POLICY | brief

Introducing the IES Brexit-Project

by Claire Dupont & Florian Trauner

What would happen if the United Kingdom (UK) leaves the European Union (EU)? The outcome of the referendum on EU membership in the UK on 23 June 2016 will not only determine the future of the UK in the EU but also have a considerable impact on the rest of Europe. Only rarely have academic and political observers zoomed into the details of day-to-day EU policy-making to have a look at what is the UK is actually doing at a policy-level.

By bundling the manifold policy expertise of the researchers of the Institute for European Studies (IES) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), this Policy brief series takes such a comparative look and investigates the role of the UK in different EU policies. All papers in the series ask the following three questions:

1. What is the state of the EU policy in focus?

2. What is the UK's role/interest in this policy field?

3. What are the potential implications of a 'Brexit' scenario at the policy-level?

In the first paper, Richard Lewis sets the historical and cultural context and explains how the UK and the EU have come to such a low-point in their relations. Next, five policy fields are analysed: justice and home affairs; free movement policies; EU external relations and representation; the (digital) single market; and environmental policy.

The comparative view reveals some interesting insights. First, the UK is a highly active player even in policy fields where it seemingly refrained from participating, such as justice and home affairs. It has consistently ensured that a certain 'liberal' spirit and rationale has been pursued in different EU policies, most notably in market-related ones.

Second, the different papers also describe a high degree of uncertainty about what a Brexit scenario implies for the UK, but the consensus seems to show more potential costs than benefits of withdrawal. For example, it may result in insecurity regarding the residence status of the 1.4 million UK citizens living in other EU member states, or involve high administrative, legal and political costs in renegotiating all the international agreements and treaties thus far signed by the EU.

Third, the contributions also point out the potential costs to the EU of Brexit. This may become evident in the adjusted international weight and influence of the EU

By bundling the manifold policy expertise of the researchers of the Institute for European Studies (IES), this paper forms part of a series of analyses investigating the potential implications of a 'Brexit' scenario for different EU policies. All papers ask the same three questions: 1) What is the state of the EU policy in focus? 2) What is the UK's role/interest in this policy field? 3) What are the potential implications of a 'Brexit' scenario at the policy-level?

After Claire Dupont and Florian Trauner introduce the project, Richard Lewis sets the historical and cultural context and explains how the UK and the EU have come to such a low-point in their relations. Next, five policy fields are analysed: justice and home affairs; free movement policies; EU external representation; the (digital) single market; and environmental policy.

in international relations, but also in internal policy developments. Where the UK has been a driver of advancing pragmatic and ambitious policies, in environmental policy or in the (digital) single market for example, its absence may lead to new internal coalitions among member states and a weakening of standards in such policy fields.

Describing the future is full of unknowns. Nevertheless, all the contributions here outline more disadvantages than advantages of a Brexit – both for the UK and the EU. We hope the work of our researchers provides food for thought in the weeks leading up to the UK referendum.

Authors

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