



## **THE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF BREXIT**

**Date:** February 20, 2020

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented throughout the event and does not exclusively represent the views of the speaker or the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### **KEY EVENTS**

On February 20th, 2020, the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS) Vancouver hosted its second roundtable in 2020 in partnership with the Vancouver Branch of the Canadian International Council (CIC), titled: *The Security Implications of Brexit*. This presentation featured British Consul General Nicole Davison as speaker, and a case study focusing on the potential implications of the “Wexit” separatist movement on the West Coast of Canada.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

#### **Presentation**

With the United Kingdom (UK) having left the European Union (EU) on January 31st, 2020, new challenges and opportunities are emerging for the UK. The UK seeks to be a major part of international and bilateral trade around the world. In a security context, the relationships with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Five Eyes community – Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, the United States (US) – do not change following Brexit, as the foundation for intelligence sharing has not changed either. Additionally, leaving the EU allows the UK to develop their own human rights sanctions regimes outside of an EU context.

#### **Roundtable**

The roundtable discussion focussed on how the UK will follow through with protecting the privacy rights of its citizens as they no longer have to follow the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Additionally, questions arose

about whether or not Scotland and Northern Ireland would try to leave the UK to rejoin the EU later on.

## BACKGROUND

### Presentation

Following the public referendum in June 2016, the public voted to leave the EU. After multiple rounds of negotiations on how the exit would occur, the UK officially left on January 31st, 2020. In order to facilitate a smooth transition, the UK will follow all EU rules and regulations as if it were a member to allow for further negotiations until December 31st. With Scotland having an election next year, there may be enough political pressure for Scotland to attempt to leave the UK and rejoin the EU. Additionally, the relationship with Northern Ireland remains a delicate peace process and balance of power, however there is no threat to Northern Ireland and the *Belfast Agreement*.

The UK will now have control over its trade and immigration through an Australia-style points system. Additionally, the UK will have control over its taxes, fishing waters, and its own autonomous and distinct legal system. The UK's future relationship with the EU will be centered on free trade with the possibility of deeper trade agreements with negotiations over the next year. Possibilities for increased trade include developing a bilateral agreement where the UK can join in on the *Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement* with the EU and Canada.

Internationally, the UK seeks to be more involved. The UK wants to make it clear that its international relations will not be restricted to Europe but will instead aim to involve the whole world. In this respect, the UK seeks to develop relations with Africa that provide not only economic growth but societal autonomy as well. Unconfined by EU standards, the UK is now able to push forward with achieving universal human rights abroad with increased sanction measures. Additionally, there are now new diplomatic positions available with the rest of the EU countries which will allow for strengthened relationships across Europe. The diplomatic and economic relationships with commonwealth countries will still remain the same, as well as the relations with NATO and the Five Eyes.

## Roundtable

The roundtable discussion topics ranged from the UK's privacy rights (without EU's GDPR), to the impact on its labour movement. Additionally, questions surfaced about the impact on the UK's domestic and international security, and their relationships with the rest of the EU member states and other large trade partners, such as the US.

## Case Study Presentation

The case study discussion focused on the rise and growth of the so-called Western Exit political movement, abbreviated as "Wexit." Wexit is a secessionist movement aimed at separating the Western provinces – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba – from the rest of Canada. Inspired by Brexit, the group refers to itself as "a voluntary association of Indigenous & Non-Indigenous Western Canadians, who share a commitment to Economic Liberty, Social Stability, and the Sovereignty of Western Canadian provinces" (Wexit Canada, n.d., para. 1). Support for the movement is growing rapidly, as the *VoteWexit.com* Facebook group contains over 262 thousand members and 7.8 thousand posts per day at the time of the presentation. Furthermore, a *Change.org* petition has seen over 120 thousand signatures campaigning for Alberta's separation from Canada.

## Case Study Roundtable

On the topic of Wexit, many questions revolved around how this would impact secessionist movements in Quebec and the rest of Canada. It was also discussed that the topic presents the opportunity for a healthy debate on what it means to be a Canadian and whether there needs to be a renegotiation of roles and responsibilities at both the federal and provincial levels in order to better serve the needs of Canadian citizens.

## KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION AND WEST COAST PERSPECTIVES

### Presentation

- The existing relationship between the UK and Canada will not be negatively impacted as a result of Brexit and could arguably become stronger.
- Despite their withdrawal from the EU, the UK still champions adherence to a rules-based international system. Additionally, the UK is better able to

reassert itself as a liberal and free trade promoting country outside the confines of the EU.

- The established relationships Canada currently has with organizations, such as the EU and NATO, will not change. Furthermore, Brexit is not expected to impact matters pertaining to security and intelligence between Canada, Five Eyes and these organizations.

### **Roundtable**

- It was noted that the impact of Wexit on Canada could result in other provinces that have had past secessionist movements to resurface, such as the Quebec separatist movement or the formation of Cascadia with British Columbia and parts of the US.
- It was argued that Wexit exists predominantly as a social movement rather than strictly a political movement. Moreover, concerns were expressed regarding the potential for violence to occur as part of a range of potential domestic security threats, which may arise in relation to grievances expressed by the Wexit movement.
- It was further argued that in order to mitigate potential secessionist movements, local governments need to better address the specific concerns of Wexit supporters, in order to prevent the movement from growing further.



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