

Great Britain and the European Union (Draft for Course Proposal, spring 2017)



Cover of Alfred Geiser, *Das perfide Albion* [Perfidious Albion], 1915.

“This is not a leap in the dark. It is a leap from a ship heading, like the Titanic, towards a huge iceberg” claimed one prominent Brexiter prior to the referendum of 23 June 2016. Brexit is now upon us. The precise meaning of the term, the form this divorce will take, its timing, and the consequences for both the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Union remain unpredictable, and potentially momentous.

This new course taught simultaneously at the IES in London, UK and the IES EU Centre in Freiburg, Germany, will assess Great Britain’s ever-changing relations with continental Europe. The course will be divided into four main thematic units:

- **Legacies:** a political, cultural and economic history of the UK’s relations with Europe
- **Crisis UK:** the political, economic and legal challenges Brexit poses for the UK
- **Crisis EU:** the challenges Brexit poses for the rest of the Europe and the world
- **Action-plan for Brexit:** a student project on confronting the challenges posed by Brexit to a specific UK or EU based organisation

Within this framework, competing explanations for the result of the referendum will be set out and potential outcomes will be examined. What will the new relationship between the UK and the EU look like? Will the UK split up? What will happen to Ireland? What about migration patterns? And the economy? Where will the banks go? And the students? To what extent might a post-Brexit Britain prove a model for EU relations with other countries in Europe’s periphery?

The focus will be on problem-solving, task-orientated on-line learning in teams. Each team will include both London and Freiburg based students. There will be frequent on-line meetings in small groups often employing Moodle media tools, and less frequent meetings in a classroom setting. The course will be led by both a Freiburg and a London based academic, one an expert in political and economic history and the other in business organisation. The aim will be to incorporate European and UK-centric views in order to convey the diverse geo-political perspectives that have contributed to Brexit, while also examining the role of the United States which has over the years proved to be a significant contributor to the success of the European project.

The course will include a news analysis project, a policy paper, and a creative writing assignment focused on questions of identity. Bi-weekly debates will employ interactive media, such as videos, to grapple with issues such as constitutional reform. There will also be on-line quizzes and an examination.

In the “Action plan for Brexit” each student group will select one field, say, education, or manufacturing, or environmental, or regional policy, and focus on one organisation that plays a significant role within that field, say a given university, or car-manufacturer, or NGO, or development

agency, or EU organisation etc. in order to prepare proactively for different Brexit scenarios. A presentation will follow.

A pre-requisite for participation in the course will be participation in a Brexit-study-trip to London and Brussels to meet with and speak to experts dealing with particular aspects of Brexit.

As President Dwight D. Eisenhower put it, the Treaty founding the European Economic Community (as it was then called) was “one of the finest days in the history of the free world”. According to a former deputy Prime Minister of Great Britain, speaking shortly before the current referendum, Brexit will leave Britain “with no Empire, no Union and no special relationship with the United States”. The UK’s decision might prove as big in its own way as the decision of the US to withdraw from Europe in 1919 and retreat into isolationism.

With the challenges posed by globalization, nationalism, low growth, inequality, the Euro, climatic change and mass migration feeding into one another, Brexit should be viewed not as an isolated phenomenon but as the epi-centre of a collective action crisis affecting the Western World. Above all, it forces a rethink of the European project as a whole. It is today’s visionaries and power-brokers, and the decisions they do or do not make, that will shape Great Britain, Europe and perhaps even the United States for the foreseeable future.

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