



## Into Uncharted Waters or Close to Familiar Shores? Brexit and the Future EU-UK Defence Partnership

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### Abstract

Brexit is usually discussed in relation to trade and to Ireland. And yet, the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union has far-reaching implications for the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) despite the latter's intergovernmental nature. Just as the EU and its Member States are taking unprecedented steps in defence integration, they are losing one of the EU's main globally-oriented military, intelligence and diplomatic actors, albeit one that has never fully committed to European defence. In the event of a 'hard' Brexit, the EU will also lose a sizable chunk of its defence and security industry, weakening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base. Despite this, the EU and the UK will continue to share values and interests and will continue to cooperate in defence and security to face shared challenges. This calls for pragmatic arrangements on defence, and accordingly this thesis focuses on the future EU-UK defence relations after Brexit. It analyses three dimensions of defence cooperation. The institutional dimension includes the Foreign Affairs Council, the Political and Security Committee (PSC), and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). The operational dimension relates to participation in CSDP missions and operations, while the industrial dimension comprises the European Defence Agency (EDA) and the European Defence Fund (EDF).

Theoretically informed by historical institutionalism – and in particular the concept of path dependence – this thesis examines whether the EU's existing models of cooperation with third countries suit the UK's preferences. As it demonstrates, they do not: the UK seeks a bespoke partnership, possibly with decision-making power. This thesis shows, however, that the EU insists on preserving its decision-making autonomy and existing partnerships with third countries, and is wary of setting a precedent. Therefore, this thesis examines whether, and to what extent, the EU can legally and politically diverge from its existing models to accommodate the UK.

This thesis finds that under the Lisbon Treaty, the EU cannot legally diverge from its existing models of cooperation with regards to the Foreign Affairs Council and the PSC – and neither does it want to. The Council of the European Union could, acting unanimously, create a new model for third countries' participation in CSDP missions and operations, but is not particularly eager to do so. Equally, new models of association with the EDA could be designed by amending the Agency's statute by qualified majority, but political will is currently lacking. Models for third country participation in PESCO and in the EDF are yet to be conceived, but they will most likely not grant decision-making powers to, or discriminate among, third countries. In these conditions, the UK is unlikely to contribute significantly to the CSDP. Thus, the UK's future defence cooperation with its European partners – notably France – may well take place outside of EU structures.