

# The potential impact of Brexit on the prospects for a green transition in Europe

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## Description of authoring organisation:

 GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION The Green European Foundation (GEF) is a European-level political foundation whose mission is to contribute to a lively European sphere of debate and to foster greater involvement by citizens in European politics. GEF strives to mainstream discussions on European policies and politics both within and beyond the Green political family.

The foundation acts as a laboratory for new ideas, offers cross-border political education and a platform for cooperation and exchange at the European level.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

*In a referendum on 23 June 2016, 51.9% of the participating UK electorate (the turnout was 72.2% of the electorate) voted to leave the EU. On 29 March 2017, the British government invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union. The UK is thus on course to leave the EU on 29 March 2019.<sup>1</sup>*

This event has enormous implications not only for the future of the EU as a polity, but also for the green transition to a sustainable society and economy which is the fundamental aim shared by Green parties across Europe. The Green European Foundation therefore decided, with the help of its national project partner organisations, coordinated by Green House think tank in the UK, to hold a series of public discussion events over the course of 2017 to explore those implications.

## The conceptual basis for the project

The rationale behind the project was two-fold. Firstly, it was intended to provide a platform for the exploration of the possible short- and medium-term impacts of Brexit on environmental and economic policies directly affecting the transition to sustainability, both in the UK and in the rest of Europe. Secondly, it was motivated by the belief that the Brexit decision in the UK raises urgent and difficult questions about the continuing coherence and effectiveness of the EU as a polity, at least in its current form, and whether it still represents the best vehicle for the achievement of sustainability in Europe in the long term.

<sup>1</sup>The achievement of sustainability in the long term' is what is meant by the shorthand term 'green transition' in the project title. This is presumed to be the shared overarching goal of Green parties across Europe, notwithstanding differences between them on the precise definition of sustainability or on timing or strategy.<sup>2</sup>

## The geographical scope of the project

The project aimed to examine these questions on a comparative European basis, involving selected EU member states for which Brexit raises particularly pressing issues, related either to their relationship with the UK or to their own national political situation (or both). Our project in-

cluded two partner organisations from founding EU member states in France and Germany; indeed, not just founding member states, but the two largest economies in the Union,<sup>3</sup> and not only, therefore, in standard economic terms the 'engine room' of the EU, but also – given contrasting economic and political traditions – the respective leaders of what are sometimes seen as the two main broad EU groupings on economic issues (the 'liberal' and 'statist' groupings), whose cooperation on any major issue has been regarded as an essential prerequisite for forward political movement in the Union, and therefore also the engine room in a political sense. With Ireland, our project also included the country which is the most economically vulnerable to Brexit, and the one with the strongest cultural links and historic political ties to the UK. In Sweden, we had the member state with (apart from the UK) perhaps the strongest and most persistent strain of Euroscepticism (including green Euroscepticism); and, in Poland, we had a representative of the accession states from the former Communist bloc, a group with a distinctly different set of economic and political preconditions and pressures from those associated with the founder states and the earlier accession countries.

The aim was to work towards common conclusions – if possible, and with room for national variation – on how best to maintain the progress towards the green transition and how to counter those social and political forces we could identify (whether contributory factors to Brexit or simply made more visible by it) which tended to slow down or prevent such a transition.

## Key issues addressed

### ***1. The reasons for the outcome of the UK referendum, and the degree to which the same or similar factors apply in other member states***

An enormous amount of material has already been written analysing the referendum campaign and result, and one of the objectives of the project was to present and explore some of that analysis in other countries where it is not as familiar as it is in the UK, with a view particularly to assessing the degree to which common factors exist elsewhere. This involved the comparative analysis of factors affecting the public's attitudes to the EU in different countries, and assessing whether the shift in opinion which led to the Brexit vote is part of a Europe-wide phenomenon.

### ***2. Economics vs politics, or 'Does Brexit demonstrate that politics trumps economics?'***

Another key element of the analysis was an exploration of the extent to which voters in the UK were motivated by their perceived economic self-interest and to what extent by other factors acknowledged to have played a major part in the campaign, notably immigration and 'sovereignty'.

### ***3. Short- and medium-term economic and other impacts of Brexit***

It was recognised at the outset that the precise nature and scale of the impacts of Brexit would be dependent on a number of crucial and highly unpredictable variables, including (i) the outcome of the negotiations between the UK and the EU on the terms of the secession and of the subsequent trading relationship between the two parties; (ii) in the UK, the issue of how much of European law would be retained after Brexit, and the legal procedures for its transposition into UK law; (iii) any new trade arrangements between the UK and countries outside the EU, especially the USA; (iv) market reactions, including currency markets, to the above.

Notwithstanding these uncertainties, it was felt that the project should address the more immediate and predictable implications of Brexit on traditional 'green' environmental and resource economics fields such as the Common Agricultural Policy, climate change policy, fisheries or energy policy.

### ***4. Democracy***

An essential issue for exploration and analysis was what Brexit tells us about the state of democracy in the UK and – by extension, by comparison, and through the analysis of local conditions – in other member and non-member European states and in the European Union itself; and the implications of that analysis for the prospects for a green transition.

### ***5. 'Sustainability in one country'***

The European Green Party is of course committed to the idea that its goals can be best and/or fastest achieved through European cooperation, both in the framework of the EU and beyond. Indeed, as a transnational political party, its existence is predicated and justified on this belief, and the European Green Party was the first pan-European political party formally instituted as such, as distinct from being a loose cooperation between similar national-level political parties. The introduction to the EGP's 'Green Common Manifesto' for the European Elections 2014 states that

This year sees the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War and is 57 years since the Treaty of Rome marked the founding of what is now the European Union. European unification has freed the continent from centuries of antagonism and war. It has inspired the removal of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. It has enabled the economic reconstruction of its member states in a spirit of social justice, and is making us a pioneer of environmental sustainability. Each enlargement has enriched our cultures, enabled us to recognise each other, making us all part of the same challenging project. There is no doubt about it that the building of the European Union has been an historic achievement.

However, it seems clear that a challenge to the EU on the scale of Brexit must oblige us to question assumptions and long-held positions, including perhaps even internationalism as a principle. This is such a fundamental challenge that it is perhaps worth setting out in a little more detail here before we look at whether and how this theme was tackled in the different participating countries.

The questions it obliges us to consider are of course not new. There have always been voices within the green movement – in the UK no less than everywhere else – who have argued that the EU is a brake on the green transition, which could be achieved more quickly by nation-states (or perhaps other political units) acting outside the EU, whether independently or in some other form of cooperation. At a deeper level, there has always been a fundamental tension within the green movement between localism (including, for the purposes of this argument, nationalism) and internationalism, or globalism. Although this tension exists within all political ideologies, it is perhaps especially strong within the green movement, given its ideological presumption in favour of the small-scale and local. If 'small is beautiful', then it follows that the local and national should predominate over the international in terms of our political as well as economic activity.

Indeed, the very first green political parties emerged at the sub-national level (in Tasmania and Switzerland) before coalescing and choosing (mainly) to act principally at the national level. This is in marked contrast with the Communist Party, which was explicitly transnational at the outset, and didn't break into a primarily nation-based movement until the First World War (the tension between the national communist parties and the overriding internationalist goals – regarded as emanating from the 1920s onwards from Moscow – continued more or less until the collapse of [western] Communism in 1990). To a considerable degree, then, the argument about whether a green transition is possible in one country at a time is in an echo of the historic argument over 'socialism in one country'.



The Communist Party was founded as an explicitly international movement, arguing for revolution in all developed economies simultaneously. In *The Principles of Communism*, Friedrich Engels set out the basis of the argument for this approach in 1847 already. He wrote:

*Will it be possible for this revolution to take place in one country alone?*

No. By creating the world market, big industry has especially brought all the peoples of the Earth, and especially the civilized peoples, into such close relation with one another that none is independent of what happens to the others. Further, it has co-ordinated the social development of the civilized countries to such an extent that, in all of them, bourgeoisie and proletariat have become the decisive classes, and the struggle between them the great struggle of the day. It follows that the communist revolution will not merely be a national phenomenon but must take place simultaneously in all civilized countries.

However, under the pressure of direct and indirect attacks from the capitalist West on the fragile Russian revolution, and following the failure of several incipient revolutionary movements in other countries, Stalin advanced the idea of 'socialism in one country', which involved isolating Russia from economic and political influences from abroad until such time as the Revolution had completed its transformational task.

It can be argued that the green movement has taken the opposite trajectory – that its roots are to be found more in ideas about local ecologies and economies, and about self-sufficiency within local bounds, and that the turn towards internationalism came later, as a reaction against the spread of globalisation and the increasing threat from transnational environmental damage such as climate change. (Globalisation and the Green movement can even be thought of as sibling rivals, growing up and simultaneously growing apart; or perhaps rather as a classic – Marxist – dialectical movement.)

This turn from the local to the international has been taken by almost all national Green parties, and - it can be argued - also by the green movement beyond politics. Support for green NGOs involved in lobbying at the international level, such as Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, or international conservation organisations such as WWF, is much larger than the membership of the combined national Green parties (though support for national conservation movements is almost certainly still higher).

One way to approach this issue with respect to 'the green transition' is via the utopian novel *Ecotopia* (Ernest Callenbach, 1975), in which the Pacific North-West of the USA (Northern California, Oregon, and Washington) breaks away to form an independent republic based on the principle of sustainability. Ignoring for a moment is-

sués of literary merit (and also critiques of the questionable moral and social psychology evinced in the work), it can be acknowledged at the least that it represents a provocative and prescient essay on many aspects of economic sustainability and on some aspects of politics. However, from today's perspective, one of the most striking aspects of the work is the degree to which it fails to foresee the rise of economic globalisation. In order for Ecotopia to succeed to the degree it does as a sustainable economy, it has to be isolated from the regional (and even more from the global) economy to an extent that seems entirely implausible today – entirely utopian, in fact. The novel is set 20 years after the secession, and although we can forgive the author's ignorance of the inescapably transnational nature of a threat such as climate change, of which hardly anyone was aware in 1975, and of the internet and global communications technology, it is hard to credit even at that date the degree of isolationism he believes either possible or necessary for the achievement of his sustainable society. Ecotopia is essentially totally economically self-sufficient bar a minimal and insignificant level of trade in luxury goods. Not only that, it is more or less cut off from non-trade contact with the rest of the world, including the neighbouring states of the USA. There seems to be no cross-border movement of people whatsoever; indeed, no news of how things are developing in Ecotopia seeps out to the apparently indifferent citizens of the USA to tempt them into trying to cross the border, for whatever reason. This artificial isolation is in tune with the emphasis on simplicity, inwardness and self-sufficiency that characterised the so-called 'counter-culture' movement in the region at the time the novel was written, but it is also of course necessary for the political plot: Callenbach recognises – consciously or not – that the desired transition towards sustainability within his fictional state requires it to be sealed off from the disruptive and undermining influence of the movement of people, goods, services and finance (not to mention ideas) across its borders. The 'four freedoms' of the EU's internal market would be anathema to the achievement of a sustainable economy in Ecotopia.

The argument for 'sustainability in one country' has never gone away entirely, and Brexit prompted its re-emergence. A key issue for the project was therefore the question of how far it played a part in pre-and post-referendum thinking in the UK - as part of, or related to, the key Brexit slogan of 'taking back control' – and whether Brexit would prompt a revival of such thinking in green circles elsewhere in Europe.

The first place where these and related issues were to be explored was – appropriately enough – the closest mainland European neighbour to the UK, France.

## 2. THE VIEW FROM ACROSS THE CHANNEL: Paris, France, 27 June



The first event in the framework of the transnational project was organised by the Green European Foundation with the support of Fondation de l'Écologie Politique and the Maison de l'Europe in Paris. The debate was moderated by Benoit Monange, Director of the Fondation de l'Écologie Politique.

Three speakers were invited to take part in the conference: **Viviane Gravey**, PhD, is a lecturer at Queen's University in Belfast.

Her PhD investigated how attempts to dismantle EU environmental policy (1992-2014) were linked to efforts to further integrate or disintegrate the EU. In 2017, she was awarded the Rudolf Wildenmann Prize of the European Consortium for Political Research for her work on Environmental policy dismantling in the EU. She currently works on the consequences of the Brexit on agricultural and environmental policies in both the EU and the UK. She co-writes two blogs specialized on those issues: [environmentaleurope.ideason europe.eu/](http://environmentaleurope.ideason europe.eu/) [environnementeuref.blogspot.fr/](http://environnementeuref.blogspot.fr/)

**Pascal Durand**, is a French green MEP since 2014, and has been a lawyer for 25 years in Paris. Prior to becoming an MEP he served as spokesperson and National secretary for Europe Ecologie Les Verts. At the European Parliament, he is a member of the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) and of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

**Faustine Bas-Defossez**, is Policy Manager for Agriculture and Bioenergy for the Environmental European Bureau (EEB). The EEB is the largest network of European environmental organizations, gathering 143 members from 31 countries. Faustine holds a masters degree in European Union law from the University of Lille, France and a masters degree of EU Politics from the Institute for Political Sciences in Strasbourg, France. The debate was moderated by Benoit Monange, Director of the Fondation de l'Écologie Politique (FEP).



## Summary



The Brexit impulses a new dynamic in the European environmental policy process: it both creates uncertainties and opens opportunities for the EU in terms of environmental policy. From an ecological perspective, the Brexit is not only impacting the UK but the EU in general, if we take into account that ecological issues are not contained by national borders. Furthermore, the EU has helped implementing many pro-environment laws since the 1970', among others on air pollution, on the public's right to information, or on the possibility to sue a State for environmental harms, through the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

As the Brexit seemed very unlikely initially, nothing had been planned ahead by the British government: a new agreement between the UK and the EU on the environment is needed in order to avoid huge difficulties that may arise in the future.

The EU has eased collaboration between different European organizations working in the environmental field. Those networks in the research, companies, and volunteer areas are now jeopardized by the UK leaving the EU. There is a strong risk that the Brexit will curb this dynamic. Furthermore, British environmental NGOs are very active in Brussels having them leave will be a great loss for the EU organized civil society.

From an institutional point of view, the UK was one of the main opponents of regulatory policies, most of the time running counter to the environmental interests. The absence of the UK might encourage countries that used to be silent on those issues, to express their opposition and reveal their true position. In this sense, the Brexit will disturb the current balance in the European institutions.

There are other issues where the UK has played a favorable role towards greener policies. The British diplomacy assumed a leading role in climate negotiations. The UK was among the countries pushing for a greener (less productivist) Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Without the UK, the CAP loses a significant financial input.

There is a strong concern that post-Brexit, the UK would weaken its environmental regulations to stimulate the

economy. To remain competitive, EU economies would in turn be tempted to deregulate and we would be confronted with an environmental downward spiral that would be detrimental to a green transition.

To conclude, the Brexit weakens unequivocally the European move towards an ecological transition, but as it opens the scope of the possibilities, it can also create opportunities to rethink the European project from a greener point of view. In any case, we will face a political battle to convince people of the advantages of a green transition at a time when self-interest and competition will be exacerbated.

### Reflections on the Brexit & Ecological Transition event in France held on 27.06.2017

Viviane Gravey, Queens University Belfast, 10.11.2017

▶ The EU referendum exposed the lack of discussion on Europe and the lack of understanding of the European Union among EU citizens – beyond as well as within the UK. Our French discussion event – held at the Maison de l'Europe, hence attracting members of the public already interested in European affairs was another example of this. While our audience knew about the overall functioning of the EU and that the EU was working on environmental matters, I found a gap between on the one hand the high-level discussions on power in Europe, and frequent opposition between France and the UK on future direction for Europe, and, on the other hand a discussion on 'low level' policies such as the ecological transition and the cooperation needed to deliver it. That the UK had been a leader in many environmental and climate initiatives came at a surprise to the audience.

▶ A second surprise for the audience, was that the Brexit would also affect continental Europe. Brexit is simply not in the news – apart from punctually, e.g. when Barnier makes a speech, or when there is a EU Council. Stepping away from the UK it is striking how within the EU, only the UK, and to a lesser extent Ireland, speak constantly of Brexit. For other countries it is only one of many issues, and is not at the top of the political agenda.

### So how is Brexit likely to impact the Ecological Transition in Europe and France?

▶ The UK tree and the European forest: the UK has been a leader in some policy areas (climate change mitigation, greening agricultural policy) and a laggard in others (pushing a vision of environmental policy as red tape, opposing targets

on energy efficiency, opposing a soil directive, opposing environmental taxation at EU level). Where the UK apparently stopped EU action, other laggard states stayed silent. We may expect silent laggards to speak up and replace the UK in blocking EU initiatives – whether we will find similar replacement for UK leadership is unlikely.

▶ UK also key source of capacity – booming research community at heart of EU research networks, UK NGOs critical in funding and manning EU level civil society, UK contributions to EU budget etc. Post Brexit vacuum is both a threat to continuation of ongoing environmental projects, putting new barriers to future cooperation and an opportunity for actors in continental Europe to occupy the place left by their UK counterparts. But do they have the will and capacity to do so? And will this help or hinder the ecological transition?

▶ What about France? Since Paris 2015, France keen to deliver on Climate Change (legacy of COP21) – with UK out of EU, potentially out of ETS, added difficulty to do so. But could this be worse – not only hinder positive change but foster negative change? France has long been at least ambivalent about the idea of greening the Common Agricultural Policy and reducing the negative environmental impacts of some agricultural subsidies. Without the UK's voice at the EU table, will the next CAP roll-back its limited environmental advances?

▶ Both UK and EU will remain strongly linked if only by reason of geography. This means any deregulation, dismantling in one will create downward pressure in the other as economic actors would argue they face unfair competition: e.g. if the UK were to import a Singapore model of low regulation in Europe, or if EU were to slow down action on climate or reverse greening of agriculture. To avoid a race to the bottom continued cooperation on our shared environmental challenges is necessary.

### Two recent developments: Macron & Gove

▶ Despite fears on both side of the Channel that Brexit could lead to a dilution of standards and ambition, both Emmanuel Macron (in his Sorbonne Speech in September) and Michael Gove (in his 'unfrozen moment' speech in July and repeatedly since) have argued the only way is up.

▶ Macron: "I deeply believe that Europe must be a pioneer of an effective and equitable ecological transition. For this to happen, we need to transform our transport, our housing, our industries."

"The floor price, interconnections, the regional transition contract and border carbon tax are the four pillars of this ambition for energy in Europe." (inc. carbon floor price, a UK policy...)

[www.international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html](http://www.international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html)

▶ Gove: "Leaving the EU gives us a once in a lifetime opportunity to reform how we manage agriculture and fisheries, and therefore how we care for our land, our rivers and our seas/ And we can recast our ambition for our country's environment, and the planet. In short, it means a Green Brexit. When we speak as a Government of Global Britain it is not just as a leader in security or an advocate for freer trade that we should conceive of our global role but also a champion of sustainable development, an advocate for global social justice, a leader in environmental science, a setter of gold standards in protecting and growing natural capital, an innovator in clean, green, growth and an upholder of the moral imperative to hand over our planet to the next generation in a better condition than we inherited it. That is my department's driving ambition - and it should be central in the next five years to our national mission."

[www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-unfrozen-moment-delivering-a-green-brexite](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-unfrozen-moment-delivering-a-green-brexite)

▶ In the late 1990s and early 2000s the EU tried to argue environmental ambition was its new *raison d'être*. Is 2017 the return of this idea not only in Paris but in London as well as Brexit Britain tries to (re)define itself? If so, we have some cause for optimism. Yet we should remain cautious: after the grandiose declarations of the turn of the century, Brussels has seriously dimmed its ambition since the beginning of the eurozone crisis. Thus, any environmental success should not be taken for granted – the ecological transition, just like European integration, is not a one-way process.

### 3. The view from Eastern Europe: Puszczykowo, Poland 13-16 July

The second of the six events that were the main activity of the transnational project was held in a forestry school in the village of Puszczykowo, in beautiful green surroundings near Poznan in Poland, as part of the annual 'summer university' organised by the Polish Green Foundation Strefa Zieleni. (Ironically, given the venue, the local issue which most preoccupied the participants and organisers was the criminal destruction taking place at the same time of one of Europe's last remaining primeval forest areas, through logging sanctioned by the Polish government in defiance of UNESCO and the European Court of Justice.) But there was also lively interest in Brexit, its root causes and its implications for Poland and the rest of Europe, as evinced in two discussion sessions.



#### Sustainable post-Brexit Europe – or not...

Will the United Kingdom burn in a neoliberal fire? Will the European Union go green? These questions were debated by the guests of the plenary debate opening the third Polish Green Summer University, led by **Bartłomiej Kozek** representing the Green European Journal. The debate was entitled “**Europe after Brexit. Will the Green transition still be possible?**”.

Before the debate, a meeting was held with some local activists from Puszczykowo. They talked about their struggle to preserve the unique, park-garden style of their town, located on the outskirts of the National Park of the Greater Poland. The proposals to cut down monumental trees, build multi-storey apartment buildings and widen roads for traffic inside the green and residential parts of the town have caused concern among the inhabitants, in particular women. Such absurdities are proposed by the local government and the council,

who think first of all about applying and getting money “from the Union”, without good analysis of the real benefits of the investments for their town. It shows the challenges of the EU, both in terms of the necessary mental change within people and the need for a better design of the tools by which the EU seeks to achieve its goals.

#### Seeking a majority

Will Brexit damage the European Union's cohesion? Or will it provide an impulse towards further and deeper integration? If this second option is to transpire, how would it look in practice? Before the panelists started to seek answers to those questions two introductions were presented.

The first one was delivered by the co-chair of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament, **Philippe Lamberts**. In his opinion, Europe is a collection of small countries facing the great challenges of globalization. Challenges that it's easier to deal with together than alone, for example the achievement of the goal to use 100% of renewable energy, through the sharing of available resources on the continent. He added that the EU is a very democratic structure, and if it opts for neoliberal solutions, it's because there is currently no political majority for progressive solutions on the continent. Efforts must be made to create such a majority today, if Europe is to develop in a sustainable way.

#### Lonely island

The root causes of Brexit were presented by the Green House ecological think-tank analyst **Dr Ray Cunningham**. He pointed to the origins of the British sense of exceptionalism, such as the memory of a great colonial empire, obscuring a more sober assessment of the current geopolitical situation of the country.

In his view, it is necessary to consider some fundamental questions if we want to build a better future. Is environmentalism possible today in one country of the EU? Cunningham is sceptical. He also encouraged reflection on what it means to “take back control” in today's world (apparently so important for large parts of the electorate), and on who exercises that control.

#### Ecology in the shade?

**Lucile Schmid**, the co-president of the Green European Foundation, noted that the intense lobbying of the European Commission does not facilitate the green transition of the continent. Concerted action is not facilitated by the fact that Member States create their own energy policies – she said. She also brought up the situation in France, where the presidential election was recently won by Emanuel Macron, building his entire political movement around pro-European messages.

According to Lucile Schmid, if Macron wants to get more involved in ecological communication he will have to create new networks with other social actors and political players. At present, the issue of environmental protection is being given a high profile through the person and the program of the new minister of ecology, the respected ecological activist Nicolas Hulot. Hulot could become a driver of the ecological transition and of ambitious climate policy for ecological movements in the whole of the EU, not only in France.

#### Bonding the continent

**Jakub Gogolewski** from the “Development YES – Opencast NO” Foundation drew attention to the lack of inspirational stories about the continent and its future, the best proof of which was the recent presentation by the European Commission of five scenarios for the future of the EU, which were characterized by a lack of imagination, creativity and vision. Gogolewski noted also the fear of discussing the need to update of the European treaties, practically frozen after the defeat of the referendum on the European Constitution in France and in the Netherlands. In his view, the alternative to a slow death from inertia is the emergence of an “European avant-garde” of states wishing to integrate faster and deeper than the others, who can join them some later.

#### Dilemmas and alternatives

On this last subject, the co-chair of the Polish Greens, **Małgorzata Tracz**, drew attention to this scenario. Her co-chair, Marek Kossakowski, considered the scenario of “multi-speed Europe” to be potentially dangerous from the point of view of Poland's interests. Interests, which, contrary to the current government's assertion, do not consist of sticking to “coal as a national tradition” but follow the path of sustainable development. In the debate following the panel presentations, the representative of Bankwatch, **Izabela Zygmunt**, spoke about an alternative, the sixth vision of the future of the EU as a space of ecology and democracy. The NGO that she is working for signed, together with several hundred other organizations in Europe, a blueprint for a green



modernization scenario: increasing social participation in EU decision-making and support for ambitious climate and social policies.

#### Will these scenarios include the United Kingdom?

Ray Cunningham is not convinced that Brexit can be stopped, as it would be considered as disregarding the will of the electorate in the referendum. Instead, he expects his country to work out a model of cooperation with Brussels similar to that adopted by Norway or Switzerland - becoming a partner in the common market and in a number of bilateral agreements.

#### Reanimating the dialogue

As Lucile Schmid pointed out, Brexit has acted as a vaccine against further attempts at leaving the EU. During the discussion, the view dominated that Poles, too, predominantly wanted to stay in a greener Europe. As Jakub Gogolewski noted: „this would require our departure from the vision of the EU being a money box to discussion of our responsibilities as members of a larger, continental community”. For now, however, we must watch the confrontation between Warsaw and Brussels. The issue of judicial reform, as pushed by the Law and Justice party, has recently been added to the list of sensitive topics on this communication channel. The unwillingness to accept refugees and the stubborn adherence to coal also do not have a positive impact on the prospects for bilateral dialogue about the future of Europe - at least at the governmental level.

*Based on the report of Bartłomiej Kozek on: [zielonewiadomosci.pl/tematy/ekologia/od-brexitu-do-lepszej-europy/](https://zielonewiadomosci.pl/tematy/ekologia/od-brexitu-do-lepszej-europy/)*

## 4. The view from the North: Stockholm, Sweden, 29 September



The next event was organised by the Swedish green think tank Cogito, and held in Stockholm on 29 September. It was attended by about 60 people, who heard presentations from Ewa Sufin-Jacquemart, Director of the Polish Green Foundation, fresh from the event she had organised herself in Poland (less than 100 miles away from Sweden across the Baltic); Caroline Lucas, Co-Leader of the Green Party of England and Wales; Mikael Karlsson, Co-President of the European Environment Bureau; Robert Watt, of the Stockholm Environment Institute; and Max Andersson, Swedish Green MEP. Swedish national television took the opportunity to hold a long interview with Caroline Lucas about Brexit.

**Brexit could become a disaster for the environment and the green transition in Europe. It is important that the green movement puts pressure on Britain and the EU to stick to high standards. For Britain, joining the EEA could be a compromise that would maintain trade relations and keep high standards for environmental protection.**

This is the view of Max Andersson, Green MEP from Sweden.

Sweden and the United Kingdom have been allies on many areas in the EU. One of those areas is environmental politics, where our countries have often been pushing for more ambitious policies. After listening to environmental experts it is clear that there are good

reasons to worry about environment standards in the UK after Brexit. There is a risk that Theresa May will make a quick trade deal with the US in order to show strength. The leadership in London and Washington do not have environmental protection or the green transition at the top of the agenda, and such a deal could become a real backward step.

It could also strengthen the forces in Europe that would like to lower standards in the EU. Countries and corporations can point to a potential US - UK deal and threaten the EU with the risk of their companies losing out in competition with corporations based in countries with lower standards. This could be the start of a race to the bottom, or at least it could become a significant obstacle to the development of further necessary rules and transition projects.

A “hard Brexit”, in which the UK leaves the Single Market, would cause economic problems for the UK, making it harder to find funding for green transition projects. A so-called car-crash Brexit without an agreement would also entail many other problems and costs, such as border controls and problems for EU citizens living in the UK. Both scenarios could create severe problems for the peace process in Northern Ireland.

With regard to the environment, a “post-Brexit Britain” would no longer be part of the common legislative process for agreement on standards for chemicals, food safety, labelling and so on. There is also a risk that environmental standards already agreed will be weakened if the European Court of Justice cannot stand as the guarantor that they are enforced.

### The EEA agreement as a solution

One alternative for Britain is to find a solution inside the EEA agreement. Norway and Iceland find it an effective way of being part of the Single market and at the same time maintaining national competence over some areas, like agriculture and fisheries. The EEA countries have their own voice in the UN and other global fora. The EEA countries are not at the decision table in Brussels, but have access to the negotiation papers and can take part in many committees where legislation on trade is prepared.

With the EEA agreement, trade can go on more or less as before and all the environmental standards agreed in the EU regarding products can stay in place. It would also make it possible to have open borders in Northern Ireland. If the UK were to join the EEA, this group of countries would also be stronger in their future negotiations with the EU.

Another possibility is of course that Britain has a ratification referendum, or new legislation in the House of Commons, and decides to stay in the EU after all. The prospects for this do not seem high today, but it is hard to predict the future.

- ▶ The EU has not been able to share the burden and help refugees. With effective solidarity, Europe could have provided shelter to everyone who has had to flee from war. Instead, the EU has been building its external walls even higher.
- ▶ There is also a big democratic deficit, due to the size of the Union and the lack of a common European media debate. Democracy is strongest at the local and national level, and will remain so for many years to come. The subsidiarity principle needs to be a cornerstone of EU politics.



### The EU needs to change

One thing that could make such a change politically possible is of course be if there were a process of reform in the EU. Brexit and EU-scepticism from many citizens in other EU countries should actually be a wake-up-call to the EU leadership. There are good reasons to be critical of the EU:

- ▶ The common Euro currency has been a disaster, especially for some countries. The policy of forcing every country to abide by the same economic rules, despite great differences between their economies, has prolonged the Euro crisis and kept millions of people out of jobs for a decade.
- ▶ The decision-making process in the EU is slow, and subject to severe pressure from corporate lobbyists. There are now more than 30,000 lobbyists in Brussels. The lack of transparency and the complicated decision-making process make it possible for those who can afford to invest huge sums in professional lobbying to influence decision makers on a scale that citizens' groups can't even dream about. This has watered down environmental standards, for example in the negotiations over chemicals (REACH).

### Question the super-state ambitions

Earlier this year the European Commission published a white paper offering different scenarios for the future of the Union. One of them calls for more supra-nationality, new institutions, EU taxes, coordinated foreign and security politics, unified defence and ultimately a European federation. On the other hand, some of the alternatives in the Commission's white paper show traces of a more sober tendency, mentioning the ideas of less power to the EU and flexible intergovernmental co-operation.

The idea of a “two-speed Europe” should be avoided. That would mean that the “core” countries merge into a state-like structure, and take decisions themselves that other countries would later have to accept. The EU should not become a state, it should instead become more like a co-operation.

There is a need for international cooperation. The ideas of the extreme right and Donald Trump about reverting to closed national states are doomed to fail. One can be critical of some aspects of globalisation, but it also brings positive effects. Today we can study abroad and consume goods and services from all over the world. Environmental issues, refugee questions and tax avoidance are some of the areas that require cross-border cooperation.

## Flexible Europe - a new way forward

One of the scenarios the European Commission white paper opens up is for groups of countries to cooperate on reforms, even if not all member states agree. In the German and French academic debate, similar voices are now being heard about a flexible EU as a third way between the grandiose super-state visions and retrogressive nationalism. The Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz has also proposed a “flexible euro”, wherein countries like Greece can in practice adjust their exchange rate within the framework of a monetary union.

I am positive towards flexible cooperation. It is reasonable that groups of countries within the EU should be able to make common arrangements regarding for example train booking systems, a Tobin tax or regulations that make it more difficult for companies to hide money in tax havens. There are already such possibilities, but they should be extended.

It is also possible to design such cooperation in ways that make it possible for countries outside the EU to take part. Norway, Iceland and Switzerland are for example part of the Schengen agreement; and Norway and Iceland are part of the EU Emissions Trading System. New flexible cooperation systems should be constructed so as to make it possible for the UK to take part in future environmental and climate partnerships with the EU.

There are also proposals to make it possible for countries to leave common projects. In that case, there must be safeguard clauses so that countries cannot step away from common baseline agreements, for example regarding minimum standards for the environment or settlement of refugees.

## Decentralisation would make the EU better

One area for decentralisation is agricultural policy, where large parts can be dealt with on the national level. It is not reasonable that farm cooperatives [?] should report small-scale country projects to bureaucrats in Brussels. Municipalities should be able to buy food for their schools with higher national environmental and animal rights standards. We should also give all EU countries the legal right to stay outside the EMU and there should be an orderly way for countries to leave the Eurozone if they need to.

Other reforms that could make the EU more attractive are to strengthen transparency, to regulate lobbying strongly, and to include the national and regional parliaments in the decision-making-process.

While creating a flexible EU, we must make it more open and democratic. In the absence of a developed European media, most of the democratic discourse is on a national and regional level. The EU should therefore be reformed from below, with the decisive influence coming from the regional and national levels. Such reforms would make the

EU run better, and become more efficient and democratic, but it would probably take time for the results to show.

## Stay strong on green issues

In the Brexit process, it is important that the EU negotiators stay strong on environmental standards. There should not be any deal with the UK that undermines the Paris agreement, REACH (and the updates that are in the pipeline for chemical regulation), agreements on consumer rights, human rights, animal rights and so on.

So far the negotiations have been focusing on citizen rights, Northern Ireland, and who will pay the bill for Brexit. It is worrying that environmental issues have not been addressed properly. When the second part of the talks about the future relationship starts, green issues must be highlighted, by the EU, by Britain and by Sweden. If Theresa May or the EU leadership show tendencies towards using the environment or climate as bargaining chips in the negotiations, this must be met by strong opposition from everyone who believes in a green transition. It is important to stay in dialogue with environmental organisations in Britain, but also with the Tories and with the opposition parties like Labour, Liberals and Greens.

The most important factor in keeping standards up and maintaining the transition speed is the pressure from active citizens and environmental organisations. The main force that can make Theresa May or Jeremy Corbyn remain strong on these issues is active grass roots movements. International cooperation between movements needs to continue all the way through the Brexit process and beyond. As green parties, we can support these groups by providing them with information about the Brexit process and the ongoing transition work in the EU and in the UK.

## In summary:

**Brexit can be a real threat to the green transition, both in Britain and in Europe. It is crucial to keep up contacts between concerned groups and parties in Britain and the EU during the negotiations and to put firm pressure on the two parties to keep environmental standards high. If the UK leaves the EU, there must be new ways to cooperate on climate, chemicals, consumer protection, green energy and other important issues. One realistic way to do this could be via the EEA agreement. Changes within the European Union could also open up new possibilities for Britain to cooperate on green issues, or even to stay in the Union after all.**

Max Andersson  
Member of the European Parliament for the Green Party of Sweden

# 5. The view from the heart of Europe: Berlin, Germany, 26 October

The format of the next event in the series – organised by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, and held at their Berlin offices – was different. It was an expert roundtable, designed to feed into the Brexit response policy being worked out among the MPs and MEPs of the German Green Party. The Foundation published a summary report on the discussions, together with a [podcast](#) of interviews with the moderator (the Berlin-based blogger and political commentator Jon Worth) and with Ray Cunningham, the coordinator of the project. The summary report by Till Uebelacker was first published [on the Heinrich Böll Foundation's website](#) and follows here in translation.

## The consequences of Brexit: Threats and opportunities for a green Europe

*Is Germany losing an important partner for climate policy? What will Brexit mean for democracy in Europe? European environmental policy experts met to discuss these and associated issues at the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Berlin.*

At the end of October, an international group of experts on European environmental policy met in the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Berlin offices to discuss possible Brexit scenarios. Despite the confusion which continues to reign not only among experts but among the European population at large with regard to the Brexit negotiations, it proved possible in the course of the day to shed considerable light on some of the key questions. These discussions formed part of a series of events organised jointly by the Green European Foundation and Green House think tank (UK) with other European partner organisations including the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The meeting was moderated by Jon Worth, a Berlin based blogger, green activist and Brexit expert.

## The outcome of the negotiations remains unclear

Eighteen months after the Brexit referendum decision, the dynamics of the British internal political situation remain difficult to judge. The ruling Conservative party, with its wafer-thin majority, is under tremendous media pressure to get a favourable outcome from the negotiations – to ‘win’. However, the experts gathered

here agreed that in view of the negotiating position of the Brits and the unity demonstrated by the remaining EU 27, the central demand of the Brexit campaigners – to ‘take back control’ – is being pursued *ad absurdum*. The rhetoric of winning and losing was felt to be fatal for a successful negotiation. All of those taking part were in agreement that, notwithstanding isolated positive signals, the overall outcome still looked negative for all the countries involved, for those on the EU side as well as for Great Britain. The EU would lose its second biggest net budget contributor and the financial and economic policy challenges would be enormous for both sides.

## Climate and environment policy

But beyond this basic insight, there were areas of disagreement over the possible consequences of Brexit for the green transition in Europe and for European climate policy. Would environmental standards be raised or lowered following Brexit? On one side, or on both? Would Germany be losing an important ally on climate policy inside the EU? What impacts might Brexit have on nuclear power in Europe?

In policy fields such as agriculture and in meeting emissions targets, Great Britain has been among the fore-runners until now. From 2040, for example, vehicles with internal combustion engines will be banned in Britain, and coal-fired power generation will cease by 2025. Indeed, at the Bonn climate conference (COP 23), Great Britain – together with Canada – launched a global alliance for phasing out the burning of coal.

Beyond the financial loss to the EU budget, Brexit also posed a big threat in the form of possible reductions in the climate and environmental standards applied to British industry. Some, however, took the view that Brexit was unlikely to bring about changes in climate policy in the UK since environmental protection and the decarbonisation of the economy were now central planks of British policy.

The implications for nuclear power and for international energy trading remain unclear. For example, it remains uncertain whether Theresa May will actually follow through on her announcement that the UK would leave the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM). The energy specialists taking part were also at a loss to understand how security of supply and price stability in the electricity market would be ensured after

Brexit. For example, could electric power be exported in future from France (EU) to Great Britain (no longer EU) and from there to the Irish Republic (EU) and on to Northern Ireland (non-EU)?

### Unity of the 27

Some surprise was expressed at the degree of unity displayed by the remaining EU 27 in the negotiations so far. Business had generally been supportive of this stance, on account of the fear that Brexit might threaten the lucrative single market. But it remains open whether Great Britain might yet succeed in loosening the cohesion displayed between the EU states on economic and trade policy so far. The positions adopted by the Benelux countries and the Scandinavians will be of particular significance here, as their economies are particularly closely integrated with Britain's, and many of their production chains cross the national borders. One economist present reported that some companies were already 'designing out' British components from their products and replacing them with parts sourced from continental Europe.

The participants were impressed by the businesslike manner in which the EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, was going about his task; on the other hand, they were critical of the ideological character of the negotiating and political style on the British side, where positions had become almost doctrinal. 'Cherry picking' - as in the British desire to hold on to the benefits of single market membership without adhering to the associated rules, such as freedom of movement - should not be tolerated by the EU.

### Possible scenarios

It remained impossible to discern on the British side a coherent and clearly identifiable objective for the negotiations. One participant described the British strategy at the highest level of the Cabinet as a 'gigantic puzzle'. However, the group agreed that a 'no deal' scenario entailed incalculable risks, and had to be prevented. It was certainly not impossible for the negotiations to conclude in a free trade agreement together with a political agreement for a strategic partnership, similar to the deal recently concluded with Canada. However, in terms of benefits, this was not comparable to membership of the single market. The meeting took the view that an extension of the two-year negotiating period was unlikely, as this would require the unanimous approval of all 27 remaining EU states.

### An opportunity for deepening of the EU?

The group took the view that the highest priority for German and European interests in the Brexit negotiations should be that of safeguarding the ongoing project of European integration. This in turn set off a discussion about the future possibilities and prospects for democratising the EU in the absence of the UK.

While some participants argued for the first steps towards a possible future 'European Republic', others warned against pushing the citizens of the European member states too far too fast. Those who favoured deepening identified as possible further integrationist measures for the foreseeable future the harmonisation of corporation tax and the establishment of an economic, fiscal and social Union.

There was a clear majority in favour of the idea of transnational candidates lists for the next European elections. The 73 Brussels seats of the former British MEPs could be opened up for such transnational party lists. Another project which could be taken forward more easily in the absence of a British 'brake' was Franco-German cooperation in foreign and security policy. However, from a green perspective, this could be viewed with ambivalence at best. Although the concept of 'pooling and sharing' was a good thing in itself, EU money should not be used primarily for the support of the arms industry and weapons research.

## 6. The view from the western periphery: Belfast, Northern Ireland, 29 October

The project partner for this leg of the project was the Green Foundation Ireland, which operates in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Given its locus at the epicentre of the post-Brexit trade issues, and now at the centre of the political arrangements guaranteeing the UK government its slender parliamentary majority, it was appropriate that the venue for the conference was Belfast in Northern Ireland. Intra-Irish border questions not surprisingly took up a large part of the discussions, but not all by any means. And one intriguing idea which emerged was the proposal to 're-wild' the internal Irish border, an idea which has a precedent in the 'German Green Belt' along the old internal border between East and West Germany. Nor was the interest in Irish questions restricted to Ireland: one by-product of the conference was that the main organiser, Professor John Barry of Queens University Belfast, was subsequently interviewed by Bulgarian national radio on Northern Ireland and Brexit.



### Workshop Brexit: Populism and Progressive Politics at Queen's University Belfast

Green Foundation Ireland would like to thank Aideen O'Dochartaigh most sincerely for allowing us to use her article about our event from her blog The Sustainable Business Edit (<https://sustainablebusinessedit.wordpress.com/>) which forms the basis of this report.

Aideen has just completed her PhD in sustainable development and business at the School of Management, University of St Andrews, Scotland. In October 2015 she commenced an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Quinn School of Business, University

College Dublin on the topic of "Overcoming Barriers to Sustainable Enterprise: an Empirical Exploration of the Possibilities of Corporate Sustainability".

On 29 October 2017 the European Green Foundation, together with the Green Foundation Ireland, organised a workshop in Queen's University Belfast (above) on "Brexit: Populism and Progressive Politics". This one-day event was divided into four panels featuring speakers from a number of sectors, including academia, politics, think tanks and NGOs.

### PANEL 1: Brexit and Progressive Politics

The first panel began with **Steven Agnew**, leader of the Green Party Northern Ireland. Discussing Brexit, he made the point that while the Green Party will fight for the rights of people who aren't included (for example women, LGBTQ), it is less effective at including people "who are not as educated as us, people who have been victims of the policies of the right" i.e. many of the people who voted for Brexit. He asked "how do we let them tell their story, people who the working classes can connect to? Our big prejudice is education. We need to have these conversations in community centres as well as in Queen's University".

**Ray Cunningham**, Co-Ordinator of the Green House Think Tank, was the next speaker and he explained and challenged the idea of a "Green Brexit", as proposed by **Michael Gove**, among others. He highlighted that the people who voted for Brexit were not particularly sympathetic to green or progressive ideals, citing [this YouGov survey](#) in February 2017. Ray pointed out that "'Green Brexit' policies require a government willing to pursue them and an electorate ready to support them, this is wishful thinking. You can't push something through without a democratic mandate". He also drew our attention to two relevant books on the topic: [Ruling the Void](#) and [The Lure of Greatness](#). He concluded that there can only be a "progressive Brexit" with the break up of the UK into republics within the EU, arguing that "Britain is already breaking up through how Brexit is being handled", for example Teresa May's "very Southern English" cabinet.

The final speaker was **Stephen Nolan** of Trademark, who discussed the ideas of "radical municipalism" and "solidarity economy". Radical municipalism is about



“dispersing power and building social power”, for example the [Department of the Commons](#) in Naples, Barcelona en Comú and [Cooperation Jackson](#). Examples of the solidarity economy are the Mondragón co-operative, the [Red Belt](#) in Italy, where 50% of the workforce are in co-operatives, and the town of [Marinalda](#) in Spain, which has 0% unemployment. Inspired by these examples, Stephen has supported the development of several workers’ co-operatives in Belfast in the last few years, including the Belfast Cleaning Society in 2011, the Creative Workers’ Co-Op, Farmegeddon Brewing, Lúnasa Cáife and That’s Arts. Read more about them [here](#).

### **PANEL 2: Brexit and Sustainability in Northern Ireland, the UK and Europe**

The second panel focused on the impact of Brexit and the environment. **Viviane Gravey**, a lecturer in European Politics at Queen’s, suggested that Brexit creates challenges not only for environmental law in the UK but in the EU. She noted that, while the UK government has often opposed EU environmental law, it has been a key leader in particular areas such as agriculture and climate change, and it is unclear who will replace the UK in this role, for example the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) may become less green.

**Nichola Hughes** of Sustainable Northern Ireland spoke of the challenges related to waste, climate change and energy. On waste, she drew our attention to the EU’s [circular economy package](#), warning that products incompatible with the package could be shipped to the UK and used there. On climate change, she noted that the UK government has recently adopted its fifth low carbon budget but, if the UK is not part of the Emissions Trading Scheme, how will the government be accountable? She also noted that getting local authorities in Northern Ireland to act on climate change is difficult because, unlike in the Republic, there is no NI legislation to require them to do climate action plans. In relation to energy, Nichola observed that there is an element of the Tory Party that is pro-fracking and nuclear, but if renewable energy turns out to be “the better option financially” then it will be adopted.

**James Orr** of Friends of the Earth Northern Ireland focused on environmental issues around the border. For example, he noted that in the case of opposition to fracking in Fermanagh, industry played one side of the border off against the other. He suggested that “ecocide” is happening along the Irish border, citing the results of [this](#) project. His proposition was that we need to “rewild” the border, along the lines of the [African transfrontier rewilding project](#).

### **PANEL 3: Brexit, the Border and Futures for Ireland and Northern Ireland**

The first speaker was **Katy Hayward**, a reader in Sociology in Queen’s, who took us through the impact of the EU on the border. She explained that the EU has changed the border in a number of ways, such as the depoliticisation of cross border co-operation, common EU citizenship, the right to cross border work and education and research co-operation.

**Claire Bailey**, MLA for the Green Party NI, spoke of how, in the UK, the impact of Brexit on Ireland is not being considered, and Ireland is often seen as something separate. She added that “we have never made people feel comfortable with the multiple identities we can have in Northern Ireland”, and explained that Brexit complicates this further.

The next speaker was **John Kyle**, Belfast City Councillor and member of the Progressive Unionist Party. He noted that Unionists are very divided on Brexit, even within their parties, and that “tribal divisions between nationalists and unionists are worse than they have been for a couple of decades”. He argued that in Northern Ireland people view the EU institutions as remote and bureaucratic. He suggested that we need a North-South ministerial council, an active civic forum, a British-Irish council, a common travel area and to see the cultural rights of NI citizens protected.

Lastly, **David Phinnemore**, Professor of European Politics in Queen’s, set out his ideas for “differentiated withdrawal” for Northern Ireland, whereby the terms of withdrawal and the future relationship with the EU could be different for NI. He suggested that there is precedence for treating part of a State differently, for example, Greenland, Svalbard. He observed that a language is beginning to emerge around “flexible and imaginative solutions” to reflect the unique situation of NI, and Teresa May also recently spoke of finding “special solutions” for NI.

### **PANEL 4: Roundtable discussion on Populism, Brexit and the European Green Movement**

The first speaker in this session was **Dick Pels**, Professor of Sociology at Brunel University in London. He discussed global politics in 2017, with an emphasis on Brexit and Trump, suggesting that what we are seeing is a clash between two types of democracy – populist (plebiscitary) and pluralist (liberal).

**Lee McGowan**, Professor of Politics in Queen’s, looked at the rise of populism in Europe, drawing our attention to the reduced support for the major parties in the recent German elections. He noted that centre right parties, for example in Austria, are now starting to adopt the slogans and themes of the far right parties, “making political capital out of it”. He asked “are we seeing a silent counter revolution – revenge against the establishment and left-wing elites?” Lee used the evidence on how people across Europe feel about non-EU immigration to illustrate his points.

**Sophie Long**, a recent doctoral graduate in politics in Queen’s, offered the following advice on how Greens can respond to populism:

- ▶ Deconstruct populist narratives because they don’t offer any truth, for example they don’t tell us how to deal with capitalism, automation, industrialisation.
- ▶ Reclaim reason and challenge anti-intellectualism.
- ▶ Look at feminist and gay responses to Brexit. The narratives of leavers are masculine and about control. [This](#) LSE blog on voter values tells us about gaps that Greens could be addressing.
- ▶ Be critical and vigilant about the idea of a white working class, for example one-third of Asian voters voted for Brexit.
- ▶ Offer alternatives, for example green values of co-operation, non-violence, evidence.
- ▶ Consider how women are impacted by all this – there is only one woman on the nine person Brexit negotiating team.

Finally, **Eamon Ryan**, TD and leader of the Irish Green Party, discussed Brexit and the rise of the right. To conclude, he had some inspiring words on how Greens can use Brexit as an opportunity to offer people an alternative to populism:

“If ecology is about connection and interconnection, we need to talk to the other side, we need to go out and talk to everyone. You have to engage in a way that’s respectful. We can’t completely cut off the right. In doing this we will be true to our original principles.

Grab the space by being decent, by talking to everyone, by working with everyone, not by trying to be the boss; start listening.”



## 7. Concluding project conference: London, 11 November



On 11 November 2017, the Green European Foundation, with the support of Green House, held a conference in Europe House in central London on 'Brexit and the green transition in the UK and Europe'. This event was the concluding conference of the project 'The potential impact of Brexit on the prospects for a green transition in Europe', coordinated by Green House on behalf of the Green European Foundation. It followed discussion events held in the home countries of the five other project partners – the **Fondation de l'Ecologie Politique** in France, the Polish Green Foundation **Strefa Zieleni**, the Swedish green think tank **Cogito**, the **Green Foundation Ireland** and the **Heinrich Böll Foundation** in Germany.

The conference was opened by **Lucile Schmid**, Co-President, on behalf of the GEF, who stressed in her opening remarks four aspects of Brexit that she hoped would not be obscured by the ongoing political manoeuvring: firstly, that it was – like this project – a transnational event; secondly, that it represented a new departure for the EU – the first time it had been faced with reducing rather than growing in size; thirdly, that if it was a symptom of

crisis, then it was a crisis not of the EU but of the nation state; finally, that UK citizens would remain a part of Europe even if no longer a part of the EU.

The former UK Transport Minister **Norman Baker**, a member of the Green House advisory group, then took the chair for the keynote presentation by **Molly Scott Cato** MEP and for the subsequent responses and discussions. Molly's presentation was entitled 'Brexit – threat or opportunity?', and addressed the question of whether there was a realistic prospect of any kind of 'green Brexit'. It was followed by responses from three prominent green thinkers from the UK in **Caroline Lucas** MP, Professor **Peter Newell** of Sussex University and **Rupert Read**, Chair of Green House.

Although some notable differences emerged in the speakers' views on the best path towards a green society, and indeed on exactly what the destination would look like, there was universal agreement that, although Brexit might open up opportunities for green policy gains in one or two areas, if exploited cleverly, overall it was likely to prove disastrous for the prospects for a green transition for the UK. The good news – if there was any – was that there was also widespread agreement that it was not yet inevitable, or indeed irreversible.

Molly's presentation, the responses and the ensuing discussions can be seen on the video of the morning session on the [Green House website/here](#).

The afternoon session widened the focus to look at the impact of Brexit to date on the green debate within and between some of our (still) partner states in the EU. The partners were chosen as a cross-section of the Union representing states with a particular interest in the Brexit phenomenon. In France and Germany, we had two of the founder member states, who constitute moreover – as the so-called Franco-German axis – the 'engine room' of the Union in both an economic and a political sense. With Ireland, our project also included the country which is the most economically vulnerable to Brexit, as well as the country with the strongest cultural links and historic political ties to the UK. In Sweden, we had the member state with (apart from the UK) perhaps the strongest and most persistent strain of Euroscepticism (including green Euroscepticism); and in Poland, we had a representative of the accession states from the former Communist bloc, a group with a distinctly different set of economic and political preconditions and pressures from those of the founder states and the earlier accession countries.



Prompted and guided by Chair **Nuala Ahern** (Green Foundation Ireland, and a former MEP for the Irish Green Party), our speakers summarised the discussion events that had been held over the course of the project in their respective countries, and placed these discussions within the wider national political discourse over Europe and the green transition. They were: Dr **Viviane Gravey**, a French expert on green and European policy now teaching and researching at Queen's University Belfast; **Ewa Sufin-Jacquemart**, Director of the Polish Green Foundation; Dr **Mikael Karlsson**, President of the European Environmental Bureau and senior researcher at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm; **Terry Reintke**, MEP for the German Greens; and Professor **John Barry**, Queens University Belfast and Green Foundation Ireland.



Each national perspective was of course different in key respects, but what they noticeably shared was a certain distance from the topic which may come as a surprise to many in the UK: Brexit is simply not the biggest issue on the agenda anywhere but here. Indeed, now that the initial fear of a 'domino effect' has subsided, with anti-EU and nationalist tendencies in other countries not enjoying the huge political boost from Brexit that some had predicted (and some had hoped for), the overriding impression (and this applies also to the green parties and movements across Europe) was instead one of a regrouping and a renewed sense of European solidarity – for now at least.

The discussions were brought to a close by **Jean Lambert** MEP (another member of the Green House advisory group), who reflected on the day's discussions and placed them in the context both of her own long career as a Green politician in the UK and Europe but also of the coming challenges, both for the population of the UK outside the EU (if that should come to pass) and for the green movement in these islands and in Europe as a whole, and she finished on a suitably sombre note, with a warning (echoing remarks made by Molly Scott Cato earlier) that there are powerful forces within European politics and society which are opposed not only to the green transition but even to fundamental democratic rights we had long assumed to be safe.

The afternoon session is also available on video [here](#).

And the day was brought to a final close with a wine reception, which featured an organic real ale brewed in Exeter (Avocet). This British beer had also been the star attraction at the reception following the first in this series of events, in Paris, where it arrives via sailing ship, using wind power alone – a fine example of a greener future for Europe, whether the UK remains a member of the EU or not.



## 8. Some personal reflections

It remains very difficult to draw firm conclusions from the inchoate Brexit phenomenon about its implications for the prospects for a green transition or about the future of Europe as a polity. There are several reasons for this. One is the Brexit referendum campaign itself, and the poor quality of the political debate it engendered in the British media, reduced to shallow slogans on the one side that deliberately obscured proper analysis, and cost/benefit analyses on the other that totally misread and failed to engage with the fundamental issues at stake.

All of this was muddled by a popular press which pursues the largely off-shored interests of its owners and the prejudices of their editorial lackeys. As a result, the British public was short-changed, deprived of the enlightening information and analysis that the media should provide if it is to fulfil its role as an essential safeguard of a healthy democracy. But a subsidiary result was that the politicians who headed up the Leave campaign had not been obliged by the media to lay out their plans in the event of a Leave vote; there had consequently been no pressure for the different interests gathered together under that one simple referendum option to work through their differences and arrive at a common political agenda; and so when Theresa May triggered Article 50 and the negotiations process, the British government did not have a clear mandate, or an agreed set of objectives, or a negotiating strategy. The process began in confusion, and it has continued in confusion.

At the time of writing, the EU has just finally confirmed that 'sufficient progress' has been made in the first phase of the negotiations (covering the 'divorce bill', citizens' rights and the Irish border) to enable the talks to move on to the second phase, which will include trade. However, the fact that the intensely difficult and painfully slow steps forward so far have been hailed by some of Theresa May's Cabinet colleagues as a 'win', and as evidence that 'the EU blinked first', suggests that the underlying approach remains very nationalist and adversarial, and augurs extremely badly for the second phase of the negotiations. May's Conservative government has just lost its first House of Commons vote on a part of its Brexit legislation, revealing how weak its mandate is, and the same applies to its control over the domestic political situation. Neither the British public nor the EU negotiators are yet any clearer about the degree of unity within the UK government on its precise desired outcome for the negotiations. And that same British public – according to opinion polls – is itself just

as divided as ever over the fundamental issue of membership, with the latest polls in fact suggesting that there is now a small majority in favour of remaining in the EU. Although the likelihood of another Scottish devolution referendum on the back of the Brexit vote seems to have receded, the distasteful pork-barrel agreement that bought the votes of the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland to shore up May's government and Brexit mandate has staved off for now a bigger crisis and kept it in power so far – just; but now the divisions within the English Tories and even within the Cabinet are appearing, and political and constitutional chaos still seems to threaten just below the thin ice on which Prime Minister May is attempting to take her bold steps forward (or backward).

In fact, the situation in the UK has felt just as confusing and precarious ever since the morning of the referendum result. In July this year, I offered an update for readers of the Green European Journal on what it felt like at that time on this side of the Channel (see <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/notes-from-an-island-one-year-on-from-the-brexit-referendum/>). It feels hardly less confused and unstable now. In that article, I suggested, only half-jokingly, that a post-Brexit UK might suffer the fate of Austria after the First World War - the sudden collapse of a hollow imperial façade, of a fragile constitutional settlement no longer adequate to the challenges of the day. It is fashionable at the moment to suggest 'scenarios' for the future of Europe – this being a useful device in situations of extreme complexity, where a large number of variables, connected in a network where each is reciprocally impacted on by the others, make predictions about the future almost impossible. (For a recent and relevant example of this kind of exercise, see the 5 scenarios outlined in the White Paper on the future of Europe by the European Commission: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/white-paper-future-europe-reflections-and-scenarios-eu27\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/white-paper-future-europe-reflections-and-scenarios-eu27_en); and also the so-called '6th scenario' put together by Friends of the Earth Europe for a coalition of NGOs: [http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/other/2017/6th\\_scenario\\_future\\_of\\_europe.pdf](http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/other/2017/6th_scenario_future_of_europe.pdf)).

In the course of the six events held across Europe this year as part of this transnational project, I have frequently been asked to predict the eventual outcome of the Brexit phenomenon. In response, I have suggested a few images (even 'scenarios', which suggests some level of detail, would be too firm a term for these one-dimensional pictures) that might help us to picture possible futures. In addition to the image or caricature of Austria after the First World War, the other images I tentatively put forward were these.

(i) In the shorter term, a **'half-in, half-out'** UK which has formally left the EU as a political project but still retains membership of a common trading area, like Norway or Switzerland – a soft Brexit, in other words. This is what I still think is the most likely outcome of the Brexit negotiations, for the simple reason that it leaves the fewest political bodies on the stage in the UK. It is therefore the path of least political resistance. However, it would be a compromise that would not cure the underlying problems of an unmodernised British political culture and constitution and an increasingly undemocratic EU, and hence would only postpone the next crisis.

For the longer term, I found two images useful as shorthand. (ii) A sudden collapse of the UK's constitutional settlement brought about by political crisis, accompanied by reforms in Europe that (as part of a proper, considered response to Brexit) enable it to move forward in a progressive manner, at the same time as the UK moves backwards. This would be like the shorthand image of Austria I used in order to suggest the possibility of constitutional collapse in the UK, but with a simultaneous and opposite forward movement in Europe in reaction. I called this the **'scapegoat'** scenario. Here, I am using 'scapegoat' in its proper Biblical sense of the sacrificial animal onto which are loaded the sins of the wider community. By this I mean that a post-Brexit UK might enact the aggressive 'off-shoring' reforms threatened by Theresa May (undercutting European tax levels and social policy standards), but would thereby only succeed in isolating itself further, drawing onto itself as it were the reactionary neo-liberal policy 'sins' it has to some degree shared with the EU (and to some degree foisted upon it), and thereby enabling the EU – in a countervailing movement - to break free of those temptations and to build a proper, modern, social and sustainable Europe. This is, as it were, the Austria scenario accompanied by a simultaneous reform and revival of the EU.

The constitutional anachronism that might trigger the crisis in the UK could be the status of Northern Ireland, or perhaps that of Scotland, or Gibraltar, or even England; or perhaps it might not be a relic of empire but of monarchy, one of the many peculiarities of the British political system (such as the unelected Lords, or the 'royal prerogative') that linger on and prevent us becoming a proper modern republic. In any event, when it occurs (for I think such a crisis is now inevitable), it might just conceivably set off a different reaction. This possibility is represented by the second long-term shorthand image (iii), the **'utopian paradox'**, in which out of Brexit there eventually emerges a modernised and reformed UK, with a new and radically different constitution and political culture, probably involving secession from the Union (or far greater independence at the very least) for Northern Ireland and Scotland, and quite possibly the end of the monarchy, enabling the nations of the UK fi-

nally to emerge as modern - European - republics. In such a scenario, Brexit would have performed the redemptive function of sparking the revolution needed to modernise and Europeanise the UK, at the same time enabling us to work closely together with our European neighbours and partners and thus pointing the way forward to a Europe which would be sustainable in political as well as social and ecological terms.

Though this may sound hopelessly utopian, to a small but significant degree it could be said to be under way already. Before and immediately following the Brexit referendum, the great fear among the EU 27 was that a Brexit vote might have a domino effect, encouraging anti-EU sentiment and energy across Europe and potentially leading to other 'exits'. However, it was quickly apparent that the opposite seemed to have happened. The next series of national elections led, broadly speaking, to reductions in the anti-EU vote; even where avowedly nationalist parties made further inroads against the established parties, they did so not an explicitly anti-EU platform. Many Brits were surprised to find, as a part of this phenomenon, that Brexit was not the all-consuming issue of political debate everywhere across Europe; indeed, after the initial shock, the most noticeable impact of Brexit was the increased solidarity and commitment to the European project evident amongst the EU 27. Brexit seems, then, and for the moment at least, to have had what might be called an immunization effect, halting the spread of anti-Europeanism. It is even possible that at some point in the future we might be able to look back and identify Brexit as the moment that Europe woke up to its problems and began to solve them. At which point we will all be able to say, 'Thank you, Nigel Farage'.

In any event - and I hope this is something suggested by each and all of these shorthand images – it is clear that the crisis of which Brexit is a symptom is not, at root, a crisis of the EU. As Lucile Schmid, Co-President of the Green European Foundation, emphasised in her introduction to the discussions at the concluding conference in London, the crisis is one of the nation-state. Some of the underlying root causes of Brexit also played a part in the election of Trump in the USA, in the independence crisis in Catalonia, in the rise of the AfD in Germany, in the shrill nationalism disfiguring the politics of Hungary and Poland; all of these express a troubled and confused sense that our current political structures, with power loaded disproportionately at the level of the nation-state, are not adequate to meet the most pressing challenges of today's globalised world with its massive and growing population, increasing inequality, diminishing resources and precarious interdependence. The citizens of the world increasingly suffer from and sense the inadequacy of the inter-state or inter-national system, but cannot yet see clearly the diagnosis or the cure.

This brings us back once again to the question of the role of the nation-state in the pursuit of the 'green transition'. Although it was assumed at the outset of the project that Brexit would raise seriously once more the idea of 'ecologism in one country' - that is, a debate about whether it made more sense to pursue the green transition one country at a time - it was remarkable how little was heard of this idea in the six events held in the partner countries. Even in the UK - now (together with Trump's USA) the champion within the richer nations of the reactionary turn towards nationalism and against international cooperation<sup>4</sup> - it was extremely difficult to find any high-profile greens who would speak out in favour of Brexit. And the same was even more true elsewhere in Europe. The idea was not seriously considered in any of the six national project events. I have little doubt that this would not have been the case 15 or perhaps even 10 years ago.

Seen in this light, the recent rise of populist nationalism can be recognised more clearly for what it is – a reactionary response to a sense of perceived powerlessness, or lack of agency, which is now almost universal. The call to 'take back control' resonates everywhere, and is the underlying feature common to the Brexit phenomenon, Trumpism, eastern European nationalism, and the independence movements in Catalonia, Scotland and elsewhere. Greens are (as discussed in the introduction) historically and ideologically in sympathy with the fundamental instinct, but they have overwhelmingly recognised that control needs to be concentrated not at the nation state level but both downwards and upwards AWAY from the nation state – to local, properly democratic and properly empowered communities, but also to new regional and global governance structures capable of addressing the transnational and global threats to our common security and prosperity.

Green localism coupled with green internationalism, rather than green nationalism, are now recognised within the green movement as representing the only realistic route towards transition; national exceptionalism can only lead backwards. Which only confirms that we in the UK, suffering from a general reactionary turn towards nationalism (which has shifted political power here to a distinctly non-green political elite), have a lot of work to do – even more now than was the case before Brexit. And we have to hope that even if our European green partners now forge ahead, with increasing trans-national cooperation, on the path to a green transition, they do not forget – or, worse still - abandon us.

## **(Endnotes)**

- 1 (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brexit>. Accessed 14/12/17)
- 2 It is worth noting in this context that the UK government also shares this goal, although its differences with the national and European Green parties may be larger; in 2011, it published a surprisingly far-seeing but little noticed document entitled 'Enabling the Transition to a Green Economy' ([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/183417/Enabling\\_the\\_transition\\_to\\_a\\_Green\\_Economy\\_\\_Main\\_D.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183417/Enabling_the_transition_to_a_Green_Economy__Main_D.pdf)). But then, of course, almost all governments are signed up to a transition programme under the heading of 'sustainable development', but as yet they are barely held to account against this commitment.
- 3 Usually, the position of second largest economy in the EU is disputed between France and the UK, but the fall in the value of the UK currency since the referendum vote means that that position is now clearly held by France.
- 4 If this seems to be placing too much weight on Brexit, it should be borne in mind that the push to leave the EU was accompanied by a related push to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights, an idea supported by Theresa May, and to radically reduce the UK's foreign aid budget.





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