

Proposed research project: Brexit and its consequences.

Preamble

The 1st decade of this millennium brought with it conflicting directions that the EU in the 21st-century might take. The Lisbon Treaty (2007), itself a disputed constitutional agenda, signposted Europe, incrementally, towards an integrated legal and political project. Expansion to Central and Eastern Europe (2004/7) produced political and geographic unity, but potential deficits in economic and social equalities and the need for new strategic approaches for the EU's new Eastern neighbours. And from 2008, the global economic crisis and the resulting impact on the Eurozone challenged the assumed economic progression on which the EU's social and political integration was expected to depend.

From these regional and global events have emerged the European politics of the 2nd decade: of identity; ultra-nationalism; anti-migration; austerity and consequently, anti-statism and anti-Europeanism. Most if not all of the EU member states have experienced some or all of these political extremes with the resultant "disruption" to conventional national politics and governmental processes. It is in the light of these circumstances that this project seeks to explore one significant and immediate EU dilemma – Brexit. The British government's reconfiguration of its relations with its European neighbours may be seen as a manifestation of those 21st-century political "disruptions" outlined above and evident in all member states. Alternatively, it may be perceived as British exceptionalism (Mannin 2010; 2013; 2016), a product of a unique set of historic- structural and contemporary- agent phenomena.

In effect, we intend to explore familiar conceptual European dilemmas: statism and supranationalism; interdependence and sovereignty; and cultural particularism and universalism, in the context of current and immediate EU problems and Brexit in particular. This will be progressed by a Lecture Series, followed by a Research Conference.

The Lecture Series

In a series of 6 x 1 hour lectures Britain's relationship with its European mainland will be explored from the Second World War to the current period of Brexit. The series will form 3 blocks.

Block One (1 x 2 hours)

Britain and Europe (1945 – 86): Post imperialism and economic decline; cultural and political sovereignty; ideologies and parties; perceptions of "Europe" (problem or solution?); Prime ministerial agency: Heath; Wilson; Thatcher (1); the allure of the single market.

Block 2 (1 x 2 hours)

The Awkward Partner (1986-2010) : economic redirection and integration, governmental adjustment and political divisions; the role of parties; Labour's conversion and Conservative scepticism. The EU as an elite structure; public/electoral indifference. Prime ministerial agency: Thatcher (2), Major and Blair. The Press. The emergence of the EU sceptic. Reaction to Political and Economic Union. Conservative Party division and the rise of UKIP.

Block 3 (1x2 hours)

Sleepwalking towards Brexit: the EU as an electoral issue – 2009 – 15. The failure of party leadership Miliband – Cameron – Clegg. Austerity. EU membership as an electoral football. Organised UKIP and Farage. Referenda as a political “solution”; public ,regional and party division The shock of the result. Brexit negotiation and its organisation. The issues. Mrs May and Mr Corbyn. Party and parliamentary division and public confusion. Constitutional issues-Scotland and Ireland. What next?

Research Conference: Brexit – what next?

As a 2nd aspect to the proposal there will be a (2?) day conference, with a provisional title- Brexit: what next?

This conference, timed in the aftermath of final Article 50 negotiation (April – May 2019?) will incorporate 2 related themes: the 1st will examine Brexit as a political and organisational “disruption”. Here such immediate issues as the legal – constitutional, financial, economic and policy competencies of the EU and member states as affected by Brexit and the parallel political, economic and constitutional impact on the UK and Ireland, will form several conference panels.

The 2nd theme Brexit and European integration, explores Brexit as an opportunity for 21st-century EU reform. In this broader context, the opportunities for strategic, institutional and policy re-prioritisation and solutions to other challenges (migration, internal and external security, financial policy and institutional reform implications, etc) will form the basis of panel discussions.

The conference will thus appeal to both EU academic, political and policy audiences. Speakers will be invited from the universe of professional Europeanists and full use of existing personal/institutional networks will be made to advertise the conference and its proceedings. (UACES/EUSA/Jean Monnet Action etc.).

References

Mannin, M (2010) British Government and Politics: balancing Europeanisation and independence. Colorado, Rowman Littlefield

Bretherton, C and Mannin, M, eds. (2013) The Europeanisation of European Politics. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

Mannin M (2016). Britain, Brexit and the referendum – a background paper. Department of Economics. La Trobe University, Melbourne. October.