

How can we avoid Britain being cut out of the EU's foreign policy negotiations?

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*With the appointment of Theresa May's government, the UK is now very likely to withdraw from the EU. "Brexit means Brexit", reiterates **Hylke Dijkstra**. And following [Simon Hix](#), he argues that we now need to focus on the practicalities and to fight for continued, intensive cooperation in various policy areas, especially foreign policy.*



Much of the attention so far has gone on how the UK can keep access to the internal market and trade freely. As important as market access is, cooperation within the EU is naturally much wider in scope. Brexit also presents big challenges for EU foreign policy.

EU foreign policy is not on the priority list. After all, the UK has traditionally been sceptical of developments in this domain. The importance of 'sovereignty' played a key role in the Brexit debate. And overblown fears about the potential creation of an EU army made even some Brexainers worried.

Yet on a day-to-day basis, many useful things happen in the EU security, foreign and development policies. It is therefore both in the UK's and EU's interest to think about ways to continue cooperation after Brexit.

EU security cooperation

The area of EU security and defence will probably be least affected by Brexit. On the issue of territorial defence and high-intensity intervention, NATO takes the lead. While Brexit [hardly benefits](#) NATO, it is clear that the UK and continental European states will continue their cooperation within the North Atlantic Alliance.

The UK has also developed substantial bilateral cooperation in the field of defence. The French may prove to be a bit difficult over the bilateral [Lancaster House Treaties](#), but the reality is that France and the UK both need each other to continue to sustain their armed forces.

Under the flag of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the EU also deploys its own operations. Yet British participation in CSDP operations has been minimal. Ever since the UK unilaterally withdrew its troops from the EU military operation in Bosnia in 2006, it has only made a small contribution on two occasions.

For the EU anti-piracy missions off the coast of Somalia, the UK has made its military operations headquarters available. However, the UK has not regularly deployed warships as part of this operation. France, Germany and Spain carry the heavy burden. In addition, the UK has recently participated in the naval operation off the coast of Libya which targets human traffickers. On the whole the British contribution to CSDP is thus very limited.

Following Brexit, the UK will still be able to contribute to EU military operations as a third country. Indeed, countries like Turkey, Ukraine and the United States have previously participated in operations under EU command. This option will remain available for the UK as well.

More significant than operations is the UK's participation in European defence investment, R&D, and the European internal market for defence. It should not be too difficult to allow the UK to continue to contribute to [Pooling and Sharing](#) or the projects of the European Defence Agency. Participation in the internal market for defence will present a much bigger challenge.



European foreign policy coordination

Ever since the 1970s, diplomats and ministers of EU countries very regularly meet to exchange views and share information about foreign policy. The EU agrees on common positions, issues daily statements and engages in diplomat actions. Brexit presents a real problem for EU foreign policy.

The risk is that the UK gets completely cut out of EU foreign policy. This means that both the UK and the remaining EU member states lose significantly in terms of information exchanges as well as personal diplomatic contacts. EU foreign ministers, for instance, formally meet once a month in Brussels. EU diplomats every day.

One key issue, in this respect, are the regular EU coordination meetings in other countries and international organisations. The local EU delegations ('embassies') make their offices available and all local EU ambassadors meet to discuss ongoing issues. At the UN in New York, we are talking about thousands of annual meetings. The UK absence would present a major setback for both the UK and the EU.

Another question is also what to do with common positions and statements. When it comes to major events, the UK would want to issue its own statements (just as it does today). But what about all the positions and statements on nitty-gritty details about all events in the world? The EU currently allows non-EU states (such as candidate countries) to "align" themselves with EU positions, but they don't have any input. Such a system does not seem to make much sense for the UK.

Beyond statements, the EU regularly takes part in high-level diplomacy. The negotiations with Iran on non-proliferation are an interesting example. The EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, negotiated on behalf of the permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Germany, UK, US) and Germany with Iran. Following Brexit, there will likely be some questions on the UK's role in this respect.

Because the UK has such a central role in the EU with respect to foreign policy, it is important to consider mechanisms for continued (informal) participation. One option would be for the EU to open up its foreign policy meetings. NATO's North Atlantic Council, for instance, regularly met in "ISAF format" during the Afghanistan operation with all troop contributing countries around the table. It would be good to think further along these lines how the UK could take part.

Development cooperation

Brexit presents another key challenge for EU cooperation in the area of development and humanitarian aid. Indeed, the EU is one of the world's most important donors.

As a [House of Commons report](#) makes clear, the UK paid in 2010 approximately £1.2bn into the EU development

budgets. This included its contribution as part of the regular EU budget, as well as its contribution to the separate European Development Fund. In total, the UK contribution was about 15% of the EU development budgets.

There are key questions about what will happen with this contribution. Naturally, some of the Brexiters suggested transferring the full EU contribution to the NHS instead. On the other hand, the EU may also force the UK to contribute to the EU budget in exchange for market access.

Regardless of these political discussions, there are practical considerations. If the EU development budgets are reduced by 15%, they will have to change their priorities and their projects. Such budgetary shortfalls will be comparable to, say, shortfalls in the Common Agricultural Policy or Horizon 2020.

Yet on the British side too, there will be issues. First of all, all most the money given to the EU for the purpose of development counts towards the British 0.7%/GNI ODA targets. Unless the Theresa May government revises Cameron's ring-fencing of development assistance, the UK really cannot spend this money on the NHS.

Second, the UK will face a significant challenge to actually spend this additional development money. It may not have the administrative capacity to bilaterally administer all these funds. It could also send the money through different multilateral channels (e.g. the UN), but the question is whether this satisfies British priorities.

There are thus key questions with regard to development policy. Interestingly, the European Development Fund may offer a way out. Since it is not part of the regular EU budget, the UK might be convinced to continue to contribute through those channels and gradually reduce its contribution over time rather than abruptly.

The details of the divorce

These are only some of the challenges that Brexit presents in the area of EU foreign policy. While everyone currently seems to focus on internal market access and free trade, the EU is much broader in scope. When going into individual policy areas, it is clear that Brexit will likely harm both the EU and the UK.

Given the UK's traditional strong role in foreign policy and diplomacy, it is particularly important to better consider the consequences of Brexit for EU foreign policy. And it is worth investing considerable thought into possible mechanisms to continue cooperation after Brexit.

This post represents the views of the author and not those of the BrexitVote blog, nor the LSE. Image [credit](#).

Hylke Dijkstra is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Maastricht University, The Netherlands. He tweets @DijkstraHylke

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