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**Article**

## Making sense of the (post-)Brexit EU: Security, stability and the future of EU's collective security

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## Making sense of the (post-)Brexit EU: security, stability and the future of EU's collective security

Alexandru-Constantin APETROE\*

### Abstract

*This paper will address the situation of the European Union following the 2016 Brexit referendum. Enveloping the debates surrounding the European Union's collective security and the role of NATO in the post 9/11 world, Brexit opened the door for a serious discussion on the transatlantic partnership of the European Union with the United States, in particular after the 2016 Presidential Election. British reluctance on European integration and their "special relationship" with the United States have always been seen as an element which hindered Europe to reach its full potential as a global actor. Brexit, if carefully and pragmatically assessed, can signify an opportunity for the European Union to behave in a more cohesive manner on ensuring its collective security, either in the form of a European Common Defence Programme, or in the form of a reformed/reimagined NATO.*

**Keywords:** Brexit, EU, PESCO, NATO, collective security

### Introduction

The result of the 2016 Brexit referendum was quite the blow for the European Union. The immediate impact on the monetary ratings of some of the EU's financial and economic powerhouses (France and Germany) gave rise a "situation of uncertainty" (Belke *et al.*, 2018) thought capable of generating negative consequences in the financial sector. This impacted the EU as a whole since Brexit happened after other crises (Verhofstadt, 2016, p. 75) – the 2009 Financial crisis, the 2013 Eurozone crisis, the 2015 Migration crisis. Needless to say, at the supra-national level it was also a severe blow to the morale and the prestige of the EU as a global actor, and at the national level, it also impacted some member states before important electoral seasons (again France and Germany in particular). On the British side, the Brexit referendum result came down as a lightning. Due to the mainstream British and European politicians' disbelief in the success of the Leave camp in the referendum (McGowan, 2018, p. 68), the strong effects of Brexit on British politics cannot be denied. It is also noteworthy to mention the schizophrenia of British politics pertaining EU membership: the

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distaste shown by certain Labour MP's and the radicalization on the Tories against the perceived overreach from Brussels did not happen overnight. This was the result of over two decades of constant friction between the Conservatives and Brussels, mainly due to the weakness of the Labour camp to fully commit in support of the European project (MacShane, 2015, p. 12). Moreover, in spite of the long awkwardness of Britain's EU membership (Buller, 1995, p. 33) the idea behind a successful Brexit was too absurd to be envisaged, being more akin to an irrational behaviour, rather than a carefully planned move, thus a withdrawal from the EU making no sense since Britain tried so hard to join back in the 70s. Nevertheless, few could have anticipated the impact of the Eurozone crisis, the Migration crisis and the rise of UKIP.

Still, the much-heralded Brexit apocalypse failed to happen, in part due to the prolonged plan to negotiate the UK's withdrawal, and in part due to the limited extent of which Britain was actually involved in the European project. In fact, things might not be as tragic and as calamitous as some might think. Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union (Lisbon, 2007) triggered by Britain after the 2016 Referendum on the European Union, was put in place for a specific reason, meaning that (a) the limited possibility of a withdrawal at some point was, if not purposely envisaged as such, (b) the clear product of some preparation to mitigate a possible outcome or even a distinct possibility which might arise in the future. Therefore, even if Brexit was a shock to many pro-Europeans, it did not signify anything more than a deliberate and justified action by a sovereign people in full right to decide on matters of capital importance (such as the EU membership) in complete obedience to the applicable EU laws and regulations. Furthermore, financially speaking, the effects of Brexit on the EU market are being assessed by some as being "minuscule, if not irrelevant" (Ringe, 2018, p. 3).

With regards to the other effects of Brexit, we will inquire on the very important matter of collective security, represented by NATO, and possibly by PESCO. Ideally, the Alliance's security framework should be enough to ensure the security of its members, including the majority of EU member states. After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO's *raison d'être* was seemingly no more. In this respect, in the 90s and the early 2000s, NATO became more oriented towards combating terrorism and, with some exceptions (Kosovo, Afghanistan), it was more and more dedicated to fulfil a peacekeeping role rather than integrate the defensive and offensive capabilities of nation-states towards combating large scale invasions and operations such as those envisaged during the apotheosis of the Cold War. The 2016 shift in American politics, in conjuncture with the seemingly bleak scenario for Brexit, represent another set of challenges for the EU. In this respect, the signals of instability which are being transmitted from Washington have forced the EU, or at least part of it, to act in quite different ways than others. More specific, disruption is bound to happen (Postelnicescu, 2016, p. 208), as some Central-East European member states (Poland and Hungary in particular) are

more favourable to a lesser integrated EU and weaker Brussels influence (Nič, 2016, p. 286) and which perceive the reformist Franco-German doublet as a threat to what remains of their sovereignty and national interests within the EU. As we have seen in the previous instances such as the UN General Assembly Resolution vote on Jerusalem (UN-GA, 21 December 2017) if a decision will be forced on Central-East Europe, we might see a support for the US rather than for the EU's common position, making it highly probable that the European Union will have to deal with yet another systemic crisis on its hands.

The first part of our paper will discuss the Brexit and its perceptions, from different standpoints (political, economic) of different actors. In the second part we will address the challenges to the transatlantic relationship after 2016, highlighting the importance of the political moves of the new US Administration and the disruptive effects of Brexit. The third part will try to prospect on the EU's actions and reactions for Brexit, by discussing various scenarios on NATO/PESCO and their consequences on EU's security. In our research we will use several resources: official documents and press releases, prospective studies and relevant academic sources. As such, our purpose is to assess and critically examine the modalities of how the ongoing Brexit negotiations are being managed, the gaps in perceptions surrounding Brexit, and the overall impact of dogmatic views on both sides of the Channel. Not lastly, this paper aims to identify the cooperation gaps between the EU and the UK, as well as concluding a set of policy proposals directed towards limiting the negative effects of Brexit on the greater issue of EU-NATO relationship and the security of the EU.

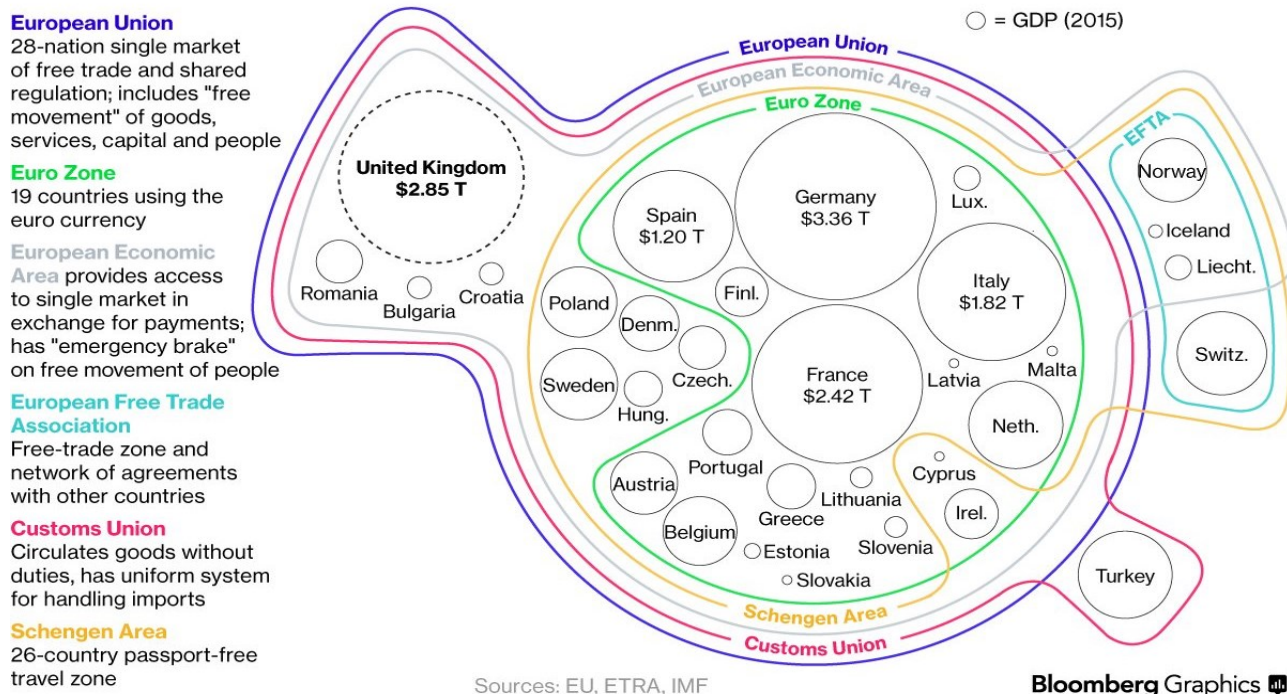
## **1. Trying to make sense of Brexit – which consequences?**

In this first part of our paper, we will assume not to explain the Brexit, or to answer questions on “why Brexit happened?” or “why did the Brits vote for the Leave camp?”, but rather to understand the logic behind the consequences and the dynamic of the effects of the 2016 EU membership referendum. It is essential to keep in mind that, when discussing Brexit, we must first strive to understand its subtleties and to try to avoid the apocalyptic and monochrome rhetoric which unfortunately has corrupted both the Leave vs. Remain debate in the UK, and the ensuing debates in Europe and abroad. To an extent, the main question which is still asked in a manicheistic manner, is the following: “is Brexit good, or is it bad”? As such, many scholars seem to fall into a logical pathway which is predetermined by their choice of standing on the matter (McEwen, 2016, p. 22; Bachmann and Sidaway, 2016, p. 47). In light of this, we are of the opinion that Brexit issue should not be detailed in such simplistic and binomial terms, as ultimately there is neither “good” nor “bad”, due to the fact that Brexit is a complex, ongoing event, which has not yet reached its most critical

phase (predicted for 2019-2020). Adding to this, we have also a debate on the facts which are fuelling the over-exaggerated fears of Brexit’s malign consequences (Parkes, 2016, p. 188), facts which don’t seem to add-up, and effects which cannot be fully assessed at the moment (Howorth and Schmidt, 2016, p. 10).

Shown below, we can observe the solitary place that Britain occupied before 2017 in the EU 28(-1) framework. This is a very good indicator of the level of British dis-integration within the EU’s main areas: the Eurozone and the Schengen space, notwithstanding the “emergency breaks” after the accession of the Central-East member states in 2004 and 2007. In a moment deserving of the epithet of ‘Kafkaesque’, Britain has been battling since 2016 to obtain “an accession in reverse” (Baker, 2017) coming after almost four decades after the joining the EU. In this respect, we can say, without any regrets or malice, that Britain did not understand neither the extent, nor the breadth of the European project (Schmitt and Loughran, 2017, p. 2). On the other hand, the EU itself was too busy trying to make the Union work, that it very much ignored the British demands for lesser integration. This resulted in a marginalized Britain which was bound to behave in the manner that it did (Pertusot, 2016, p. 135).

**Figure 1. Britain’s place in the EU before Brexit (2015)**



Source: Bloomberg, 2017

Furthermore, if we look at the history of Britain’s relationship with the EU (shown below) we cannot ignore certain important events linking the EU(EEC) and the UK, as well as their political



consequences/motivations. This is relevant since it shows that Britain resisted several times the tendencies of the EU to reform itself into a more coherent economic and political union.

**Table 1. The history of Britain and the EU – “defining moments”**

| Year | Event   | Obs.   |
|------|---|--|
| 1963 | First and second British attempts to join the EU                        | French President Charles de Gaulle vetoes Britain's accession                  |
| 1967 | (EEC)   |  |
| 1973 | Britain (finally) joins the EU (EEC)                                    | Britain immediately begins discussions for a renegotiation of its membership   |
| 1974 | The Labour tries to renegotiate Britain's position in the EU            | Labour promises a referendum for the following year                            |
| 1975 | First British referendum on EU membership: 66% for and 34% against      | Tories campaign for the Remain camp<br>Labour campaigns for the Leave camp     |
| 1979 | Creation of the European Monetary System (EMS)                          | Britain's first opt-out  |
| 1983 | Labour promotes leaving the EU (EEC)                                    | Labour is defeated in general elections<br>Tories campaign for EU membership   |
| 1986 | The Single European Act is adopted Spain and Portugal join the EU (EEC) | Tories begin to develop Eurosceptic tendencies on EU enlargement               |
| 1988 | PM Margaret Thatcher's famous Bruges speech                             | Tories start to favour a Eurosceptic tone<br>Labour is becoming more Europhile |
| 1992 | Signing of the Treaty of Maastricht                                     | The creation of European Union;<br>Britain opts-out again                      |
| 1997 | British tests rule out joining the Euro                                 | Britain is reluctant to join   |
| 2002 | The adoption of the Euro currency                                       | Britain opts-out yet again   |
| 2004 | Twelve former communist states join the EU                              | Britain obtains a temporary opt-out from the Freedom of Movement               |
| 2007 |   |  |
| 2008 | Beginning of the Financial crisis<br>The EU bails out several big banks | Eurosceptic tendencies begin to develop over financial motivations             |
| 2009 | Signing of the Treaty of Lisbon   | Article 50 is elaborated, theoretically permitting a withdrawal from the EU    |
| 2011 | Adoption of the European Union Act                                      | A referendum will be necessary for any further transfer of power to the EU     |
| 2013 | The mounting of support for UKIP and large increase in Euroscepticism   | British PM David Cameron promises a renegotiation and subsequent referendum    |
| 2016 | PM Cameron fails to obtain a renegotiation and calls a referendum       | Britain votes to leave the EU with 51.9% for and 48.1% against                 |
| 2017 | PM Theresa May triggers Article 50                                      | A two-year planned withdrawal is in progress                                   |
| 2018 | Ongoing negotiations; A transition phase is agreed until December 2020  | Brexit deal needs a minimum 20 votes out of 27 on the EU Council               |
| 2019 | Britain leaves the EU   | Transition period in effect – Britain is bound to respect certain EU rulings   |

Source: European Union (2017) and Business Insider (2018)

One thing is certain about Brexit – that it brought instability where it was needed the least. Before trying to make sense of Brexit, it is important to understand that the UK never fully became a EU member as it chose to opt-out early on out of several important and defining European projects. Britain was reluctant to be a part of anything more than the EEC, and preferred the status quo before the Treaty of Maastricht (1992). In addition, the political scene in Britain changed quite a lot after

1992 (MacShane, 2015, p. 235), the change of roles between the Tories (early supporters of EU/EEC integration) and Labour (which was quite the Eurosceptic party at the time of Britain's accession), muddled the political waters and blurred the ideological lines, paved the way for the complete confiscation of the EU referendum theme by UKIP, event which started from the 2014 EU Parliamentary elections and which lead straight back to Westminster's doorstep (Glencross, 2016, p. 15).

Based on data alliable until May 2018, we will try and discuss several scenarios on Brexit and envisage some policy recommendations based on said scenarios. As such, on Brexit, we can discern between two categories of effects: the effects of Brexit per se; and the effects of the types of Brexit, ('hard' or 'soft' Brexit). This differentiation is relevant because they will help in assessing the situation and ensuring that all possible scenarios are given proper credit.

In the first category, we have the effects which loosely began from the day after the 2016 Referendum (24 June) and which continue to affect both the EU and Britain at least until the end of the transition period (2020). Moreover, we can further discern between the two sub-types of implications brought upon by Brexit: the short-term and the medium- to long-term consequences, as follows.

- The short-term consequences of Brexit revolve around the great instability brought upon by the result of the Referendum and later, by the formal triggering of Article 50 by PM Theresa May on 29 March 2017. Some immediate effects included violence and protests, the resignations of former PM David Cameron and former UKIP leader Nigel Farage, a petition for a second referendum, the British Pound recorded losing almost 8 percent reaching its lowest level since 2008 (Belam, 2016). After the triggering of Article 50 and the start of negotiations, things seemed to have returned to a relative calm, yet the uncertainty of Brexit proceedings still lingers.
- The medium to long-term consequences of Brexit are more difficult to assess, since they will contour upon the type of Brexit: 'hard' vs. 'soft'. Some very sensitive matters are on the table on the long run: the border issue between Northern Ireland (Britain) and Ireland (Berberi, 2017, p. 2), the repositioning of the UK on the international trade scene, the trade deal negotiations with the EU, the issue of EU regulations which were integrated by Westminster into Common law, the delicate matter of Scottish independence, the future of NATO and the role of Britain in EU security.

Subsequently, the second category has in mind the effects of the two imagined Brexit scenarios: the 'hard' Brexit and the 'soft' Brexit (Howorth and Schmidt, 2016, p. 8). Since both scenarios are amounting to virtually opposite endings for the UK-EU 'divorce', this also adds to the uncertainty created by Brexit itself.

- The 'hard' Brexit will be the conclusion of a so-called 'messy divorce' between Britain and the EU. If this happens, it will undoubtedly be unfavourable to both the EU and the UK, yet will more likely affect Britain more than it will affect the EU. Nevertheless, we still have to keep in mind the role played by the City of London on the EU financial scene, the reciprocally large number of expats living in Britain and in the EU respectively (MacShane, 2015, p. 40) and the issues concerning security and defence policies, all which will need to be adjusted in some way. Essentially a 'hard' Brexit will see Britain leave from the Customs Union and the Single Market and also leaving the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice (Downer, 2018).
- The 'soft' Brexit implies a continued partnership between Britain and Europe, focused on maintaining a level of presence of the UK in European affairs in the form of pseudo-membership or "access to" (as opposed to full membership) the Single Market (Menon and Fowler, 2016, p. 10), and a mandatory trade-deal which will be negotiated after the transition period will end. But before this will take place, there is the very important aspect of the "overlooked Article 218 of the TFEU" (McGowan, 2018, p. 50) which in essence, is applicable once Article 50 has been triggered, and which will involve a voting procedure in the EU Council, with a minimum 20 out of the 27 votes. Also, a 'soft' Brexit will put Britain in a position of weakness (Wincott, 2017, p. 693), basically meaning that the whole referendum and Brexit conundrum will have been for nothing.

Since we are operating in uncharted territory, even the possibility of a less than 'soft' Brexit leads to even more confusion and disruption to businesses and the financial sector on both sides of the Channel. Recently though, there are more and more voices warning of the possibility of a 'hard' Brexit (Hamilton, 2018). As such, Brexit remains a very complicated and thorny issue, both politically and otherwise. But for who? The EU will most likely overcome the real shock of Brexit, yet Britain still has high hopes for the next decade, hopes which are dependent a lot on the manner which Brexit will be concluded. It will come as no surprise, but it seems that Britain rejected once again the better option for both itself and the EU – it wanted Brexit – and seems to prefer national pride to a reasonable deal which could support the UK's most vulnerable economic sectors from being further weakened.

## **2. Transatlantic relations after 2016 – from friendship to growing antagonism**

After Brexit, a second element which has disturbed the already muddled political waters of the EU, was the shift in American politics and the election of Donald Trump. Before 2016, the relationship between Europe and the US has been, besides international trade, human rights and



shared values, was one of long-time cooperation and mutual security guarantees within the NATO Alliance. World War II was a crude awakening to the fact that another conflict in Europe will result in a catastrophe on an unprecedented scale of death and destruction. Yet keeping these in mind, after the 2016 Presidential Election, the new US Administration embarked on a campaign to re-negotiate any and all international agreements which the US was part of until that time, the deals with the EU and NATO making no exception. In this respect, Brexit opened a door on the debate on the role of the EU in the post-9/11 world, a world in which mainly the US initiated foreign expeditions to topple governments and export democracy, attempts which, if they did not fail, they undeniably had, and will continue to have, heavy consequences not only in the region, but globally. Some EU member states went along, others protested, but the majority of them, bound by their national agreements to NATO, participated in some way.

As such, discussing Brexit, EU and NATO, we consider the following. First, Brexit – if carefully and pragmatically assessed, can signify a opportunity, but more for the EU rather than for the UK. Europe has the chance to assert itself on the international scene, to behave in a more cohesive manner on ensuring collective security, either in the form of a stronger European Common Defence Programme, or in the shape of a reformed/reimagined NATO, both options having intrinsic advantages and disadvantages.

Second, the relationship between the EU and the US can now enter a much-desired pragmatic phase. From economic and environmental issues, to ensuring security and maintaining stability in troubled regions, the new US Administration has made it very clear that it wishes to renegotiate all previous existing agreements with its Allies, specifically with the EU, meaning that this is another opportunity for the EU to address the more challenging aspects (trade tariffs, the JCPOA, the status of Jerusalem to name a few) on the future of the Euro-Atlantic partnership.

Third, the so-called “special relationship” between Britain and the US also comes into play (Baylis, 1998, p. 117), as the new US Administration has other plans – it withdrew its support from a number of international commitments and undermined not only the UK’s position, but also that of other EU member states such as France and Germany. This is where a rift was revealed, between Brexit as a means to strengthen the UK on the international scene by “making Britain great again” and the American position which sees Brexit as more of a disruption rather than an opportunity to re-engage their bilateral relationship.

On the future of the transatlantic relation after Brexit, we discuss about “several key-factors” (Kaufmann and Lohaus, 2018, p. 18) which have shaped the relations between Europe and America, and which are the basis of the continued partnership between the two continents:

- Liberal transatlantic culture, is the main driver since the US and Europe maintained and nurtured common values and principles such as: human rights, individual freedoms, transparency in government and the rule of law.
- European capacity for collective action, represents another important aspect to consider. Notwithstanding the politics and the friction inside the EU, Europe has shown some progress towards a more cohesive integration policy, even if the EU still suffers from the aftershock of Brexit and the rise in Euroscepticism.
- Global order and security, makes for another crucial factor. From national interests and geopolitical drivers to international institutions and agreements, the global order is composed from those which support international law and those which try to circumvent it. This is why it is of paramount importance that some form of consensus must be agreed-upon so that the fragile balance between the actors of the international scene can not only be reached, but most importantly, maintained.
- Military technologies and the importance of the defence sector have been at the centre of the progress of humanity since Antiquity. However, the private sector has somewhat overstepped the military in creating technology and building the future. This is why the creation of a sphere where competition and technology-sharing will benefit not only the sectors involved, but also society itself.
- The combined military force of the Transatlantic Alliance was put to the test in many instances, but 9/11 was the only time when Article 5 of the NATO Charter was applied. Nevertheless, current political trends in Europe and in the United States are signalling a new stage for the EU-US relations, a pragmatic phase where the differences of opinion between the Americans and the Europeans will likely result in either light frictions or a stalemate for the short-term and in a gradual disengagement and polarization in the long run.

All of these elements combined do make a point for a continuing relationship in spite of political and membership differences, between three, rather than two international actors on the security and human rights issues (the EU, the US and the UK). However, the main aspect of the first half of 2018 seems to contradict this: the strained relationship between the EU member states and the US has reached an unparalleled low, with controversial moves in particular on several European-born projects (the JCPOA being the most visible example). As such the future of transatlantic relations are quite difficult to predict, nevertheless taking into consideration the abovementioned drivers, the authors (Kaufmann and Lohaus, 2018, p. 24) observe four scenarios on the matter of the EU-US relationship:

- The first scenario: “pick and choose” – centred on the decline of the EU, where we will see pragmatism at its best in international politics and a revival of Realpolitik and bilateral agreements.
- The second scenario: “Europe takes the wheel” – centred on the decline of American hegemony will see the EU having no choice but to try and take the lead. This is a valid scenario because since 2016, the new US Administration has changed both the tone and the rhetoric when dealing with its ‘European friends and allies’.
- The third scenario: “rally ‘round the flag” will signify a regression from internationalism towards isolationism, following the established “Trump model”, itself a reimagined version of the Monroe doctrine. The rise of populist and nationalist political models in Europe, even when falling short of placing overt controversial political figures in power, will nevertheless undermine the capacity of mainstream political parties to shape and model policies. The major campaign themes will still be about immigration and economic revival, but more focused on a histrionic view of the world.
- The fourth scenario: “rules for the future” will no doubt be focused on establishing a new regulatory system for the technological advances which seemed to have eluded policy-makers. From GMO’s to AI and crypto-currencies, the world has changed a lot in the past twenty years. One matter of immense importance concerns the privacy of millions of EU citizens which have seen their private data and personal details used not only in immoral transactions, but against themselves in the ensuing scandals of electoral manipulations and data harvesting for electoral purposes. One major and significant difference between Europe and the US is the increasing hostility towards big tech companies of the former and the laissez-faire position on regulations of the latter.

The future of the so-called “security bargain” (Hallams, 2013, p. 219) between the US and Europe, is being threatened not only by sharp words, but also by polarisation on the more pressing issues such as Iran or North Korea. In his first address before a NATO gathering, President Trump omitted to mention the famous Article 5 – which bounds all members to defend another in the case of aggression, the last time it was invoked was in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks – provoking fears that the US will withdraw their support to the Alliance. In a recent turn of events, the arrival of the newly appointed US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the NATO headquarters, was seen by the NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg as being a “proof of President Trump’s renewed commitment to NATO” (Herszenhorn, 2018). But there was no insight into more pressing matters such the Iran nuclear deal, which is the most recent apple of discord out of many between European leaders and the US President. One eminent example is the 2 percent of GDP which all NATO member states must allocate to defence spending, at the moment only 5 out of 28 member states meet the 2

percent threshold: the US, the UK, Greece, Poland and Estonia. All of these actions are very likely to continue, meaning that the EU has to embark in a very long and strenuous journey.

### 3. Making sense of the EU's collective security: Brexit, NATO, PESCO

Security, or rather the imminent threat of danger, is a very powerful tool which helps bring together even the most reluctant and opposite sides. Following the 9/11 events and the terrorist attacks in 2004 and 2005, the perspective of European security was shifted towards combating terrorism, coupled with organized crime, as the main security threats to the EU: “security is the cornerstone of our freedom; fighting terrorism aims to protect fundamental rights: those to life, security and freedom”, said the then-EU Justice, Freedom and Security Commissioner (Frattini, 2005), as he presented to European citizens a vision of a “more centralized security policy within the European Union” (Meyer, 2016, p. 32). Following the expansion of the European Security and Neighbourhood Strategy, cooperation and co-integration of security and defence policies was not possible because of the reluctance of Britain to join, this apparent weakness being exploited by the EU competitors and by the US. Still, Britain still remains a member of NATO, and a very important member to boot. But in simple terms, NATO represents the aegis which defends Europe. As such, the issue with NATO and Brexit are more than just technical, they also involve several layers of political decisions and geostrategic moves. On the issue of the EU's security after Brexit, a recent study issued by the Rand Corporation highlighted a few important aspects to consider:

*The immediate day-to-day impact of Brexit may be felt less keenly in defence than other policy areas, such as trade, market regulation or social policy. This reflects the continuing focus on the nation-state as the primary actor on defence matters, while international collaboration is predominantly at the intergovernmental rather than supranational level. Despite its ambitions and future plans, the EU is not yet a major defence player; in no small part, of course, due to the UK's strong opposition to past European initiatives that it felt might duplicate or impact NATO. (Black et al., 2017, p. 144).*

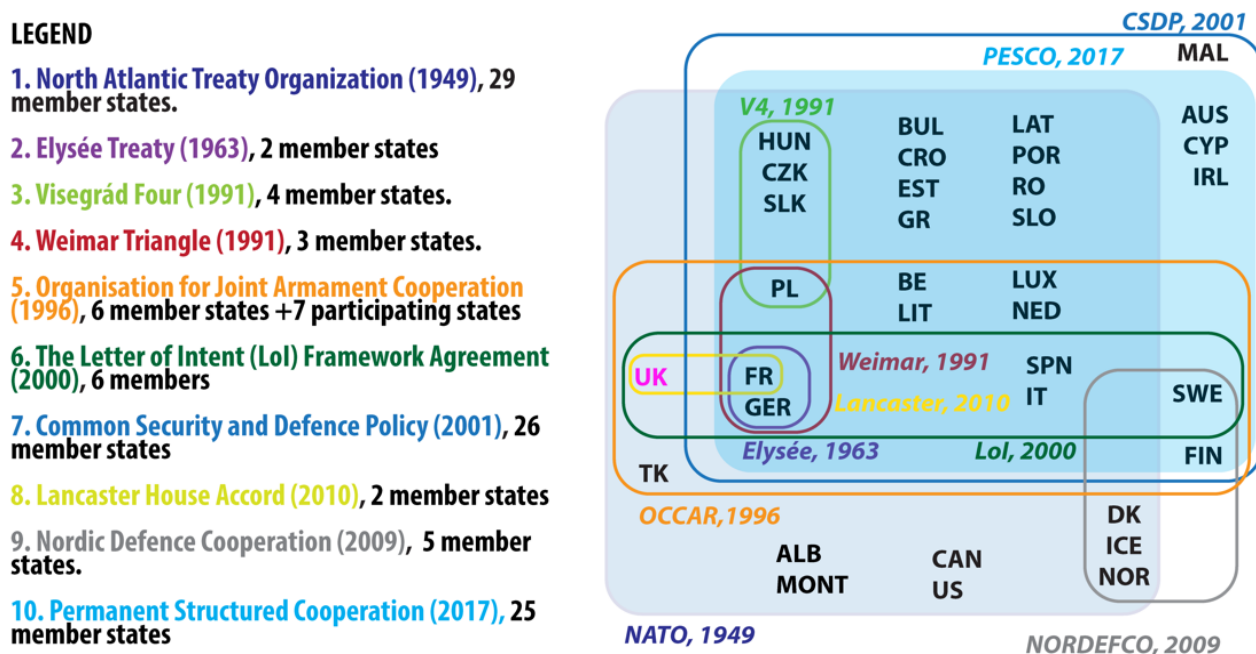
In addition, according to a briefing paper issued by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, starting from March 2019, “Brexit could impact European security in five areas” (Chalmers, 2018, p. 1), as follows:

- Britain will not be able to participate to the EU's foreign policy elaboration process;
- It will immediate impact the UK-EU defence and security relationship;

- The EU defence and security industry will be impacted by the departure of the UK, both from the Single Market and the Customs Union;
- The issues of cross-border cooperation in combating organised crime and antiterrorist operations will likewise be impacted;
- If a ‘hard’ Brexit happens, it will possibly inflame the delicate matter over the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland proper.

The withdrawal from the EU’s regional security affairs of Britain, when coupled with Brexit, will not signal the end of collaboration between the UK and EU member states. There are other, bilateral or minilateral agreements which the UK is a part of, however, the signal given by the UK to other EU member states and to the world for that matter, is not one of supporting global initiatives in the fields of security and defence. We must not forget that Britain, alongside France, still plays a very significant role in global collective security as a NATO founder member state, forming the “leadership of its inner core” (Matlár, 2014, p. 258). But as we can observe below, Britain refused to join the first EU-sponsored common defence project (CDSP, 2001), preferring to be engaged in multiple bilateral and multilateral military and defence alliances.

Figure 2. Transatlantic and European security and defence alliances



Source: own representation based on Faure, 2017

The issue between Brexit and NATO is somewhat more pressing than the economic aspects of Britain’s withdrawal from the EU. Following the fall of the Iron Curtain and the weakening of Russia, that NATO’s mandate has been shifting from the defence of the European homeland to a three-

dimensional engagement in global issues like terrorism, human rights abuses, military partnerships with fledgling democracies, energy security, nuclear proliferation and other similar events. When Russia under became more and more assertive in its foreign policy and started to become a larger-than-anticipated threat to the European and American interests in the region (Loftus and Kanet, 2017, p. 13). NATO tried to use this as an opportunity to revamp its rhetoric as it found a new purpose. However, not all NATO member states are concerned by Russian military threats, as only the Baltic and Eastern member states consider themselves 'threatened' by Russian expansion. We must not forget that the true crux of the geopolitical conundrum involving the US, the EU, NATO and Russia is, for the moment, stationed in and around Ukraine and in the Caucasus and the Black Sea region (Averre, 2016, p. 706). But the reasons for this are the more down-to-earth motives such as gas and oil revenues and supporting the fledgling rise of democratic governments in the region and the promotion of neoliberalism, rather than combatting the spectre of the Cold War and the glory of the former USSR.

One of the more systemic issues when talking about NATO is the unbalanced deployment of military power in Europe. There is great disproportion with regard to NATO's ongoing presence, evident by the military and matériel stationed in Western Europe (in UK, Spain, Italy, the Benelux and Germany in particular) when compared with those stationed in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, the same inconsistencies are present between the various parts of Eastern Europe itself – between the Baltic States and between some Central-East members (Rosen, 2016). This makes for a very uneven image, particularly when considering the defence spending discrepancies between Western and Central-East member states. The debate ranges on from the subject of unmet budgetary requirements to increase in military cooperation, force readiness and, most importantly, on the need to dissipate the image that NATO's problem in Europe is the result of the politically fragmented, and strategically incoherent European allies. This unbalanced distribution of NATO's capabilities gave rise to some questions especially with the events such as the Annexation of Crimea (2014) and the ongoing conflict in the Donbass region, and with the increased presence of Russian forces at the Eastern borders of the EU since 2009, such as the Zapad military exercises near the border with Poland (Johnson, 2017) – all stress the very different geopolitical risks and threats to NATO and EU member states. As such, the purpose of NATO has been both advertised and scrutinised, as being something more than a defensive alliance (Webber *et al.*, 2012, p. 3) particularly when observing the interventions and their consequences in Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2003), Somalia (2009) and the controversial involvement in Libya (2011) (Song, 2016, p. 123). To this day, NATO has evolved from being only a defence alliance. From the US perspective "NATO is primarily described as a military, political and cultural tool" (Pettersson, 2015, p. 9), meaning that a distinction between the



three cannot be made with ease. Even if it adds to the overall image and prestige of the organization, “it is almost impossible to draw distinct lines between what is military, political, and cultural”.

All these inconsistencies on the part of NATO gave rise to the political will to envisage an alternative. A direct successor of CSDP (2001), PESCO came into effect after two important events: Brexit and the weakening of US support for NATO. In addition, the issues surrounding Russian meddling in elections and the obvious support given by the Kremlin to Eurosceptic and Nationalist leaders within the EU have made a convincing statement in favour of the establishment of a means to counter Kremlin’s hybrid tactics (Polyakova, 2016). However, as it stands today, PESCO is more of a shadow of another shadow of NATO – it cannot singlehandedly ensure EU’s security and it does not help the US-EU relationship either. Moreover, on the short-term, Europe’s security cannot be envisaged in a rational manner, neither without the backing of the US nor without the support of the UK. The US has by far the most powerful military in the world and boasts an impressive presence in Western Europe. The UK is traditionally one of the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council and possesses, after France, the most powerful military within the Europe (Global Firepower, 2018). PESCO cannot become more than it is – a project created more for and from political reasons rather than concrete security ones. It is because of this that, for the moment, it is NATO, not PESCO, which is defending Europe. Even if the policies of the US on global matters are becoming more and more inconsistent, and even if Britain will renounce the Customs Union in a ‘hard’ Brexit, we must not forget that both the UK and the US make for a significant part of NATO, both militarily and politically.

Furthermore, all is not all so quiet within the EU, particularly since the 2015 Migration crisis. The so called “East-West” divide within the EU was revealed and accelerated by the eurosceptic and illiberal leaders of Central and Eastern Europe (Duro, 2017). However, as the euphoria of accession makes way to the hardships of integration we can observe that the EU is not as unified as some might argue or believe (Bustikova and Guasti, 2017, p. 167). Notwithstanding eurosceptic and nationalist views on the European project, the official positions on matters of importance in the EU are mainly grouped in two categories: the reformists (France, Germany and others) and the reductionists (the Visegrád group). A third group is also present, the undecided (Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and others) will most likely make their choice by simultaneously negotiating with the two main groups. Also, we must also remember that NATO came before the EU for many Central and Eastern Europe states. The emotional impact of relinquishing the symbol which marked their exit from Communism cannot be underestimated (Lašas, 2010, p. 148).

Brexit will no doubt have an effect on the level of cooperation between the EU member states and the UK, even entailing some difficulties in coordination and rapid deployment because of the

withdrawal from the Customs Union. Brexit might also impact NATO's image and larger mission. Because the purpose of NATO has changed drastically with the dissolution of the USSR and the dismissal of the Warsaw Pact, the Alliance was forced to adapt to new threats and overcome the hurdles which seemed to arise at every corner (da Mota, 2018, p. 148). Both Britain and the US were the key actors in this transformation of NATO. In truth, NATO is something more than a defensive alliance: it represents both a common security framework, and a political club – and was for a time – even a prerequisite for EU accession (Schimmelfennig, 1998, pp. 1-2). It also draws on the traditional link between US and its Allies, as a form of direct heritage dating back to the Allies of the Second World War. This is why Britain's role in the EU was far more than a simple member state with limited integration. Because of the blurred lines between EU membership and NATO membership, and because of the reluctance of the British to fully commit to the so-called 'ever closer union', Brexit does not only affect the involved parties, it spills over into adjacent domains such as collective security, which as we clearly know, are not managed solely by the EU.

## Conclusions

In the course of our paper we tried to argue that even if Brexit's biggest effect was indeed the air of instability on the EU, it should not be viewed in such a bleak perspective. First, the UK was not as integrated in the EU as other member states, even if the a 'hard' Brexit will come to pass, it will not impact the EU in such a way that it will disintegrate it. Second, Brexit's most intrinsic quality is that of a catalyst for change, it provides the EU with a very unique opportunity to have a very committed debate on the future of EU integration and on the role that common security has for the Union. Third, the short-term economic consequences of Brexit have been exaggerated, neither the EU nor the UK were impacted financially in such a grievous way as some preached. However, on the medium- to long-run, we may observe a contraction of the UK's economy in the case of 'hard' Brexit. Fourth, Brexit we believe, should be viewed in relative terms – it imposed change on the EU and on Britain, yet the window of opportunity will not be open for long. The EU has already pushed forward with some reforms, yet Britain is embroiled in political civil war between Labour and Tories, leaving it unable to fully commit to negotiations and to try and prepare alternative plans to see Brexit through. With regards to the issue of the transatlantic relationship, there is no unique scenario which can be accurately envisaged. Nevertheless, some aspects highlighted do have the capacity of becoming reality, such as the gradual withdrawal of the US from conflict areas, the inflammatory rhetoric on immigration and the US' obsession with 'just trade' being only a few. The future of EU-

US relations will be undoubtedly marked by their diverging opinions on the larger geopolitical issues such as the Iran nuclear deal, Russia and the NATO/PESCO debate.

On the EU's role in all of this, we must say that the EU's greatest strength is that its operating in crisis management mode for over a decade now. The impact of populist and nationalistic rhetoric on public policy and the weakening of mainstream parties can no longer be denied. Europe has seen more change in the past years than it saw in decades. However, the EU has its own issues with regards to the illiberal and less-than-democratic tendencies growing in Central and Eastern Europe, the slowing-down of the integration process and the ultimate battle on EU reform of the between the core and the periphery. On the impact which Brexit had on EU's security, it is essential to understand that the Brexit, in whichever format will be implemented, must not dictate the EU-UK relationship, particularly in such areas of paramount importance as security, defence and antiterrorist cooperation. We might see that at the end of the day, Europe and Britain will come to see beyond their past differences, and recognise that we share similar values and that we adhere to the same principles. Discussing PESCO, we must keep in mind that it took three attempts to integrate EU's structures into a permanent framework. Also, one of the most valid concerns about the 'EU Army' is that there it could impact NATO by becoming a parallel defence mechanism. If in the future, the EU will have to make a decision between NATO and PESCO, the more rational choice will be to integrate PESCO into NATO, under the condition that the EU will have a larger impact on the Alliance's decision-making process. Any other 'extreme' option will be quite challenging to envisage without a very serious event which would destabilise the Transatlantic partnership.

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