

*Dr. Bhawna Sharma,
Associate Professor,
Department of Political Science,
Himachal Pradesh University,
Shimla.
drbhawnasharma@yahoo.com
drbhawnasharma402@gmail.com
8118859096
#9001540521*

European Union and the Crisis of Brexit

Introduction

Regionalism is an important concept as well as trend after Second World War in international politics. It's a wide concept. Regionalism becomes a global phenomenon especially after cold war period and different nation states are looking for different ways to accommodate themselves in the globalized world order. Different kinds of regional arrangements are developed in the world for regional cooperation. Regional Organizations plays an important role in the global political economy. Economic aspiration is not only a factor for regional cooperation but it is a complex one. It covers many segments economic, political, social, security and many more aspects. If an organization restricts its membership to a particular region, then we say it's a regional organization. Such as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, African Union, Gulf Cooperation Council and many more. The study of Regional Organizations is very interesting but too subjective in character and content. This paper intends to provide a concise overview of the most important crisis of the present century in Europe i.e., Brexit.

The most substantial regional organization among all the Regional Organizations is the European Union (EU). Stephen David Krasner a professor of international relations at Stanford University since 1981, editor of journal International Organization says that EU is not a model that other parts of the world can imitate. EU is a complex regional organization, which is built in many years through number of treaties in which the state has become too big for the little things and too small for the big things.¹

Historic Steps of Membership

Both the world wars are cataclysmic episodes of the twentieth century and their impact was both profound and long lasting for the whole world. During the Wars Europe had been the battle field and the critical sufferer. This all further weakens the economic, political and military might of Europe. The European leaders thought a lot to prevent past from repeating itself which resulted in the transformation of the European community into the EU and this is the most significant event of the post-world war period. This helped Europe in overcoming age-old enmity between the nation states of the European continent because the attitude of superiority and use of force was replaced by the community methods of togetherness.

The founder members of the EU are France, Germany, Italy and Benelux countries then further enlargements took place and the number of member states raises up to twenty-eight through six enlargements. The last enlargement took place in 2013 with the addition of Croatia. Along with enlargement number of treaties are also built to transform, modify and to make EU an ever-closer union. Efforts for the unification of Europe are also made before the formation of the European community.

We can trace up to long back. London Peace society about 170 years ago took an initiative to organise the 3rd Paris Peace Congress on 21st August 1849. The president of the Paris Peace Congress was Victor Hugo who is considered to be one of the greatest and best-known French Writers. Hugo envisioned about “The United States of Europe”. His vision was of peace, democracy and unity in diversity.² Motivation for Victor Hugo was Switzerland which became a federal state year before with the adoption of federal constitution. Although Europe face two WW but his speech is a trace of a wave of optimism about the future of Europe among the European intellectuals, such as Jean Monnet, George C Marshall, Rene Plevin, Robert Schuman, Christian Fouchet, Konrad Adenauer, Aristide de Gasperi, Paul Henri Spaak, Leo Tindeman, Ernest Bevin, James Dooge, Jacques Delors and many more.

Popular Crisis of the present century in EU

Since few years we have seen several rifts in the EU on issues including, economic recession, refugee crisis, Ukrainian crisis, and the latest one is Brexit. The age of crisis began in 2009-2010 with the commencement of the eurozone crisis. This crisis threatened the one of the main policy achievements of the EU i.e., Euro. After it we have seen debate on migrants in the whole Europe. This crisis raises due to Syrian crisis, middle east unrest and from other war-torn regions such as Afghanistan, Iraq. Further this crisis deepens due to economic migrations from other parts of the world. This crisis was at its peak in 2015. Commonly this is known as refugee crisis.

The Ukrainian crisis also erupted at the same time. Russia was against the proposed agreement with the EU so to restore Russia’s global standing, Russian President Vladimir Putin regain control over Crimea by forceful annexation from Ukraine. This creates a scenario where EU faces instability on the eastern border along with instability on the southern border due to migration and internal unrest due to economic recession. Forces that motivated European countries to share sovereignty in order to resolve collective action problems seem to have given way to forces that are pulling countries apart. Steady progress over the decades towards deeper political and economic integration has stopped, with the prospect of disintegration suddenly all too real. Such a dramatic change of fortune calls for new thinking³ about the nature of European integration and the direction of the EU.

Lisbon Treaty

EU is formed through series of treaties. Lisbon Treaty was proposed in 2007 and this treaty came in force in late 2009.⁴ Any member state of the European union if wants to withdraw from the Union, it can, then it will no longer be a member of union and according to Article 50 of the binding arrangements between EU and its members it is legal and political process. This Article 50 was originally drafted by the member of the European Convention, Lord Kerr of Kinlochard, and introduced by Treaty of Lisbon.⁵ This article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty displays that how a member state of EU might voluntarily leave the union. Article 50 says: “Any member state may decide to withdraw from the union in accordance

with its own constitutional requirements.” However, there are few withdrawals from EU but no country has ever invoked article 50 before UK.⁶ Before the introduction of article 50 there was no formal provision of withdrawal or right to exit from EU. This article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty displays that how a member state of EU might voluntarily leave the Union. The article states that: ... A Member State which decides to withdraw shall notify the European Council of its intention.

At the time of the Lisbon Treaty’s ratification, the EU was experiencing a period of territorial expansion and economic growth. The debt crisis that would hobble the euro zone economy was still on the horizon, and Bulgaria and Romania had completed the accession process just two years earlier. Little public attention was paid to Article 50 of the treaty, which outlined the provisions under which a country could leave the EU. Article 50 dealt with a country’s voluntary separation from the EU. However, and the mechanisms under which a member might be expelled were unclear. Russia’s forcible annexation of the Ukrainian autonomous republic of Crimea in 2014 and a migrant crisis that saw hundreds of thousands of refugees seeking asylum in Europe helped fuel a growing sense of Euroscepticism.⁷

Crisis of Brexit

EU is enlarging since its formation and initially United Kingdom (UK) has not shown interest to join EU. Later on, UK got highly impressed by the success of the European Economic Community (EEC) and started rethinking on its viewpoint. In August, 1961 United Kingdom move forward it’s application for the membership along with Denmark, Norway and Ireland. But UK got success in joining EU on 1st January 1973. After applying twice and so, the accession of UK in the EU proved to be long and exhausting. And it happened only when General De Gaulle departed from the scene. General De Gaulle have deep mistrust towards UK intension. De Gaulle vetoed entry of UK in the European community. De Gaulle considered Britain close to USA. On the Contrary United Kingdom was keen for membership as its relations were on descending path with the common wealth nations, countries from African continent were against Britain’s apartheid policy, UK was losing its global positioning in realistic world due to liberation of colonies. Along with all this British thought that it would have better chance to influence international affairs after joining the European community than a single state of her own.⁸

UK become the first country to use Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty and leave the EU which we called as -British Exit or in short as Brexit. This was opposed by Bremain which means the movement for the UK to stay in the EU. This raises debate not only in UK but in the whole world that whether the country should be a part of European Union or not. All sides have their own views. Those who are supporting Brexit have an opinion that Britain is held back by EU, as EU impose too many rules on business and charges billions of Pounds a year as a membership fee for a small return. Immigration affecting UK hard so Britain should take back full control of its borders and reduce the number of people coming in to work. Further they thought that they can better deal with issues such as refugee crisis, economic aspects, migration, terrorism, extremism. People were interested for another referendum because they argued that EU has changed a lot over the past 40 years. There is too much red tape in EU which hinders the progress of UK. Further Britain could reinvent itself as a Singapore-style supercharged economy. They begin to organise rallies for Brexit means pro Brexit rallies and hate speeches trigger on social media. But on the other side those who favour stay of UK in EU says that if UK leaves EU, then UK will lose a massive

amount of good will from people else in Europe and Britain is powerful as a member state of EU than after leaving the EU. So they also begin to organise rallies for Bremain. where in Europe Ivan Rogers, the UK's former ambassador to the EU tells some home truths about the failures of the British Political class and the flaws, dishonesty and confusion inherent in the UK's approach to Brexit so far. He said "it has of course to be that Brexit means Brexit" He further added that debate in the EU on this matter of British question in so far as there is one, suffers from complacency, fatigue and strategic myopia.⁹

Obviously, this Brexit put people of UK in a deeply troubled and essentially conflictual relations with EU. David Cameron promised for referendum. The debate was so fierce that the traditional party lines of Right and Left diminishes. The debate raises to an extent that some in David Cameron's own party begin to support the exit of Britain. Finally, there was a referendum on 23rd June 2016 by the British government led by David Cameron. In this 72% people participated and there was a huge regional disparity in the results of the referendum. 51.9% voted for leave and 48.1% supported to stay in EU. Then UK split over the voting but finally the difference of 3.8% decided the future prospects of new generation.¹⁰ Debate was so fierce that Nigel Farage who was leading Brexit campaigner stepped down as leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Nigel Farage said that my political ambition has been achieved.¹¹ German Chancellor Angela Merkel told Britain in clear and bold words that it will not able to cherry-picking... there should be noticeable difference if a country wants to remain as a member of the European Union family or wishes to stay out of the family. Whoever wants to leave this family can't expect to do away with all of its responsibilities while keeping the privileges.¹² When David Cameron resigned Theresa May becomes the new prime minister but later on, she also resigned. She ultimately failed to achieve a way for the UK to leave the EU.

When Theresa May resigned in 2019, Boris Johnson was appointed as Prime Minister of Britain. He came with the promise of getting Brexit done, it had to happen in March, 2019 but the deadline was extended twice. Finally, Britain exit as the Britons get fed up due to never ending debate.¹³ Boris Johnson proved that strategically his leadership is good enough to get the promise accomplished, and the ultimate resultant is that UK left EU on 31st January 2020 under the leadership of Boris Johnson. When Britain exit few people must have become nostalgic as they have feeling of anxiety and loss and the outcome was against their wish, for others it is an astonishing moment as they have hope for future because what they wanted, they get it done. This referendum, confirm the dissatisfaction among those who are negatively affected by globalisation. Those who voted in favour of Brexit were mostly older, less educated, economically backward, more socially conservative, against immigration and feel that they have been left out by the wave of globalisation.¹⁴

The Northern Ireland which is the part of the UK shares the land border with the Republic of Ireland. This is known as Irish border or British Irish border, it is 310-mile border in length. This British Irish border is only the land connectivity between the UK and the EU. If UK creates border check post on this British Irish border, then it would mean to disregard the Belfast Agreement, which is also known as the Good Friday Agreement. This agreement was designed to stabilize peace in Northern Ireland on 10th April 1998. After Brexit it is challenge to UK to install border checks in Great Britain, because it may cause separatist tendencies in Northern Ireland. In deal it was finalized that invisible borders without checkpoints will be maintained between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.¹⁴ Still there is huge uncertainty and the debate about the future of Scotland also

raises. But at times one has to accept what the situation is and so both EU and UK are happy as the deal is finalized.

Conclusion

The entry of UK was not easy in the EU and finally the UK becomes the first country to formally leave the EU. We have witnessed various crisis in Union; economic crisis, refugee crisis, Ukrainian crisis and then exit of UK. Among all these crises the exit of Britain was the most debatable as due to this episode bond of almost nearly five decades of EU and UK finally broke. The big debate on exit rises to an extent that some in David Cameron's own party supported the exit of Britain. People not only in Europe but also in other continent begin to think that EU was on the verge of collapse. With this entire episode question was raised on the "idea of Europe". The debate was not only in Union but also in UK itself; even this crisis brings forth the question of Northern Ireland. The EU will recover from the loss of the UK, but that recovery will not be easy. The relationship between Britain and the EU was of almost of half century. It is really appreciable that they sort out the issues related to Brexit peacefully through debates and discussions. This whole episode also reflects a kind of disappointment towards EU. UK have done right or wrong that will be decided in near future.

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