BREXIT VERSUS NEOFUNCTIONALISM

Case Study: Brexit

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# Introduction

On June 23rd, 2016, Britain conducted a referendum in which slightly more than half (51.9%) of their population decided that Britain should leave the European Union. Following her population's wishes, the then PM Theresa May invoked the dreaded "Article 50" of the Lisbon Treaty, commonly known as the EU charter, and began the dreaded process that came to be known as Brexit. For the subsequent three years, many political analysts have cam to observe that leaving the EU is not as easy as it seemed then. There are financial and economic costs attached to the mix. These costs can be understood through the lenses of Neofunctionalism. This theory has not been the subject of discussion for a very long time. The core values of Neofunctionalism can be used to explain certain unprecedented scenarios that have started to form after the formation and evolution of the European Union. The basic assumption of Neo-functionalism is that integration in the economic sector, termed in social sciences as "lower-political areas" of a region can lead to integration in defense and other "high-political areas". This can be observed by the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community that later blossomed into the European Union (Radaelli). However regional integration in the European Union can be observed as the bone stuck in the of the pro-Brexit group in the British Parliament. The latter started to experience a long list of issues that started to emerge after Britain expressed its desire to leave the European Union. This will be seen as a danger signal for rest of the Twenty-seven members of the European Union if they decide to part their ways, as this experience will bear all the costs related to leaving the European Union, should the need arise for any member of the European Union

# Theoretical Background

The evolutionary process of the European Union can be described in the framework of the early theories of Functionalism, Federalism, and Neofunctionalism (Niemann). We will only be discussed the specifications of the latter one. Neofunctionalism is a combination of both federalism and functionalism. It is also the basic framework for understanding the scenario of European integration. The main advocate of the theory, Ernst Hass, suggested that economic cooperation can lead to integration in all political areas. Hass regards economic integration as the stepping stone for complete regional integration. Neofunctionalism recognizes states' role in regional integration but he thinks that the integrative process should be directed from non-state actors, like a business and interest associations, which later happened in the form of the European Coal and Steel Community (Radaelli). However, the role of the European Union has been challenged by the state-centrist approach advocates. They believe that cooperation in lower political areas can lead to local unrest, a point on which Hass’ Neofunctionalism is silent. That is what we have started to observe in the case of Brexit.

# The Question of Brexit

Britain has always dealt with Euroscepticism, especially since its association with the European Union since 1973. This suspicion was always catered by the founding members of the European Union, which can be observed by the fact that Britain was rejected multiple times in its bid for membership to the Union. It was not among the founding fathers of the European Union. Also, we can observe in the framework of the Britain-led European Free Trade Association that its core is more of an intergovernmental nature, rather than of a supranational one, as observe commonly in the European Union today. The division in the Union had begun then. Two groups were formed that were later known as the Outer Seven and the Inner Six, the latter being the founding members of the Union. It also proved DE Gaulle's view that Britain will not cooperate with the rest of the European powers to stop yet another world war (DR Troitiño). It can also be observed that DE Gaulle tried every political maneuver in his power to stop Britain to join the European Union, including stopping his ministers to attend the Union's council meeting in 1965. The British decided to join the European Union in 1973 but the traces of Euroscepticism remained. First, in the referendum of 1975, then in the political movements of Tony Been and Michael Foot and finally in the promises of the Labor Party's manifesto to leave the European Union for good. The general claim at the time was that British people" gave more and got less". British Prime Minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher's withdrawal from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1992 further added fuel to the fire, resulting in an open debate among the public that Britain should leave the European Union as soon as legally possible. The lose of value of the Pound Sterling and the Euro Crisis served as the final nail in the coffin that resulted in the popular decision of the British leaving the European Union.

# Brexit and ‘locks’ of Neofunctionalism

Article 50 of the Lisbon gives Britain two-years to withdrawal from the European Union after it intimates to do so. After that, many have observed a significant time of seriously complicated rounds of debating in the European Parliament. The members of the union are finding it very difficult to disengage Britain due to a series of multilayered cooperative mechanisms that make separation both costly and technically difficult. Some issues like the borders between the Republic of Ireland and the Ulster Constabulary are at the spearhead of the British worries. The century-old struggle with the Irish Republican Army has significant impacts on British history for a long time (Guelke). If a hard border is established, Britain and Ireland can experience hostility at the “only territorial border of Britain”. Another issue faced by the British will be the free movement of labor. Britain, like the US, has a diverse population, composed of diverse ethnic groups. Often, there are British citizens having relatives in other parts of Europe (Shaw). This will force them to make a hard choice that may affect the British economy directly, should they choose to resettle. Also, the movement of British goods will be restricted due to the abolishment of the single European market. This increase of duties and decrease of labor power will result in the surge of prices of British goods, the effect that they seek to avoid in the first place. The example that can be offered to assert the above claims is through observing the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (abb. DEFRA). DEFRA will be the most affected department in Britain (T Lang). Its portfolio regulates the most perishable products in Britain including (but not limited to) fisheries and agricultural products. They have already started to prepare for a no-deal Brexit, meaning a Brexit in which no compromises are made. They have prepared a legal regulatory framework that will aim at reducing their losses from Brexit. The restriction of goods and services will be followed by a restriction on transportation. It is a large business with diverse and wide-ranging consequences, from negative impacts like economical, social and environmental to serious strains in foreign relations with their European neighbors. The freedom enjoyed by the British within the framework of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) will disappear (S Cave), causing difficulty in ticketing both monetarily and diplomatically.

# Damage to Neofunctionalism (Conclusion)

Brexit is, without a doubt, one of the hardest issues for both the EU and Britain and we can only guess the impacts that it will bring. Many scholars believe that it will result in a domino effect of skepticism that will unravel the basic fabric of the European Union. Others believe that the European will be better off with their severe ties with the British with regards to the Union. Truthfully, this case study will raise a strong question mark on the Hass' advocacy of Neo-functionalism. The assumption made by Hass concerning regional integration has failed and that the problems that will arise later will be diverse and highly complicated. The disintegration of the bodies discussed above will create multiple deadlocks in the future. Most of the European public, as well as the British commoners, will suffer from their daily dealings that a whole generation was raised around and that they take for granted. We will find that it will not be easy to roll back the changes that have materialized in almost half a century. Neofunctionalism is damaged, but it will try to restore the balance. British have been in Europe like Russians have been in Asia, a nation of diverse geographic identity. If Russians can be Asian with being considered Asian, then Britain can do the same. In short, there is a possibility that Britain will be more damaged in the process of Brexit than the concept of Neofunctionalism.

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