

Blog on Healthcare, Policing and Foreign Policy
Part 2

By Christian Turner

As the United Kingdom embarks on a new chapter in the nation's history, it is clear that Brexit will not just be about trade, but also about a forced, radical reshaping of policies and ideals. Three crucial areas that will come under scrutiny are Foreign Policy, Policing within the scope of customs and the border, and finally healthcare.

With heightened global tension on the back of North Korea's continued testing of its nuclear arsenal, Britain's approach to foreign issues has once again come under the microscope. The European Union for its case now loses one of the two permanent seats it has enjoyed on the United Nations Security Council through its members, and thereby a sense of prestige if not necessarily power in the global body. After all, Britain's departure in many ways is a blessing for foreign policy. Since the Second World War, the UK has chosen to align itself carefully with Washington D.C. over its European allies, which has been seen recently with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the removal of Colonel Gadhafi in Libya and the Syrian Civil War, both in 2011. In turn, Germany has led the majority of scepticism against such action, often preferring to use diplomatic pressure seen through its constant mediation of talks over the Ukrainian conflict and in particular, Crimea. Brexit now is likely to see a greater spirit of cooperation over a common EU foreign policy, led by Germany and France, with the latter often awkwardly siding between both sides dependant on the public mood in the country.

Of course, Brexit does not mean that Britain will have no common policies with the EU. However, the cooperation that will exist will almost entirely come down to the trade deal that the UK strikes, which in turn will affect customs and borders. As has already been touched on, Britain must resolve the issues over the Irish border before moving onto phase 2 of the negotiations with the EU. Representatives from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have made it clear that they believe the soft border should remain, as anything else risks a return to the violence seen in the 20th century (The Guardian, August 2017). At the same time, it is clear from the Prime Minister's Lancaster House speech and the Conservative Manifesto for the 2017 General Election that the Government wishes to impose greater restriction on the movement of people, which in turn will affect the movement of goods. It is extremely difficult to imagine a realistic scenario by which all sides can emerge with a deal in which they are happy. Potential solutions have included the introduction of a sea border, an exception for Northern Ireland to somehow remain a part of the Customs Union and Single Market (In practise, this would likely mean a border between Britain and N.I.) or according to the Government's position paper, the use of 'technical solutions' (*Northern Ireland and Ireland*, position paper, August 2017).

It is not just Northern Ireland that will be affected by the decision over the border, but the county of Kent also faces great problems. Home to major ports in Folkestone and Dover, in addition to Eurostar terminals in Ashford and Ebbsfleet International, the very issue of freedom

of movement and goods will have a great effect on infrastructure. As Dover M.P. Charlie Elphicke has already written, roads in particular will find themselves under great strain, and his solution includes a 'Brexit Infrastructure Bill, which will enable the Government the ability to 'speed through administrative processes (that) would enable vital projects to be delivered on time' (*Ready on Day One, 2017*). Projects mentioned include the new Thames Crossing, the upgrading and duelling of the M2/A2 and finally the creation of the M20 Lorry Park for use when Operation Stack is enforced.

Elphicke's recommendations come on the back of what Britain is at risk of losing by departing the European Union. Through the Treaty of Le Touquet (a trio of treaties between Belgium, France and UK), goods and people currently clear customs before arriving in the UK. With Britain leaving the European Union, France could for instance refuse to carry out this task. According to figures in the Elphicke Report, the Port of Dover alone is responsible for handling £120 billion of imports and export every year, whilst over 10,000 freight vehicles pass through the docks each day (pg. *summary*). In 2015, when strikes by French ferry workers saw the port of Calais closed, over 4,600 lorries queued for 30 miles for four days on the M20 as part of Operation Stack, with the estimated disoperation costing the UK economy £1 billion. A poorly negotiated deal with the EU, or even no deal and reverting to World Trade Organisation status, threatens similar scenes with no end in sight.

Finally, the desire to restrict freedom of movement will have a profound effect on the British economy. As mentioned in our 2017 Rural Economy report, the agriculture industry is reliant on Eastern European workers for seasonal work. Often, there is simply no desire for jobs to be filled by British workers, with just 14 of 13,400 workers recruited on seasonal contracts between January and May being British (*Kent and Medway: Making a Success of Brexit*, pg.31, July 2017). Over 75% were Bulgarian and Romanian. This access to labour has also been profoundly helpful for the healthcare sector, where many nurses come from Europe. According to the Nursing and Midwifery Council, nurses from the EU registering has dropped 96% since the Brexit Referendum (The Guardian, July 2017). Already, close to 1/3 of nursing jobs are vacant at the Medway NHS Trust (Kent Messenger, 16th August 2017), whilst the East Kent NHS Trust reported the worst response time to people in A&E in the entire country (Kent Messenger, 14th August 2017). This is without even mentioning the use of EU funds for research centres across the country who rely on the bloc to make ground-breaking developments in the fight against cancer in addition to other medical advancements. Already, centres have reported that their funding has not been renewed and face the real prospect of ending their innovative work (The Guardian, February 2017).

Overall, Britain's departure from the European Union brings continued uncertainty 15 months on from the Referendum. Some aspects can be seen as positive for both sides of the negotiations, such as foreign policy where there has often been differences for decades. In other areas, such as the policing of the borders and customs union in addition to the healthcare sector, we are no clearer to finding out what the future holds. In Kent and Medway, we are both the gateway to Europe and to the United Kingdom. The final terms of the Brexit deal will affect our economy, infrastructure and our very way of life. It is imperative that ample time is

given to businesses and to people to adjust to our post-Brexit world, and that the Government continues to seek opinion and advice not just from national representative organisations, but also local, specialist people and bodies who can make clear what Brexit threatens and promises.

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