

After a Brexit: the EU that falls apart, continues to muddle through, or integrates further



*A British exit from the EU would be an unprecedented event with uncertain consequences for the future of European integration and cooperation. As **Tim Oliver** outlines in this blog, the EU could react to Brexit in one of three ways: it could fall apart, muddle through or integrate further.*

It has not passed unnoticed across the EU or around the world that the EU faces a series of challenges that, for some, could make or break it. The EU's Brexit question might be only one, but is **not one to be overlooked**. For a long time many – including in the UK – felt a British in/out referendum was an unlikely possibility, especially when compared to other crises. But would the EU be better off without Britain? To borrow from US President Johnson: would it be better for the EU to have the UK inside the tent pissing out or outside the tent pissing in?

We can only answer that by asking what type of union the EU would be if the UK left. This is not just an important question for the EU; it is one the UK itself needs to reflect on. Britain's major foreign policy concern has always been and will remain the geopolitics of its home continent.



In this blog, I outline how Brexit might shape the EU in five broad areas: the unity of the EU and its place in Europe; the EU's balance of power; its political economy; security and global relations; and relations with the UK.

In each of these I consider one of three scenarios similar to those **Tom Wright of Brookings** mapped out in 2013 for the future of the EU in the face of the Eurozone crisis. Scenario 1 imagines a Brexit triggering centrifugal forces that unravel or weaken the EU. Scenario 2 is a largely no-change scenario, with the EU muddling in the face of a Brexit. Scenario 3 portrays a Brexit leading to more integration in the EU.

The table below summarises the analysis of where the EU might be headed.

The Impact of Brexit on the EU

	1. EU is weakened	2. EU muddles through	3. EU more united
Unity of the EU and defining ideas about Europe as a political space	UK leads the way in EU fragmentation, potentially unraveling EU. Best outcome for EU is a core Eurozone union as one of a series of overlapping organisations in Europe.	Tensions remain over intergovernmental and supranational approaches, but Eurozone as heart of EU is strengthened. EU remains Europe's predominant political organisation.	Without one of its most awkward members integration becomes more likely. EU continues to emerge as the dominant political organisation in Europe.
Balance of Power	Adds to confused leadership with no clear leader; small or large states gain; East/South v's North/West; Eurozone under pressure.	German power enhanced, tensions with France remain, but EU remains generally rudderless.	Clearer leadership for EU institutions, complimented by enhanced power of Germany.
Political economy	More inward looking, protectionist or divided.	Retains strong outward looking agenda thanks to global pressures.	A global economic power pushing its own model.
Security and global relations	EU remains a 'military worm'. Europe/EU is vulnerable to divide and rule by external powers.	Fragmented military and security relationships, NATO and bilateral links remain key. EU remains central security actor on many new security challenges and major player in economic power. Continues to rely, with difficulties, on civilian power.	EU acts more united with some military power, but never fulfills military potential without UK. NATO remains strong, but potential strong EU dimension. Other global powers continue to develop direct relations with Brussels.
Relations with UK	Difficult, UK plays a role in trying to redraw Europe's geopolitical relationships.	UK a close partner, engaged with but political relations strained by continued mutual dependence.	UK treated as close but junior partner, similar to attitude of US in US-UK relationship.

Which of these paths the EU follows will depend in no small part on how it responds to such a vote by the British to leave. But 'it' is not a single entity. The EU's position will have to reflect those of the governments of 27 member states, the EU's institutions, the views of allies such as the USA. As the brief outlines, to understand how these will respond we need to keep in mind five I's: the role of Ideas such as European integration; Interests such as trade and security needs; Institutions and the links and limitations they can impose; International pressures and expectations; and the outlook of Individuals such as, but not only, the German Chancellor.

This post, which first appeared on the Dahrendorf Forum site, represents the views of the author and not those of BrexitVote, nor the LSE. Download Tim Oliver's Dahrendorf Analysis on the impact of a Brexit on the EU [here](#). Photo via Flickr: [speedpropertybuyers.co.uk](#)

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