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Europe's British Question: The UK-EU Relationship in a Changing Europe and Multipolar World

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Abstract

Britain's often uneasy relationship with the European Union has become increasingly strained leading to speculation that Britain is – sooner or later – headed towards an in-out referendum that will result in its withdrawal. Such a development would present both Britain and the EU with unprecedented challenges. Britain's debate about its future in the EU - its 'European question' - creates a 'British question' for the EU, the answers to which could change the EU's unity, leadership, prosperity and security with implications for wider European politics and academic analysis of European integration. This article sets out the links between these two questions. It does so by considering what the future of UK-EU relations could mean for the regional politics of Europe in an emerging multipolar order.

Keywords: Britain, Europe, Europeanisation, Euroscepticism, integration, multipolarity.

¹ I am indebted to the following for their support, comments and guidance: Bastian Giegerich, Chris Chivvis, Dan Hamilton, Almut Möller, Roderick Parkes, Claudia Major, Markus Kaim, William and Helen Wallace and the two anonymous reviewers. I am grateful to Marco Vieira for giving me the opportunity to refine my arguments as a participant in the Birmingham University conference 'Brazil and the UK in a changing global order'.

Introduction

Britain has rarely played a smooth part in European integration, earning the description of 'an awkward partner'.² Some in the rest of the European Union could be forgiven for thinking that in recent years Britain has gone further, becoming a dysfunctional and destructive partner. Not a day seems to pass without Britain's domestic politics causing problems for the rest of the EU. The relationship now seems characterised by vetoes, rows, allegations of blackmail, of Britain gambling with its future, and where even a British Foreign Secretary can declare that Britain is 'lighting a fire' under the EU.³ Some of these problems stem from tensions within the Conservative Party. Yet the 'European question' in British politics is not simply about the problems of one political party. Whatever the outcome of the UK's 2015 general election, the issue of Britain's EU membership looks set to remain a topic of often-fraught political debate.⁴ All three of the UK's main parties are committed to holding an in-out referendum, albeit under different circumstances with Labour and the Liberal Democrats prepared to hold an in-out referendum in the event of any new EU treaty or significant transfer of new powers.⁵ That the Eurosceptic UK Independence Party (UKIP) has emerged as a political force in part explains why this has happened. But we should not overlook the internal – and in the case of Scotland's vote on independence, existential – problems the UK is passing through which have knock-on effects for the rest of Europe.⁶ While a British exit

² Stephen George, *An awkward partner: Britain in the European Community*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

³ See Matthijs, Matthias. "David Cameron's Dangerous Game: The Folly of Flirting with an EU Exit." *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 92 (2013); "David Cameron Blocks EU wide deal to tackle Euro crisis" BBC News (9 December 2011), available: <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16104275>> (accessed 11 November 2014); Matthew Holehouse, "Britain is 'lighting a fire under the EU' says Philip Hammond", *Daily Telegraph*, (17 October 2014), available: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/11169431/Britain-is-lighting-a-fire-under-the-European-Union-says-Philip-Hammond.html>> (accessed 11 November 2014)

⁴ See Tim Oliver, "Will the UK's general election lead to an in-out referendum?" *E!Sharp* (March 2015), available: <<http://esharp.eu/essay/37-will-the-uk-s-general-election-lead-to-an-in-out-referendum/>>; and Mark Leonard, *The British problems and what it means for Europe*, ECFR, London (March 2015), available: <http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_128_BREXIT_%28March_-_final%29.pdf>.

⁵ See David Cameron, "The future of the EU and the UK's relationship with it", London, 23 January 2013. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/eu-speech-at-bloomberg>> (accessed 11 November 2014); *Conservative Party Manifesto 2015* (London, Conservative Party), p72; *Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2015* (London, Liberal Democrats, 2015), p149; *Labour Party Manifesto 2015* (London, Labour Party 2015), p77..

⁶ Tim Oliver, "Scotland: Out of the UK and Into the EU? Part I - Views on Scottish independence from seven member states," *IP Journal*, (August 2014), available: <<https://ip-journal.dgap.org/en/ip-journal/topics/scotland-out-uk-and-eu-part-i>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

(also known as a 'Brexit') is not inevitable or as likely as might appear if one focuses on the UK's press coverage of EU matters, the UK's ongoing difficult relations with the rest of the EU mean it looks set to remain an awkward partner. Even if the government elected in 2015 is not directly committed to holding a referendum, the idea and possibility will continue to hang over UK-EU relations.

So far Britain's behaviour has provoked only a few direct calls for it to leave the EU.⁷ This is in part because politicians of other member states have tried to avoid involving themselves in a topic that could influence the UK's 2015 general election. However, it is also because the idea of any member state either quitting or being forced out of the EU is a taboo. Either would be an unprecedented and potentially traumatic development. Despite this there is limited analysis of the potential implications for the EU of a withdrawal by Britain or any other member state. This compares with the plethora of books, reports, articles and speeches on what a Brexit could mean for the UK.⁸ The growing possibility of a British exit, and the possibility of a Greek exit from the Eurozone (known as a 'Grexit'), has led to some publications, but these remain small in number.⁹ The academic, especially theoretical literature is little better. The vast literature on Europeanisation includes only a few pieces that explore ideas and theories of European disintegration.¹⁰ The field remains dominated by top-down theories of Europeanisation that assume continued integration. Much less

⁷ Michel Rocard, "A French message to Britain: get out of Europe before you wreck it," *The Guardian*, (6 June 2014), available: <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/06/french-message-britain-get-out-european-union>> (accessed 11 November 2014)

⁸ A small sample of the large literature on what a Brexit could mean for the UK would include Stephen Booth and Christopher Howarth, *Trading Places: is EU membership still the best option for UK trade?* Open Europe, (June 2012). <http://www.openeurope.org.uk/Content/Documents/Pdfs/2012EUTrade.pdf>; or the winner of the IEA's €100,000 'Brexit prize' - Iain Mansfield, *A Blueprint for Britain: Openness not isolation* IEA, London (July 2013); or David Charter, *Au Revoir Europe: what if Britain left the EU?* Biteback, London, 2012.

⁹ See Tim Oliver, *Europe without Britain: assessing the impact on the EU of a British withdrawal*, SWP Research Paper 2013/RP 07, Sept. 2013, available: <http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publications/swp-research-papers/swp-research-paper-detail/article/europe_without_britain.html> (accessed 8 April 2014); Adam Lazowski, "Darling you are not going anywhere": the right to exit in EU law', *European Law Review*, Vol 40 (2015); 'Heading for a Brexit?' *RUSI Journal*, 158(4) (August 2013).

¹⁰ See Douglas Webber, 'How likely is it that the European Union will disintegrate? A critical analysis of competing theoretical perspectives.' *European Journal of International Relations*, January 2013; and Hans Vollaard, 'Explaining European Disintegration' *JCMS* Vol 52(5), Sept 2014.

research addresses how domestic politics – not least a decision by a member state to withdraw – could affect EU-level politics and the wider geopolitics of Europe.¹¹

This lack of debate or analysis does not mean a Brexit or some form of exclusion is not contemplated elsewhere in the EU.¹² But as can be seen in any review of how other EU member states view the UK-EU relationship, the question of what to do about Britain has to be seen in the wider context of an EU facing significant and potentially existential challenges ranging from the survival of the Eurozone through to the security of Eastern Europe vis-a-vis an increasingly assertive Russia. The 'British Question' can appear something of a distraction, one which the rest of the EU might see little incentive to agonise over. This is especially so given Britain is not a member of the Eurozone, and seems determined to isolate itself.

Understandable though such feelings are, the 'British question' is connected to broader questions about the future direction of European integration and European regional politics. Even if Britain is a declining power within the EU, thanks to a growing population it is to some extent a growing power in a wider European sense. A British withdrawal from the EU would also change the EU and European politics adding to already transformative changes unleashed by the Eurozone's struggles. Much to the disappointment of British Eurosceptics, the EU will not disappear from British politics should it withdraw. In much the same way 'British-sceptics' in the EU will be disappointed to find that what happens in British politics will continue to matter more than they might like for the rest of Europe and the EU.

¹¹ For analysis of how domestic politics can affect EU-level politics see Simon Bulmer and Christian Lequesne, *The member states of the European Union* (Oxford University Press, 2012), and some discussion in Nathaniel Copsey and Tim Haughton, "Farewell Britannia? 'Issue Capture' and the Politics of Cameron's EU Referendum Pledge", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol 52, Special Supplement 1, (2014), pages 74-89. For an analysis of how Britain has been shaped by and shaped in return the politics of the EU, see Ian Bache and Andrew Jordan (eds.), *The Europeanisation of British Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

¹² For a review of how other member states view the future of UK-EU relations see Almut Möller and Tim Oliver (eds.), *The United Kingdom and the European Union: What would a Brexit mean for the EU and other states around the world?* (Berlin, DGAP, 2014).

To explore how Britain's domestic debate could potentially change the path of European integration the article examines five aspects of UK-EU relations. First, it briefly outlines some ideas and theories of European disintegration that we will return to while discussing the potential impact of a Brexit. The article then examines what Britain's 'European Question' is and how it shapes Britain's behaviour in Europe. The paper then moves onto the 'British question' facing the rest of the EU by looking at how the EU could be changed by Britain's behaviour. This opens up discussion of what the ramifications for the EU and Europe could be from a Brexit. Finally, the paper turns to the wider question of the British and European security relationship in an emerging multi-polar world. In analysing these issues the article draws not only on the aforementioned academic literature on Europeanisation but also the small number of reports on what a Brexit could mean for the EU. A great deal of the latter is speculative, this topic remaining an underexplored area even in the think tank community. One aim of the article therefore is to provide a synthesis of the literature that allows us to map out some of the potential scenarios for how UK-EU relations may develop.

Ideas of European Disintegration

There have been few academic attempts to analyse the way in which the EU could reverse direction, either disintegrating or fragmenting. In one of the few pieces of work on this topic, Douglas Webber reviewed several theories of European integration, assessing to what extent the variables that each identifies as driving forward European integration are still present, have waned or disappeared in recent years.¹³ Webber defines European disintegration as meaning: 'a decline in: (1) the range of common or joint policies adopted and implemented in the EU; (2) the number of EU member states; and/or (3) the formal (i.e. treaty-rooted) and actual capacity of EU organs to make and implement decisions if

¹³ Douglas Webber, 'How likely is it that the European Union will disintegrate? A critical analysis of competing theoretical perspectives.' *European Journal of International Relations*, January 2013.

necessary against the will of individual members.’¹⁴ Using this he identifies different variables that may lead to European disintegration. A realist explanation for a breakdown in European integration would point to the withdrawal of US military forces, bringing to an end the security guarantee that has sheltered European integration. Classic intergovernmentalism, based on the idea that integration is pushed forward by the preference of the main powers, would break down if the domestic politics of these powers – notably Germany and France, but also to some extent the UK – failed to align on key issues. As Weber makes clear, ‘Intergovernmentalism implies that if a fundamental breakdown should occur in Franco-German relations, this would surely lead to European disintegration.’ Similarly, the approach of France, Germany – and potentially the USA and UK – is key to the approach of international relations institutionalism which explains the EU’s durability on the EU’s institutions achieving a high level of durability and bringing about common interests between the member states. According to theories of historic institutionalism, the EU’s survival is guaranteed by its longevity and the growing central role it plays in both the politics of Europe and of the member states. It would take a significant crisis to change this. Neo-functionalism, transactionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism theories work on the idea the EU has already reached a constitutional and political durability thanks to growing economic interdependence. Disintegration could only follow from a decline in this interdependence. Finally, according to theories of comparative federalism the EU is becoming – or has already become – a federal state. Any disintegration would emerge from a further transfer of powers to the EU level provoking a backlash at the national level which exposed the weaknesses of this federal level political identity and structure.

Webber identifies two factors that need to be kept in mind when considering the above theories. First, many theories fail to take into account the role of domestic politics, especially growing Euroscepticism in the member states. Secondly, they overlook the powerful,

¹⁴ Douglas Webber, ‘How likely is it that the European Union will disintegrate? A critical analysis of competing theoretical perspectives.’ *European Journal of International Relations*, January 2013, p2.

potentially hegemonic role of Germany as the state central to underpinning integration. The EU and European integration has yet to face a crisis made in Germany. Germany's central position is also raised in the work of Hans Vollaard.¹⁵ His work argues that the costs of exiting the EU for some states are too high. This is especially so for those within the Euro or who have a sense of interdependence that is much stronger than for others, this particularly applying to member states who are physically surrounded by other EU member states as opposed to located on its periphery. Some states also have unique options open to them, for example links with other states around the world, which mean they can balance or seek to replace their relationship with the EU.

The Europe Question in British Politics

When in January 2013 David Cameron committed his Conservative party to holding an in-out referendum, he argued, 'It is time to settle this European question in British politics'.¹⁶ The question can appear to be a simple in-out one, and potentially one that only exercises the Conservative party. However, closer examination of the issue throws doubts on whether the complexities of the UK-EU relationship can be reduced to a simple in-out choice or just a Conservative party obsession.¹⁷ Britain has long been home to a range of ambivalent feelings about relations with the rest of Europe, and in particular the EU, that connect not only to UK-EU relations, but to changes in UK politics and ideas of Britain's place in Europe and the world.

First, the European question is about identity and national interpretations of history. Britain is not the only EU member to be home to ambivalent feelings about European integration. However, Britain's experiences seem to have created particularly strong feelings. This is in part a result of Britain's late membership of the EU, difficulties being admitted, a feeling that joining the EU was an abdication of a wider global role and giving up on a separation that

¹⁵ Hans Vollaard, 'Explaining European Disintegration' *JCMS* Vol 52(5), Sept 2014

¹⁶ *Cameron, op. cit.*

¹⁷ See Tim Oliver, "To be or not to be in Europe: is that the question?" *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (2015).

has, to some extent, spared Britain some of the instability experienced elsewhere in Europe, a frustration at the failure of Britain's efforts at the alternative European Free Trade Area, difficult economic changes as UK trade moved towards Europe and away from former imperial markets, and a membership that began in the economic crises of the 1970s and so missed the economic growth seen in the earlier phases of European integration. Underlying all this has been a feeling the relationship is a transactional one, a marriage of convenience with membership as a means to an end. That end has never been the EU's ideal of 'ever closer union', more of enhancing British wealth and power in the world. Seeing membership of the EU as a means to an end creates tensions because the EU has come to represent 'Europe' which has for a long time served as the 'other' against which British - and notably, but by no means exclusively, English - identity is cast.¹⁸ This is so strong the British - fed especially by a famously Eurosceptic media - can often overlook their European identity. Britain has not faced any catastrophic defeat or revolution that has triggered a critical-juncture in its history where it has had to reevaluate its position and identity vis-a-vis the rest of Europe. Instead, the Eurozone crisis combined with the growing appeal of emerging markets have added to a sense that the EU is the past. In a telling choice of words, former Conservative MP turned UKIP MP Douglas Carswell once told the House of Commons that 'in joining Europe, we shackled ourselves to a corpse.'¹⁹

If there is one arena where differences over UK-EU relations have played out more vividly than in any other it is the UK's party politics. Cameron's January 2013 speech was a reflection of long-running tensions over the EU within his Conservative Party, tensions which in part brought down Mrs. Thatcher, tore-apart the government of John Major and plagued leaders of the party in opposition from 1997-2010.²⁰ The outcome is a party that has grown

¹⁸ William Wallace, "Foreign policy and national identity in the United Kingdom", *International Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1991), pages 65-80.

¹⁹ Douglas Carswell, Hansard (Commons), 26 Oct. 2012, col. 1257, available: <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm121026/debtext/121026-0002.htm>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

²⁰ Anthony Forster, *Euroscepticism in Contemporary British Politics: opposition to Europe in the British Conservative and Labour Parties since 1945*, (London: Routledge, 2002).

increasingly Eurosceptic. However, Conservative divisions can distract attention from tensions within other parties. The Labour party is the only major party to have split over the issue of Europe, the Social Democrat Party splitting from Labour in 1981 over a range of differences, in particular the party's then policy of opposition to Britain's participation in European integration. Tensions could reemerge, with Labour leader Ed Miliband under pressure to take a more Eurosceptic line to stop traditional supporters moving towards Eurosceptic parties and to reject what some on the left of the Labour party see as the overtly neo-liberal agenda of the EU.²¹ Even the Liberal Democrats, a party with a commitment to the EU in its DNA, has committed itself to an in-out referendum in order to manage internal party unease over Europe.²² The rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which has emerged as a fourth party of UK politics, has hit all three parties, in particular the Conservatives. UKIP's emergence is not all thanks to the issue of Europe. It has captured public disillusionment with the three main parties, unease about Britain's political economy and fears about immigration. Its power and potential might be overplayed, but it encapsulates how the issue of Europe is playing a part in the wider decline of two party politics and the emergence of a more plural UK party system. The Northern Ireland Democratic Unionist Party, whose leader has spoken of the possibility of a coalition with the Conservative party, supports an in-out referendum.²³ Even Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the pro-European Scottish National Party, said in October 2014 that an in-out referendum on EU membership in 2017, 'now seems inevitable – almost regardless of who wins the general election next May'.²⁴ She potentially sees in it the chance to trigger another referendum on

²¹ See Kelvin Hopkins MP, *The European Union: a view from the left*. Labour Euro-Safeguards campaign, January 2015.

²² George Eaton, 'When Clegg supported an EU referendum', *New Statesman*, (22 October 2011), available: <<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/10/referendum-membership-lib>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

²³ Allegra Stratton, 'Nigel Dodds sets out DUP's demands' *BBC News*, 12 March 2015.

²⁴ 'Nicola Sturgeon in call over EU Referendum' *The Scotsman*, 29 October 2014, available: <<http://www.scotsman.com/news/uk/nicola-sturgeon-in-call-over-eu-referendum-1-3587376>>

Scottish independence.²⁵ This all means that whatever the outcome of the 2015 General Election, the issue of Europe looks likely to remain a lively and divisive one within the UK's party politics with the potential for a referendum likely to hang over even a government that excludes the Conservative party.²⁶

Look beyond party politics, or the result of elections, and the issue of Europe is to be found embedded in the UK's constitutional and economic tensions. Scotland's independence referendum was the most obvious sign the United Kingdom is going through a constitutional and identity crisis that could make or break it. The Scottish question itself far from settled, especially with regard to potential developments in UK-EU relations.²⁷ Various cities, regions and centres of power across the UK are manoeuvring for change.²⁸ The situation in Northern Ireland, while much improved, should also not be taken for granted; especially if the UK were to vote to leave the EU.²⁹ The issue of sovereignty is often raised when discussing the UK's EU membership. Yet debates about sovereignty cannot be narrowed to the UK-EU relationship given that different ideas of sovereignty exist within the UK.³⁰ Arguments over sovereignty also drive calls for the UK to abandon the European Convention on Human Rights - often mistakenly thought to be a part of the EU. Such calls often ignore the marginalisation this would bring to the UK and the British origins of the document. The most important political, economic and constitutional questions facing the UK revolve around the

²⁵ Philip Stephens, 'When Britain leaves Europe, Scotland will leave Britain,' *Financial Times*, (24 October 2013), available: < <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8eff7a1e-3bf4-11e3-9851-00144feab7de.html#axzz3lo2ZMkLO> > (accessed 11 November 2014)

²⁶ See Tim Oliver, E!Sharp, 'Will the UK's general election lead to an in-out referendum?' *E!Sharp* (March 2015) available: <<http://esharp.eu/essay/37-will-the-uk-s-general-election-lead-to-an-in-out-referendum/>>

²⁷ Philip Stephens, "When Britain leaves Europe, Scotland will leave Britain," *Financial Times*, (24 October 2013), available: < <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8eff7a1e-3bf4-11e3-9851-00144feab7de.html#axzz3lo2ZMkLO> > (accessed 11 November 2014)

²⁸ Timothy Garton-Ash, "Let's not fear the F-word or the C-word: we should move to a federal Britain in a confederal Europe," *The Guardian* (21 September 2014), available: <www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/21/not-fear-f-word-federal-britain-confederal-europe?index=1> (accessed 11 November 2014).

²⁹ John Bruton, "Passport controls on the border at Newry will be a reality if Britain leaves EU," *independent.ie* (25 January 2013), available: <<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/john-bruton-passport-controls-on-the-border-at-newry-will-be-a-reality-if-britain-leaves-eu-29022868.html>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

³⁰ William Wallace, "What price interdependence? Sovereignty and independence in British politics", *International Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (1986), pp. 367–89.

power of London.³¹ The capital city is a place apart from England and the rest of the UK. It is a largely pro-European, international mega-city, where a third of the population was born outside the UK and white-Britons make up only 45% of the population.³² When it comes to participation in the EU or globalisation, London appears to be ahead in a race other parts of the UK are either falling behind in or weary of the consequences (especially over immigration) of taking part in.³³ This creates tensions within the UK and in UK-EU relations when London dominates the UK's economic, political and EU policies. Such is London's growing difference from the rest of the UK that campaigning on an anti-London ticket pays dividends whether you are Scottish nationalists or UKIP seeking support elsewhere in England.

So how likely is it that if faced with an in-out choice the British people would opt for getting out of the EU? We should be careful not to assume such a breakdown in relations is inevitable. The rocky relationship of UK-EU relations has seen many low-points, including an in-out referendum in 1975. It remains to be seen whether an in-out referendum will even happen. Any Labour or Liberal Democrat commitment would only be triggered if the EU undertook a new treaty of transfer of power. The conservatives would need to form a majority government in order to be sure a referendum on their terms takes place, or secure a commitment to this as part of a new coalition agreement. Polling also shows that while the British electorate are not overly enthusiastic about the EU, their views are more complex and less harsh than often assumed.³⁴ Polling shows support for withdrawal has not yet matched the heights it did in the early 1980s when one polling organisation registered 71% support for withdrawal.³⁵ When pushed on the issue, polling shows a large proportion of the public

³¹ "The London Question," *New Statesman* (28 August 2014), available:

<<http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/08/leader-london-question>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

³² Tim Oliver, "Londoners are not Little Englanders," *LSE British Politics and Policy Blog*, (17 March 2014)

<<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/londoners-are-not-little-englanders/>> (accessed 11 November 2014)

³³ See Robert Preston, "Why did UKIP do less well in London?" *BBC News*, (27 May 2014), available:

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-27585765>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

³⁴ Nathaniel Copsey and Tim Haughton, "Farewell Britannia? 'Issue Capture' and the Politics of Cameron's EU Referendum Pledge", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol 52, Special Supplement 1, (2014), pages 74-89.

³⁵ See Mori European Union membership trends, available: <<https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2435/European-Union-membership-trends.aspx?view=wide>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

opt for the status-quo of remaining within the EU with support increasing if this is preceded by some renegotiated relationship.³⁶ Nevertheless, the rise in support for UKIP does represent an unease about the EU that cannot be dismissed. Some polling might have shown the British people are likely to vote to stay in, but there have been numerous polls indicating support for withdrawal. Events in Scotland serve as a reminder that even though the vast majority of polling points one way - in the case of Scotland the direction was towards remaining a part of the UK - the overall vote may be uncertain and closer than most are comfortable with.

The British Question in European Politics

Britain's debates about its European question often focus on the negatives of Britain's EU membership. The debate therefore overlooks that Britain has exercised a degree of power and influence in the EU that has passed unappreciated in UK political debate. Britain's influence has not passed unnoticed elsewhere in the EU. Europe's 'British Question' is not only about whether the UK will stay or leave, but how to manage relations with a state that has played a large role in European integration and wider European politics. Not only has the UK successfully secured a large number of exemptions from EU policies - the most obvious being from the Euro, Schengen, some Justice and Home Affairs policies, and a rebate on its contributions to the EU's budget. Britain has also successfully pushed agendas such as enlargement of the EU, cooperation on foreign, security and defence matters, and its 'Anglo-Saxon' economic influence over the political economy of the EU was one of the reasons many feel was to blame for the 2005 French referendum rejection of the EU's Constitution.³⁷ Indeed, Britain can be viewed as having benefitted most of all from EU membership, even in areas that give rise to much debate in the UK such as intra-EU

³⁶ "EU Referendum: record lead for staying in Europe", *YouGov*, (17 June 2014), available:

<<http://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/06/17/eu-referendum-record-lead/>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

³⁷ "A less 'Anglo-Saxon' EU: Sarkozy Scraps Competition Clause from New Treaty," *Spiegel Online*, (22 June 2007) available: <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/a-less-anglo-saxon-eu-sarkozy-scraps-competition-clause-from-new-treaty-a-490136.html>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

immigration.³⁸ Nevertheless, the UK's position in the EU can appear to be in a position of decline and marginalisation. This is not without some justification given the UK's domestic political debate makes for an often strained UK-EU relationship. In an EU of 28 members, the UK can appear just one member, and one increasingly sidelined by the attention that is focused on the leadership of Germany. British governments have long struggled in their relations with other EU states, but relations today seem to have reached new lows.³⁹

As several of the theories of European disintegration touched on earlier make clear, a large member state such as the UK plays a central in European integration with its actions likely to influence the response of other member states. Britain's place in Europe looks set to grow, potentially counterbalancing its marginalisation within the EU. On current projections Britain's population will overtake that of Germany in the 2040s. Germany has already begun to experience a decline in its population, something that has not passed unnoticed within Germany itself.⁴⁰ If the projections hold then by the 2040 the UK could have a larger population than any other EU member state. It would be behind only Russia and Turkey in a wider European context. Even the loss of 5.5 million Scots – should they hold another referendum at some point and decide to withdraw – would be made up by 10-15 years of population growth in the rest of the UK. By 2035 the population of England alone could be 62.1 million, and expected to grow even further by 2060.⁴¹

Projected populations 2010 and 2060⁴²

2010	2060
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³⁸ See Adrian Favell, "The UK has been one of the main beneficiaries from free movement of labour in the EU", *LSE British Politics and Policy Blog*, 3 July 2014.

³⁹ Möller and Oliver, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ Suzanne Daley and Nicholas Kulish, "Germany fights population drop", *New York Times* (13 August 2013), available: < http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/14/world/europe/germany-fights-population-drop.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 > (accessed 11 November 2014).

⁴¹ Office for National Statistics, "Summary: UK Population Projected to Reach 70 Million by Mid-2027," (26 October 2011), available: <<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/npp/national-population-projections/2010-based-projections/sum-2010-based-national-population-projections.html>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

⁴² Eurostat, *Population projections 2010-2060* (8 June 2011), available: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-08062011-BP/EN/3-08062011-BP-EN.PDF> (accessed 11 November 2014).

Germany – 81.7 million	UK – 78.9 million
France – 64.7 million	France – 73.7 million
UK – 62 million	Germany – 66.4 million
Italy – 60.3 million	Italy – 64.9 million
Spain – 45.9 million	Spain – 52.2 million
EU – 501 million	EU – 516.9 million

Accurate population projections are notoriously difficult. A large population is also no guarantor of power. Nor does it mean the UK's economy will become the largest or most important in Europe. However, the economies of Britain, France and Germany could grow similar in size cancelling out some of Germany's economic leadership. Germany could suffer problems thanks not only to population decline but also from problems in the Eurozone. It could be that Berlin's efforts to save the Eurozone have not only limited the EU's economic potential, but have overstretched Germany leaving it destined to become a drag rather than the engine of European growth. Here it is worth recalling Webber's warning that European integration has yet to face a crisis made in Germany.

In 2050 Britain could also still wield a more powerful military force than any other EU member state. Britain's armed forces are of course much reduced compared to what they once were. However, the capabilities of the British military remain considerable.⁴³ Britain will almost certainly remain a leading power in NATO, committed to the regional security of Europe (even if, like the USA, it has reduced its Cold War military commitments in places such as Germany). Britain has committed itself to a number of bilateral defence arrangements with other EU states such as France and the Netherlands. Despite the huge cost, the UK still looks set, in cooperation with the USA, to replace its Trident nuclear weapons system with an upgraded system that will be operational in the middle of the

⁴³ Andrew Dorman, "The capabilities of Britain's armed forces may not be diminishing as starkly as the numbers might suggest," *LSE British Politics and Policy Blog* (31 January 2014), available: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/is-there-a-need-to-panic-british-defence-expenditure-today/> (accessed 11 November 2014).

century. Britain will also not operate alone. If there is something 'special' about the UK-US relationship then it is cooperation on intelligence, nuclear weapons and special forces. Despite significant strains in the relationship, cooperation in these areas remains very close. These capabilities and relationships also mean the UK has, or at least feels it has compared to many other EU member states, more options available to it when examining its future relations with the EU and the rest of the world.

Of course, all of this could change. Germany's population decline could be halted and reversed, its reputation for economic competitiveness and efficiency maintained. Britain's own economic power could falter thanks to an over-reliance on financial services and an over-heated South East of England and London. Further and deeper cuts to the British military may end what is left of UK military capabilities with a global reach, raising doubts in the USA or elsewhere about the viability of continued close links. Britain itself – always destined to be located outside the geographical centre of Europe – could be an unsure power thanks to ongoing internal problems that define its current political debates, especially the aforementioned ones over its unity, identity and place in Europe. Current political and racial tensions surrounding immigration could grow given that Britain's population is expected to increase in no small part thanks to immigration and high birth-rates amongst immigrant communities. If so then Europe could be faced with a rising power, located on the edge of Europe, that is one that could not only break up, but be home to a political debate that is inward looking and unsure of itself.

What seems clear is that as the 2020s approach, Germany's population decline and Britain's growth will start to register as a political and strategic issue. If this is so then, according to theories such as classic intergovernmentalism, for the EU and the UK this means relations between the two should matter more. It remains to be seen whether the UK and the rest of the EU will maintain the political links for making the most of this relationship. It is also unclear whether the EU will be able to respond in a united form. In part this is because one of the most frustrating aspects of UK-EU relations is how contradictory, frustrating and

confusing they can be. Even when relations are difficult, both sides can often agree over some key parts of an issue. The recent appointment of Jean-Claude Juncker as the new President of the European Commission saw the UK largely alone in opposing him. Yet Britain's concerns about Juncker, if not its confrontational approach, were not without their merit and sympathy elsewhere in the EU.⁴⁴

Incidents such as Juncker's appointment underline how political relations, whether personal or inter-party, have rarely been harmonious. David Cameron's own decision to withdraw his Conservative party from the European Peoples Party, and thus detach the Conservatives from routine links with most of Europe's centre-right parties, has left UK-EU party political relations - at least at the level of governing parties - resting largely with the Labour Party. Britain's weakness at connecting with other states in the EU becomes clear in any review of how others see the UK, with even traditionally close allies such as Sweden or the Netherlands growing distant.⁴⁵ Admittedly if Britain remains in the EU and population projections turn out to be accurate, then in the 2040s British MEPs will begin to outnumber their German colleagues in the European Parliament meaning they could become the hub of many political party groupings. But this might not make up for the long-running low recruitment rates of Britons to EU institutions.⁴⁶ As discussed earlier, many theories of European integration – for example, functionalism, transactionalism or liberal intergovernmentalist – rest on growing economic interdependence binding EU member states together. As we turn to below, any economic interdependence could potentially make up for strains in the UK-EU political relationship, but there are limits to how far this could bind the two together.

⁴⁴ "EU diplomats struggle to understand Cameron's strategy on Juncker," *EurActiv.com* (25 June 2014), available: <<http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014/eu-diplomats-struggle-understand-camersons-strategy-juncker-303045>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

⁴⁵ See Erik Brattberg, "Sweden," (pages 77-78) and Rem Korteweg, "The Netherlands," (pages 99-102) in Almut Möller and Tim Oliver (eds.), *The United Kingdom and the European Union: What would a Brexit mean for the EU and other states around the world?* (Berlin, DGAP, 2014).

⁴⁶ Alex Barker, "British eurocrat: au revoir to all that," *FT Magazine* (23 May 2014), available: <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/a09b7684-db08-11e3-8273-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3lrkzafzW>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

Brexit Stage Right?

Europe's 'British question' is not then simply about the UK leaving the EU. It is about the economic and political place of the UK in a changing EU and how to manage relations with a large but difficult European state whether as a member of the EU or not. Should a Brexit occur then the initial problem for the EU would be the unprecedented experience of negotiating a withdrawal.⁴⁷ Difficult and potentially interminable Brexit negotiations would not only take place with the UK. Negotiations would also have to take place within the EU to fill the gap left by Britain. These would revolve around the never-easy tasks of negotiating changes to national voting rights, allocation of MEPs and staff, and budgets. When combined with possible changes to the Eurozone, a Brexit could add to shifts to the EU's balance of power and changes to the EU's policies and outlook. This could help push the EU towards one of the three outcomes outlined by Tom Wright in his analysis of how the EU might move forward in dealing with the Eurozone crisis: increased unity; muddling through; or disintegration.⁴⁸ Which one the EU ends up following will largely reflect developments in the Eurozone. Nevertheless, the UK's behaviour could play an influential part because its withdrawal could change the EU's internal balance of power with implications for wider European politics.

Increased unity within the EU could be brought about by losing a notoriously awkward member state, allowing the EU to move more easily towards 'ever closer union'. While countries such as France and Germany have not allowed UK objections to fundamentally delay European integration, the UK has stood as an alternative to the direction and ideas of European integration. As a result, British opt-outs, such as over the Euro, have placed the UK in an outer-tier. A British withdrawal would leave some members of the EU continuing to hold some opt-outs, for example Denmark's non-membership of the Eurozone. However,

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the withdrawal procedure see Adam Lazowski, "'Darling you are not going anywhere': the right to exit in EU law", *European Law Review*, Vol 40 (2015)

⁴⁸ Tom Wright 'Europe's Lost Decade', *Survival*, Vol. 55, No. 6, (2013), pages 7-28.

these would be smaller, and so the EU and Eurozone would more neatly align. There could then be no repeat of events in December 2011 when David Cameron's lone veto of a new treaty for the Eurozone led the rest of the EU to bypass the UK and establish arrangements for the Eurozone amongst themselves and therefore separate from the EU's treaties.

Alternatively, the EU could continue to muddle through, with Britain's absence having little to no effect. The UK's absence from the Eurozone has not meant leadership or unity of it has been easy with deep disagreements over austerity policies and the degree of supranational oversight of member states. Any muddling through following a UK exit would also be the likely result of the remaining EU coming to terms with shifts and changes to the distribution of power within it. Germany's dominant position could be extended, reinforcing at an EU level Germany's preference for geoeconomic thinking over the geopolitical.⁴⁹ The EU's centre of gravity could also shift eastwards, presenting difficulties to states such as France that worry about an EU that no longer focuses on Western Europe and in particular the Franco-German axis.

The possibility of EU disintegration as a result of the Eurozone's problems remains a possibility. Whether a British exit by itself could trigger such a collapse would depend on whatever centrifugal pressures it could unleash. If a Brexit pressured Germany to weaken its commitment to either the EU or Eurozone, then as argued earlier by Webber, European integration could face its biggest test to date.⁵⁰ Britain might not even need to go so far as to withdraw to pose such a challenge. Demands by some in the UK for a renegotiated relationship within the EU have led to warnings from elsewhere in the EU that an 'a la carte Europe' is unacceptable as it would lead other states - and in particular political groups on the far right and left - to make their own demands, in turn fragmenting the EU.

⁴⁹ Han Kundanani, 'Germany as a Geo-Economic Power', *Washington Quarterly*, Vol 34, No. 3, (2011), pages 31-45.

⁵⁰ See Douglas Webber, "How likely is it that the European Union will disintegrate? A critical analysis of competing theoretical perspectives," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 20 No. 2, (June 2014), pages 341-365.

The British question also has implications for wider European unity and cooperation. The European Free Trade Area (EFTA) and/or the European Economic Area (EEA) could be transformed by changes to UK-EU relations. Further afield, losing a large, western, Christian country would make it highly unlikely that some of the remaining states, especially France, will agree to a large eastern European, Muslim country such as Turkey being allowed to join. But as with Norway and Switzerland, a British exit, or renegotiated relationship within the EU, could open up new models for relations that could then be extended to other states. However, this depends on the willingness of these states to give up their own individual relationships with the EU, and the willingness of Britain or the EU to share any special arrangements.

If there is one issue that fuels the UK's debate about membership of the EU, it is economics. The same applies to the EU, and especially countries such as Germany who have close relations with the UK in trade and shared approaches to political economy. Given the important part of economic interdependence to many theories of European integration, it is in this area that we may find some pointers to how the EU and the UK-EU relationship may develop should the UK decide to withdraw. The UK's economic place in the EU is substantial. Britain constitutes 14.8% of the EU's economic area, with 12.5% of its population.⁵¹ British exports are 19.4% of the EU's total exports (excluding intra-EU trade).⁵² Within the EU Britain runs a trade deficit with the rest in goods and services of around £28 billion a year (2012 figures).⁵³ Neither the UK nor the EU would have an interest in allowing a situation in which their economic links are damaged. Nevertheless, the various proposals put forward for a new UK-EU economic relationship focus almost entirely on what might be

⁵¹ Population figures calculated from Eurostat figures for 2011: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_gind&lang=en>; Economic figure calculated from Eurostat figures for 2013, GDP at current prices. UK economy is €1,940,659.6 billion of the EU's €13,086,459.2 billion economy.

<http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nama_gdp_c&lang=en>

⁵² *Right Speech, Right time?* (London: Open Europe, January 22, 2012): available:

<<http://www.openeurope.org.uk/Content/Documents/Pdfs/EuropeSpeech.pdf>>

⁵³ See answer from Baroness Warsi, *Harsard*, HL Deb, November 14, 2012, c1507. Available:

<<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldhansrd/text/121114-0001.htm#12111438000002>>

best for Britain. Yet the final agreed arrangement will also be one shaped by what is best for the EU and Europe. Few if any member states will see anything to be gained from agreeing to a deal whereby the UK can undercut the EU by having access to the EU's Single Market without shouldering any of the costs of membership. The City of London, already something of a target for some within the EU, could become an even clearer target for hostile acts should the UK withdraw. In the longer-term a Brexit could make the EU less inclined towards liberal, free-market economics, a concern often raised by supporters in the EU and elsewhere of Britain's continued membership.⁵⁴ Britain has been a long-standing supporter of the EU's Single Market and has repeatedly pushed for it to be more open and deregulated.⁵⁵ This has led to uneasy talk elsewhere in the EU of Europe being subject to an 'Anglo-Saxon' agenda, or even the 'Britishisation' of the EU.⁵⁶ However, Britain's role in the EU's economic thinking is already limited by its exclusion from the Eurozone. Without the UK the Eurozone and EU could more neatly align, leaving the members of the Eurozone as the undisputed heart of the EU both politically and economically. It is also questionable to what extent countries such as Germany or even France would allow the EU, or the Eurozone, to become more inward looking and protectionist. Even the European Commission, often lambasted by British Eurosceptics as a bastion of state-socialism, also often finds itself accused of pursuing harsh neoliberal trade agendas.⁵⁷ Reforms to the Eurozone might have struggled to overcome its problems, but the intention has been to ensure the Eurozone is more open and competitive.⁵⁸ The UK is also not alone in seeing the potential and feeling the draw of emerging markets, something some British politicians accuse the EU of holding

⁵⁴ See the Swedish, Japanese and US views in Almut Möller and Tim Oliver (eds.), *The United Kingdom and the European Union: What would a Brexit mean for the EU and other states around the world?* (Berlin, DGAP, 2014).

⁵⁵ *Review of the Balance of Competences Between the United Kingdom and the European Union: The Single Market*. July 2013, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/227069/2901084_SingleMarket_acc.pdf

⁵⁶ Charles Grant, 'In defence of Anglo-Saxon capitalism', *CER*, 29 September 2008.

<http://www.cer.org.uk/insights/defence-anglo-saxon-capitalism> and Douglas Webber (ed.), *New Europe, New Germany, Old Foreign Policy?* (Routledge, 2001), p140.

⁵⁷ Ferdi de Ville and Jan Orbie, 'The European Commission's Neoliberal Trade Discourse Since the Crisis: Legitimizing Continuity through Subtle Discursive Change', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol 16 (No. 1), February 2014, pp149-167.

⁵⁸ Laurence Knight, 'Eurozone's long reform wishlist', BBC News, 26 June 2012. <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-18560234>

Britain back from. Germany's interests in markets such as China and Brazil dwarf those of the UK, with many other EU members also pursuing links. Pressure from the USA or China and international trade negotiations, will not leave the EU many options but to continue embracing an outward looking economic agenda.

Possible economic implications of a Brexit could be seen first with the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), a development Britain has been at the forefront of efforts to create.⁵⁹ While a TTIP without the UK would not be impossible – indeed, the USA and EU have warned this could happen – Britain's large economic and political relations with the USA and rest of the EU mean it would be more difficult and a lesser deal if secured, and potentially a more difficult sell to the US Congress.⁶⁰ Given the aim of TTIP is to expand to include other states such as Canada, a UK outside the EU could secure some form of partnership. However, what this partnership with other countries might entail is not yet clear. Nor is it clear whether the EU would allow the UK anything less than a backseat in TTIP. For the EU the partnership would be a bilateral one between Washington and Brussels.

Europe and Britain's Global Security Questions

Even if Britain - in or outside the EU - is a rising power in Europe, the place of Britain, the EU and wider Europe will continue to face decline in a wider global sense. Given Britain has played a prominent role in European approaches to matters of international security, what might then the changing UK-EU relationship mean for how the UK and EU face the political and security challenges of an emerging multipolar world?

⁵⁹ Raf Sanchez, 'Britain leads push to convince Washington to back transatlantic free trade deal', *The Telegraph*, 24 September 2014. Available: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/10329783/Britain-leads-push-to-convince-Washington-to-back-transatlantic-free-trade-deal.html>>

⁶⁰ Julian Borger, 'EU exit would put US trade deal at risk, Britain warned', *The Guardian*, 27 May 2013; and Tim Oliver, 'The British Problem Facing a Transatlantic Trade Deal', *Huffington Post*, 25 October 2013. Available: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tim-oliver/the-british-problem-facin_b_4164712.html>

Despite its relative decline in power, Britain remains a European power with global aspirations and capabilities that can deliver on this to a certain extent. This is especially so when the UK is compared to other EU member states. Along with France, it is the only other EU state with a sizeable military that is both experienced and able to operate independently - even if in a limited sense - beyond Europe. Britain's soft power, along with other aspects of its power such as in intelligence, diplomacy and humanitarian aid, remain considerable. Britain's international aspirations has been one of the drivers behind efforts to develop the EU's own foreign, security and defence policies and capabilities.⁶¹ This might be little appreciated in the UK itself. But one only has to look to the efforts successive UK governments have made towards trying to develop European cooperation on international matters to see how Britain has sought to lead the EU on international matters in order to secure its sought for end of Britain as an international player. This has not focused exclusively on EU cooperation. NATO, bilateral or multilateral cooperation have also been pursued. Defence and security cooperation with France in particular has been pursued in no small part as a result of frustrations by both at the inability of EU cooperation to deliver progress with other European partners, particularly Germany.

British disengagement from the EU could therefore further complicate European defence and security cooperation. It may leave France with few options by which to pursue closer links with other EU partners, particularly the Weimar Group involving it, Germany and Poland. Britain might have been central to EU efforts in these areas, but it has also been a big obstacle as a result of domestic unease at cooperation on defence matters at the EU level. Britain's absence could therefore offer the remaining member states of the EU opportunities to develop new ideas on defence and security matters. However, as with previous efforts at defence cooperation, a lot would depend on Germany's response.⁶² A

⁶¹ For a discussion of the UK's role in the EU's foreign, security and defence policies see 'Heading for a Brexit?' *RUSI Journal*, 158(4) (August 2013).

⁶² Ronja Kempin and Jocelyn Mawdsley, 'The UK, the EU and European Security: a German Perspective', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 158, No. 4, (August/September 2013), pages 32-36.

similar problematic outlook could then face NATO, leaving doubts about the future of transatlantic relations. Britain would no doubt remain committed to NATO, facilitating a means through which high-level international security issues can be discussed in addition to any bilateral discussions. But NATO itself continues to face an uncertain future, with British-EU relations having the potential to further complicate efforts at maintaining or increasing European defence cooperation.

The future of Europe's place in the world, and how UK-EU relations might shape this and the future of NATO, would depend significantly on the positions taken by the USA. The US 'pivot to Asia' and away from Europe is not a new development, the USA pivoting from Europe in the early 1990s when it withdrew large numbers of its European based forces following the end of the Cold War. This US disengagement could be reversed should Russian behaviour towards states in Eastern Europe become more belligerent. But any such reengagement is unlikely to equal that of the Cold War. While talk of US decline can be overblown, the US is not in the position to commit to European security in the way it did in the past. Indeed, the disappearance from Europe of the American security guarantee – one of particular interest to realist interpretations of European integration – is a test the EU and Europe has yet to face.⁶³

Britain's behaviour - particularly a Brexit - could therefore add to strains in the transatlantic relationship which impacts on the US security guarantee. On the one hand any desire by Britain to continue working with the USA would require it to engage in affairs beyond Europe. While it will retain an ability to do so to some extent, this would face significant difficulties if the security of Europe became a more pressing matter. In such a context it is unlikely the USA would welcome British support of US efforts internationally instead of British engagement in European security matters. The USA could face a series of European

⁶³ For a discussion of the possible security implications for the UK and Europe of a US withdrawal from Europe, see David Blagden, 'Global multipolarity, European security and implications for UK grand strategy: back to the future, once again' *International Affairs*, Vol 91, No. 2, March 2015.

problems from a UK exit from, or marginalisation in, the EU. Not only could a British exit reduce the UK's international standing, and thus its utility to the USA. An EU that became more inward looking - economically and strategically - as a result of a British exit would damage US hopes of European cooperation and engagement in international matters, and increased cooperation on defence, that reduce Europe's security dependence on the USA. This does not mean the USA would then give up on the EU or the UK. The sheer economic size of the EU - a collective GDP of \$18.5 trillion compared to Britain's \$2.5 trillion - means close transatlantic relations will be crucial. Nor, despite talk of Britain as the US 'Trojan Horse' in the EU, will there be any shortage of applicants to fill the UK's place. The USA has long had close relations with a large number of EU states, even if it has sometimes abused those relationships or taken them for granted.⁶⁴

One reason the USA is likely to maintain an interest in Europe is due to a concern that the continent could again become a divided and contested space in international relations. The USA is not alone amongst allies of both the UK and rest of the EU at expressing concerns at where UK-EU relations may take the wider geopolitics of Europe.⁶⁵ Countries such as Canada, Singapore, Japan, Australia and New Zealand have, like the USA, used their links with the UK to influence the EU and maintain an outward looking EU agenda that is friendly and accommodating to these states and wider Western interests. But as with the USA, their relations with the EU go beyond the UK, with many also having close relations with other EU states. For these states the possibility of the EU fragmenting and/or being weakened would add to the pressures already facing the West from emerging powers. A Brexit could help create a multipolar Europe in a multipolar world.⁶⁶ A Brexit or break-down in UK-EU relations

⁶⁴ Andrea Thomas, "U.S. spying on Germany unacceptable, says Merkel", *Wall Street Journal*, (12 July 2014), available: < <http://online.wsj.com/articles/u-s-spying-on-germany-unacceptable-says-merkel-1405174452> > (accessed 11 November 2014).

⁶⁵ See the views from Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Singapore, and Japan in Almut Möller and Tim Oliver (eds.), *The United Kingdom and the European Union: What would a Brexit mean for the EU and other states around the world?* (Berlin, DGAP, 2014).

⁶⁶ Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, *The Spectre of a Multipolar Europe*. European Council on Foreign Affairs, (October 2010), available: <http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR25_SECURITY_UPDATE_AW_SINGLE.pdf> (accessed 11 November 2014)

could see the EU surrounded by the poles of Britain, Russia and Turkey. The outcome, should the EU remain weak or carry on muddling through, could make more likely a scenario, as outlined by Jan Techau, of a Europe that, “is not a pillar of world affairs but a territory that risks being pulled asunder between the United States and Asia”.⁶⁷

Conclusion

The EU faces a long list of challenges, not least of which are the Eurozone’s continuing fragility and security fears surrounding the intentions of Russia towards Eastern Europe. The ‘British Question’ can therefore appear an unwanted distraction. If Britain is going to be half-hearted and awkward in its relationship with the EU then why should the rest of the EU show anything other than half-hearted interest in Britain? Similar feelings can be found amongst those in the UK who feel Britain would be better off if it withdrew from the predominant political and economic organisation of the continent it is forever bound to. Neither is a sustainable approach or likely to make the most of a relationship in which the EU will remain the most important relationship for the UK and an integral part of many of the domestic debates shaping Britain.

The various theories of European integration show that the UK’s behavior – especially a Brexit – could be an important independent variable that shapes how the EU develops, in particular whether the EU disintegrates. A realist account points to the strained security situation in Europe, and Britain’s unwillingness or inability to change this, as a key pressure on European integration. Cooperation between large member states, the key component of classic intergovernmentalism, could continue despite a Brexit if the Franco-German axis was sustained. The continued vitality of the Franco-German axis is also important for theories of international relations institutionalism; the durability of the EU’s institutions being sustained by support from the axis. It would take a collapse of the Franco-German axis, perhaps

⁶⁷ Jan Techau, “Europe torn apart in the Asian century?” Carnegie Europe, (1 July 2014), available: <<http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=56054>> (accessed 11 November 2014).

brought on or exacerbated by a Brexit, to bring about the type of crisis necessary to change integration as understood by the theory of historic institutionalism. Theories of neo-functionalism, transactionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism provide perhaps the most optimistic outlook, with economic interdependence making it too costly even for a state such as the UK to withdraw or, should it do so, leaving it in a position where it will continue to be bound economically to the rest of the EU. For comparative federalism, Britain's increasingly distant political relationship with the EU could limit the potential for it to disrupt the emergence of a federal state. As Webber pointed out, with all of these theories we should not overlook the wider domestic politics of other EU member states, especially growing Euroscepticism in a range of states that mean the UK is not the only state with a strained political relationship with the rest of the EU. And the role of Germany is key, whether as part of a Franco-German axis or in its approach to managing the security and defence challenges the EU and European integration look set to face. Ignoring the possibility of a Brexit risks ignoring a development that would play an important, perhaps transformative, part in the EU's development.

A way has therefore to be found for the EU to give appropriate attention to the possibility of a Brexit. Focusing solely on the 'British question' would more than likely lead to disappointment on all sides. The attention would create expectations on the part of the British that concerns about Britain's membership are the most important issue on the agenda. This is an expectation the rest of the EU would be unable to fulfil. For the rest of the EU, focusing on Britain is likely to cause resentment across the EU at giving into - or being more willing to discuss - British demands at the expense of other agendas. Neither would be in the interests of the EU or wider European unity, especially when Europe's place in the world will face a growing number of challenges as the world enters a more multipolar era.