

BREXIT: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

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I am grateful to Yuste Foundation for allowing me to participate in the courses “The Future of Europe: Opportunities on Shared and Global Challenges”, “The Future of Healthcare in Europe and the World: Challenges and Solutions to a Global Challenge” and “European Citizenship, Identities and Values”, which were held during the summer of 2021; a year that presented great challenges and opportunities, as was the celebration of these courses remotely, enabling the attendance of students on the other side of the world as in my case. I was determined to participate in these courses, because I was in the process of completing a Masters in International Studies where I undertook research on the European Union; in this sense, the courses included in Campus Yuste have given me more knowledge about its future, challenges and opportunities from the perspective of great academics and professionals immersed in its current evolution. I, furthermore, do not discard the possibility of continuing my line of research via a doctorate. With the presentations made during the courses, I developed an idea about Brexit and the opportunities it can offer the European Union itself.

Introduction

At the end of World War II there were two conceptions, the unionists’ and the federalists’, which came together to rebuild Europe by laying the foundations that make up the current European Union (EU) and which mark the development and at the same time the limitations of European construction. These prevail to this day; they are known as Eurosceptics and Europeanists, the same ones that are reflected in decision-making that generated the Brexit process and finally its achievement.

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In this sense, we see that in the course of history different changes have marked the path of the historical development of international relations. Holsti (2004) calls some markers as moments of change in space-time, making them important events. Brexit is one of them because it alters traditional patterns and structures, causing changes in the distribution and correlation of forces, both in the EU and in the international context.

An opportunity for the European Union

The EU is the largest business union in the world and globalisation has provided it with the necessary elements for growth, so that, by 2021, 447 million people in 27 Member States enjoy the benefits of European cooperation. The euro is the second most traded currency in the world and is part of the daily life of 340 million citizens in 19 countries, who have the possibility to move freely and reside in all Member States within the Schengen area. All this places it as a strong actor within the multipolar system along with the United States, China and Russia.

However, each of the countries that make up the EU face the challenges imposed on them by globalisation, the structural crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, where they are currently immersed, so they will have to look for joint mechanisms to get ahead. As stated by Sanahuja (2018) on constitutive theories, their role within reality grants “meaning to social relations and guides the practices of social actors, building the world according to its understanding and interpretation by those actors”, so the EU will have to rebuild itself in a communitarian way and with a single voice.

In this sense, the EU sees Brexit as an opportunity, which was evident from the very first moment that the United Kingdom (UK) threatened to use security

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cooperation as a negotiating weapon, causing the reactivation of the lost idea about the European army by concretising a truly common European Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), in accordance with Ochman (2017) when he emphasised that the UK consistently obstructed such a project by avoiding its construction. This will enable it to establish a strategic autonomy as stipulated in the Treaty of Lisbon. And as is stated in Juncker's *White Paper*, warning that the European Union cannot be naïve and must ensure its own security because soft power is no longer enough when force can prevail over law. In this regard, Pou (2018) tells us that the Council of Ministers of the European Union promoted Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), enabling the creation of a European defence structure, making clear that it will be coordinated with NATO but not subordinated to it.

In this sense, structures in supranational institutions will be modified, making Brexit an opportunity to review treaties through intergovernmental meetings, as proposed by Guinea (2018), in order to remove the impediments set by the UK and relaunch the strengthening of the EU.

Similarly, a relaunch of Europeanism is sought, as pointed out by Nasarre (2015), who argues that this should be a federalist one because the EU currently faces major challenges, mainly of a political nature, so its solution should also be political, which will involve its political union in the future. Currently, the relationship between Europeanism and Euroscepticism - it is explained by Sberro (2018) as an unavoidable part of European integration - results in that as integration increases, one also finds the other side of the coin, its opposition reflected in its Eurosceptic detractors who call it into question.

Regarding the way in which the EU operates, there are those who consider that the intergovernmental conferences allow them to return to the origins, because the individual positions of all the Member States can be heard, which enables the

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achievement of far more significant agreements, such as the multiannual budget allocation and the *Next Generation EU*, which will contribute to the reconstruction of the European Union after the Covid-19 pandemic, supporting investment in green and digital transitions through the European Green Pact.

For its part, the European Parliament (EP) is seeking the introduction of new own resources to finance the EU budget and the amortisation of the new recovery fund. In this manner, it will obtain resources to finance projects that will lead to the recovery of the lost well-being and it will become the voice of European citizens.

It should be noted that the steps taken by the EU to strengthen the economy through the latest budget negotiations warn about the postulation made by Habermas (2018) as they imply “the recovery of political power and popular support, by establishing powers and a budget that would allow it to carry out programmes with democratic legitimacy that would prevent further economic and social alienation between the States”. This will be reflected in the forthcoming Conference on the Future of Europe, which was proposed by France and taken up by both the EP and the European Commission, in order to determine the lines that the EU will have, taking the opinion of citizens into account.

Conclusions

Faced with the new challenges, the EU will have to be stricter in decision-making with respect to the UK because the Trade and Cooperation Agreement has left large gaps in many sectors that were not taken into account when signing, which is generating more questions than answers.

The EU should also be more cautious with its current members, a fact that has led it to launch the first review of democratic quality, political plurality, judicial

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independence, respect for minorities and freedom of the press, which is mainly addressed to the so-called Visegrad Group, which is not respecting the agreements they signed when they joined the EU. This in turn does not facilitate the idea of future enlargement.

Last but not least, at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic the EU did not provide a timely response to the most affected countries. However, the pandemic allowed it to recapitulate and take a glimpse at its weaknesses regarding social and health policy, which is why the foundations for a health union and the creation of the world centre for the prevention and detection of epidemics based in Berlin are currently being laid.

In this sense, the EU stands in a privileged place within the multipolar scenario, which could situate it as a normative power, defender of human rights and against climate change, thus becoming a geostrategic ally for many countries. However, this will be possible as long as the Member States continue to act and think as one, as Europeans, which is why they will have to invariably strengthen their foreign and security policy under a united voice so that it is taken into account in the current multipolar international scenario.

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