

How has Brexit altered Germany's Role within the European Union?

The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union (EU) in 2020, known as Brexit, will forever be carved in the annals of European political history. It not only changed the political and economic geography of the EU but also altered the intra-state relations of the member countries. One of the most important areas where Brexit has had an impact is Germany's position in the EU and its centrality in EU decision-making. Germany, one of the largest economies and founders of the EU, has always had an immense influence on European policy. In the absence of the UK, Germany has been able to exert more power than was previously possible, albeit it is also tasked with the responsibility of maintaining equilibrium in the power dynamics in the EU. This paper examines the impact of each aspect of Brexit that has contributed towards Germany becoming a lead pillar of the EU, focusing on its economic and political leadership, changing bilateral ties with other member states, and the need for Germany to change its strategy with the increase in its power within the EU.

Germany has historically been an important power within the EU, owing to its economic clout, political order, and participation in European integration. Germany's war guilt clause also justifies its sheer determination towards EU integration. Given that Germany is the largest economy within the EU, it has taken part in all structural policies, mainly regarding fiscal policy, monetary policy and trade. Together with France, Germany has been perceived as one of the "twin engines" of the EU, which directed and governed the processes in the integration union. The exit of the United Kingdom, one of the key political and economic actors of the EU, has naturally changed the situation and increased Germany's accountability for deciding on the development of the future European Union. In considering how such shifts brought by Brexit have altered the role of Germany within the EU, this study utilises qualitative approaches in combination. It focuses on the examination of policy papers, addresses delivered by German and European leaders, and academic literature that explains these phenomena. Furthermore, case studies of Germany's engagement with major post-Brexit issues, including EU's post-COVID-19 recovery strategy and prospects for the EU's trade relations reflect on how Germany has adjusted to its broader responsibilities. Such documents provide an understanding of the official views as well as the rhetoric on Germany's role after Brexit. The study also draws on secondary literature, including popular media, opinion polls and statistical data about Germany's economy and diplomatic activities after Brexit. The research also includes analysis of interviews with key EU politicians and political scientists to gather and interpret impressions of Germany in the EU context regarding its regional leadership role.

One of the most direct, and at the same time most striking, results of Brexit concerning Germany's place in the EU has been witnessed regarding the arena of economic governance. Following the British exit, Germany's position as the foremost dominant economy within the union has been cemented. Previously, the UK, which used to be the second-most powerful economy in the bloc, acted as a counterbalance to Germany's economic policies in most cases, especially in the context of fiscal terms and the monetary union. Britain's exit from the EU has resulted in Germany acquiring more control over the formulation of the economic agenda of the union. In a sense, Brexit has officialised Germany as the key mediator of the schism within the EU. One observation of the heightened economic leadership of Germany was during the discussions with the rest of the EU on the parameters of the COVID-19 recovery plan. In 2020, the EU approved the establishment of a recovery fund amounting to €750 billion to help

member states that were most affected by the pandemic. This fund was called 'Next Generation EU' and had a fundamental influence in changing the EU's fiscal framework because it approved the collective principle for raising debt to fund recovery. Germany's shift towards a more activist fiscal policy in the European component of the agreement also reflected the country's traditional position as a supporter of fiscal conservatism and lowering debt levels. Former Chancellor Angela Merkel went along with the rest of the EU in supporting the fund, which displayed a radical reversal of Germany's past stance on EU debt mutualisation, indicating the changes taking place in Germany's leadership within the EU after the UK's withdrawal.

Besides economic policy, Brexit has also affected Germany in the context of EU foreign policy and defence issues. The UK was indeed one of the strongest foreign policy actors within the EU, thanks to its global outlook and military power. After the departure of the UK, Germany has been forced into a more central role within the EU, especially concerning the EU's foreign relations policy with Russia, China and the United States. Historically, Germany had more emphasis on politics integrated with economics and trade matters, but post-Brexit, the scenario has pressurised Germany to pursue some active engagement in foreign affairs, too.

Germany has tried to work increasingly with EU institutions, which has caused some problems of its own. In reaction to the upward shift of Germany, politically and economically within the EU, there have been new formations. Germany should be cautious of other member states, as many view Germany as a superpower, which could provoke anger in other states trying to assert their sovereignty if the EU is to remain intact. Germany, as a dominant power, encounters animosity and resistance from different member states, which can further deter the building of coalitions on matters of critical importance to the interests of the European Union. A very key challenge has been the relations with the rest of the member nations, especially Eastern and Southern Europe. With the withdrawal of the United Kingdom, countries such as Poland and Hungary, which depended on Britain to advocate their positions based on sovereignty and integration with the EU, have lost an important supporter. It has been the responsibility of Germany to find a place within these internal cleavages of the EU as the biggest member state and persuade other nations towards solutions to these divisions. This has been particularly evident in the debates around the rule of law and democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland, where Germany had to balance European interests along with EU solidarity.

Another problematic aspect for Germany has been its relations with France, which is a key player in the EU. For centuries, Germany and France were seen as the two engines of Europe's integration, but this balance of power has shifted since Britain left the EU. With the departure of Britain, it now seems that Germany has taken the lead in EU economic governance as France concentrates on the EU's defence and security matters. Such a scenario has caused tensions between the two countries, especially when they need to be flexible in a post-Brexit Europe. These issues are not only internal but also geo-political. The Brexit has further reduced the influence of the EU in the international forum, especially on trade and security matters. Germany occupies the most dominant position in the EU economy, and it is quite natural for such issues to gravitate towards such an economy. The re-assessment of UKEU relations in terms of trade and security will probably be the first and most formidable test of Germany's leadership in the EU after Brexit. Brexit reinforces the United Kingdom's desire to remain an outlier in Europe. The European Union has witnessed its first exit, which has raised scepticism about further progression amongst the members, as well as it has raised severe doubt about other member countries following the UK's suit. As a country that is committed to fostering European unity, Germany has a major part to play in maintaining the structure of the EU. Achieving this will not only require efficient leadership but also the ability to make compromises and address the concerns of European Union members who may feel left out of the decision-making processes of the EU.

However, Brexit has allowed Germany to alter the policy formulation within the EU, and hence, Germany can push for policies that are reflective of its national interest because there is no British opposition to such policies. For instance, Germany has become one of the driving forces in contemporary discussions about climate change and European defence integration, which the UK had previously dominated. In addition, Brexit has accelerated the scope of integration among the member states of the EU and particularly has given Germany an opportunity to advocate for such integration. With no British resistance to speak of, issues like fiscal policy harmonisation and greater defence integration, which were controversial, can now be deliberated.

Olaf Scholz, present Chancellor of Germany, understands that Brexit has changed the chessboard within the EU altogether and, therefore, it has increased the burden of leadership on Germany's shoulders. He views this change in dynamics as requiring strategic shifts such as in economic policy, European cohesion and foreign diplomacy. One of Scholz's essential arguments is that the German economy is now the most dominant economy within the European Union. Germany's economic strength has noticeably increased, demanding Berlin to maintain order within the eurozone region. As part of the EU, Germany is assumed to lead the Union more actively rather than passively. With the exit of such a country, Germany has more responsibilities than it did in the past and hence, Deutschland must reposition itself. He believes that Germany is positioned as the mediator between the Southern half of the EU, which heavily advocates financial integration, and the other half, which is fiscally more disciplined. Therefore, Germany has a determining role in the process of negotiations, and its voice echoes within the European Union.

The gap in European global influence in terms of security and foreign policy has also been identified by Scholz with the British withdrawal. He explained such security and defence policies as attempts to consolidate Europe's cohesiveness against the rising challenges from China and Russia. He advocates for Germany to lead the defence integration of Europe by collaborating with France and other key players to make sure that Europe can defend itself from increasing external and internal challenges. Also, in the opinion of Scholz, Brexit changed the relations that Germany had with France. The Franco-German bloc became even more important in shaping the political order of Europe after Britain withdrew from the EU. However, Scholz understands that such ambitious leaders may create tensions in this partnership, and he has reiterated the importance of a constructive relationship with Paris.

Scholz insists that the Franco-German alliance must continue to collaborate, particularly on issues of severe importance like climate change, digitalisation and economic governance, through synergetic co-leadership. Brexit indeed proved to be an event with important ramifications for the future role of Germany within the European Union (EU). Most significantly, Germany will probably continue to play an active role, something that encompasses not just the internal politics of the Union but also its foreign relations. Since the United Kingdom's withdrawal, Germany has emerged as one of the leading nations that must fill the leadership gap created by the EU's rising scepticism and rising populism. In addition to energetically carrying out regional leadership as well as political unity, Germany will also help ensure that the Union delivers its expected frameworks. Furthermore, Germany will be actively engaged in internal and external policies which aim at positioning the EU for expansion.

The more focused Germany becomes, the better it will be supported as the leading EU nation. With Keir Starmer looking to 'reset' relations with the European Union, Germany and the UK are presently in pursuit of a new bilateral treaty, reshaping Germany's role within the Union. Starmer's plan to 'reset' UK-EU relations includes a complicated bilateral treaty with Germany that can undertake changes in Germany's role within the Union. Germany, by strengthening relations with a post-Brexit Britain, may successfully act as a bridge between Britain and the

European Union in future trade, security and foreign relations. This would enable Germany not only to enhance the cohesiveness of the EU but also to control its foreign relations, showcasing its leadership. As every coin has two sides, Germany's position could be weakened if other EU countries assume that the treaty is prioritising national rather than European interests. Germany's internal allegiance to phase out coal and switch to renewable sources of energy will be consistent with the overall EU's objectives, making it one of the leading countries driving green changes within the bloc. To sum up, the post-Brexit period for Germany within the EU is a complex one, but it comes with more authority and responsibilities than before.

The German government will be very instrumental in helping the EU draft its economic strategies, strengthening its political cohesion, and promoting Franco-German cooperation while enhancing the EU's global profile and lead on climate issues. The German government aims to play an active role in the development of the EU's economic strategies while reinforcing the political union and supporting French-German relations while also amplifying the global influence of the EU.

To conclude, the position of Germany after Brexit has been unequivocally enhanced within the EU, especially regarding the leadership and Economic Governance as well as the union's relations with the rest of the world. Germany's interest has been in maintaining its grip on shared domains such as fiscal and environmental measures, but at the same time, it has faced new trials on its diplomacy and strategic placement. As events unfold, the dynamics between Germany and other EU members will have a decisive impact on future processes of European integration. Critics argue that it might be too soon to assess the impact of these changes in the long run, but it would be fair to say that Brexit has reshaped the balance of power within Europe, with Germany establishing itself as a significant player on the European stage. In the years to follow, the central question in forecasting a stable EU future will rest on the shoulders of Germany, as to what extent it will pursue its national objectives vis a vis its partners in Europe. Brexit has been a turning point for Germany in the Eurozone since Germany wields more political weight now. However, Brexit has also been an enormous cost for the Deutschland. With the British exit from the EU, Germany has been able to extend its influence over the Eurozone countries more than before, but this has also increased the misunderstanding and suspicion by the other member states regarding Germany's objectives in the region. As Europe evolves in response to this crucial geopolitical shift, Germany's leadership will be crucial in ensuring both the stability and prosperity of all its member countries.

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