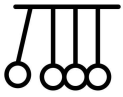# Redrawing Boundaries: Brexit As A Sovereignty Statement

POLITICS

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Introduction

With new technologies and major developments in science and communication, globalization is on the rise in the modern world. Globalization, meaning the growing interdependence between populations, cultures, and economies around the world, has enabled countries to form partnerships and organizations to facilitate communication and trade with one another. It doesn't only affect economics; it has also had major impacts on politics. The rise of supranational organizations through globalization has significantly influenced global affairs.

Some may confuse supranational organizations with international organizations. However, they differ in one essential aspect: while all states are equally involved in decision-making within an international organization, a supranational organization has a higher authority — the organization itself — that makes binding decisions. In other words, member states delegate a portion of their sovereignty to the organization, allowing it to make decisions on certain policies. Although these organizations can increase a state's influence in global affairs, they also require member states to relinquish a certain degree of sovereignty, which can potentially limit national autonomy in policymaking.

A concrete and current example of this controversy can be seen in the case of Brexit, where the United Kingdom chose to leave the European Union largely due to concerns about protecting its borders and national autonomy. This article focuses on the process of Brexit, its outcomes, and offers a broader perspective on the relationship between state sovereignty and supranational organizations.

The Brexit Referendum

The process of Brexit — meaning *British exit* — officially began on June 23, 2016, with a referendum in the United Kingdom. The referendum was held to determine whether the British people wanted to leave or remain in the European Union. It resulted in a narrow vote to leave the EU. According to the BBC, 51.9% voted to leave, while 48.1% voted to remain.

The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) successfully led this process with its anti-EU policies and emerged victorious, while most leaders from other parties supported remaining in the EU. The party was centered around Euroscepticism — a critical stance toward the EU — and capitalized on citizens' frustrations to campaign for a referendum.

Following the referendum, Prime Minister David Cameron was forced to resign, and a period of uncertainty began regarding how the UK would officially leave the European
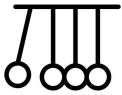
Union. His successor, Theresa May, also resigned after failing to successfully implement a withdrawal plan. The UK's official departure did not occur until January 31, 2020.

Euroscepticism and Causes of Brexit

British criticism of the EU had many reasons, such as the bloated bureaucracy within the organization and the lack of accountability that caused undemocratic actions. As the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) increased its popularity after its success in the European Parliament elections, the party also highlighted the immense migration problem, making it one of the main reasons for the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Known as the most influential hard Eurosceptic party, UKIP promoted an anti-immigration platform, particularly after the migration crisis in 2015–2016 caused by escalating wars in the Middle East and the growing migration from Eastern Europe to the UK via the EU's regulations. The rise of populism in Europe had a major impact on the growing anti-immigration policies, resulting in the increasing popularity of highly populist parties such as UKIP itself. In other words, having the sovereignty to protect its borders can be seen as one of the principal motives for the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

The European Union was also seen as elitist and unconcerned with the needs of average British citizens, while it was also criticized for imposing continental beliefs on the British public. British citizens argued that the EU was becoming harmful to British identity and culture, with its ultimate goal of creating European integration both politically and economically. As the UK had often remained outside of the EU mainstream, concerns over national sovereignty gained popularity, especially with the campaign slogan "Take back control."

It is known that the UK was not an original member of the organization, and its motive for joining was mostly economic. The country often played the role of a bridge between the United States and Europe, without fully participating in the European integration process. The UK did not support the common currency and did not adopt the euro. Additionally, economic concerns played a part in its departure, as it saw new opportunities with growing global economies, without needing to comply with EU regulations and policies, which were argued to have become burdensome and unreasonable. It was also claimed that the UK's financial contributions to the EU budget were not effectively used for the country's benefit, and that the UK would have more freedom to invest in its own industries without EU restrictions.

Furthermore, the Eurozone crisis highlighted the inefficiency of the EU's financial bureaucracy, as the euro lacked a central governing authority, and any sudden loss of confidence could result in a crisis that could not be resolved without assistance from third parties — as was the case with several EU countries, including Greece and Spain.

Process after the Referendum
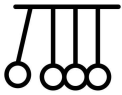
After the Brexit referendum, the UK government formally notified the EU of its intention to leave on March 29, 2017. Following this, negotiations between the UK and the EU began. British citizens and officials had believed that an agreement beneficial to the UK would be reached even before the referendum. On November 2018, the parties agreed on a withdrawal agreement. After some modifications, both sides finalized an agreement on 17 October 2019. The bill was signed on 24 January 2020 by the European Commission President, the Council President, and the UK Prime Minister. By 30 January, it was officially approved.

The Withdrawal Agreement

The Withdrawal Agreement aimed to ensure an orderly exit for the UK and to provide legal certainty for citizens, businesses, and institutions on both sides. It covered the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in EU countries. The rights of those who had established residency before the end of the transition period were guaranteed for life. In addition to citizens' rights, the agreement included a financial settlement known as "the divorce bill."

The agreement also covered protocols on Northern Ireland, Cyprus, and Gibraltar. According to the agreement, Northern Ireland would follow certain EU Single Market rules, the UK would maintain its sovereign base areas in Cyprus, and cooperation between the UK and Spain on the Gibraltar protocol would be ensured. Legal and technical arrangements for the UK's departure from EU institutions and systems were also addressed. Additionally, a Joint Committee was created to oversee implementation during the transition period.

The transition period allowed for adaptation and negotiation of the future UK-EU relationship. This period lasted from 1 February 2020 to 31 December 2020. During this time, the UK remained bound by EU law, the Single Market, and the Customs Union; however, it lost its voting rights and representation in EU institutions.

Future EU-UK Relationship

In their future relationship, the UK and the EU are now working on forming a strategic partnership. This partnership includes not only trade but also climate change, global security, research, and foreign policy. While they have quota- and tariff-free trade according to the TCA (The Trade and Cooperation Agreement), the UK now has limited access to EU services as it lost automatic market access. Additionally, both parties agreed on minimum standards in environmental protection, labor rights, and state aid to prevent unfair competition.

Furthermore, fisheries quotas were rebalanced in favor of the UK with a planned transition period of 5.5 years. It was agreed that both sides would continue cooperating on
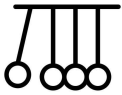
security, law enforcement, and criminal justice, but the UK will no longer have access to the Schengen Security System, and cooperation will be more limited.

As another natural result of the withdrawal, British citizens now need visas or permits to live or work across the EU border, although short-term travel remains visa-free.

Critics and Final Look

In the end, Brexit had many results, both negative and positive; however, most surveys conducted show general dissatisfaction. Even some voters who supported leaving remain lukewarm about the results of the negotiations. For example, in economics, limited services in trade especially hurt small and medium-sized businesses, while there have been major negative consequences for the country's financial sector. Additionally, economic uncertainty during the transition period caused a reduction in investments, leading to a decrease in the UK's economic growth.

Brexit also caused polarization in the country. With the referendum resulting in a narrow margin between leave and remain votes, demands for a second referendum on the independence of Scotland increased, as Scotland had supported remaining in the EU. Additionally, debates over the borders in Northern Ireland remain heated due to the Withdrawal Agreement.

However, some goals were achieved, such as limiting migration to the UK. While "taking back control" allowed the UK to regain more sovereignty over its borders, debates about British identity and culture intensified, resulting in deeper societal polarization. Although the UK is now the first and only country to leave the EU, the European Union aimed to manage the process with minimal damage and to prevent the popularization of the "leave" tendency.

In conclusion, while it is debated that supranational organizations limit states' sovereignty, cases such as Brexit show that it is not an absolute loss of power but a conditional sharing of authority. As the economic and political difficulties in the UK demonstrate, supranational organizations enable countries to manage crises more effectively. It could be said that sovereignty is not only a state's authority within its borders but also its ability to impact and act with other states beyond its borders.
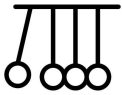
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