

Krzysztof, Feliks SLIWINSKI, Associate Professor,

Department of Government and International Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University

11/F, R. 1111. Academic and Administration Bldg., 15 Hong Kong Baptist University Rd., Kowloon Tong, Email: chris@hkbu.edu.hk, Tel: +852 3411 5753

Hong Kong, 9 July 2016

‘Brexit’ and European security

23rd of June marks an unprecedented event in the history of European Union or European integration (a process that started right after WWII). It is indeed the first time that a member of this elite club may withdraw from this prestigious form of international, regional integrative institution. It comes as a shock to many that a country as big and as important as the United Kingdom would actually perform such action.

Such decision, if acted upon, begs questions regarding ramifications both for the EU and UK. This short paper will focus on some of the consequences that operate in the realm of international politics, especially regarding European security.

In recent days, influenced by emotions, numerous commentators lamented on the outcome of the British referendum. Many voiced their concerns identifying manipulation by ‘leave camp’ or even ignorance of British citizens as major reasons behind the ‘tragedy’ that is about to unfold ahead of Britain and Europe. Emotions aside, British referendum, fits perfectly into a growing division inside EU as well as within many, if not all, European societies. In this respect, one identifies the forces of globalization fueled by the ideology of neoliberalism. To cut the long story short, these forces have for years undercut national sovereignty and to some extent even territorial integrity of many societies. European Union with its ‘single market’ has benefited largely in terms of its economy and at the same time became much more exposed to the volatility of the markets.

Modern history of philosophical thought points to Immanuel Kant, a famous 18th century European philosopher, addressed one of the most vexing questions that scholars have asked

throughout centuries: how can different political communities coexist peacefully in a world of constant competition? One of the answers that Kant gave, not the only one though, was referring to trade as in instrument of peace and security. In short, countries that trade with one another, would have too much to lose in an event of a war since their prosperities, assuming international trade develops enough, would be intertwined. (This needs to be facilitated by the emergence and recognition of norms that would regulate relations between such actors. Around those norms the actors themselves would build institutions that would serve as arbitraries, should a conflict of interest endanger security of any of the participants). War would then be simply deemed too costly. This simple reasoning lies at the foundation of what academics call **neoliberal institutionalism**, of which European Union is one of the best manifestations. In this sense, it has been claimed that EU is a provider of security and by extension also provider of peace in Europe. Historical analysis, seems to support such claims based on the fact that Europeans have been living peacefully for 71 years so far.

What then, in light of the above, to make of ‘Brexit’? How will British departure from EU influence security arrangements in Europe, especially vis-a-vis Russia? Firstly, one needs to remember that EU is not a major security actor in international relations, at least not in a hard-power, military sense. The nature of European Union and its comparative underdevelopment as a military actor has been compensated for long time by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Here, the UK is a formidable power. It is the fourth or fifth (depending on the source of data) biggest military spender in the world and a nuclear power. It is like all members of NATO bound by the Washington Treaty with its *Casus Foederis* clause (collective defence) as stipulated by article 5. The membership of EU and NATO overlap to a large extent (with an exception of USA, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Turkey, Albania – not members of EU and Northern Ireland, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Cyprus and Malta - not members of NATO). It is NATO with its American involvement that provided a nuclear umbrella over Europe and therefore tangible security service through the strategy of deterrent.

As it happens, we are witnessing an important NATO summit (Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016). This is in fact a unique summit as it is paralleled with two other meetings: EU-US leaders’ meeting and EU-NATO joint declaration. The first of these, emphasizes the unity between

European Union and United States amid rising terrorism, refugee crisis and Russia's foreign policy.

EU-NATO joint declaration is supposed to lead to enhancement of practical cooperation between the two in areas such as cyber security, maritime security and most importantly hybrid attacks (vide situation in Ukraine).

Last but not least, NATO Warsaw summit will among others formally decide on further strengthening the Alliance's military presence in the eastern part of Europe. NATO will send four rapid, multi-national battalions to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

Parallel to these, EU has just introduced its global strategy for foreign and security policy, a document which stresses the need for more visibility, strength and unity between its members as well as further cooperation with NATO.

Time will show how all these provisions will turn into actions and what consequences will such actions produce. International system, just like any other system, is driven by action-reaction dynamics. EU and US by signaling their cooperation to the rest of the world will certainly trigger some reactions, which will ultimately influence regional security.

As for EU itself and British departure from it, should it happen at all, it is almost certain that close economic cooperation will continue between the two in one form or another. This will to a large extent continue facilitating peace and security in the European continent.

On the downside, one might expect that the power relations inside EU will change, favoring the remaining countries that combine large populations with strong economies. It is therefore very likely that the influence of Germany will increase even further both economically and politically. This is admittedly received with considerable unease in Central and Eastern Europe, where German propensity towards close economic relationship with Russia is seen as a challenge (not a threat yet), Nord Stream II being a case in point. A project that is deeply mistrusted in Poland and criticized, at least by some, in Brussels as flying in the face of EU energy union.

In this regard, one ponders German reactions to NATO military exercises codenamed 'Anaconda', which just ended in Poland. It was a two-week 'war game' (largest since the cold war) designed to check the ability of the alliance to defend its eastern flank. German foreign

minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier criticized ‘Anaconda’ exercise for bringing unnecessary challenge to Russia, calling it ‘sabre-rattling and warmongering’.

To sum up, the economic cooperation that has brought prosperity and peace to the area covered by EU will continue regardless of ‘Brexit’. It is rather the solidarity of its members *vis-a-vis* other countries as well as commitment to NATO with its collective defense that should be the prime focus now and in the foreseeable future.