accessed November 11, 2021, <https://www.allianceparty.org/brexit>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Newsroom, “FULL STATEMENT: Foster explains why DUP want to leave EU,” last modified February 22, 2016, <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/full-statement-foster-explains-why-dup-want-leave-eu-1265505>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sammy Wilson, “Video: DUP's Sammy Wilson dismisses David Cameron's EU deal,” *RT UK*, February 3, 2016, video, 1:28, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/video-news/video-dups-sammy-wilson-dismisses-david-camerons-eu-deal-34420627.html>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

the country's unique situation after a troubled history were rarely or not at all debated nor mentioned during the campaign preceding the referendum.

The referendum campaign of the Leavers on leaving the European Union consisted of listing all the disadvantages it had on the United Kingdom and all the advantages the Kingdom would receive if it were to leave it. The official Leave campaign, apart from completely ignoring such issues as Northern Ireland – which is not so surprising, otherwise they would have campaigned against themselves – rather focused on economic advantages, such as how the United Kingdom would save 350 million pounds a week that could go to the National Health Service (NHS). It also argued for the benefit of free trade, as well as on sovereignty questions, such as that the country would be able to make its own laws without the interference of the European Court and be in charge of their borders to which the burning issue of immigration was connected.¹¹ Immigration in Europe and the United Kingdom was described as being “out of control,” and that “Europe’s open-border arrangement [... was] effectively an international passport-free zone for terrorists.”¹²

The crucial issues Northern Ireland would face owing to Brexit were not only completely ignored by the Leave campaign but also hardly presented by the media. According to Kevin Maguire, who is the associate editor at the *Daily Mirror*, he often encountered difficulties when he wanted to cover the Northern Irish border issue in the newspaper’s pre-referendum coverage.¹³ Kevin commented: “It got drowned out because of the focus on money and immigration.”¹⁴

The campaign of the Remainers warned people about some of the consequences Brexit would have on Northern Ireland in their campaign, but rather as an additional element. The Remainers entirely focused their campaign on enumerating what dire effects leaving the European Union would have on the United Kingdom, mainly economically, as well as on people’s finances, therefore the title for it was “Project Fear.”¹⁵ There was an enormously wide range of forecasts about what would happen to the United Kingdom once Brexit is voted. In

¹¹ “Why Vote Leave,” Vote Leave Take Control, accessed November 16, 2021, http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/why_vote_leave.html.

¹² Qtd. in “Why Vote Leave,” Vote Leave Take Control, http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/why_vote_leave.html.

¹³ Jayne McCormack, “Brexit: How the Irish border issue was viewed during campaigning,” published October 12, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-politics-49988057>.

¹⁴ Qtd. in Ibid.

¹⁵ Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley, *Brexit*, 33.

summary, predictions included increased prices, risks to investments, and endangerment of jobs. Banks anticipated higher interest rates and inflation. Warnings about security were included, with apocalyptic pictures of the disintegration of the United Kingdom and the EU. This list can go indefinitely longer, as essentially there was a warning for almost every aspect of economy or finance supplemented by threats to national security.¹⁶ But, again, Northern Ireland was not at all in the focus.

The problem with Northern Ireland was only very marginally addressed by this campaign, and not the whole of it. For example, voters living there were told that Brexit would have a serious financial effect on the country, with the loss of investment funds that were worth billions of pounds.¹⁷ The border issue was mentioned, more precisely, reports claimed that if the United Kingdom were to leave the European Union, it would cause damage in the transnational commerce between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland due to custom controls.¹⁸ Similarly, Dublin was concerned about the borders between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland too, since Brexit would mean leaving the Customs Union, which would result in border-crossing checks, “with cars, vans and lorries checked for any goods on which duty had not been paid.”¹⁹ Therefore, rather economic issues were mentioned. On the other hand, equal, or even more important problems, such as how the still ongoing peace process, identities of the citizens and the relationship between the Protestants and the Catholics could be offended and damaged were not mentioned at all. Yet, these could have provided a very strong campaign material for Remainers.

¹⁶ Ibid, 35-44.

¹⁷ Ibid, 35.

¹⁸ Ibid, 44.

¹⁹ Denis MacSahne, *Brexit, No Exit: Why (in the End) Britain Won't Leave Europe* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017), xix.

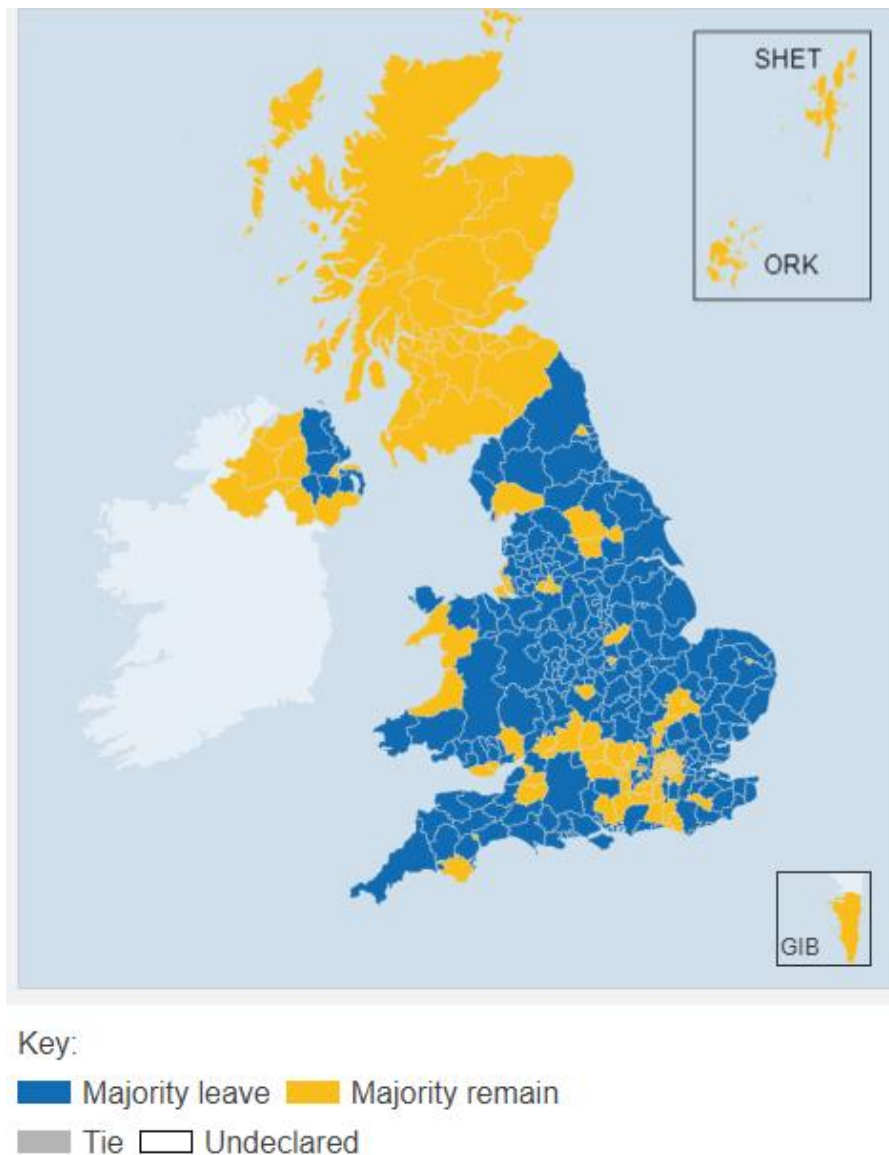


Figure 1. *EU Referendum Results*. “Results,” EU Referendum Results, accessed November 11, 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results.

“Project Fear” of such a scale was just not enough and not widespread enough to convince the majority of the electors to vote for remain, and what followed was a sharply divided and troubled period. On 23 June, 2016, 26.3 million people from the United Kingdom cast their vote at a polling station and among another 7.2 million citizens voted by post. This referendum of historical importance had the highest turnout rate since the 1992 general elections with its whopping 72.2 per cent.²⁰ The results deeply divided the community inside the United Kingdom, as the Leavers won by 51.9 per cent and the Remainers lost by 48.1 per cent. The referendum not only broke up the unity and harmony between the people inside the

²⁰ Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley, *Brexit*, 1.

United Kingdom but also between its countries. While the majority of England with 53.4 per cent and Wales with 52.5 per cent voted to leave the European Union, Northern Ireland and especially Scotland had a majority which voted to remain with the former having 55.8 per cent, and the latter having around 62 per cent, and, with all of its local results having a majority remain vote without exception.²¹ Among the four countries of the United Kingdom, Brexit had the greatest impact seemingly on Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, it reignited the unresolved issue of independence. However, Brexit had the most severe effect on Northern Ireland, as it resulted in a split of the already divided community by jeopardising the hard won-peace concerning the prolonged period of the “Troubles.” An immediate aftermath was mounting tension between the Catholic and Protestant communities.

Northern Ireland is particularly interesting in regard to referendum outcomes if we consider religion and juxtapose it with the local results, since the division of the population is based on religion. The seven parliamentary constituencies that had a majority vote leave were North, East as well as South Antrim, Upper Bann, Lagan Valley, Strangford and Belfast East.²² According to the December 2013 Constituency Profiles of the Northern Ireland Assembly, all of these aforementioned parts of Northern Ireland had a “Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)” majority. Likewise, the eleven remaining parliamentary constituencies that had a majority vote remain – North Down, Belfast North, West as well as South, South Down, Newry and Armagh, East Londonderry, Mid Ulster, Foyle, West Tyrone and finally Fermanagh and South Tyrone– all had Catholic majorities except for two, North Down and East Londonderry.²³ Therefore, it may be concluded that religion influenced the Northern Irish attitude towards the Brexit referendum and their ballot decisions. The question of religion was, still is, and will be absolutely crucial concerning the Northern Irish attitudes towards Brexit as it permeates the everyday lives of the country's citizens and influences their approach to political, societal, economic, and numerous other questions.

²¹ “Results,” EU Referendum Results, accessed November 11, 2021,

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results; Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley, *Brexit*, 151.

²² “Results,” EU Referendum Results, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results.

²³ Ibid.

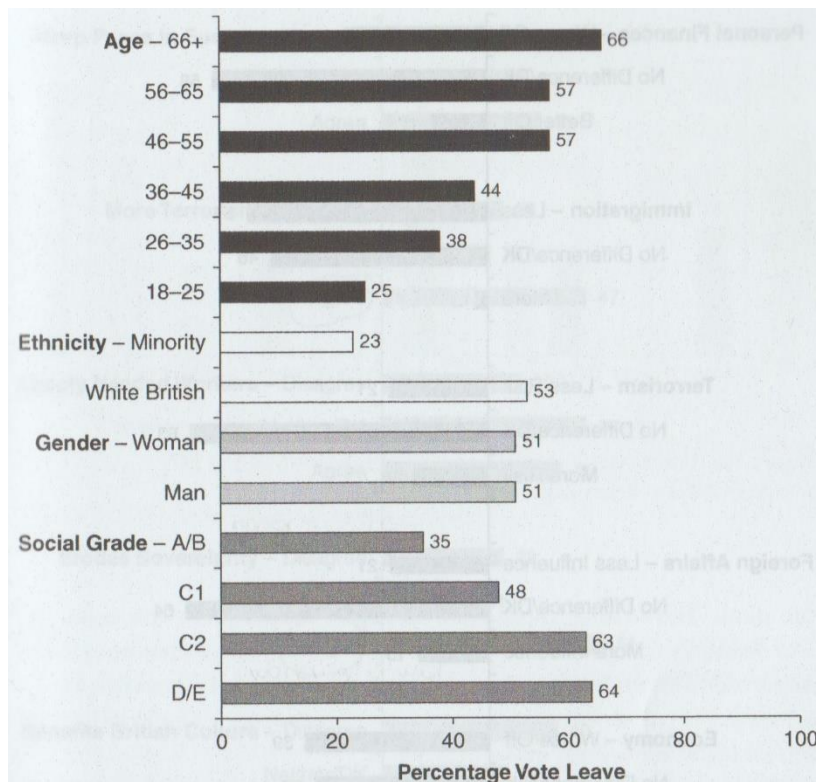


Figure 2. *Leave Voting by Socio-Demographic Characteristics*. Source: ECMS Pre-Referendum Survey, June 2016. Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley, *Brexit*, 155.

Division was created in many aspects of life. For the United Kingdom’s community, there is a lot of data based on surveys that provide a comprehensive picture of the referendum voting, or more precisely, who voted for leave or remain. For instance, the ECMS Pre-Referendum Survey “Leave Voting by Socio-Demographic Characteristics” of June 2016, can provide detailed information. The data is organized according to four categories; age, ethnicity, gender and social grade. It can be seen from the figure that majorities to Vote Leave comes from the sixty-six plus age group, with 66 per cent to Vote Leave, from the White British ethnicity group, with 53 per cent, and from the D/E social grade, that is the working or lower classes, with 64 per cent. Then, if we “reverse” the results we can get an idea of who the Remainers were. Only 25 per cent voted to leave from the eighteen to twenty-five age group, 23 per cent of the minority from the ethnicities, and only 35 per cent from the A/B social grade that is the upper-middle class. Gender did not have an influence on voting, both men and women had a 51 per cent tendency to vote for leave in the survey.²⁴ Given these results, Brexit, without doubt created considerable societal tension, as this pre-referendum survey illustrates the differences between age groups, ethnicities and social grades.

²⁴ Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley, *Brexit*, 155.

One of the most fundamental parts of understanding Brexit is the question of why the majority of voters came to the conclusion that the benefits of leaving the European Union would outweigh the costs of remaining in it, at least based on the information offered by the campaign at the time and their own knowledge and intuition. It is also important to emphasise that Brexit was not caused by a single factor, but rather by “a mix of calculations, emotions and cues.”²⁵

According to YouGov’s 2015 end-of-year survey, the main issues the United Kingdom faced were immigration, with 63 per cent of the vote, the second most important one was healthcare with 39 per cent, and finally economy with 33 per cent. Moreover, a not that unpredictable 93 per cent of Leave voters shared a worry about high rates of immigration, but what is astonishing, is that even almost the majority of those who voted remain also shared this worry, more precisely 49 per cent.²⁶ Not only immigration itself was the main problem, but also what the United Kingdom felt that stemmed from it, just to mention a few significant ones: criminals coming into the country, terrorism, criminal offences, the discrimination of domestic workers, cultural threats, and increasing pressure put on the NHS.²⁷ Nigel Farage, the leader of UKIP that was primarily focusing on immigration, corroborated this by adding “It’s the biggest single issue facing this country. It affects the economy, the NHS, schools, public services, the deficit. [...]”²⁸ UKIP and other Eurosceptic politicians and parties believed that the only way to put an end to the continuing influx of immigrants was to leave the European Union.²⁹

Healthcare, the second biggest issue reported by the aforementioned survey was, just like the economy, connected with the problems of immigration. Priti Patel, a Conservative Member of Parliament, claimed the following: “Current levels of migration are causing unsustainable pressure on our public services and we can see that the NHS is creaking under the strain.”³⁰

The reason of the loss of the Remainers campaign was that it was much less effective than Vote Leave. Their campaign only consisted of the so-called “Project Fear,” which mainly focused on the economic disasters that may come in the future. This campaign, however, and quite understandably was just not enough to win a referendum, as it did not focus on the needs of the ordinary people, while the Leavers campaign exactly tried to do that. According to a

²⁵ Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley, *Brexit*, 146.

²⁶ Ibid, 11-12.

²⁷ Ibid, 40, 11-12, 48.

²⁸ Qtd. in Ibid, 89.

²⁹ Ibid, 28.

³⁰ Qtd. in Ibid, 48.

YouGov survey from 16-17 June 2016, *Sunday Times* results, 41 per cent of the people believed that the Remain campaign represented the “Establishment,” while only 19 per cent of the people believed that it is the Leave campaign that did that. In contrast to this, 26 per cent said that the Leave campaign represented the “Ordinary People,” and 10 per cent said it is the Remain campaign. To put it simply, the majority considered it was the campaign of Leavers that represented the general public’s needs, while the Remain campaign was in favour of the government and the institutions. This was a highly significant and interesting information, since it can lead to a better understanding of why the campaign of the Leavers had reached more people, and decisively, won the referendum.³¹

The validity of the Brexit referendum had also become a contentious issue at one point adding to the number of problems it has created. Undeniably, the results are balanced on a knife-edge, as the difference between remain and leave is roughly 4 per cent. In such a case, questions may arise as to how well it actually reflects the views of the electorate. Or, whether this vote might not reflect a time-tested result, but rather the success of a current campaigning exercise. Also, to approach this from a different perspective, 37 per cent of the total electorate voted to leave the European Union in the 2016 Brexit Referendum, to rephrase it, only one-third of the total electorate was able to make this landmark decision for the United Kingdom.³²

Brexit was finally voted through, albeit by a very small majority, but with a massive turnout. It has led to a very eventful political life during the campaign in which the focus was on economic aspects, sovereignty, terrorism, the NHS, but mostly immigration. According to the various sources mentioned, Brexit clearly created a collective, high level of tension inside the United Kingdom, especially between age groups and ethnicities, and specifically, in Northern Ireland’s case, between religions and identities. Many must have believed that this division would be the greatest source of trouble for the country in the future. A small majority decided that the United Kingdom would be better off leaving the European Union. However, during the campaign, the voters did not really encounter anything that warned them against the dire effects Brexit could have on Northern Ireland. The Remainers built their entire referendum campaign on the potential for economic disaster, which not only left out Northern Ireland, even though it was a crucially important element, but was simply not enough to convince the everyday voter.

³¹ Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley, 42-43.

³² MacShane, *Brexit, No Exit*, 106-107.

Nonetheless, even five-six years later, it is precisely the issues in and connected to Northern Ireland that are determining the future of Brexit. It has seriously damaged the peace-process in Northern Ireland, where Brexit is even more problematic, due to the country's long, troubled history. It was not addressed at all during the campaign, but this history is necessary to know why Brexit was and still is so dangerous in Northern Ireland, what problems it has already caused, the reasons behind that, and what it could lead to in the future, as the situation is still ongoing, and one problem leads to another.

Chapter 2

The History of the Northern Irish “Troubles” and the Peace Process

This chapter aims to provide a broad picture of the history of “the Troubles,” as well as the peace process in Northern Ireland, as it is critical to know its fundamental role in Brexit since it is the answer behind why and in what way Brexit poses a threat on and harms Northern Ireland. Therefore, it will serve as the imperative background for the third chapter, where the present-day and ongoing problems of Brexit will be discussed, and virtually all of them are based on the history mentioned in this chapter. During the Brexit campaign, the future of Northern Ireland has not been given a prominent role, in fact, it has been overshadowed by arguments such as finance or immigration, and the average voter has not even thought about the issue as they were not adequately informed about it. However, after Brexit was voted, it is now undeniably in the centre as it is a key issue, and the success of Brexit is very much dependent on it still today in 2021-22 as this paper is being written.

To lay the foundations for this chapter, it is necessary to give a brief history preceding the beginning of the Troubles. This historic series of events carry massive importance as it was one of “[...] the longest-running conflicts in twentieth century European history and the longest counter-insurgency operation carried out by British troops [...].”³³

There is a long history behind the dawn of the Troubles that lasted from the 1960s until the end of 1990s. More precisely, the series of events which became the root of all later conflicts in Northern Ireland can be traced back to the seventeenth century, to what is known as the Plantation of Ulster. This period covered a huge influx of English and Scottish Protestant migrants to the north-eastern part of Ireland – to Ulster – supported by the English Crown. Tension, and then violence immediately started to develop as the Protestant migrants were confiscating land from the Irish as well as bringing Protestant religion to a Catholic inhabited land. The two separate religions became two separate identities, but also separated in means of geography: The Protestants settled down in the north and the east and the Catholics in the south and west of the Irish Island. Due to a series of successful Protestant military victories their position became secured in the northern part of Ireland, able to uphold the status of the wealthy and powerful, and they were not afraid of any means of methods to protect this position, like violence or intimidation. For centuries, the sectarian and ideological conflict remained between

³³ Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, *The Origins of the Present Troubles in Northern Ireland* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

the Protestants and the Catholics. Major events which further reinforced the conflicts were such as the Act of Union in 1801 in response to a rebellion from the British Crown which integrated Ireland with England and Scotland, ending a part of Irish history. Division sharpened, and the centre of the conflict was between Catholics who wanted to break free from British influence and have a united Ireland and the Protestants, backed with the British military force, who still wanted to remain in close relationship with the British crown. Therefore, by the end of the nineteenth century, the two separate communities were established distinguished by three factors: culture, religion, and the perception of their connection to Westminster.³⁴

The 1910s and 20s were a particularly significant period in the history of Northern Ireland. Paramilitary groups were founded, which became a key during any turmoil, such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), “protecting” the Loyalist’s interests, or the Irish Volunteers which later became known as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) by the Republicans, and they were not afraid to use violence. This period also entailed, apart from World War I, the Anglo-Irish war and the Easter Rising. With the “rebirth” of the nationalist political party Sinn Fein in 1917, the Republicans had been further strengthened. By 1922 the Irish Free State was established with the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, by this, Northern Ireland as a country was officially born. A separate Northern Ireland Government was also established, finally fulfilling Unionist wishes to rule six counties up in the north, and remaining part of the United Kingdom. Two nationalities and religions lived in Northern Ireland, together. The Unionists or Loyalists, as their name suggests, loyal to the British Crown, while the Catholics represented the Republican, Nationalist part of the two sides. However, unfortunately, this did not solve everything permanently, and an unprecedented, bitter and violent conflict awaited the Northern Irish soon, what was known as the Troubles.³⁵

The immediate catalyst of the Troubles was a Civil Rights movement in 1968 by the Catholic community who wished to finally give voice to their long-standing grievances in Northern Ireland, or in the Province, by the Unionists.³⁶ These grievances mainly included gerrymandering, discrimination such as in private and public employment, in public housing,

³⁴ “The Northern Ireland Conflict,” in *Teaching Divided Histories*, accessed December 25, 2021, Nervecentre, <https://www.nervecentre.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Lesson%201%20-%20The%20Conflict%20In%20Northern%20Ireland.pdf>, 11; Kennedy-Pipe, *The Origins*, 8-10.

³⁵ Kennedy-Pipe, *The Origins*, 13-18; “The Northern Ireland Conflict,” in *Teaching Divided Histories*, Nervecentre, <https://www.nervecentre.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Lesson%201%20-%20The%20Conflict%20In%20Northern%20Ireland.pdf>, 11.

³⁶ Kennedy-Pipe, *The Origins*, 31.

and in policing.³⁷ The movement soon transformed into riots and became violent at the same time.

The event that was widely considered as the first major conflict in the roughly thirty year-long Troubles was the Battle of the Bogside. The event took place from the 12 to the 14 of August in 1969 between the nationalists and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in the area of Derry or, officially Londonderry – a city (still) so divided that the former name is preferred by Nationalists, and the latter is by Loyalists. This resulted in two major milestones in the timeline of the Troubles: the deployment of British soldiers in Northern Ireland and riots broke out most notably in the capital, Belfast.³⁸

To try to ease the situation and reduce friction between the Protestants and Catholics, the British Army first geographically separated the two estranged communities by building a “peace wall” or “peace line” in Belfast. This wall, which also became known as the Irish “Berlin Wall” built of corrugated iron, covered with barbed wire, and contained look-out posts was to prevent further attacks.³⁹

Bombay Street in Belfast was a particularly important place on the timeline. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil Rights movement, on the 15 of August 1969, a mob of violent Loyalists targeted each Catholic-owned property and set them on fire.⁴⁰

Finally, the day which is believed to mark the end of the widespread protests by the Civil Rights movement was the so-called “Bloody Sunday” which took place in Derry/Londonderry on the 30 of January 1972.⁴¹ Initially it was organised to peacefully protest against the new British policy which enabled imprisonment without trial, however, what actually happened is said to be one of the darkest events during the Troubles. The British Army, perpetrators of the violence, opened fire on the Catholic demonstrators, killing thirteen people,

³⁷ John Whyte, “How much discrimination was there under the Unionist regime, 1921-1968?,” accessed December 25, 2021, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/discrimination/whyte.htm>.

³⁸ “The Northern Ireland Conflict,” in *Teaching Divided Histories*, Nervecentre, <https://www.nervecentre.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Lesson%201%20-%20The%20Conflict%20In%20Northern%20Ireland.pdf>, 12.

³⁹ Kennedy-Pipe, *The Origins*, 49-50.

⁴⁰ Noel McAdam, “The burning of Bombay Street: ‘The start of the combustible years’,” last modified August 15, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/the-burning-of-bombay-street-the-start-of-the-combustible-years-1.3986347>.

⁴¹ “The Northern Ireland Conflict,” in *Teaching Divided Histories*, Nervecentre, <https://www.nervecentre.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Lesson%201%20-%20The%20Conflict%20In%20Northern%20Ireland.pdf>, 12.

and wounding fifteen. It resulted in further, mounting tension, for example, the British Embassy in Dublin was burned down as an immediate response.⁴²

Initially the British troops were deployed to the Province to help out the Northern Irish government and to protect the Catholic communities from Protestant violence. However, the relationship between the British army and the Catholics slowly deteriorated. The estrangement was gradually made worse because of the introduction of internment without trial, or events such as the aforementioned “Bloody Sunday.”⁴³ Therefore, the British Army, once the protectors, were transformed into enemies in the eyes of the Catholics, and the conflict became centred, yet again, on the fight against the repressive British Government.

The Northern Irish Troubles was marked by acts of terrorism by paramilitary forces, most notably bombings. Significant violent incidents included for example the McGurk’s Bar bombing on 4 December 1971 in Belfast, where fifteen civilians were killed by the UVF. Bombs were not only set off in Northern Ireland but also in the Republic of Ireland and in England too. On 17 May 1974, a total of thirty-three people were killed due to four separate bombings in a single day in Parnell Street, Talbot Street, and South Leinster Street in Dublin, as well as in Monaghan, all said to be carried out by Loyalist paramilitary groups, marking the day where most civilians were killed in the Republic of Ireland on the course of one single day. In England this day is marked by the bombing of 21 November 1974 where the IRA blew off two public houses in Birmingham, resulting in twenty-one civilian lives.⁴⁴

The crucial period in the history of the Troubles was the so-called peace process. The exact date of the beginning of the process is not historically clear, but it started around the late 1980s and early 1990s. The period, as its name suggests was defined by a substantial number of meetings between political leaders and figures, and ceasefires from paramilitary groups. There are two defining events that are connected to the beginning of the period. Marking the first talks of the peace process, was the meeting of Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin, with John Hume, the former leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), on 11 January 1988. The latter one was the announcement of a ceasefire from the IRA on 31 August 1994. The peace progress continued in spite of a bombing carried out on 9 February 1996, in

⁴² “Bloody Sunday: What happened on Sunday 30 January 1972?,” *BBC NEWS*, July 2, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-foyle-west-47433319>.

⁴³ Kennedy-Pipe, *The Origins*, 54.

⁴⁴ Fionnuala McKenna and Martin Melaugh, “Violence - Significant Violent Incidents During the Conflict,” accessed December 29, 2021, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/violence/majinc.htm>.

London, Canary Wharf. An agreement, the principal element of the peace process was achieved on Friday, 10 April 1998, named the Good Friday Agreement.⁴⁵

The Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement had a decisive role in ending the roughly thirty year-long conflict. The negotiations were carried out by the then-largest political parties in Northern Ireland and the British government. The Agreement was widely accepted, which was also shown by the opinion poll carried out six days after signing it, on 16 April 1998, where 73 per cent of the citizens of Northern Ireland were in favour of it, and in the Republic of Ireland, a whopping 94 per cent of voters supported it. Thanks to the Good Friday Agreement two imperative bodies were established such as the Northern Ireland Assembly and the British-Irish Council. The former fulfilled the role of a parliament for domestic issues, and where executive power had to be shared by parties that represented both the Republicans and the Unionists. The latter was established to promote cooperation between the two parties and addressed extremely important issues such as nationality or identity by offering dual citizenship, but it also addressed issues such as security and police.⁴⁶ The Good Friday Agreement, owing to the wish of the citizens, acknowledged Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, while also established the possibility for a united Ireland. This could be achieved only if the majority wishes, and in this case, the United Kingdom was obligated to provide a referendum for and accept the result. The Agreement settled problems through political means and helped the two communities to cooperate under democratic conditions to help them live together peacefully, while it also brought progress to decommissioning and normalised security arrangements.⁴⁷

Undoubtedly, the Good Friday Agreement helped to settle a thirty year-long conflict that had roughly 3,500 victims.⁴⁸ In the following years, Northern Ireland had a relatively calm political scene, and the Good Friday Agreement really seemed to bring fundamental change. It

⁴⁵ Martin Melaugh, "The Irish Peace Process – Summary," last modified February 2, 2006, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/sum.htm>.

⁴⁶ Ruth Strachan, "What is the real value of the Good Friday Agreement?," last modified October 12, 2021, <https://www.investmentmonitor.ai/analysis/good-friday-agreement-northern-ireland>; Dr Alan MacLeod, "A brief history of the Good Friday Agreement," published January 21, 2018, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/northern-ireland-good-friday-agreement-protestants-catholics-brexite-border-ira/>.

⁴⁷ Ben Kelly, "Good Friday Agreement: The peace deal that ended the Northern Ireland Troubles 20 years ago," last modified January 21, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/good-friday-agreement-what-is-it-northern-ireland-belfast-1998-sinn-fein-the-troubles-a8278156.html>.

⁴⁸ Malcolm Sutton, "An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland," accessed January 11, 2022, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/tables/Status_Summary.html.

was definitely a success, but it is important to note that it was not a panacea for all problems. The Agreement helped the two communities to finally live together peacefully through mainly political methods, but the generation that experienced the Troubles on their own skin still had vivid memories about the period, and therefore societal tensions were, and are still very much present in Northern Ireland.

The peace walls are still up even today, and very much present and important in the lives of Protestant and Catholic communities as they are deeply afraid of a possible attack from the other group. At first, it was believed that the walls will only be needed for a short period after it was built, however, they were not demolished even fifty years later.⁴⁹ Currently, there are 20 miles, or around 30 kilometres of peace walls in Belfast, if added up.⁵⁰

Moreover, in fact that these walls are becoming taller and taller, as rocks or Molotov cocktails are still thrown from one side to the other, and some homes are even covered with cages for additional protection.⁵¹ Many residents want the peace walls to remain, as they feel safer, since tension, sectarian violence and clashes are still present. It is not uncommon that people to be attacked from the other community and suffer serious physical injuries.⁵² Protestants and Catholics live their whole life mainly in segregation. According to one article from the *BBC*, around 93 per cent of the children in Northern Ireland attend segregated educational institutions and live in segregated communities.⁵³

The period of the Troubles divided the two communities by creating fear, mistrust and suspicion with the “other side.” All of these usually come from unsettled grievances, which can also create a so-called “grievance culture.” In this case, the unsettled grievances are passed from one generation to the other, and are made known to the newer generation, the children, from a very young age. The two distinct communities have their own distinct identities which can be expressed through identity markers, such as clothing. These can help to differentiate between

⁴⁹ “A saját Trianonjukat ássák az angolok,” *Index.hu*, December 13, 2019, video, 16:14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T29puynKUS4>.

⁵⁰ Fergal Keane, “Cages around houses: Life at Belfast's peace wall,” last modified April 16, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-northern-ireland-56765168>.

⁵¹ “A saját Trianonjukat ássák,” *Index.hu*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T29puynKUS4>.

⁵² Steven Grattan, “Northern Ireland still divided by peace walls 20 years after conflict,” last modified January 14, 2020, <https://theworld.org/stories/2020-01-14/northern-ireland-still-divided-peace-walls-20-years-after-conflict>.

⁵³ Mark Easton, “Crossing Divides: Keeping the peace in Northern Ireland,” last modified March 3, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-47373925>.

the two communities, but can also be dangerous, as one can be attacked for it in areas where the two communities meet, such as in the city centre. This shows the level of tension that is still present in Northern Ireland.⁵⁴ In Belfast it is very clear which part is the Catholic Nationalist community and which is Protestant Loyalist. Irish or British identities may also be marked by language – Irish or English –, and the colours of the national flags present in the streets and on premises, everywhere.⁵⁵ Murals are also pervasive in the streets of Northern Ireland, the most prevalent themes are politics, history, paramilitary groups and commemorations. The presence of murals also keeps the memories of the troubled history alive in the citizens’.⁵⁶

The situation in Northern Ireland is undeniably still a cause for concern. The considerable tension in the society mainly comes from their difficult, problematic history, especially from the period of the Troubles. While it is true, that the present situation in Northern Ireland is not a bit as severe as it was during the Troubles, but as an aftermath of it persisting tension remained. In this volatile situation, any outside factor can ignite the already underlying strain. Legitimate and individual grievance and significant loss suffered in this period culminated in the preoccupation with the past. The Troubles can be called both an individual and a collective trauma for the citizens of Northern Ireland. Forgetting and burying the past is understandably not an option for everyone. The possibility of reconciliation in the country has always been a debated question and unfortunately, it is hard to tell how it could be achieved.⁵⁷

Northern Ireland had to go through an extremely difficult past to finally be able to live together in relative peace. Apart from this, the country is still facing great and difficult problems that already would have taken a long time to resolve. However, the Brexit vote has put even the fragile peace they had achieved over decades at huge risk, as it might impose borders within the Island and separate the communities once again. The next chapter will mainly focus and elaborate in what ways Brexit jeopardises the hard-won peace in Northern Ireland, as well as what damage it has caused already.

⁵⁴ Mike Morrissey and Marie Smyth, *Northern Ireland After the Good Friday Agreement: Victims, Grievance and Blame* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 155.

⁵⁵ Grattan, “Northern Ireland still divided,” <https://theworld.org/stories/2020-01-14/northern-ireland-still-divided-peace-walls-20-years-after-conflict>.

⁵⁶ Ivette Feliciano, “These murals lie at the center of a debate over Northern Ireland’s future,” published February 25, 2017, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/belfast-murals-recall-brutal-war-debate-northern-irelands-future>.

⁵⁷ Morrissey and Smyth, *Northern Ireland*, 188-189.

Chapter 3

Problems and Consequences Brexit has Created in Northern Ireland

After signing the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, Northern Ireland had a relatively peaceful history apart from a few occasions of bombings and assassinations. However, the Agreement could simply not solve all the problems existing in the country due to its immense complexity and diversion. The trauma suffered during the Troubles were vividly alive in the memories of the citizens of Northern Ireland. Inside the country two communities, the Protestants and the Catholics are trying to live together, but tension has remained in the air. Grievance culture is still very much present, as well as the physical force tradition, where the opposition prefers to impose violence, as it had always been more expedient especially during the history of the Troubles, than peaceful demonstrations. The first chapter presented how the Brexit campaign had already stirred up a storm within people of different political affiliations, age groups, ethnicities, identities and specifically in Northern Ireland's case, between the Protestant and Catholic communities. Only after the Brexit vote did the unprecedented amount of problems come to the forefront concerning Northern Ireland, and the very success of Brexit now depends on the solution of these problems and questions. However, no Brexit deal of any kind will be without consequences. Some damage has already, irreversibly been made. It seriously jeopardises the hard-won peace in Northern Ireland as Brexit creates a division between the two communities, therefore leads to societal and political unrest as well as economic ones.⁵⁸ This chapter will discuss the problems Brexit has already created in Northern Ireland, as well as what it might lead to in the future since the final question of Brexit is still unanswered and unresolved.

It is important to note that the methodology for this chapter will slightly differ from the previous two chapters. While for the first two chapters of the paper an abundant amount of literature in the form of published books were available and easily accessible from various domestic libraries or bookstores as well as shorter sources from the internet, however, concerning the subject of this chapter, there is still quite a shortage in terms of literature published in form of books. While there are definitely more and more secondary sources appearing on this issue, it is not as prevalent since the topic is still very new and ongoing, and the events are still in progress. Therefore, in this chapter mainly sources found exclusively on the internet will be used, such as news articles from various kinds of news outlets with different political affiliations, or videos.

⁵⁸ "A saját Trianonjukat ássák," *Index.hu*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T29puynKUS4>.

The vitally important question concerning the success of Brexit and the future of Northern Ireland is the border issue. The United Kingdom voted on a national referendum to leave the European Union on 23 June 2016 and officially left it on 31 January 2020. However, on the Irish Island two countries border each other: the Republic of Ireland, remaining part of the European Union, and Northern Ireland, leaving the European Union as it is part of the United Kingdom. Evidently, a border needs to be placed between a non-EU country and an EU country, if not necessarily a physical one, but some type, as if there is no border, there is no Brexit either. One of the options was to place a border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and the second is to “place” a border on the Irish Sea, between Great Britain and the Irish Island. However, the difficulty is that neither option is without problems due to the division between the Catholic and Protestant communities living in Northern Ireland. It is true that by 2022, some issues became irrelevant, such as putting a border on the Irish Island, it still opened up old wounds and created tension and division which are all irrevocable.⁵⁹

Incidentally, before further agreements were made, such as the Northern Ireland Protocol, there was also the idea of the possibility of a border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. Objectively, it would have been the most sensible solution to have a border separating non-EU Northern Ireland from the EU member country, the Republic of Ireland. However, that outcome would have had extremely dire outcomes. It would have gravely offended the Republican, Catholic community who fought for their Irish identity, and any form of separation from the Republic of Ireland would have violated that. Any form of border between the two countries could have reignited tension that already existed which stemmed from the past due to the history of the Troubles. During that period there was a physical – a hard – border between the two countries, and it was especially difficult to get from one side to the other. But after signing the Good Friday Agreement, these visible borders were eradicated and the passage between the two countries became seamless, and freedom of movement inside the whole Irish Island became possible. This part of the Agreement was particularly vital for the Republicans in accepting the Agreement because it provided the achievement of the idea of “all Ireland,” the concept of the Irish Island being a “united” Ireland, and not separated into two countries. By putting up the border again this part of the Agreement would have ceased, and there would have been again a physical, visual representation of occupation that would gravely offend the Republican, Catholic community.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Moreover, putting a border on the Irish Island would have been complicated from an economic as well as practical point of view. A great example is the village Pettigo, located on the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland divided by a river. Crossing the border was completely seamless after the Good Friday Agreement. However, during the Troubles it was especially hard to cross the border, as people had to go through security checkpoints. This hard border was also the main indicator and the physical representation of the conflict between the Protestant Unionist and Catholic Nationalist communities. At the earlier stages of Brexit, there was a possibility of putting back some sort of border control, which would have meant that products going through the border would also have had to be checked. The main problems with this solution were not only economic ones but also societal, as due to the Troubles the border became a rather symbolic element especially for those who lived through and experienced this period fraught with difficulties and traumas.⁶¹

In another video on the border issue by *The Guardian*, Seamus Murphy, a local historian, and former journalist gives his opinion which represents the Republican community's point of view. In the interview, he explained that putting a border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland would be just the same as when a border was established on the Island in 1921. As then, it would be forced upon them against the people's will, and they would fight at every opportunity, such as by methods like smuggling. In the past, during the period of the Troubles people rebelled against the border by destroying them, but smuggling products from one side to the other was also a very popular form of objection. In the interview he also makes a comparison between how Brexit was enforced on the people of Northern Ireland and how the border was imposed upon them in 1921, both of which were done by force.⁶²

Ultimately, it became clear that a border should not be set up by any means between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, as it would be almost impossible to implement and would have extremely serious consequences. Nevertheless, some form of border had to be established, as non-EU countries are under strict food safety rules implemented by the European Union, and certain products have to go through border checks. But, a new solution had to be found for a border, as politicians feared that any form of infrastructure installed between the two countries would disturb the peace and create political instability. It was agreed that the

⁶¹ "Brexit Could Cause Chaos At The Northern Ireland Border (HBO)," *VICE News*, December 25, 2018, video, 3:48, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNXGoLah7HY>.

⁶² "Border line: a journey through the Irish heart of the Brexit crisis," *The Guardian*, December 9, 2019, video, 15:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkjkKYYrEyE>.

Good Friday Agreement, which restored normal border conditions on the Irish Island by eradicating the physical ones and eventually brought peace, had to be protected.⁶³

Therefore, the Northern Ireland Protocol was established in January 2021 under the government of Boris Johnson.⁶⁴ Before Brexit, the trade was very simple between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as both of the two countries were EU member countries. But as Northern Ireland with the rest of the United Kingdom left the Union after Brexit, it is therefore under the aforementioned safety rules and checks. However, it was finally agreed that the border could definitely not be between the two countries, and a special agreement, the Northern Ireland Protocol was formed. The gist of the Protocol was that document checks and inspections are between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, rather than between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, therefore it aims to protect vitally important elements from the Good Friday Agreement.⁶⁵ This solution was only approved after it was settled that Northern Ireland would remain to follow the EU rules on product standards and remain in the EU's single market.⁶⁶ However, this resulted in the creation of what is effectively a trade border between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, on the Irish Sea.⁶⁷ As a result, this solution became just as controversial as the previous question of the border being put on the Island. While the Nationalist, Catholic community would have felt their rights violated because of the border on the Irish Island, it is now the same for the Loyalist, Protestant community, who feel that a border had been created between them and the United Kingdom, and in effect, blocking them from their British identity.

Therefore, the establishment of the Northern Ireland Protocol was very controversial among the Unionist community, and they gave voice to these grievances through several demonstrations. In a video by *DW News*, where several people were interviewed on the issue from the Protestant side give their opinions. The major issue with the Protocol according to the

⁶³ Tom Edgington and Chris Morris, "Brexit: What's the Northern Ireland Protocol?," published February 3, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53724381>.

⁶⁴ Sarah McCann, "NI Protocol: What is the Northern Ireland Protocol? Here is the NI Protocol explained in simple terms," last modified February 3, 2022, <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/people/ni-protocol-what-is-the-northern-ireland-protocol-here-is-the-ni-protocol-explained-in-simple-terms-3553811>.

⁶⁵ Edgington and Morris, "Brexit," <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53724381>.

⁶⁶ Edgington and Morris, "Brexit," <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53724381>; McCann, "NI Protocol," <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/people/ni-protocol-what-is-the-northern-ireland-protocol-here-is-the-ni-protocol-explained-in-simple-terms-3553811>.

⁶⁷ Edgington and Morris, "Brexit," <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53724381>.

interviewed, is that it puts a border on the Irish Sea, therefore a border between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. The Loyalist community considers this as a betrayal, a sell-out from the United Kingdom's government, as it takes away their British identity, something they had fought for and died for in their past, such as during the Troubles.⁶⁸ Jim Wilson from the Protestant paramilitary group named Red Hand Commando, in his interview with *Index.hu* made similar comments on the issue. He said that the Protestant, Unionist community feels loyal to the Queen, and they wish to be part of the United Kingdom. The Protocol goes against the Good Friday Agreement as it forces the Protestant community to be economically connected to a united Ireland.⁶⁹

Apart from this, the video also discussed the issue of the physical force tradition. Generally the citizens, but in this particular case the Protestant community of Northern Ireland, feel that violence might be the answer. During the question of whether the border should be between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the Catholic and the Nationalist, Irish community threatened to resort to violence, which was initially successful, as the idea of the border being put on the Irish Island was effectively abandoned. Therefore, the Protestant, Unionist community sees this as an opportunity to use violence in order to achieve their demands too, which Jim Wilson confirms in the video with his comments such as: "violence in democracy seems to be more of a threat than people being peaceful and democratic."⁷⁰

While it is true that the negotiations concerning the final form of the Northern Ireland Protocol are still ongoing even in 2022, it has already caused a lot of tension in Northern Ireland. The response to the Protocol was very severe and deeply worrying. Many protesters took to the streets in Northern Ireland and gave voice to their rejection of the Protocol in different, more often than not, violent ways. Unfortunately, there are several significant events that can be mentioned as an example.

A long and serious series of protests began in late March 2021. More precisely, on 29 March in Londonderry where a group consisting of around forty people were dispersed by the police, while a petrol bomb was also thrown at a police car. For the remaining days of March,

⁶⁸ "Post-Brexit border reignites tensions in Northern Ireland | Focus on Europe," *DW News*, July 4, 2021, video, 5:07, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WAdB6rSk5s>.

⁶⁹ "A saját Trianonjukat ássák," *Index.hu*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T29puynKUS4>.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

petrol bombs, as well as masonry were thrown at the police and their vehicles, as well as some started fire on the roads.⁷¹

In April 2021 tensions were so severe that it was said by the police to be the “worst seen in Northern Ireland in years.”⁷² The violence took various forms in Belfast, such as riots, arson, and attack on police officers. On 7 April, a double-decker bus was attacked by rioters who threw petrol bombs at the vehicle and set it on fire, but several cars were also burned, owing to a clash between Republicans and Loyalists. PSNI Assistant Chief Constable Jonathan Roberts, given the severity of the situation, feared that even weapons might be brought out to the streets, and commented that “given the history of Northern Ireland, it is something always in the back of our minds.”⁷³ Some of the riots in April were connected to the paramilitary group Ulster Defence Association (UDA). Since the end of March and the 8 of April more than 50 police officers were injured due to the violent attacks of the rioters, and around ten people were arrested, some of were as young as 13 years old.⁷⁴ One hate crime or sectarian abuse was also committed during the week. Kevin Scott, *Belfast Telegraph* photographer was physically abused by two men while he was covering a public disorder, as well as his camera was smashed to the ground. Apart from this, he was also verbally abused as one of the men said to him during the assault “f*** off back to your own area you Fenian c**t.”⁷⁵ The word Fenian, according to the Racial Slur Database is “[...] used by Protestants to demean Catholics in Northern Ireland.”⁷⁶

The violence escalated to such a level that the Northern Ireland Assembly had to meet on the situation.⁷⁷ However, riots continued for a few days before they stopped. The police had to use a water cannon for the first time in six years to disperse the crowd targeting them with

⁷¹ Jordan Kenny, “Timeline: How Northern Ireland's violence unfolded,” published April 12, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56675894>.

⁷² Qtd. in Julian O'Neill and Emma Vardy, “Belfast: Rioting 'was worst seen in Northern Ireland in years',” published April 8, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56664868>.

⁷³ Qtd. in O'Neill and Vardy, “Belfast,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56664868>.

⁷⁴ O'Neill and Vardy, “Belfast,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56664868>.

⁷⁵ Qtd. in Gillian Halliday, “Belfast Telegraph photographer attacked during disorder at interface area in west Belfast,” published April 7, 2021, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/belfast-telegraph-photographer-attacked-during-disorder-at-interface-area-in-west-belfast-40285994.html>.

⁷⁶ “Fenian,” The Racial Slur Database, accessed February 14, 2022, <http://www.rsdb.org/slur/fenian>.

⁷⁷ Lisa O'Carroll and Rory Carroll, “Northern Ireland assembly meets after sixth night of unrest,” published April 8, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/07/bus-set-on-fire-in-belfast-on-sixth-night-of-unrest-in-northern-ireland>.

fireworks, petrol bombs, and stones. The incident took place in west Belfast in the vicinity of the gate – which was smashed open – separating Loyalist and Republican communities.⁷⁸ By 9 April, around ninety police officers were injured due to the violence in street riots.⁷⁹ The unrest finally stopped on 9 April, linked to the death of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, as Loyalist groups called on protesters to stop in a show of respect.⁸⁰

However, disorder broke out again in November 2021, showing that it did not stop with April. In Newtownards, Northern Ireland, on 1 November 2021, a bus was hijacked and then set on fire and burned to ashes reportedly by Loyalist men from the UVF paramilitary group. According to politicians of Northern Ireland, the hijacking was linked to Loyalists opposing the Northern Ireland Protocol. Six days later another hijacking was carried out in Newtownabbey.⁸¹ This time not only the driver, but also passengers were on board, who were ordered off the bus by four masked men, then it was set on fire. Apart from this, disorder also appeared in Belfast in form of demonstrations and violence.⁸² In November 2021 disorders began simultaneously at the peace wall in Belfast, on Lanark Way, a Loyalist Shankill Road area as well as on the Nationalist side Springfield Road. The demonstrators took to the streets to oppose the Northern Irish Protocol. During the incident two children, one aged twelve and the other fifteen, were arrested. In Lanark Way protesters blocked the road, and then disorder broke out on both sides of the Loyalist and Nationalist communities where items were set on fire, as well as missiles and fireworks were shot at the police and their vehicles.⁸³

⁷⁸ Chris Page, “NI riots: Police say 19 officers injured in latest night of violence,” published April 9, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56684571>.

⁷⁹ Michael Hirst, “NI riots: What is behind the violence in Northern Ireland,” published April 14, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56664378>.

⁸⁰ Hirst, “NI riots,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56664378>; Kenny, “Timeline,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56675894>.

⁸¹ “Police arrest four people after bus was hijacked and set on fire in County Down,” Sky News, published November 12, 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/police-arrest-four-people-after-bus-was-hijacked-and-set-on-fire-in-county-down-12466827>.

⁸² Megan Baynes, “Northern Ireland: Bus hijacked and set on fire near loyalist estate on the outskirts of Belfast,” published November 8, 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/northern-ireland-bus-hijacked-and-set-on-fire-near-loyalist-estate-on-the-outskirts-of-belfast-12463733>.

⁸³ Press Association, “Arrests in Belfast after police attacked in Brexit protocol unrest,” published November 4, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/nov/03/police-attacked-in-belfast-over-northern-ireland-protocol>.

After Brexit and especially after the Northern Ireland Protocol another contentious topic came to the forefront: the question of Irish unification. The Nationalist, Republican Irish saw the Northern Ireland Protocol as some sort of victory. Mickey Brady from Sinn Fein commented on the Protocol in an interview by *Index.hu*. He said that the Northern Ireland Protocol was “the best of the worst option,”⁸⁴ and that “the only good thing about Brexit [...] is that it brought the whole issue of the reunification of Ireland to the forefront.”⁸⁵ He also confirmed, that he saw a good chance of that happening.⁸⁶ The Irish feel that a unified Ireland is increasingly getting closer.⁸⁷ Gerry Adams from Sinn Fein also called for a referendum on Irish unification, meaning that Northern Ireland would leave the United Kingdom and unify with the Republic of Ireland.⁸⁸ The idea of unification is actually completely possible, and as elaborated in the second chapter, a part of the Good Friday Agreement. According to a poll by Lord Ashcroft, the majority of the voters believe that Brexit made the question of Irish unification more likely in the future.⁸⁹ In the year 2021, Mary Lou MacDonald from Sinn Fein said that a referendum on unification might be possible within the next five years.⁹⁰

Another huge concern that can be connected to Brexit is that it can help the paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland to recruit new, usually young members. The reason for this is that while the new generation born after the Good Friday Agreement did not experience any sense of occupation for about twenty years, now as a result of Brexit a border had to be imposed which provides a feeling of occupation, or at least a sense of tension, which young people are now experiencing first-hand. Therefore, the new generation becomes much easier to be convinced and, usually, manipulated into joining paramilitary groups.⁹¹ This idea was even acknowledged by a paramilitary group itself, more precisely the New IRA. Senior members of the group said that Brexit helps the paramilitary group to recruit young members, as it highlights the fact of the Island being partitioned, and that there is an ongoing tension. A representative

⁸⁴ “A saját Trianonjukat ássák,” *Index.hu*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T29puynKUS4>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “Post-Brexit border,” *DW News*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WAdB6rSk5s>.

⁸⁸ “Gerry Adams says Brexit could lead to Northern Ireland leaving the UK,” *VICE News*, July 25, 2016, video, 5:36, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-6gq2jEJI>.

⁸⁹ “Gerry Adams repeats call for vote on united Ireland,” *The Irish Times*, last modified Jun 1, 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/gerry-adams-repeats-call-for-vote-on-united-ireland-1.3550189>.

⁹⁰ Ahmet Gurhan Kartal, “This is a 'critical' decade for Irish reunification, says Sinn Fein,” published June 29, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/this-is-a-critical-decade-for-irish-reunification-says-sinn-fein/2288824#>.

⁹¹ “A saját Trianonjukat ássák,” *Index.hu*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T29puynKUS4>.

from the group added, “It would be remiss of us not to capitalise on the opportunity. It’s put the border on the agenda again.”⁹² Another person from the organisation elaborated that the paramilitary group is “driven by young people”⁹³ as in the absence of appropriate political parties, they have no one to turn to and they become radicalised.⁹⁴ Although the sources containing the above-mentioned ideas were published in 2019 and 2018, they are well supported by the fact that several minors were arrested during the 2021 riots in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Protocol has still not been finalised. In fact, the United Kingdom wants to renegotiate some terms of the Protocol as the government finds it too strict and they feel it is a big compromise on their part. Some parts that the United Kingdom’s Government wish to change is, unsurprisingly, connected to Northern Ireland. To give an example, the United Kingdom wants that Northern Ireland should only meet British standards on the products, and should not need to adhere to EU laws as well. Moreover, the Government also wants the compulsory border checks and paperwork to cease between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. The third major thing the Government wants to change is connected to the issue of self-sovereignty – which issue was elaborated in the first chapter of the paper – and which term was heard extensively during the Brexit referendum. Namely, the demand was that the United Kingdom wanted the European Court of Justice and European Commission to be removed from overseeing the Protocol. However, the European Union does not want a renegotiation. Instead, it has rather offered concessions.⁹⁵

The situation is so intense that Northern Ireland’s first minister, Paul Givan, from the DUP, has resigned on February 3, 2022. The motive behind that was to protest against the Northern Ireland Protocol, as DUP completely rejects any form of border control imposed by the Protocol. A day before the resignation, agriculture minister Edwin Poots, also from the DUP, ordered a freeze on product checks as a threat, and when the day after it became clear that checks were continuing, it culminated in his resignation.⁹⁶

⁹² Qtd. in Emma Snaith, “New IRA says Brexit helps its cause and draws in young recruits,” published April 28, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/new-ira-brexiteer-recruit-young-irish-border-a8890301.html>.

⁹³ Qtd. in Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ McCann, “NI Protocol,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53724381>.

⁹⁶ Lisa O’Carroll, “Why Paul Givan quit – and what it means for Stormont,” published February 3, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/feb/03/why-paul-givan-may-resign-and-what-it-would-mean-for-stormont>.

Nonetheless, according to Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, the leader of DUP, the negotiation on the Northern Ireland Protocol is making “very little progress.”⁹⁷ He also added that it is highly unlikely that any solution will be made before the Stormont Assembly election.⁹⁸ However, it is pointless to speculate when an agreement will be achieved on the Protocol. The United Kingdom and the European Union both agreed that they wish to come to a solution until March 2022, but after Prime Minister Boris Johnson put the chance of success of achieving a deal to 20 to 30 per cent in February, hopes remain slim.⁹⁹

The huge surge in violence, the rise to prominence of paramilitary groups, the violation of the identities of the residents, the political instability, the sensitive issue of Irish unification emerging to the forefront, the seemingly never-ending problems with the Northern Ireland Protocol, and others all prove this paper that Brexit seriously jeopardises the hard-won peace in Northern Ireland.

Undeniably, the biggest problem that Northern Ireland, as well as the United Kingdom, has to face in the present time, and no telling how much longer in the future, is the Northern Ireland Protocol. As it can be concluded from the aforementioned events, it is an exceptionally volatile situation, where anything can happen at any moment. The objection of the Protestant community can be clearly seen, and there is also the possibility of further unrest and riots. What is clear is that there will be no border of any kind on the Irish Island. However, Protestants do not in any way want a border between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. The current situation in Northern Ireland can thus be described as a stalemate. It will be interesting to see how events will change in the future concerning this problem and what solutions will be found, and when.

⁹⁷ Qtd. in Clea Skopeliti, “Talks on Northern Ireland protocol making ‘little progress’, says DUP leader,” published February 12, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/feb/12/talks-on-northern-ireland-protocol-making-little-progress-says-dup-leader>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Skopeliti, “Talks on Northern Ireland,” <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/feb/12/talks-on-northern-ireland-protocol-making-little-progress-says-dup-leader>; Lisa O’Carroll “Brexit: ‘30% chance’ of new deal for Northern Ireland – Johnson,” published February 4, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/04/boris-johnson-30-percent-chance-new-brexite-deal-northern-ireland>.

Conclusion

Although Brexit was voted on 23 June 2016, six years have now passed and the final details have still not been finalised as major problems are still continuing to emerge concerning it. Due to the problematic history of Northern Ireland and therefore their special status in Brexit, solutions that satisfy all parties, and where no interests are harmed seem to be impossible to be made. This paper was finalised when the negotiations about the Northern Ireland Protocol were still ongoing, and in this position, there was no telling when the results would come. However, based on what has happened in the past few years, it can be assumed that the end of the problems is still a long way off. Brexit was not only a considerable source of tension during its campaign, but as a result of it, the peace process in Northern Ireland was severely disrupted.

During the Brexit campaign, the unique situation of Northern Ireland was not emphasised nor adequately communicated to the public. In this case, the legitimate question also arises whether, if more emphasis had been placed on the history of Northern Ireland and the impact of Brexit on it, would Brexit have been voted through at all. Although most voters, who did not possess adequate knowledge on the issue, are not, oppositional political groups taking part in the campaign that preceded the referendum are certainly to blame. “Project Fear,” the campaign of the Remainers, focused on the dire economic effects the United Kingdom would have leaving the Union, which included Northern Ireland to a small extent. However, if the campaign had focused more on the relevant issues affecting Northern Ireland, mainly on its problematic history, it might have been more successful and reached more people.

In my point of view, the implementation of Brexit was an extremely insensitive decision. As I got deeper into the subject during my research, it became incomprehensible for myself how the idea of Brexit even came to the forefront. Northern Ireland has a profoundly divided society after their troubled history, which are still vivid in the memories of the citizens. After the Good Friday Agreement moderate peace has begun to develop in the country. However, Brexit goes against all the effort that was made to bring peace, as it imposed the question of a border yet again. In a deeply divided society, any external pressure can culminate in a major problem, which in this case is shown in the many cases of street violence of recent years over the debate of the border. Above all, the implementation of Brexit offended the citizens of Northern Ireland by not taking the country’s history into consideration, and also offended their right to finally live in peace.

One of the frequently debated questions by the public and the most important for myself was whether Brexit was worth it, for which I strongly believe that the answer is no. The result

of its negative impact could be immediately seen, first during the referendum campaign as people from differing social classes, age groups, political affiliations and in Northern Ireland's case religions got divided on the issue. However, what impact it still has on Northern Ireland was presumably not anticipated by anyone. To emphasise again, six years have passed since the referendum, and no final solution for the arisen numerous and complex problems can be seen in the immediate future. This paper was written in a faculty of humanities, therefore it does not examine financial or economical aspects in depth. On the other hand, my research does suggest that from a moral point of view Brexit is definitely detrimental, but according to the current economic difficulties discussed in the paper it can be said that it is also a setback. In conclusion, from my point of view, the multitude of problems and therefore the disadvantages arising from Brexit simply outweigh the participated advantages.

Currently, one of the most intriguing aftermaths of Brexit is that it brought the idea of a united Ireland and a broken-up United Kingdom to the forefront. In recent decades Scotland has been focusing on the question of its independence, but after Brexit, this intention was complemented with an independent Scotland re-joining the European Union. In Northern Ireland, however, the idea of a united Ireland is deeply sensitive, yet becoming more prominent and popular. Certainly, this is the interest of the Catholic Republicans, but under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, it is completely feasible. As the concept now gained a prominent focus, it is possible that even serious negotiations could take place in the near future in favour of it. However, what most determines the situation in Northern Ireland is precisely what agreements are reached on the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Brexit and its aftermath are definitely the biggest sources of tension since the past twenty years after signing the Good Friday Agreement. While Brexit was not the only thing that could have caused problems in Northern Ireland, the combination of issues and difficulties stemming from it are ripping open the very wounds that hurt the citizens of Northern Ireland the most. What is certain is that the damages that have already been done to the peace process are irreversible, and cannot be forgotten regardless of future outcomes of negotiations and possible new solutions. In the following months or even years, there will be numerous things related to Brexit that will be intriguing to monitor, such as the situation in Northern Ireland, especially between the Catholic and Protestant communities, the initiatives about a united Ireland as well as the independence of Scotland, the future of the unity of the United Kingdom, and the negotiations about the Northern Ireland Protocol.

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