

Title: “Brexit: A Simple Question to a Complex Problem”

In wake of the Brexit referendum, the reality of the UK leaving the European Union (EU) is at the forefront of international politics and trade. During the course of the referendum campaign, the question that citizens of the UK grappled with was simply whether they should exit or remain in the EU. However, there is nothing simple about Brexit. The complexities of international trade were not discussed at the time of the referendum and are only being revealed to the general public post referendum. Recently, I was fortunate enough to visit a few of Europe’s primary cities: Paris, Brussels and Geneva where I had the opportunity to conduct primary research within the field.

While many academics and general people alike are distraught by the Brexit decision members within the European Commission seemed rather calm about the whole ordeal. It was evident during our meeting that the procedure of the UK formally leaving the EU would be made very lengthy. Despite what was being conveyed by the European Commission, the representative from the European Parliament was hopeful that Brexit wouldn’t actually happen. It was puzzling to see a representative within parliament having hope while the rest of Europe is increasingly losing it.

Post-Brexit an important dialogue has been re-opened in Europe: the idea of European integration and solidarity. Through our meetings in Brussels, it became clear that if the UK actually follows through with leaving the EU the rest of Europe must stand together in solidarity. In relation to the integration piece, we took to the streets of Brussels to understand the perspectives of ordinary citizens. Most people I interviewed were in favour of the EU and hoped to see Europe stand united not divided. Being present in France for the election results, it is encouraging to see Emanuel Macron beat Marine La Pen as his policies are pro-integration while hers were not. With the current political climate in Europe, many people question whether a wave of right wing populist leaders is becoming the new trend. Although it is early to assume this, many have said that perhaps the election of Macron over La Pen shows that Brexit was an outlier and that the rest of Europe (for the most part) wishes to stay united.

Moving forward, it is important to discuss the complexity of Brexit and the implications of this decision. While I can’t talk about this issue in great detail I will attempt to shed light on some things I learned during my research trip. A common thread within all of our conversations was this idea that the UK won’t really be able to exercise “free” trade in the sense that they would like. By leaving the EU they are choosing to leave a powerful negotiating bloc and this does not necessarily endow the UK with the power to negotiate effectively bilaterally. The issue is far more complex. There are 1400 bilateral trade agreements between the EU member countries and the rest of the world.

The first step Britain must take post-Brexit is to sort out agreements bilaterally with the EU and amongst all its trading partners. Furthermore, Britain will need to renegotiate tariff schedules and market access as they will no longer be able to continue using the ones they had access to as members of the EU. For Canada, the most important task is to sort out their own priorities and political interests and see how they align with the EU and the UK and based on these priorities develop a strategy for negotiations. It should not be difficult for Canada to negotiate with the UK as we have a strong standing relationship with them more so than other European countries apart from France.

Brexit is shaping up to be a new challenge for the WTO, the organization is used to bringing in new members not with members leaving. They believe it is in Britain’s best interest to begin

forming trade alliances with countries with which they have common interests in order make these negotiation processes as smooth as possible. Resolving anything related to Brexit will take a great deal of time, trade negotiation is not a simple task and the UK has a long road ahead of them. If they follow through on leaving the EU, the UK will need a whole lot of patience and impeccable negotiating skills to get through what's coming for them. It will be interesting to see how the public reacts as time passes, it is unknown whether the citizens of the UK will still stand by what they decided or re-think their decision.

TAKE AWAY 1

European level politicians think that the UK will back-track on Brexit although it seems unlikely.

TAKE AWAY 2

The UK has a monumental task ahead of them with re-negotiating its trade relations with the rest of the world.

TAKE AWAY 3

I'm hopeful that Brexit is an outlier rather than a trend towards populism and economic nationalism worldwide.