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The Troubles Continue – The Impact of Brexit on the Northern Irish Peace Process

Jelige: *sláinte*

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Introduction

Conflicts, rioting, sectarianism – these keywords precisely summarise the turbulent era, also known as the Troubles, that lasted between 1968 and 1998 on the Irish island, mainly in Northern Ireland (NI). The Good Friday Agreement, which was meant to resolve the conflicts once and for all, marks the official end of the Troubles. Despite the long-standing historical hostility between the two nations, it appears that the Irish island has finally achieved a peaceful state. Or has it? Could the Troubles continue? These questions have a greater impact than ever as the 2020 Brexit had its toll not only on political, economic, and administrative levels but also deepened disagreements about national affiliation. This research paper focuses on the impact of Brexit on the Northern Irish peace process, precisely, on the five sectors of security. Did changes, if there were any, move the United Kingdom, specifically, Northern Ireland towards a positive or negative direction security-wise? All in all, how were they affected by the dramatic divorce from the European Union?

In this research paper, the sectoral security theory of the Copenhagen School of international relations will be the core of my analysis regarding how Brexit has affected the Northern Irish peace process. With the use of the five sectors of security that Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde specified in their 1998 book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, we can measure and compare the differences before and after Brexit and, consequently, conclude. These five sectors, i.e., military, political, economic, societal, and environmental, alongside with official governmental statistics will serve as the key data sources for this study, which intends to comprehensively examine the multidimensional dynamics and interdependencies across the aforementioned components.

Alongside the sectoral security theory of Buzan-Wæver-de Wilde, documents that played a significant role in the Brexit process will be analysed.

Furthermore, primary sources included papers, agreements, and political speeches, while secondary sources – utilising these sources – allowed for further analysis and information.

In the first chapter, the research methodology behind this work will be provided. In the second, the historical background of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (ROI, Ireland) is summarised for the reader to see how the Troubles – and other crucial events as well – affected the relationship of the now two separate countries. The United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU, Union) had a long history together – this will be the topic of the third chapter. In the following one, the analysis of crucial Brexit documents will be presented and briefly examined. The sectoral analysis of pre- and post-Brexit Northern Ireland's security is studied and assessed in the fifth chapter. After that, conclusions are drawn, and the findings of this research paper, for the sake of clarity, are presented in a spreadsheet form. A list of abbreviations can be found at the end of the work.

1 Research Methodology

1.1 The Copenhagen School and the Sectoral Security Theory

The Copenhagen School provided a new way of reflecting on security and security studies, international security, defence policies, and correlated issues. The school was founded in 1985 along with the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, aiming to promote constructivist research in the aforementioned topics. Constructivists believe that the basic social concepts of our world, besides the objective facts of the natural world, such as ideas, values, norms, and theories are based on agreements between humans. The social world and its phenomena, institutions, and within them, basic presumptions about international relations, such as the anarchic nature of the global framework, the security dilemma, the clash of civilizations, or the interests of the state do exist, but they are socially constructed and thus changeable. As a result, constructivism challenges the deterministic and hence reductive view of international relations. It also claims that the conduct and interests of states are dictated not by power or its allocation in the framework of international relations, but by the political community's ideas, identities, and social norms. Constructivist thinkers believe in immaterial power like ideas, culture, and language over the conventional concepts of power.¹

¹ FEJES et al. 2019: 34–35

1.2 Sectors

Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde named five sectors through which “the distinctive character and dynamics of security” could be examined and analysed. These five sectors are: military, political, economic, societal, and environmental. Their comprehensive and new framework for security studies rejected the traditionalist argument of limiting security to a certain sector, stating that security is an aspect of politics that applies to an array of issues. Their theory also provides a constructivist way of differentiating the concept of security from the process of politicisation.²

The impact of Brexit on the Northern Irish peace process can be measured and, thus, analysed. Statistics and official findings e.g., case studies offer an objective approach to learning whether the fragile peace between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland could be threatened by the changes (or the lack of them) the departing has caused.

1.3 Literature Review

Constructivists such as Barry Buzan challenged the traditionalist idea that security should be restricted to only one sector, arguing that security is a component of politics that relates to a wide range of subjects in their book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. However, they argued that politics is a sector in itself. For a long time, security studies saw the military component as the one true sector of the field, which the writer trio dismisses and adds four more.

Simon Duke was a Professor at the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht, the Netherlands who wrote the *Will Brexit Damage our Security and Defence?* The book navigates through Brexit and examines how it would impact the (inter)national security and defence of the United Kingdom.³ He did not make a specific prognosis regarding UK-EU relations, but stated, “The value attached to any future partnership with the UK by the Union and its members is likely to hinge on the extent to which it is perceived to contribute to the EU’s ability to attain a number of broad security and defence objectives.” The book was written in a refreshingly upfront yet factual tone and argued that Brexit and the UK’s security and defence were overemphasised, and member states and generally the Union were overlooked in the process, although they were, naturally, also deeply affected.⁴

² BUZAN–WÆVER–DE WILDE 1998: vii

³ The book was published in 2019 before Brexit took place and negotiations finished.

⁴ DUKE 2019

Katy Hayward, Professor at Queen's University Belfast, specialises in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, cross-border questions, especially regarding Brexit, and peace and conflict processes. She was a co-author of research for the REGI Committee,⁵ *Impact of Brexit on the Development of Irish Regions and their Cross-Border Cooperation*. The Withdrawal Agreement (WA) highlighted both the positive effects of European integration on regional development and the Irish cross-border collaboration as well as their vulnerability to Brexit. This research outlined the impact of Brexit – both predicted and actual. The emphasis for this case study was on non-trade issues regarding administration, environment, and culture because they are handled on a regional and local level. It also recommends measures concerning future territorial cohesion and regional development in Ireland.⁶

1.4 Document Analysis

When talking about Brexit it is worth noting that legal documents shaped the course of the nearly five year long exiting process because of heated debates. The Latin phrase, *verba volant, scripta manent*, is the base of every legal system and legislation process, including Brexit. That is why I chose the use of document analysis besides the security theory in my research paper. The most significant documents of the Brexit talks were the Withdrawal Agreement, the Protocol on Northern Ireland and Ireland, the Political Declaration, and the Windsor Framework, although there are some EU- and government-issued papers that are also mentioned among these lines.

This method provided primary sources for the study, and articles, case studies, and books based on them provided secondary sources.

2 A Brief History of the Irish Island

2.1 From the Beginnings Until the Great War

The United Kingdom's Northern Ireland is commonly referred to as Ulster, although in the past it was one of the four ancient Irish provinces beside Leinster, Munster, and Connaught.

In the 16th century, Ulster was divided into nine shires or counties. Those located in the territory of the ROI still exist today, although their very survival was in danger. Two predominant Roman Catholic counties, Tyrone and Tyrconnell, took a major part in the rebellion against Queen Elizabeth I and the imposing of the English Reformation on the Irish.⁷

⁵ The European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development.

⁶ CREAMER-HAYWARD 2023

⁷ *Ulster* 2023

In 1603, at the end of the Nine Years' War of Ireland, fifty-nine undertakers of Presbyterian Lowland Scot and northern English origin were planted in the province of Ulster by King James VI and I, as he and an alliance of the Irish earls failed to come to an agreement.⁸

The Lowland Scots Presbyterian minority had grown into a majority, therefore the eastern region became predominantly Protestant.⁹ Over the next century, not only the islands but also Europe was immersed in religion-motivated wars. In 1688 King James VII and II, the last Catholic monarch of England, Scotland, and Ireland, was overthrown by Protestant William III, Prince of Orange.¹⁰

In 1845, the Great Famine, also known as the potato famine, broke out in Ireland. Although the Irish were part of the United Kingdom, and while they starved, the British continued their food exportation for profit. More than a million people died.¹¹ The famine caused rebellion and an even stronger will for independence. Over the century there were multiple bills to propose the Home Rule.¹² The bill meant granting the Irish sovereignty for their domestic affairs without breaking their Union with Britain.¹³ After World War I broke out, a deal was reached in which the bill would become law alongside a suspending act, thus deferring Home Rule until peacetime.¹⁴ It was intended to act as a constitutional reform, to change the unitary parliamentary state into a federation with a unique, devolved parliament for the entirety of Ireland.

2.2 The Turbulent Era of the Early 20th Century

“[The Easter Rising was] an act of armed propaganda rather than a serious attempt to seize power”, states Fearghal McGarry, Irish historian. After the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force during the Ulster Crisis (1912-1914), it was feared that conflicts would follow the institution of a “provisional government” in Belfast. And they did. The 1916 Easter Rising involved the Irish Volunteers' radical wing; a secret society, called the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), and a socialist military force, the Irish Citizen Army amongst other smaller groups. According to Eoin MacNeill, Chief of Staff of the Irish Volunteers, their *casus belli* was the introduction of mandatory conscription. The rebels' attitudes and actions throughout

⁸ Imperial War Museums 2023

⁹ *Ulster* 2023

¹⁰ Nowadays, the Loyalist marching season in July is in memory of the British hero, William of Orange.

¹¹ Imperial War Museums 2023

¹² *About the Ulster Covenant*

¹³ BIAGINI 2018: 259–275

¹⁴ *About the Ulster Covenant*

Easter week show that the insurgency had a more symbolic essence than being a *coup d'état*. The declaration of an Irish Republic was one of the most significant moments of the Rising.¹⁵

The Irish War of Independence was the climactic point of the centuries-long political (Irish Republicans vs. the British Government) and religious-sectarian (Catholics vs. Protestants) tensions between Ireland and the United Kingdom.

The IRB and the Irish Volunteers merged, and as a result, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) were born. Despite their triumphant battles in the War of Independence, the IRA was still anticipated to lose. British intelligence played a significant role in undermining and ultimately defeating previous rebellions in Ireland. However, years of decay in this field allowed the IRA to gain the upper hand. Michael Collins, the IRA's Director of Intelligence, was crucial to their success, as he built an extensive network of spies.

As the events escalated, the British Government introduced the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 intending to settle a political deal. The Irish, however, felt as if it were a badly executed Home Rule, limiting their freedom rather than granting them Republican status. The act established the Parliament of Northern Ireland and the Parliament of *Southern* Ireland. The six counties of Ulster, now part of Northern Ireland, had their own administrative system, which intensified nationalist sentiments. The most notorious event of the war took place in November, called Bloody Sunday, on which twenty-eight people were shot dead. The conflict had a major impact on the province of Ulster. Unionist politicians suggested separating Ireland to maintain their position in the United Kingdom. As a result, they pushed the government to shift power and establish their own law enforcement unit, the Ulster Special Constabulary. The outcome of the conflict left Nationalists, who were dedicated to a united Ireland, feeling outraged. The British were under domestic pressure to stop the war, so in July 1921, a truce was agreed upon, leading to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. While this treaty brought an end to the conflict, it also confirmed the partition of Northern and Southern Ireland, which had already been established in the 1920 Government of Ireland Act.¹⁶

The Civil War of 1922 and 1923 cemented the measures of the Anglo-Irish Treaty such as the power being taken away from local governments and concentrated in Dublin.¹⁷ The borders of the United Kingdom were redrawn, with only six of the original nine Ulster counties remaining part of the country. The new borders ran across the streets, tearing apart families, communities, and parishes. This move was driven by Unionist interests, with the aim of

¹⁵ MCGARRY 2014

¹⁶ *Irish War of Independence*

¹⁷ DORNEY 2012

securing a Protestant political majority in Northern Ireland. Despite this, a significant number of Catholics also became citizens of the new state. After the parting, the southern part became the Irish Free State, but in 1937, the Republican Fianna Fáil party introduced a draft of a completely new Constitution. This act resulted in renaming the Irish Free State to the Republic of Ireland.¹⁸

During this period, voting was manipulated to the benefit of Unionists by gerrymandering, meaning the electoral districts' boundaries were structured in a way that Unionist voters would outnumber their Nationalist opponents. Gerrymandering was mostly used in the mainly nationalist city of Derry/Londonderry, where Unionists secured their dominance with only a third of the total number of votes.¹⁹ The name of the city and the county is still a topic of discussion as legally it is called Londonderry, and Unionists refer to it accordingly, but Nationalists simply use Derry, emphasising the fact that they do not wish to be part of the United Kingdom with the use of 'London'.

The working class was hindered when it came to elections: voting rights were subject to property censorship. Nationalists in Belfast were prejudiced against accessing job opportunities; women also faced challenges in finding employment. Due to these factors, during the annual Apprentice Boys of Derry March in 1969, a violent outbreak occurred. The marching route crossed the predominantly Catholic neighbourhood of Derry/Londonderry, the Bogside. The event resulted in clashes between the residents and the marchers.²⁰ Army leaders agreed on not trying to enter the Bogside, and 'Free Derry', as Nationalists called it, was governed by a local defence group for the next two months. As a result, about fifty peace walls were installed to separate Protestant communities from Catholics.

2.3 The Troubles

The battle of the Bogside marked the beginning of a thirty-year violent conflict between Protestants and Catholics, or Loyalists (Unionists) and Nationalists (Republicans) in NI and the ROI. This period, known as the Troubles, which claimed 3,532 lives and impacted hundreds of thousands of people, ended in 1998 with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.²¹

In 1969, the IRA split into two factions, resulting in the formation of the Provisional IRA (PIRA) and the Official IRA. Meanwhile, the Red Hand Commando, the Ulster Defence

¹⁸ Imperial War Museums 2023

¹⁹ Ó DOCHARTAIGH 2022

²⁰ Imperial War Museums 2023

²¹ Ó DOCHARTAIGH 2022

Association (UDA), and the Ulster Volunteer Force, which were Loyalist paramilitary groups, saw a surge in their membership.

When the PIRA escalated their armed campaign against the British and Northern Irish security forces, many Nationalists saw it as an act of defending the community, but in the eyes of Loyalists, they were nothing but dangerous insurgents.²²

Operation Banner was the longest continuous deployment in the history of the British Army, lasting almost four decades. The last soldier working on the operation left his position in 2007. The British military was initially stationed in Northern Ireland to support the police in restoring law and order. The first troops arrived for the battle of the Bogside, but instead of withdrawing them after the events, the British Government, seeing the violence, decided against it. It was the Unionist government at Stormont, the place of the Northern Irish parliamentary building, that requested the assistance of the armed forces, but the Nationalist community saw the band as the necessary evil to safeguard them from the Loyalists' violence and aggression. Their view changed later, as Stormont introduced a seriously debated Northern Irish state policy.²³ This new policy was internment without trial, and it was the 1922 Special Powers Act that legitimised it.²⁴ The British Army started arresting those who were identified as suspects: possibly IRA members and political opponents.²⁵

On Sunday 30 January 1972, in Derry/Londonderry, a march against internment without trial took place that turned out to be a disastrous event. The British Army was commanded to move into the Bogside neighbourhood as part of an arrest operation. The same soldiers in the next half an hour shot thirteen men in the head and seriously injured just as many. The fatalities led to a surge in sympathy for Republicanism, particularly for the IRA, inside Ireland. Demonstrating their resentment, protesters burned down the British embassy in Dublin.

Then Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery, organised an inquiry to investigate the events. When Lord Widgery published the report on the case, he did not find the soldiers' actions guilty and stated that there was a strong suspicion that some civilians carried and fired weapons and handled bombs. The relatives of the killed campaigned for a new inquiry in 1998, which eventually led to Tony Blair's, then British Prime Minister, announcement about a new investigation. The new hearings were held some thirty years after Bloody Sunday.²⁶ Lord Saville's report was finally published in 2010, stating, "none of [the civilians were] posing a

²² Imperial War Museums 2023

²³ HUNTER 2020

²⁴ *Special Powers Act 1922*

²⁵ *Operation Demetrius* 2011

²⁶ MELAUGH 2010a

threat of causing death or serious injury. What happened on Bloody Sunday strengthened the Provisional IRA, increased nationalist resentment and hostility towards the Army and exacerbated the violent conflict of the years that followed.”²⁷

Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) members John Hume and Paddy Devlin made the Troubles ceasefire possible as they held meetings with the IRA. William Whitelaw, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, approved the terms of the IRA, so the paramilitary group announced the intended ceasefire in June 1972. However, after a delegation for back-door talks with the British Government was sent, the IRA ceasefire ultimately collapsed due to a disagreement, resulting in the IRA and British troops engaging in gunfights.²⁸

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, massacres and bombings were frequent. Both the IRA and the British Army – and other paramilitary groups – joined in the bloody conflict that had been going on for a decade. Lord Louis Mountbatten, World War II hero and second cousin of Queen Elizabeth II was assassinated in 1979 with a pre-planted bomb by the PIRA.²⁹

The 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, the most significant milestone in their relationship since the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, was signed between the Government of the Republic of Ireland and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Both governments affirmed that Northern Ireland’s status would not change without the consent of a majority of its population. Nevertheless, it was the first time that Ireland was given a consultative role in the security and political affairs of their northern neighbours. The agreement’s main goal was to promote reconciliation and peaceful coexistence in Northern Ireland; it had failed. In the 1990s, Northern Ireland’s two communities became as alienated as they were in the past. However, the treaty achieved some success in terms of intergovernmental partnerships in security and legal matters and cross-border cooperation. The intention to put down Sinn Féin and restrict its right-winged paramilitary group, the PIRA, was also successful, at least in the short term.³⁰

2.4 Ceasefire and the Good Friday Agreement

A long-awaited ceasefire was announced in 1994 by the PIRA and some Loyalist paramilitary groups as well, after years of radical outbursts (from both sides) including bombings, assassinations, and gunfights, but it fell apart two years later. The reason for it was that the governing Sinn Féin was left out of the peace talks because of the IRA’s continuous bombing

²⁷ SAVILLE–HOYT–TOOHEY 2010: 57–58

²⁸ MELAUGH 2010b

²⁹ KENNEDY 2023

³⁰ MORTON *Anglo-Irish Agreement - Summary of Events*

campaign. However, the Unionists were present, ready for a solution that involved the Republic's participation. Sinn Féin was invited to the discussions after the IRA restarted its ceasefire in 1997.³¹

The Belfast (or Good Friday) Agreement was reached on the Good Friday of April 1998 thanks to the peace talks between the British and Irish governments. The treaty developed cross-border collaboration between the governments of the ROI and NI, as well as laying the foundation for ongoing discussions between the British and Irish governments. However, the Real IRA acted radically and carried out a bombing in Omagh in August, killing twenty-nine people.

The new elections for the Assembly were held in June, but the IRA's refusal to surrender its arms postponed the inauguration of the power-sharing Northern Ireland Executive until December 1999, after the IRA finally carried out its disarming. The Republic revised its Constitution and removed its territorial claims to the full island and the United Kingdom renounced direct rule over Northern Ireland. Although the Troubles had officially ended, peace was fragile in Northern Ireland. Sectarianism remained, the decommissioning process was lengthy on both sides, and the implementation of the new institutions was limited, leading to the reinstatement of direct rule.

In July 2005, the IRA stated that they had instructed all their units to disarm and that they would only pursue their objectives by using peaceful methods. In addition, the IRA were willing to operate under international inspection. Unionist paramilitaries and other Republican forces followed the disarming process.

Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley, the leaders of Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the two parties that had won the most seats in the Assembly election, established an agreement in March 2007 to create a power-sharing administration. In May, Paisley became first minister and Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness, a former IRA commander, was appointed deputy first minister.³²

3 Forty-Seven Years

3.1 Beginnings

In the 1950s, Great Britain felt opening to Europe and expanding their market outside of the Commonwealth would benefit them, especially after an economic decrease in those years

³¹ WALLENFELDT *The Anglo-Irish Agreement and Downing Street Declaration*

³² WALLENFELDT *The Good Friday Agreement, the Omagh bombing, peace, and power sharing*

compared to other European countries' markets. The 1957 Treaty of Rome that established the European Economic Community (EEC) seemed to be the perfect means for that. After the initial rejection in 1960, another application was made seven years later, this time, a successful one. Talks about their joining started in 1970.

Signing the Treaty of Accession proved to be a heavily debated matter in the House of Commons, as there was massive domestic opposition to the membership and whether the correlated terms would be advantageous enough for them. Eventually, Prime Minister Edward Heath signed the treaty in Brussels on 22 January 1972. It was later sent to the House of Commons to gain legislative consent about Britain's EEC membership. Debates (about 12 clauses that lasted more than 300 hours) eventually came to an end and Great Britain joined the EEC in 1973.

Through the years, the Community outgrew itself, and with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the European Union was born, coming into effect in the following year.³³

3.2 The 2016 Referendum and its Outcome

Multiple factors played a role in the 2016 June referendum that set Brexit in motion. Immigration, economy, sovereignty, and general discontentment with politics were along the lines of reasons why Britain would want to terminate their EU membership. There were some heated arguments about security; Pro-Leave campaigners argued that preventing border issues and matters related to immigration are crucial, and for pro-Remain campaigners, data-sharing and cooperation were the main goals. During a former British Government, the David Cameron-led government demanded a special status for the United Kingdom, stating the European Commission and Parliament should not have more influence in security and defence matters than a state. Thus, Prime Minister Cameron belittled the freedom the UK should have had, however, they used their right to opt-out from some agreements on multiple occasions as they did with the Schengen Agreement or the Economic and Monetary Union and other areas as well like the area of freedom, security, and justice – opt-outs that members joining after 2004 could not do. Cameron's demands were agreed.³⁴

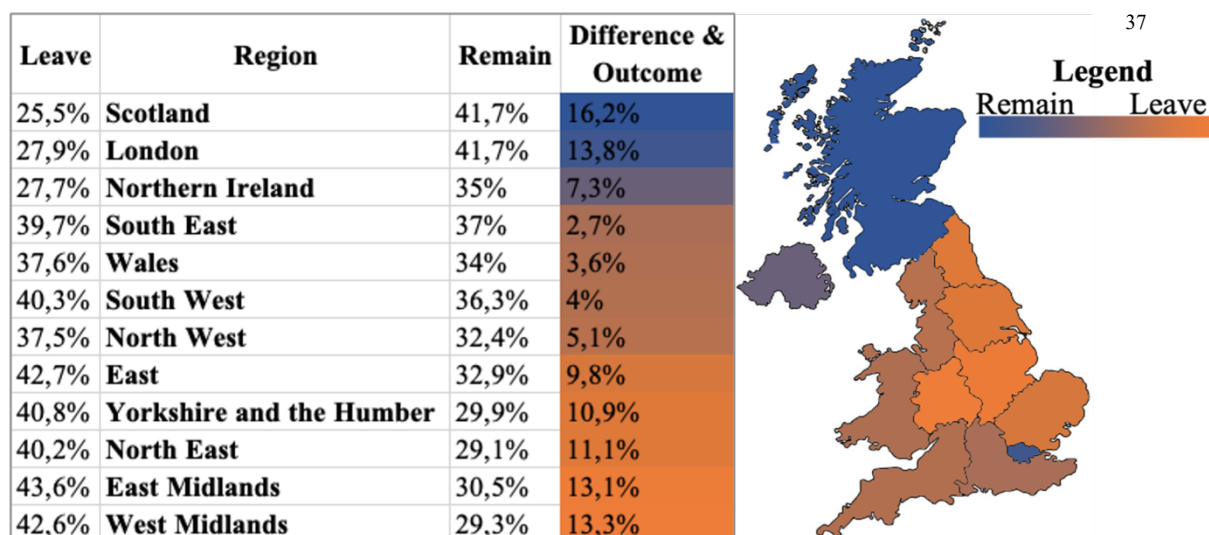
Brexiters supported their argument with the Union's federalist tendencies and the alleged plans of establishing a European army – however, in 2015, President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, suggested the establishment of such.³⁵

³³ *Into Europe*

³⁴ DUKE 2019

³⁵ KEATING 2015

The 2016 June referendum resulted in 51.9% of the voters electing to leave the Union, with a 72.2% voting turnout. There was a strong tendency to stay members in Scotland and Northern Ireland while Englanders and the Welsh opted for Brexit. A phenomenon called ‘Bregretters’ shows that about 7% of the voters regretted their choice.³⁶



1. Figure Results of the EU referendum. Edited by the Author

3.3 The Talks

Soft or hard Brexit? This question was a serious topic of debate after the referendum practically decided the future of the British Isles. The European Council (EUCO), which has been responsible for negotiations on exit, started providing guidelines for Theresa May’s government in 2017, a month after the Prime Minister set Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in motion.³⁸ According to art.50(3) TEU: “The Treaties shall cease to apply to the State in question from the date of entry into force of the WA or, failing that, two years after the notification referred to in paragraph 2, unless the European Council, in agreement with the Member State concerned, unanimously decides to extend this period.”³⁹ The EU guidelines suggested that they are ready to establish partnerships except for some areas e.g., security, defence, foreign policy, and trading.

³⁶ DUKE 2019

³⁷ *Results and turnout at the EU referendum 2019*. The brighter the blue, the greater the difference between Remain and Leave votes.

³⁸ DUKE 2019

³⁹ Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union 2012

Michel Barnier, the European Commission's (EC) then Chief Negotiator of the Task Force for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom, envisioned a two-stage process, where the second phase would only begin after a satisfactory agreement was reached. The first phase focused on the UK's financial commitment towards the Union, the rights of EU citizens and *vice versa*, and the Northern Irish border with the EU. Any questions about security and trade relationships would be therefore subject to a successful deal after the first part. The next phase started in December 2017, however, specifics regarding the citizens' rights and the possibility of a soft border between NI and the ROI – as the UK was withdrawing from both the Union, the European Economic Area (Single Market), and the Customs Union – were overlooked.⁴⁰

Theresa May's Chequers plan in 2018 was a desperate attempt to please both sides: her people and the European Union. She proposed a much softer Brexit than at the beginning of the withdrawal talks; according to it, the United Kingdom would "maintain a common rulebook for all goods" by continuing some aspects of harmonisation of EU law. It also introduced compromises regarding the European Court of Justice's role in UK-EU mediation and proposed an assisted customs arrangement in which the UK would collect tariffs for the European Union to avoid the hard-border scenario in Northern Ireland, given the turbulent history of the country. Between the EU member Republic of Ireland and the Brexiter Northern Ireland a 500km long border lies, so it was rightfully feared that a hard border would mean national outrage as well as the Good Friday Agreement being violated.⁴¹ The Chief Negotiator Michael Barnier welcomed the plan at first but later changed his opinion on the matter, even calling some aspects of it illegal to implement, and would undermine the Single Market.⁴²

May's Brexit deal consisted of two parts: first, the WA, which included the 'divorce bill', further actions regarding citizens' rights, and arrangements about the Irish question – mainly, the border. It was a legally binding document, which "introduces a transition or implementation period" until 31 December 2020. Second, the Political Declaration, which is a not legally binding framework for UK-EU relations in the future, covered the sensitive topic of integrity and sovereignty: their withdrawal from the Single Market and Customs Union and their independence.

⁴⁰ DUKE 2019

⁴¹ SANDFORD 2020b

⁴² TIDEY 2018

Although there was constant and strong opposition from pro-EU MPs, these were in the UK's best interest and carried out on the result of the June 2016 referendum.⁴³ In November, Brexit negotiations reached another milestone: The EU27 leaders signed the deal, but it still needed to be approved by the UK and the European parliaments to happen.⁴⁴

May's adapted Chequers plan, which was titled "cherry-picking" by EU leaders, was introduced to incorporate a UK-wide Customs Union with the European Union to settle the disputed Irish border backstop. Later, a vote of confidence was taken against her, which she managed to stand, but she had to step down before the next election. Talks were postponed due to heated debates.

2019 was a year of disagreements, losses, resignations, and inaugurations. Starting with the first significant loss of a vote about the terms of Brexit which was labelled the worst parliamentary loss in the UK's history. After May was sent back to Brussels to renegotiate the Irish backstop, in March, a second meaningful vote was lost, and the Prime Minister was pushed to ask for a second delay in Brexit. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Remainers marched for a second referendum to take place. A third loss in parliament left MPs unable to agree on a second referendum. After another request for a delay, the UK held its mandatory EP elections as they were still members of the Union, but the following day, Theresa May announced her stepping down from her Conservative Party leader position as soon as her successor was nominated. Brexit Party leader Nigel Farage won the elections by obliterating Remainder parties.

In July, following a long balloting process, Boris Johnson won the conservative Tory leadership, earning him the title of Prime Minister. Johnson's first noteworthy political act was a plea towards the EU to discard the Irish backstop from the Withdrawal Agreement – which was refused. Because of prior debates and the fact that an agreement was not reached on the actual exit from the European Union, the United Kingdom was expected to part ways on 31 October 2019. MPs revolted against the government recklessly driving the island nations towards Brexit with or without a deal.⁴⁵ PM Johnson expressed his strong will for divorce on multiple occasions, one time stating, "I'd rather be dead in a ditch [than ask for another Brexit extension.]"⁴⁶ However, in September, the Benn bill was introduced to prevent the no-deal scenario without the parliament's consent. Next month, Brussels rejected London's new draft,

⁴³ SANDFORD 2020b

⁴⁴ SANDFORD 2020a

⁴⁵ SANDFORD 2020a

⁴⁶ Euronews 2019

missing the Irish backstop. It was on 17 October, that a significant announcement was made in Brussels: the Brexit deal had gotten a green light. The backstop was replaced because it would seem as if they had to make compromises instead of Northern Ireland, limiting their autonomy. Boris Johnson had to ask for a delay at the end, as MPs denied their consent until the Brexit legislation was implemented. This gave the UK time until 31 January.

Following some leadership changes in the Union itself – new European Commission President: Ursula von der Leyen, new European Council President: Charles Michel –, a round of elections resulted in Boris Johnson's Conservatives winning most of the seats, although, in Northern Ireland and Scotland, anti-Brexiteers voted in majority.

2020 marks the end and the beginning of a new era in the long history of the United Kingdom – and the ROI. After the WA became law, it did not take much to get approved by EP. On 31 January, the UK officially left the EU, setting a transition phase into motion from 1 February, running until the end of the year.⁴⁷

4 Agreements That Shaped the Way

4.1 Withdrawal Agreement

The Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, as endorsed by leaders at a special meeting of the European Council on 25 November 2018, also known as the Withdrawal Agreement, consists of six parts:

- Part One Common Provisions (art.1-8),
- Part Two Citizens' Rights (art.9-39),
- Part Three Separations Provisions (art.40-125),
- Part Four Transition (art.126-132),
- Part Five Financial Provisions (art.133-157),
- Part Six Institutional and Final Provisions (art.158-185),

and three protocols, these being:

- Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland (art.1-21),
- Protocol Relating to the Sovereign Base Areas of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Cyprus (art.1-13),

⁴⁷ SANDFORD 2020a

- Protocol on Gibraltar (art.1-6).⁴⁸

Part two of the agreement discusses citizens' rights: "protecting the life choices of over 3 million European Union citizens in the UK, and over 1 million UK nationals in EU countries, safeguarding their right to live, work or study in their host country."⁴⁹

One of the key elements of the WA was the transition period that provided the smooth implementation of the new legislation which ended on 31 December 2020.⁵⁰ Part four also ensured "continued application of EU law in and to the UK during that period (but without UK participation in EU institutions and governance structures)".

Part five contains details about the financial settlement which ensures "that the UK and the EU honour all financial obligations undertaken jointly while the UK was a Member State."⁵¹

4.1.2 Protocol on Northern Ireland / Ireland

The Irish backstop had played a significant role in the Brexit talks. It was during Theresa May's governance that the 'Irish question' was raised. The backstop was a mechanism designed to ensure a 'soft', open border between the UK member Northern Ireland and the EU member Ireland. Leavers saw May's version of the Brexit deal, containing a soft border solution, as a possible further and unwanted entanglement with the EU. Back in the times of the talks, hard-line pro-Brexiteers questioned if it was even necessary to have a deal, as they would rather not have a deal at all than have a close relationship with the EU after Brexit took place. Remainers, however, thought May's agreement was worse than their current membership terms and that the deal failed to elaborate measures on future relations.⁵² While Theresa May tried to please both sides, her deal, after all, could not meet the needs and wants of either.

Concerning the history of the two countries, the Protocol on Northern Ireland / Ireland ensured avoiding a hard border between them. It was "a stable and lasting solution designed to protect the all-island economy and the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement in all its dimensions, and to safeguard the integrity of the EU Single Market."⁵³ Meaning, no hard borders or border controls are required when it comes to trading from NI to the ROI, but goods crossing the Irish

⁴⁸ *Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, as endorsed by leaders at a special meeting of the European Council on 25 November 2018* 2018

⁴⁹ *The revised EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement EXPLAINED* 2020

⁵⁰ According to art.126 and art.127(1) WA: "There shall be a transition or implementation period, which shall start on the date of entry into force of this Agreement and end on 31 December 2020", and "Unless otherwise provided in this Agreement, Union law shall be applicable to and in the United Kingdom during the transition period."

⁵¹ *The revised EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement EXPLAINED* 2020

⁵² SANDFORD 2020b

⁵³ *The Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland explained* 2023

Sea from Great Britain are subject to border control on behalf of the EU, as Northern Ireland is still part of the Union Customs Code or Customs Union). In conclusion, any products entering Northern Ireland from outside the EU, even from the UK, must be checked.

4.3 Windsor Framework

The UK tried to unilaterally override the agreement on multiple occasions. It became a topic of dispute that was ultimately settled by the Windsor Framework of February 2023 by EC president Ursula von der Leyen and current UK PM Rishi Sunak. A set of joint solutions was implemented as part of the renewed protocol, including some new measures taken on the free movement of goods and customs, value-added tax (VAT), tariff rate quotas, medicine and state aids, agri-food, and pet travel. Given the lack of a physical border, because of the soft border deal, the EU is entitled to examine and assess the danger of products not remaining in Northern Ireland. If products happen to be crossing into Ireland, structural measures can be taken.⁵⁴

The Stormont Brake, being an emergency brake, was introduced alongside the Windsor Framework, and it authorises the UK Government through the Northern Irish Assembly to object to some of the changes regarding Northern Ireland.⁵⁵

4.4 Political Declaration

The twenty-six-page long Political Declaration was drafted at the same time as the Withdrawal Agreement, in 2018. It covers the UK-EU ties after Brexit. Its first and foremost key point concerned the Irish backstop; an alternative solution was reached regarding the hard border issue.

The draft outlined an “ambitious, wide-ranging and balanced” economic cooperation that ensured a free-trading zone where both parties have an interest.

Mobility arrangements and the free movement of people were still under discussion, so they were only briefly mentioned in the declaration. However, discussions about researching, studying, and training and youth exchange programmes were on their agenda.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ LÓPEZ 2023

⁵⁵ *The Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland explained* 2023

⁵⁶ BARNES 2019

5 Sectoral Analysis: The Impact of Brexit on the Northern Irish Peace Process

5.1 Military Sector

According to the EU's mutual assistance clause, art.42(7) TEU, "If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power [...]. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.

Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation."⁵⁷

The mutual assistance clause alongside the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) offered a chance to start building out an extensive defence union. It marked the beginning of a long process – whose peak is yet to be seen.

In the past of the EU and its predecessors, there have been multiple instances where the idea of establishing a joint European army was mooted, especially after the Cold War. However, in the last decade, speeches of European politicians and influential EU leaders regarding this topic have become more frequent. France, although not a full NATO member, still advocated for the idea. Germany has too, as Ursula von der Leyen, then Germany's defence minister, put it, "Our future as Europeans will at some point be with a European army." Jean-Claude Juncker urged establishing such in 2015 when talking about the Russian threat. He added a force like that would only complement NATO, and not challenge it. At the same time, it would "help us design a common foreign and security policy." Conversely, the UK opposed it. Juncker's words caused outrage in the British media and Conservative politician and Member of the European Parliament (MEP), Geoffrey Van Orden said: "The EU's defence ambitions are detrimental to our national interest, to NATO, and to the close alliances that Britain has with many countries outside the EU – not least the United States, Gulf allies, and many Commonwealth countries." The UK Government also stated that "defence is a national – not an EU – responsibility and that there is no prospect of that position changing and no prospect of a European army."⁵⁸

In retrospect, the European Communities meant a security community ever since their founding in line with constructivist theory. Issues within the European integration have been handled peacefully thanks to mutual trust and interdependence. Due to the integration process, EU members do not feel threatened by their fellow members, therefore the process referred to

⁵⁷ Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union 2012

⁵⁸ KEATING 2015

as a security dilemma would not arise.⁵⁹ This dilemma and insecurity are socially constructed through actors highlighting an issue and utilising the support they can acquire due to their roles to expose it.⁶⁰

The state is the subject investigated in the study of military security. Primarily, the offensive and defensive military capabilities of governments, as well as public views of their intentions, are examined. There are also realist elements in this sector, for instance, the main objective of the state is to defend its territory and inhabitants, and states dissatisfied with their status quo pose the greatest threat. In today's military sector, there is a tendency for rising cooperation and a preventive nature regarding aggression.⁶¹

In the 2017 *Foreign policy, defence and development: a future partnership paper*, published by the UK Government, they stated that the UK will remain committed to European security and will cooperate on external action, furthermore, share their "policy tools and expertise, defence and security capabilities, global networks and influence, and development spend to support peace and security" despite Brexit.⁶²

Since Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, it does not have autonomous armed forces, instead, they are united in the British Armed Forces. Regular forces include personnel in the Royal Navy, the British Army, the Royal Air Force, and the Strategic Command.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) published a study in 2022 that examines how military capabilities in Europe could be measured. The paper provided information about methods used by different countries and organisations and presented their preferred method. The UK uses a framework called TEPID OIL, which is an acronym for training, equipment, personnel, information, doctrine and concepts, organisation, infrastructure, and logistics. The mnemonic plays a significant role in military development, as each letter and the meaning behind it is a piece of the puzzle that serves and operates their forced arms. However, any template created for assessing the dimensions of a specific military's capabilities is crafted by a government or organisation, therefore reflecting their view based on their experiences and experts.⁶³

⁵⁹ MOLNÁR et al. 2019: 82–83

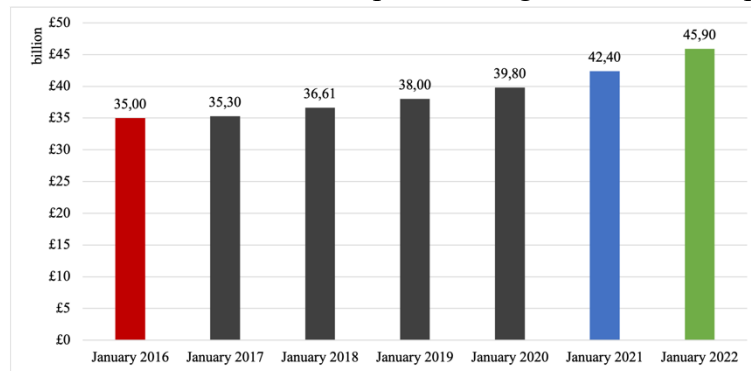
⁶⁰ LUPOVICI 2021: 257–285

⁶¹ GAZDAG–REMEK 2018: 21

⁶² *Foreign policy, defence and development: a future partnership paper* 2017

⁶³ GIEGERICH–HACKETT 2022: 5

There has been a rise in the UK's defence expenditure despite the 2016 referendum, the COVID-19 crisis, and even Brexit. The UK's position in global defence expenditure rankings,



2. Figure UK Defence Expenditure (bn £). Edited by the Author

according to IISS, has seen a climb as well: from fifth in 2016 they have gotten up to third position by 2021.⁶⁴

Following the Northern Ireland Protocol, a serious question arose regarding the free movement of the military. Since the UK is a member of the treaty, NATO had to be notified about the changes, however, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) stated that the protocol would not affect ongoing operations in NI. Ulster Unionist politicians argued that “military equipment, and in some cases personnel, cannot be moved from Great Britain to Northern Ireland unless they complete a customs form.” A NATO form also needed to be filled out before any operations in advance – fifteen days before any procedures. The MOD's response to that was a reassurance about the MOD's ability to conduct operations and, therefore, not being impacted negatively by the protocol.⁶⁵ The Ulster Unionist Party later stated that the free movement issue in the Irish Sea was resolved by not having to fill out a form before the movement of military troops.⁶⁶

Although the issue was solved, and fears (mostly) allayed, Ireland's former Minister for European Affairs expressed her view about an escalation of hostility again: “Political tensions are rising, with some signs of dissident paramilitary forces re-emerging against the backdrop of political disarray.” The former minister, being an anti-Brexiter, feared that securing peace in Northern Ireland should be the most important element of the Brexit talks.⁶⁷

According to statistics of the UK MOD, full-time trained strength (Royal Navy/Royal Marine & Royal Air Force) and full-time trade trained strength (British Army) have seen a decrease of

⁶⁴UK defence expenditure 2023

⁶⁵ McCLAFFERTY 2021a

⁶⁶ McCLAFFERTY 2021b

⁶⁷ CREIGHTON 2021: 62–63

ca., 6%. Equipment and formations have been more impacted, decreasing by 26,5%. The UK MOD explained that it was the result of offering their equipment and technology to Ukraine in their fight with Russia. The number of all UK forces personnel dropped by 6%.

Data regarding 2022 and 2023 have yet to be released to the public.

	2016	2021	2022
Full-Time Trained Strength (Royal Navy/Royal Marine & Royal Air Force) and Full-Time Trade Trained Strength (British Army)	139,475	135,444	132,346
UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations (Key Points)	6,226	5,632	4,581
All UK Forces Personnel	197,113	196,139	185,980
The UK's position in global defence expenditure rankings, according to IISS	5	3	n/a
UK Defence Expenditure	£35bn	£42,4bn	n/a ⁶⁸

1. Table Key Points of the UK Armed Forces Capabilities. Edited by the Author

5.2 Political Sector

In the study of the political sector, the ideology defining a state is the subject of a possible threat. More precisely, its sovereignty. Sovereignty could be threatened by challenges that endanger the legitimacy and international recognition of a government. The study of political security involves examining the structural stability of states, governmental systems, and the ideologies legitimising them. While states in this sector can be unique in internal structure thus, diverse, security can be universally defined as the viability of state institutes.

The 21st century brought new aspects into light about the characteristics of sovereignty; aside from traditional state sovereignty, with the EU, shared sovereignty and shared (governmental) competences came into existence.⁶⁹ According to art.4(2) Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), including but not limited to “Shared competence between the Union and the Member States applies in the following principal areas: internal market, social policy, economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and fisheries, excluding the conservation of marine biological resources, environment, consumer protection, transport, trans-European networks, energy, area of freedom, security and justice, common safety concerns in public health matters.”⁷⁰

In an article about Northern Ireland and Brexit, and how the latter impacted the sovereignty of the country, Mary C. Murphy called Brexit a “rupture” in UK politics that caused further

⁶⁸ Ministry of Defence

⁶⁹ GAZDAG–REMEK 2018: 21–22

⁷⁰ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union 2012

implications for Northern Ireland. According to the university professor, the deal highlighted the “limited knowledge and appreciation at the UK centre of highly politicised and contested issues with direct ramifications for different territories within the UK, and indeed for the British state itself.” The 2016 referendum broke the ongoing peace process from the 1998 Belfast Agreement, causing even more division in Northern Ireland between nationalists and unionists. The former voted for remaining in the EU, while unionists were more likely to opt for leaving. All in all, Northern Ireland voted for remaining. Boris Johnson’s idea of ‘recaptured sovereignty’ opposed the Good Friday Agreement, as its principles created a set of territorial, cross-territorial, and cross-national institutions.

At the time of the referendum, some experts called the process a state of ‘negative peace’. The already fragile peace was threatened by a possible Irish backstop with physical borders that would have significantly affected Northern Irish trade, precisely, the single market, which is based on open borders and the free movement of goods, persons, and capital.

Nationalists and the Irish Government voiced their dissatisfaction during the referendum campaign and the establishment of physical *and* metaphorical borders.

The pro-Brexit DUP led the Northern Irish Brexiter parties, while nationalist parties like Sinn Féin and SDLP and centralists voted for Remain. It is noteworthy that voting preference was greatly affected by “the deep underlying ethno-national divide in Northern Ireland politics”; hence, 66% of unionists opted for Leaving, while 90% of nationalists voted Remain.

However, Ireland was the most affected EU member state. The union was receptive to Irish concerns since the beginning, and not merely out of diplomatic reasons, but also because of its interest in Northern Ireland. Between 1995 and 1999, the EU provided aid worth €400 million for both NI and Ireland.

In the early stage of the Brexit talks, Theresa May attempted to settle an arrangement that kept Northern Ireland as a member of the EU Single Market and Customs Union, while the rest of the UK would exit them as well as the European Union. The DUP and their pro-Brexit allies rejected the initiation, so May PM revised the backstop deal. According to the new arrangement, the whole UK would remain in the Customs Union, and Northern Ireland would align with some of the Single Market rules. This solution would have required some checks on goods entering Northern Ireland from other parts of the United Kingdom. Unionists saw this scenario as favouritism towards Northern Ireland, so this solution was also discarded.

The UK-EU border being emphasised between NI and the ROI caused the removal of some of the Belfast Agreement’s support of an invisible border. Although Theresa May’s successor,

Boris Johnson faced the same challenges regarding the hard border question, he was able to come to an agreement in Westminster that prevented this scenario. However, it still created a *de facto* border between the two countries. The 2019 Protocol on Northern Ireland / Ireland permitted Northern Ireland to stay nominally part of the UK's customs territory but was obliged to follow EU customs regulations and comply with EU Single Market criteria, which established a customs check border in the Irish Sea. In the protocol, there is a consent mechanism This gives the Northern Ireland Assembly the option of continuing or suspending the trade and regulatory measures relevant to Northern Ireland. If the assembly refused to give its permission, a physical border between NI and Ireland would potentially resurface. A physical border would also infer a technical border – that would not be invisible. This kind of a system would be prone to destruction primarily by nationalists, as they would see it as sabotaging the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement.

The Northern Ireland Assembly collapsed in 2017 but was renewed in 2020. Nevertheless, in the absence of a functioning Northern Irish parliament, they lost a place for negotiations between parties about the historical event of Brexit.⁷¹

According to a survey of the Northern Irish Life & Times (NILT), political affiliation changed over the years, however, very slightly. Brexit did not impact significantly political affiliation in Northern Ireland.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Unionist	29	32	26	33	35	32	31
Nationalist	24	21	21	23	19	26	26
Neither	46	45	50	39	42	38	38
Other answer	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Don't know	1	2	2	3	3	3	4 ⁷²

2. Table Political Attitudes (%) in Northern Ireland. Edited by the Author

5.3 Economic Sector

Economic security can be ensured by adequately serving social welfare and state power through resources, financial instruments, and markets. Identifying threats to state security in the ever-expanding economic sector is challenging. Because of the web-like, interlinked, and co-dependent nature of the securitisation sectors, international economic trends and a state's

⁷¹ MURPHY 2021: 405–418

⁷² Northern Irish Life & Times

external economic relationships may be disrupted, thus, negatively affecting other sectors as well. Increased interdependence can have both positive and negative consequences, but an existential risk can only arise if the global market economy, its operating mechanism, and its sustainability are threatened.⁷³

The Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol includes a “democratic consent mechanism”. This means that after four years, the Northern Ireland Assembly will vote on whether to keep articles 5-10 of the protocol. These articles cover how the EU Single Market and the EU Union Customs Code are applied in NI. The first vote is scheduled to take place before the end of 2024, and after either four or eight years, depending on the voting outcome, another round of polling will take place.⁷⁴

With NI remaining in the EU’s Single Market and still following the Union Customs Code after Brexit, a hard border was avoided. According to art.26(2) TFEU, “The internal market shall comprise an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Treaties.”⁷⁵ This further supports a smooth and unharmed co-existence between Northern Ireland-Ireland and the UK-EU.

The 2023 Windsor Framework aimed to improve some aspects of the Northern Ireland Protocol by lowering commercial costs which can be achieved by reducing customs procedures for goods entering NI. Modifying some laws governing UK trade will decrease bureaucracy and reduce customs operations. Most of these changes will be made possible by enhanced IT systems, data sharing, and market monitoring regulations between the EU and the UK. Research suggests that a contraction will occur in the Northern Irish economy because of the Windsor Framework. The agreement is expected to have a significant impact on agriculture, fishing, food, and drink industries. In contrast, industries involved in services such as finance will be less vulnerable but will still experience negative effects. 80% of this contraction was caused by trade barriers between the UK and NI, thus, any attempts to improve trade inside the UK will benefit the country’s economic security.

Northern Ireland’s biggest trading partner, contributing over 65% of its imports, is Great Britain. Imports include not only directly consumed products but also intermediary goods utilised in Northern Irish industries. With NI being highly dependent on Great Britain, as a result, they are vulnerable to trade disruptions within the UK. Consequently, non-tariff

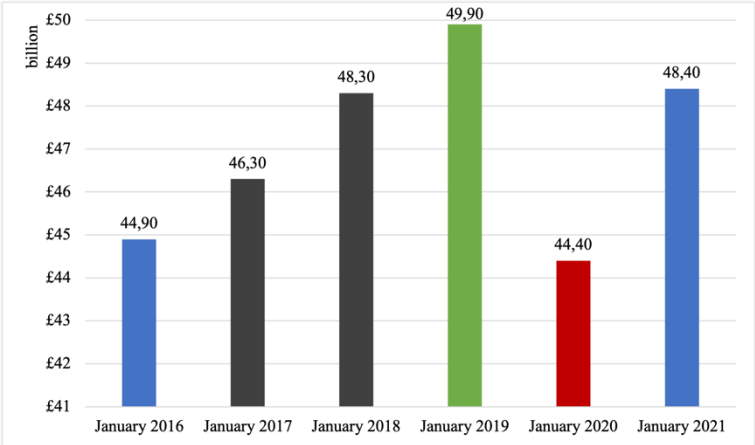
⁷³ GAZDAG–REMEK 2018: 22

⁷⁴ *Brexit Questions and Answers*

⁷⁵ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union 2012

barriers influencing inputs would raise manufacturing costs, leading to higher consumer prices. Households in NI also buy goods from industries that rely on trade with the UK. For example, wholesale and retail companies, which are significant importers from the UK, account for 29% of expenditure on domestically manufactured goods.

Industries examined in the research will be affected by the simplifications that the Windsor Framework implemented, most likely, resulting in a reduction of costs. To balance the positive outcomes of the new arrangement, NI’s GDP has slightly fallen since Brexit.⁷⁶ However, there has been a rising tendency since the referendum.



3. Figure Annual GDP of Northern Ireland (bn £). Edited by the Author

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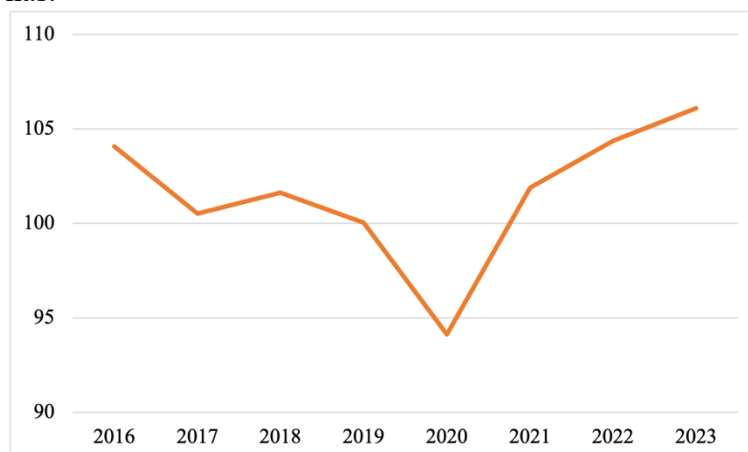
The NICEI (Northern Irish Composite Economic Index) is an “experimental quarterly measure of the performance of the NI economy based on available official statistics.” Published by the Northern Irish Statistics and Research Agency, we can see in the annual NICEI that there has been a downfall in 2020. This is a consequence of the COVID-19-induced world pandemic rather than the Brexit process. Since the 2021 Brexit, a growing tendency in the NICEI can be observed.

It is worth noting that precise data regarding the impacts of the 2023 Windsor Framework were not yet available at the moment of writing. Assuming that non-tariff trade barriers between the two islands of the UK are significantly reduced, even a positive outlook suggests that the Windsor Framework will not mitigate the economic impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland.

⁷⁶ DUPARC-PORTIER-FIGUS 2023

⁷⁷ Northern Ireland Life & Times

Nevertheless, the latest EU-UK agreement is expected to benefit the country's economy more than the protocol has.⁷⁸



4. Figure Annual NICEI. Edited by the Author

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5.4 Societal Sector

The study of the societal sector is concerned with how language, culture, religious and national identities, and customs can be maintained under acceptable conditions of development. In this sector, the aim is to maintain and preserve the identity of communities based on different civilisational patterns. Preserving a certain social group's identity is, hence, crucial. If the group comes under threat, it is perceived as a security threat by them.

Preserving a collective identity through languages, religions, cultures, and cultural norms, serves as a base for societal security. If one of the aforementioned elements of social cohesion in a state, or the very name of that state, is questioned, it is considered a societal security threat.⁸⁰

The 2022 Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act, aimed to settle some ongoing debates about the further impact of Brexit and general regarding language use and national and cultural identity, including political opinion. The Identity and Language Act, according to art.78J(1), recognises the Irish language as an official language of Northern Ireland.⁸¹

Research by the NILT shows that ca., a third of NI identify as Protestants or either have no religious affiliation, did not wish to answer, or had another religion other than Protestant or Catholic, which is 36% of NI's population.

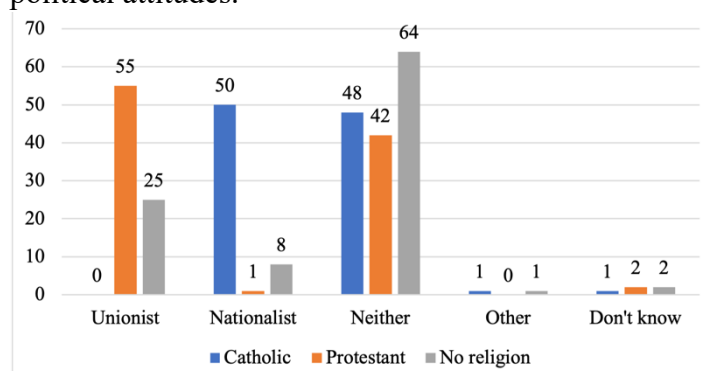
⁷⁸ DUPARC-PORTIER-FIGUS 2023

⁷⁹ NI Composite Economic Index 2023

⁸⁰ GAZDAG-REMEK 2018: 22–23

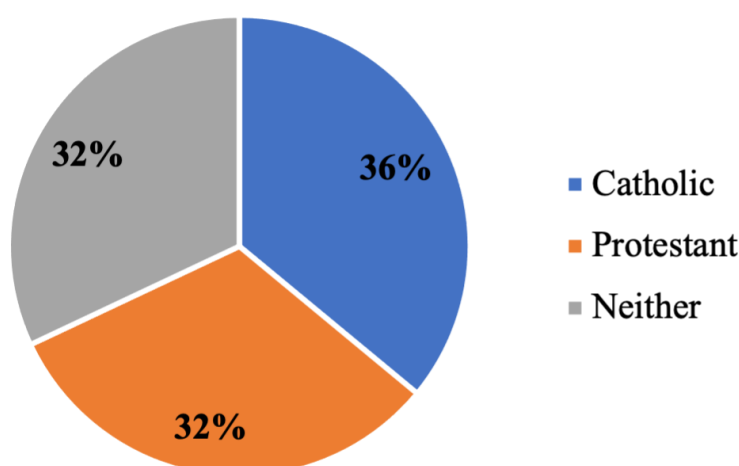
⁸¹ *Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022* 2022

A majority of people identifying as Unionists are Protestant while Nationalists are more likely to be Catholics. Although a significant amount of people showed no affiliation with any religious beliefs or political attitudes.



5. Figure Political Attitudes of Different Religions (%). Edited by the Author

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6. Figure Religious Beliefs in Northern Ireland. Edited by the Author

83

According to the Census 2021, out of the 1,836,600 Northern Irish residents (over the age of three), 95.4% of them have English as their primary language. Surprisingly, the Irish language comes in fourth place after Polish and Lithuanian. An estimated 6,000 people, 0.3% of NI are native speakers of the Irish language. 12.4% of residents of NI had shown an ability in the Irish language which is 222,600 more than native speakers.⁸⁴

⁸² Northern Ireland Life & Times

⁸³ Northern Ireland Life & Times

⁸⁴ Main statistics for Northern Ireland. Statistical bulletin. Language. 2022

5.5 Environmental Sector

In the study of environmental security, the focus is on the maintenance of the local and global biosphere as the system for all human life-sustaining activities. Amongst the environmental security threats are pollution, climate change, the overuse of resources, and their unfortunate consequences. In case of a natural disaster or global issue affecting one or more nations, the scale of sufficient intervention is often beyond the competencies of individual states. To act sufficiently, it would require the joint action of multiple countries. A further challenge is that day-to-day politics often fail to consider pollution's severe and long-term consequences.⁸⁵

Secretary of State and MP Michael Gove stated in his 2017 speech that “Leaving the EU gives us a once in a lifetime opportunity to reform how we [...] care for our land [...]. In short, it means a Green Brexit.”⁸⁶

Before joining the EU, it was the UK that first introduced its environmental policy among the future member states. Their environmental policy was reactive and limiting without fixed standards – unlike later in the Union. Although the EU had higher and exact expectations compared to before joining, the UK had now access to resources like databases and research that helped their further environmental development.⁸⁷

EU legislation, which needed to be implemented in the United Kingdom, was executed in different ways in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. These three administrations could be realised under the Scotland, the Government of Wales, and the Northern Ireland Act. Art.4(2) TFEU lists agriculture and fisheries as part of shared competences in the European Union that applied to the said countries.⁸⁸

NI and the other devolved countries of the UK faced environmental security problems during the Brexit talks, but these issues were not rooted in actual environmental concerns, but rather in disagreements in Westminster. The UK Government wanted to shift its power to Westminster for the sake of a unified policymaking. Leaders of Scotland and Wales expressed their disapproval and even labelled the transfer of power as a “naked power grab”. The UK's nations would have wanted to introduce frameworks that could prevent further debates about the topic, and even share policymaking between the countries – the UK Government suggested

⁸⁵ GAZDAG–REMEK 2018: 23–24

⁸⁶ GOVE 2017

⁸⁷ GRAVEY 2017

⁸⁸ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union 2012

Westminster be the centre. This difference within the Brexiter nations led to the rising of tensions yet again.⁸⁹

There was little change in UK environmental policies between the EU referendum and the end of the transition period. Legislation intended to allay fears about a significant decline in UK standards followed the heated debates that had been going on since 2016. The government decided to keep some 500 environmental laws of the EU so that “governance gaps”, thus, legal emergencies in environmental policies would be prevented. A concern from the EU’s side about the UK regarded the same topic. The EU feared that the UK might lower its standards to secure a competitive advantage for British businesses.

The 2021 Environment Act included a clause that provided divergence for the UK from EU norms concerning England and the devolved governments of the UK. The latter have competences that could be used to realise legislation on their own accord. With this, Westminster found a way to adapt EU policies without being part of the Union. Furthermore, in 2022, the UK introduced a bill called Benefits of Brexit which aimed to regulate future principles regarding environmental policies like single-use plastic. While the proposal was supposed to emphasise the advantages of divorce, little was included that could not have been implemented without exiting the EU.⁹⁰

With the observations and reports made by the Armagh Observatory & Planetarium (AOP) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), we can see some changes in different aspects of environmental security. In the areas of specific interest – meaning conservation designation denoting a protected area – we could see a rise since the 2016 Brexit referendum. However, after a slight growth in numbers in 2019, there have not been any changes ever since. The average annual temperature and annual rainfall have risen in NI since 2016, but these are most likely to be consequences of climate change and global warming, not Brexit. Extreme weather conditions in the future mean a challenge for NI and all the other countries on Earth.

On the other hand, the drinking water quality changed positively.

Data regarding 2023 have not yet been released to the public.

⁸⁹ GRAVEY 2017

⁹⁰ BURNS–GRAVEY–JORDAN 2022: 94

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ha)	110.700	110.700	110.700	111.159	111.159	111.159	111.159	n/a
Average Annual Temperature (°C)	10,1	10,4	10,1	10,2	10,2	10,5	10,8	n/a
Annual Rainfall (mm)	738,7	731,2	813,8	866,9	858,1	799,7	765	n/a
Drinking Water Quality (%)	99,86	99,88	99,9	99,9	99,94	99,88	99,91	n/a ⁹¹

3. Table Key Points of Environmental Reports. Edited by the Author

Summary

The findings of this paper can be assessed by analysing the statistics provided at the end of each subchapter in the sectoral security examination chapter of this paper. For the sake of clarity, the results of the analysis have been put into one table with the five sectors and three reference years. The years chosen as reference are significant years regarding the Brexit process: 2016 was the year of the Brexit referendum that sealed the UK's fate in the EU; at the beginning of 2021, the transition period ended; and 2023 is the year of writing this paper. Changes to the analysed components will be indicated with either the words “positive”, “negative”, “no change”, or “n/a”, the latter indicating data were not publicly available at the time of writing. In the case of 2016, which is the base year, the words “base year” will be added. At the end of each sectoral evaluation in the table below, an outcome of the changes is provided, simply by summarising the number of “negative”, “positive”, “negative”, “no change”, or “n/a” changes in the table.

It is important to note that not all changes in components can be categorised as positive or negative, especially when examining changes in the political or societal sector. Thus, a universal summary cannot be included in the table. However, if the changes are significant, it may indicate that tensions are increasing, which could potentially lead to security threats. Changes in these sectors will simply be categorised as negative”, “positive”, “negative”, “no change”, or “n/a” exclusively according to statistics.

⁹¹ DAERA & AOP

	2016	2021	2023
Military Sector			
Full-Time Trained Strength (Royal Navy/Royal Marine & Royal Air Force) and Full-Time Trade Trained Strength (British Army)	base year	negative	negative
UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations (Key Points)	base year	negative	negative
All UK Forces Personnel	base year	negative	negative
The UK’s position in global defence expenditure rankings, according to IISS	base year	positive	n/a
UK Defence Expenditure	base year	positive	n/a
SUMMARY	negative		
Political Sector			
Unionist	base year	positive	n/a
Nationalist	base year	positive	n/a
Neither	base year	negative	n/a
Other Answer	base year	no change	n/a
Don’t know	base year	positive	n/a
SUMMARY	no drastic changes		
Economic Sector			
Annual GDP	base year	positive	n/a or negative ⁹²
Annual NICEI	base year	negative	positive
SUMMARY	positive		
Societal Sector			
SUMMARY	no drastic changes		
Environmental Sector			
Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ha)	base year	positive	n/a
Average Annual Temperature (°C)	base year	positive ⁹³	n/a
Annual Rainfall (mm)	base year	positive ⁹⁴	n/a
Drinking Water Quality (%)	base year	positive	n/a
SUMMARY	positive		

4. Table Summary. Edited by the Author

Conclusion

The sectoral security analysis of the impact of Brexit on the Northern Irish peace process shows the following changes from 2016 (the year of the Brexit referendum), through 2021 (the end of the transition period) until 2023 (the year of writing): the military sector was negatively impacted in this period, the political and the societal sectors did not show drastic changes, the

⁹² The 2023 article *New Brexit deal will be better for Northern Ireland's economy than the protocol*, research suggests by Geoffroy Duparc-Portier and Gioele Figus suggests that a slight decrease occurred in NI's GDP since Brexit, although, no data were publicly available regarding 2023 at the time of writing.

⁹³ However, the change occurred in a positive direction, it is an indicator of global warming and climate change. In this sense, it is a "negative" change.

⁹⁴ The same applies here as to the "positive" change of average annual temperature.

economic sector shifted in a positive direction, and so did the environmental sector. This suggests that the changes before, during, and after Brexit impacted the five sectors of security differently, without a universal “good” or “bad” impact of Brexit. Furthermore, the findings of this study and the absence of extreme shifts to either the positive or negative direction imply that the five sectors of the Buzan-Wæver-de Wilde security theory were not seriously (if at all) threatened.

The research paper shows that Brexit had an indirect impact on the Northern Irish peace process, indicating that the various elements of security were influenced, and not the overall security of the UK country. It is remarkable though that the five sectors analysed are interlinked, and therefore, if any of them would be impacted or in this case, threatened, the other sectors would be affected and, thus, changed, accordingly.

Over time, preferably in the next two or three years, given that it has been over two years since the end of the transition period and the beginning of a new era for the UK, including Northern Ireland, it would be beneficial to revisit the study of the five security sectors and their changes for drawing further – and perhaps more precise – conclusions.

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List of Abbreviations

AOP: Armagh Observatory & Planetarium
DAERA: Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DUP: Democratic Unionist Party
EC: European Commission
EU: European Union
EUCO: European Council
IISS: International Institute for Strategic Studies
IRA: Irish Republican Army
IRB: Irish Republican Brotherhood
MEP: Member of the European Parliament
MOD: Ministry of Defence
MP: Member of Parliament
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NI: Northern Ireland
NICEI: Northern Irish Composite Economic Index
NILT: Northern Irish Life & Times
PESCO: Permanent Structured Cooperation
PIRA: Provisional Irish Republican Army
PM: Prime Minister
ROI: Republic of Ireland
TEU: Treaty on European Union
TFEU: Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UDA: Ulster Defence Association
UK: United Kingdom

VAT: value-added tax

WA: Withdrawal Agreement