

# The impact of Brexit: A neofunctionalist perspective

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## Abstract

This paper examines the impact of the recent Brexit crisis in Europe and the extent to which the neofunctionalist perspective can be used to understand the continued integration of the European Union (EU). It identifies key issues surrounding the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU, analysing the extent to which this crisis has affected the EU overall. By examining the historical progression of public opinion and national referendum discussions, this paper explores how the possibility of Brexit has united the member states of the EU, instead of dividing them as predicted. It addresses how the future of the EU can be explained through the concept of neofunctional integration as a crisis spillover effect, and explores the relevance of Ernst B Haas's work on continued European integration 50 years after its publication in 1968. This paper also discusses criticisms of Haas's work, but maintains that Haas's theoretical perspective remains relevant to our understanding of modern regional integration, despite longstanding criticisms. Finally, I conclude by considering the future impacts of Brexit for the EU, and the ways in which this institution can utilise future external struggles to strengthen its unity from within.

## Introduction

Brexit (the exit of Britain from the European Union (EU)) began in the 2016 United Kingdom (UK) referendum, and the crisis has continued past the deadline for an exit deal to be negotiated.<sup>1</sup> Brexit, when examined through the theoretical lens of neofunctionalism, can be explained as an event which, through crisis, has united Europe and—at least temporarily—secured its future.<sup>2</sup> When framed through this theoretical perspective, Brexit can be viewed in both a negative and positive light, as an event which poses a current crisis to the state of the Union but can also be considered a means of its continued success.

This paper examines the trajectory of the Brexit crisis through the paradigm of neofunctionalism in order to understand how European integration occurs in the twenty-first century. This paper begins by examining the current status of the crisis since it began in 2016 and the extent to which public opinion has altered, as well as the impact this has had on the rest of the Union members. Following this, it explores the lack of understanding associated with modern European integration, and the relative gap in the literature that has been left in the wake of the decline of neofunctionalism. Subsequently, it examines the crisis from a neofunctionalist perspective in order to develop a theoretical understanding of the crisis, as a method of understanding not only the relevance of this theory to the modern context, but also as a means of quantifying and rationalising the irrational events observed within the EU member states. Additionally, it considers the key critical arguments against Ernst B Haas's neofunctionalist theory in order to address the limitations of the framework and its position in current academic literature. Finally, this paper explores the implications of this analysis, and what using neofunctionalism as a framework for prediction could mean for the future of the EU as an institution.

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Erlanger, 'The Messier Brexit Gets, the Better Europe Looks', *New York Times*, January 30, 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/01/30/world/europe/european-union-brexit.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/30/world/europe/european-union-brexit.html)

<sup>2</sup> Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968).

## The crisis in context

The history of Brexit can be traced to the UK's initial membership in the EU as a nation.<sup>3</sup> The UK joined the EU during the first expansion: it was one of the later members to join the Union—not part of the initial 'Inner Six'—and did so in order to gain economic and political stature.<sup>4</sup> This late entry can be linked to the UK's Western power alliances with the United States and an insecurity in joining the relatively new movement of the EU, as well as a desire to retain its own sovereignty as a nation which was formerly a world power.<sup>5</sup> Britain's engagement with European policy has historically favoured less integration, which can also be characterised as a sign of reluctance to relinquish sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> The UK never adopted the Euro, was reluctant to join the Schengen Zone, and was instrumental in blocking certain sovereign curtailing issues within the EU.<sup>7</sup> This analysis of the UK's historical actions can be seen as a precursor to its exit: it is, therefore, not surprising that the exiting crisis in the EU centres on Britain's withdrawal from the Union.<sup>8</sup>

The Brexit crisis began in 2016, when Britain called for a national referendum.<sup>9</sup> The crisis was not limited to the UK: countries such as France (Frexit), Italy (Irexit), the Netherlands (Nexit), and Greece (Grexit) were all discussing leaving the EU.<sup>10</sup> This was seen not only in the media but also in academic literature as a trend which could spell the end of the Union in Europe.<sup>11</sup> The international trend of dissatisfaction with the EU throughout Europe was exemplified in Brexit, as the crisis which pioneered the way for the rest of Europe.<sup>12</sup> However, once the UK voted to exit the EU, the lack of an organised strategy for this disentanglement resulted in a deterioration of both the populist-driven exit from the EU and the open discussions of leaving in many other countries.<sup>13</sup> The referendums in the Netherlands and France subsequently failed after the UK's referendum, in the wake of the EU's implementation of financial and political ramifications on Britain for its exit choice.<sup>14</sup> The costs imposed on the UK have been detailed in its exit, and as the deadline for finalising a deal with the EU for exiting approached, Britain's lack of a coordinated strategy became apparent, as well as its own internal dissent on the matter.<sup>15</sup>

The crisis itself, however, was not isolated to the UK.<sup>16</sup> As noted above, its exit from the EU was part of wider international debate within countries such as France, Italy, and the Netherlands on the comparative advantage of EU membership, and the ability of the EU as a supernationally governing actor to benefit its members.<sup>17</sup> The issue was centred around not only the curtailing of sovereignty through further integration, but also the negative impact of the EU on individual member states, as seen with Greece and the Eurozone crisis of 2008—which affected most members of the EU—as well as the

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<sup>3</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>4</sup> Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, *Switzerland and the European Union* (Bern: FDFA, 2016), [www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/en/documents/publications/EuropaeischeAngelegenheiten/Schweiz-und-EU\\_en.pdf](http://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/en/documents/publications/EuropaeischeAngelegenheiten/Schweiz-und-EU_en.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Michelle Cini and Amy Verdun, 'The Implications of Brexit for the Future of Europe', in *Brexit and Beyond: Rethinking the Futures of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Martill and Uta Staiger (London: UCL Press, 2018), [doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt20krxf8.12](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt20krxf8.12).

<sup>8</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>9</sup> Oluwatobi Aje and Felix Chidozie, 'Regional Integration and the Neo-functional Model: The Brexit Narrative', *Chinese Political Science Review* (2018), [doi.org/10.1007/s41111-018-0116-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-018-0116-0).

<sup>10</sup> Sam Meredith, 'Nexit, Frexit or Grexit? The Countries That Could Follow Britain Out of the EU', *CNBC*, February 13, 2017, [www.cnbc.com/2017/02/13/nexit-frexit-or-grexit-the-countries-that-could-follow-britain-out-of-the-eu.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2017/02/13/nexit-frexit-or-grexit-the-countries-that-could-follow-britain-out-of-the-eu.html).

<sup>11</sup> Cini and Verdun, 'The Implications of Brexit'.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Erlanger, 'The Messier Brexit Gets'.

<sup>14</sup> Jason Walsh, 'What Happened to Frexit, Grexit, Nexit and Irexit?', *The New European*, January 19, 2017, [www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/what-happened-to-frexit-grexit-nexit-and-irexit-1-4855962](http://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/what-happened-to-frexit-grexit-nexit-and-irexit-1-4855962).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Kathleen R. McNamara, 'Despite the Brexit Chaos, Europe Did Not Collapse Like Dominoes', *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2019, [www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/04/12/despite-brexit-chaos-europe-did-not-collapse-like-dominoes/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/04/12/despite-brexit-chaos-europe-did-not-collapse-like-dominoes/)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

2015 migration crisis which threatened border security.<sup>18</sup> Frexit, Irexit, Nexit, and Italexit were all possibilities in the wake of the 2016 Brexit elections, which became the Brexit crisis, and popular debate at the time favoured the possibility of a mass exit from the EU. This public opinion was the driving factor in these discussions and debates; however, this perspective has been countered through the growing reality of Brexit.<sup>19</sup> Despite public opinion not improving on EU membership within countries, the consequences of Brexit for the UK have become a deterrent for exit discussions across Europe.<sup>20</sup> This reality has only been further supported by the ‘no deal’ Brexit that was negotiated, or rather was not negotiated, throughout 2019.<sup>21</sup> Beginning in March, the date of exiting has been changed and extended continuously.<sup>22</sup>

The UK’s process of exiting has been continuously drawn out since the vote to exit in 2016, including the triggering of article 50 as well as Britain’s official withdrawal from the EU.<sup>23</sup> After triggering article 50 on 29 March 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May requested an extension on 20 March 2019 for the deadline to be extended to 30 June 2019. The European Council approved an extension until 22 May 2019.<sup>24</sup> The implications of triggering article 50 were that the UK had two years from the activation of the policy to negotiate an exit deal, during which time the current policies and treaties between the EU and UK would stand, unless ‘the European Council—in agreement with the Member State concerned—unanimously decided to extend this period’.<sup>25</sup> However, more than two years after the date, the UK has still not ratified a deal.<sup>26</sup>

The UK has continued to request extensions from the EU, and as the balance of power changed from Theresa May to Boris Johnson, the deal remained unratified. Although one was agreed upon by the UK and EU at Brussels on 17 October 2019, the British Parliament refused to agree to the deal and requested a further extension until 31 January 2020.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the likelihood of a ‘no deal Brexit’ is growing, as the British Parliament continues to refuse any deal proposed by Brussels. Without a standing trade agreement leaving the Union, the UK will be at a significant disadvantage with its closest and most lucrative trading partner, with the likelihood that divisions between Northern and Southern Ireland will grow as a result.

The outcome of this drawn-out process has been a decline in support for exit talks across Europe.<sup>28</sup> The UK’s disorganisation and inability to agree on a deal for Brexit has left the country without negotiated treaties at the end of its transition period,<sup>29</sup> and with the official Brexit date extended for a third time to 31 January 2020, the government has undergone several deadlocks and leadership changes, notably that of Theresa May’s resignation and the election of Boris Johnson in the 2019 general elections.<sup>30</sup> Without a unified and successful plan in place, the UK has proven to the entire European Community that while

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<sup>18</sup> Cini and Verdun, ‘The Implications of Brexit’.

<sup>19</sup> Erlanger, ‘The Messier Brexit Gets’.

<sup>20</sup> Alessio Colonnelli, ‘Forget About “Quitaly”’: Italy is Now Replacing Britain as the Third Most Important EU Power’, *The Independent*, August 3, 2016, [www.independent.co.uk/voices/brexit-eu-referendum-europe-quitaly-italy-replacing-britain-third-european-power-a7169766.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/brexit-eu-referendum-europe-quitaly-italy-replacing-britain-third-european-power-a7169766.html).

<sup>21</sup> Erlanger, ‘The Messier Brexit Gets’.

<sup>22</sup> Press Association, ‘Brexit Timeline: What Could Happen Next?’, *This is Money*, September 7, 2019, [www.thisismoney.co.uk/wires/pa/article-7435973/Brexit-timeline-What-happen-next.html](http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/wires/pa/article-7435973/Brexit-timeline-What-happen-next.html).

<sup>23</sup> Cini and Verdun, ‘The Implications of Brexit’.

<sup>24</sup> ‘European Council Decision No. 476’, 22 March, 2019, [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019D0476&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019D0476&from=EN)

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Sebastian Payne and Nathalie Thomas, ‘Business Groups Admit Many Companies Ill-Prepared for No-Deal Brexit’, *Financial Times*, August 19, 2019, [www.ft.com/content/07db4722-c189-11e9-a8e9-296ca66511c9](http://www.ft.com/content/07db4722-c189-11e9-a8e9-296ca66511c9).

<sup>27</sup> Peter Barnes, ‘How Soon Will Brexit Happen?’, *BBC News*, December 18, 2019, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-46393399](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-46393399).

<sup>28</sup> Colonnelli, ‘Forget About “Quitaly”’.

<sup>29</sup> Payne and Thomas, ‘Business groups’.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Castle, ‘Boris Johnson’s “Explosive” Move to Get His Way on Brexit: Suspend Parliament’, *New York Times*, August 28, 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/08/28/world/europe/boris-johnson-brexit-parliament.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/28/world/europe/boris-johnson-brexit-parliament.html).

the idea of exiting was favoured in the referendum results, the actuality is an unstable and domestically destructive process that has only served to disunite the Parliament of the UK, not the EU.<sup>31</sup>

Brexit has shown the costs associated with exiting, not only to areas such as international trade, but also financial and political repercussions on domestic levels.<sup>32</sup> The UK is indebted to the EU as a result of triggering article 50, a cost that outweighs the benefits to EU member states.<sup>33</sup> This harsh reality has been a national deterrent for many talks within European countries, and has precipitated a movement and motivation for change from within, rather than for change without the EU.<sup>34</sup>

## The crisis of theory: Neofunctionalism and the gap in modern integration theory

Modern international relations theory, such as realism, fails to address the current trends observed in cycles of European crisis integration.<sup>35</sup> Although theories such as realism propose integration through regional and global cooperation, they fail to address the historical and crisis-related contexts that underpin the integration of the EU. The original integration theories have been discarded in favour of broadly applicable frameworks such as globalisation, but in doing so these theories fail to address the unique nature of the regional crisis development observed in the EU.<sup>36</sup> The current gap in European integration theory can be attributed to the inability of these modern theories to explain the recent evolution of the EU through the crisis of Brexit.<sup>37</sup> Integration theory, while proposed initially by Ernst B Haas in 1968, has been relatively underdeveloped in the nearly 50 years since.<sup>38</sup> Although modern theorists such as Andrew Moravcsik have critiqued neofunctionalism as an underdeveloped framework that does not follow the conventions of a modern theory,<sup>39</sup> there has been no suitable replacement to this work that identifies the issues in European integration in the wake of the recent Brexit crisis.<sup>40</sup> The 2019 development of a ‘no deal Brexit’ has only highlighted the current gap in a developed and regionally applicable integration theory, and the extent to which theories such as liberal intergovernmentalism are unable to explain new and emerging trends in regional integration.<sup>41</sup>

The assumptions of neofunctionalism frame regional integration more optimistically than other frameworks of integration.<sup>42</sup> Neofunctionalism suggests that regional integration is an inevitability of international cooperation, and that the ‘spillover’ of technologies, cultures, and governance is a geographically oriented process that cannot be avoided.<sup>43</sup> With the added cooperation of a central union of countries in the wake of a continental crisis (World Wars I and II), this framework suggests that countries are likely to respond to crisis by continuing these patterns of integration due to their historical

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<sup>31</sup> Castle, ‘Boris Johnson’s “Explosive” Move’.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Cini and Verdun, ‘The Implications of Brexit’.

<sup>35</sup> Hans Vollaard, *European Disintegration: A Search for Explanations* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-41465-6.

<sup>36</sup> Engin I. Erdem, ‘European Integration and International Relations Theory’, *SSRN Electronic Journal*, December 20, 2006, doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2202768.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, ‘The European Constitutional Compromise and the Neofunctionalist Legacy’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 12, no. 2 (2005): 349–386, doi.org/10.1080/13501760500044215.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Godowska Magdalena, ‘The Relevance of Neofunctionalism in Explaining European Integration in its Origins and Today’, *Journal for Perspectives of Economic Political and Social Integration* 18, no. 1–2 (2012): 145–155.

<sup>43</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

issues of dissent, and that the region's response of unity will result in a supranational union that integrates all levels of nation-states into a single unitary actor.<sup>44</sup>

Neofunctionalism was initially developed as one of the first frameworks to assess European integration during the emergence of a European union.<sup>45</sup> It has been used as a historical basis for the current understanding of European integration and is acknowledged as the primary text in establishing the concept of European integration across EU literature, not only because it was the first text to be released on the topic, but also because it was seen to be relevant at the time of its release, in the optimistic early days of the EU.<sup>46</sup> It is, however, largely unexamined with regard to the EU's recent development, and has been critiqued by scholars as an overly optimistic perspective that favours unlimited and continuous integration, which has no valid standing in the modern context.<sup>47</sup> This perspective has resulted in not only the original framework's understanding being overlooked, but also a lack of analysis and consideration of its concept of integration as applied to modern crises such as Brexit.<sup>48</sup> This research aims to identify the ways in which this framework can be applied as a relevant theory of European integration using the example of Brexit, in order to prove that it is not only a valid theoretical perspective, but also the most applicable perspective when analysing the current integration-through-crisis trends seen across Europe. Although this theory would require a revision to be applicable to international relations overall—as discussed in critiques of the theory—the framework should be considered a highly relevant and suitable authority on the current integration in the EU.

The original framework argued for an optimistic 'even closer union' to be created by the then European Community (EC) through inevitable spillover and the predicted continuation of growth in the union.<sup>49</sup> Since 1968, against the predictions of other major theories that the union of Europe would collapse,<sup>50</sup> the EC continued to integrate and strengthen regional dependency into the institution that became the EU.<sup>51</sup> The EU has integrated beyond its original intentions, adopting not only an international currency shared by a number of the Union's member states, but also integrating domestic issues such as transport, border controls, and trade into the supranational union.<sup>52</sup> As the pioneer of the concepts of the spillover effect and regional integration in the European context, Haas's work demonstrates not only the EU's potential for continued integration into a supranational body that transcends the limits of an international organisation of states,<sup>53</sup> but also highlights the ability the EU has to adapt and grow through crises.<sup>54</sup> This analysis has been absent from other theoretical perspectives, and the concept of European integration considered pessimistically as a short-lived union unlikely to survive.<sup>55</sup> This consideration was largely due to the historical paradigms of dissent in Europe, and unlike the theory of neofunctionalism—which assumed that this history united the continent against conflict—other theories expected the cycle of internal destruction to continue.<sup>56</sup> However, neofunctionalism has been proven correct as the EU has continued to integrate and grow through crises instead of becoming disunited, as

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<sup>44</sup> Ben Rosamond, 'The Uniting of Europe and the Foundation of EU Studies: Revisiting the Neofunctionalism of Ernst B. Haas', *Journal of European Public Policy* 12, no. 2 (2005): 237–254, doi.org/10.1080/13501760500043928.

<sup>45</sup> Magdalena, 'The Relevance of Neofunctionalism'.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Moravcsik, 'The European Constitutional Compromise'.

<sup>48</sup> Aje and Chidozie, 'Regional Integration'.

<sup>49</sup> Moravcsik, 'The European Constitutional Compromise', 350.

<sup>50</sup> Vollaard, *European Disintegration*.

<sup>51</sup> 'Agreement Between the European Community and its Member States, of the One Part, and the Swiss Confederation, of the Other, on the Free Movement of Persons – Final Act – Joint Declarations – Information Relating to the Entry into Force of the Seven Agreements with the Swiss Confederation in the Sectors Free Movement of Persons, Air and Land Transport, Public Procurement, Scientific and Technological Cooperation, Mutual Recognition in Relation to Conformity Assessment, and Trade in Agricultural Products', April 30, 2002, eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:22002A0430(01).

<sup>52</sup> Moravcsik, 'The European Constitutional Compromise'.

<sup>53</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> McNamara, 'Despite the Brexit Chaos'.

<sup>56</sup> Vollaard, *European Disintegration*.

theorised by other competing frameworks such as realism.<sup>57</sup> The pessimistic perspective of realism counters the optimistic view of neofunctionalism, assuming that the power of the EU lies only in its states and that the organisation not only has no power of its own, but is a power on the brink of failure due to its hollow strength. Realism argues that the organisation has no importance with regard to national power of member states, and that the EU is not an important actor in the international arena.<sup>58</sup> However, the EU has enabled significant regional change despite these assertions, changing domestic national interests, policy, and norms as part of its spillover into sovereign governance. Now influencing areas such as national economies (the Eurozone), governance (the European Parliament), trade (bilateral trade agreements), and culture (the Schengen Zone), the EU has permeated the sovereign domains of its nation-states and incorporated their values and strengths into a central body.<sup>59</sup> The EU's current success as an actor is testament to the usefulness of neofunctionalist theory in explaining European integration in the twenty-first century, and should be considered a valid model of analysis until disproven by the EU's disintegration or replaced by an equal theory of integration.

## The crisis according to neofunctionalism

Neofunctionalism explains this trend of strength through diversity in the EU as a product of supranational integration and a process of further policy development.<sup>60</sup> This has been examined since the EU's inception, as 'Group conflict is a given and expected form of conduct in the nations under study. French, German or Italian policy engages as the result of this conflict'.<sup>61</sup> Historically, Haas explains the process of regional growth through change as an effect of integration.<sup>62</sup> The recent crisis of Brexit is the latest stage of this process, and according to Haas, the very structure that strengthens ties within the EU.<sup>63</sup>

This can be examined using the spillover effect, and how the national sovereignty of states is impacted as a result.<sup>64</sup> Brexit was prompted due to the growing sense in Europe of national sovereignties being curtailed by the growing supranationalism of the EU, and that countries would become more autonomous and affluent if they chose to remove themselves from the EU.<sup>65</sup> This opinion was not solely due to the growing number of crises in the EU, but also due to issues such as the Free Movement of Persons (as outlined in the Schengen Agreement) and the Eurozone.<sup>66</sup> Both of these examples—in conjunction with crises such as migration—helped form the opinion of the EU that member states are linked more by misfortune than with unified strength, and were a burden to sovereign interests.<sup>67</sup> Engaged with the negative spillover effects of the EU, the apparent negative perception of the EU can be examined prior to the Brexit referendum.<sup>68</sup> Without an example for how countries would fare without the unity of the EU, countries such as France, the Netherlands, Italy, and Greece seriously considered leaving.<sup>69</sup> However, the open consideration of leave talks ceased in the European community as a result of the unexpected outcome of Britain invoking article 50.<sup>70</sup> The reality of Brexit served as a deterrent in the wake of the referendum, and the incentives of regional integration were thrown into stark contrast

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas Risse, 'Neofunctionalism, European Identity, and the Puzzles of European Integration', *Journal of European Public Policy* 12, no. 2 (2005): 291–309, doi.org/10.1080/13501760500044033.

<sup>58</sup> Vollaard, *European Disintegration*.

<sup>59</sup> Risse, 'Neofunctionalism, European Identity'.

<sup>60</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter and Zoe Lefkofridi, 'Neo-Functionalism as a Theory of Disintegration', *Chinese Political Science Review* 1, no. 1 (2006): 1–29, doi.org/10.1007/s41111-016-0012-4.

<sup>66</sup> McNamara, 'Despite the Brexit Chaos'.

<sup>67</sup> Moravcsik, 'The European Constitutional Compromise'.

<sup>68</sup> Aje and Chidozie, 'Regional Integration'.

<sup>69</sup> Walsh, 'What Happened to Frexit'.

<sup>70</sup> Cini and Verdun, 'The Implications of Brexit'.

with the imminent isolation of the UK. With this differing perspective on a Europe without union, loyalties of the remaining countries readjusted.<sup>71</sup> Haas argues that the union of the EU is one of convenience, that it is a result of mutually benefitting from the unification of national interests under a single body to prevent future dissent.<sup>72</sup> The Brexit crisis follows the concerns of member states that the EU was unable to provide that stability, and was ultimately countered by the reality of Brexit, and the detrimental impact it posed to the UK as a nation. Now outside the EU, without the benefits of trade and collaboration but still beholden to the union for reparations for its exit, Brexit has demonstrated that the safety of Europe for nations lies in the unification of powers, and that individual countries are more subject to conflict than they are as a single body in the face of crisis.<sup>73</sup>

Neofunctionalism also explains this crisis as a result of the evolving loyalties of nations.<sup>74</sup> The change in common opinions of national parties from wanting to leave the EU, to wanting to change it from within, is what Haas would describe as the ‘response to a pressure for conformity exercised by the new centre of power’.<sup>75</sup> In this case, the centre of power relocated during the Brexit agreement, moving from the states threatening to leave back to the institution itself.<sup>76</sup> Through the processes of ensuring that the UK suffered economic and political devastation and ridicule, the EU asserted itself as the dominant actor and was able to alter the popular perspective that leaving would be a desirable pathway.<sup>77</sup> The evolution of Brexit is proving the detrimental impact that exiting the EU would have on states, highlighting how Britain is crippled and divided by the choice to leave.<sup>78</sup> Brexit, instead of becoming the suspected symbol of independence in Europe, has become the catalyst for uniting the continent.<sup>79</sup> The countries of the EU have become united through the example that has been made of the UK, and shifted their loyalty to the EU as a result.<sup>80</sup> This, according to Haas, is the epitome of his theory of continued integration, that despite the concerns of individual countries within the Union, the body of actors continues to operate in a manner that furthers integration on all levels. Despite the concerning trends in the wake of the 2016 referendum, the predicted landslide of exits did not occur, instead leaving the EU with member states increasingly involved in supranational involvement, correlating with Haas’s predictions.<sup>81</sup>

## The crisis according to neofunctionalism’s opponents

Neofunctionalism is not a contemporary theory: it was initially constructed by Haas in his 1968 book *The Uniting of Europe*. European politics has changed significantly since the book was written.<sup>82</sup> When Haas’s neofunctionalism was first proposed in 1968, the framework was widely considered to be overly optimistic about the capabilities of a newly forming union.<sup>83</sup> The proposition that the Union would continue to grow and expand its reach was alarming and unlikely, considering the historical trends of

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<sup>71</sup> Erlanger, ‘The Messier Brexit Gets’.

<sup>72</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>73</sup> McNamara, ‘Despite the Brexit Chaos’.

<sup>74</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>77</sup> Erlanger, ‘The Messier Brexit Gets’.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>79</sup> Cini and Verdun, ‘The Implications of Brexit’.

<sup>80</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*.

the region.<sup>84</sup> The theory is also heavily criticised by modern scholars, especially those associated with competing theorists and theories such as Andrew Moravcsik and liberal intergovernmentalism.<sup>85</sup>

According to critics of neofunctionalism, the current trends observed regarding the Brexit crisis are not proof of neofunctionalism's validity, but instead its biased perspective.<sup>86</sup> The criticisms primarily state that the theory's biased favour of integration processes—and the effects of crises such as Brexit in international politics of the organisation—are not furthering integration. Rather, they argue that there is no relationship between these crises and international cooperation through the EU, and that the survival of the institution and the balance of power is threatened—and not solved—by this issue.<sup>87</sup> Moravcsik, in his article 'The European constitutional compromise and the Neofunctionalist legacy', also challenges the validity of neofunctionalism as a theory, posing the criticism that it is more of a framework than a developed theory, due to its regional rather than global understanding.<sup>88</sup>

Moravcsik's perspective on neofunctionalism—as applied to Brexit—can be seen as a criticism of a coincidental correlation of events, rather than proof of the framework's validity.<sup>89</sup> According to Moravcsik:

Neofunctionalism is not a theory, in a modern sense, but a framework comprising a series of unrelated claims. Haas' bias towards 'even closer union' meant that this framework was overambitious, one-sided and essentially unfalsifiable.<sup>90</sup>

With regard to the current crisis, Moravcsik would argue for the broad applicability of the framework over the accuracy of predicting European integration through crisis, as neofunctionalism would suggest. This perspective allows us to examine the current situation of Brexit as a coincidental correlation of event and theory; according to this view, any further integration as a result of this crisis should be considered less of a validation of neofunctionalism, and more of an eventuality of such broad and generalised claims on integration.<sup>91</sup> Moravcsik continues to say that the specific application of neofunctionalism is not relevant to the modern perspective, and that the progressive perspective of Haas—while innovative and worth consideration—is inaccurate and not applicable to the current order.<sup>92</sup> Using this criticism of neofunctionalism, it is possible to assess the Brexit crisis simply as a result of issues associated with modern integration; while the theory can be applied to this particular crisis, the trend of growing through crises must be further explored before theoretical validity is achieved.

While Haas's ideas have been contested over time, the premise of neofunctionalism is still applicable to the contemporary study of the EU.<sup>93</sup> The organisation's history since its inception of continued integration and furthered engagement can be explained using neofunctionalism, and is a valid perspective on the overall understanding of the evolving EU.<sup>94</sup> Neofunctionalism addresses the unexpected trends in the wake of the 2016 crisis, and gives reason for the continued integration of EU member states despite other predictions to the contrary.<sup>95</sup> It provides a regionally applicable perspective on the crisis, and although it is only considered a framework for its narrow scope, the concepts of integration through crisis are the universal thread that can be taken from Haas's work and applied globally. It can be applied not only to historical analysis of the evolution of the EU, but also to current challenges the EU faces and the ways in which integration can be furthered through crisis.<sup>96</sup> Although

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<sup>84</sup> Risse, 'Neofunctionalism, European Identity'.

<sup>85</sup> Moravcsik, 'The European Constitutional Compromise'.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Schmitter and Lefkofridi, 'Neo-Functionalism as a Theory'.

<sup>88</sup> Moravcsik, 'The European Constitutional Compromise'.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 350.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Aje and Chidozie, 'Regional Integration'.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Vollaard, *European Disintegration*.

<sup>96</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

the initial premise of the work may not always be directly applicable to the modern context, the Brexit crisis can still be explained using this theoretical approach, in order to understand how the continued integration of the EU is enabled through such crises.<sup>97</sup>

## The crisis in perspective: Towards the future of European integration

The future of the EU has been threatened as a result of the Brexit crisis.<sup>98</sup> Not only Britain, but many of the core countries in Europe entertained the possibility of leaving during the pre-referendum state in Britain.<sup>99</sup> This threat not only posed a challenge to individual states within the EU, but to the institution overall.<sup>100</sup> Whether continued integration would be possible was uncertain during this time; however, the results proved contrary to all popular beliefs about the future of the EU.<sup>101</sup> Neofunctionalism poses an interesting perspective during this time of unexpected integration, and demonstrates how even this heavily criticised twentieth-century perspective can still be applied to international cooperation in Europe in the twenty-first century.<sup>102</sup> The EU appears, from the historical trends of crises in recent years, to be strengthening its integration through unity during times of crisis.<sup>103</sup> This integration—as explained by neofunctionalism—describes how the EU has evolved and will continue to evolve.<sup>104</sup> Although neofunctionalism does not address when the integration will reach a critical point, or whether it will stop, it can be applied to the current situation of continuous EU growth through integration and the furthering of supranational agendas because it explains current trends seen as a result of regional spillover.<sup>105</sup>

Brexit offers a key example of how the EU is able to utilise crises to strengthen its policy and not weaken it.<sup>106</sup> The aftermath of Brexit not only demonstrates how the changing loyalties and strategic implementation of integration (or lack thereof with regards to Britain) can be employed as an incentive to states in the same way that it can be used as a disincentive, but also shows how the EU has grown in power since its inception in the form of the European Coal and Steel Community.<sup>107</sup> Through Brexit, the EU has been able to change the national perspectives of states towards this institution, and has altered the approach they threatened to take from withdrawing completely to transforming the institution from within.<sup>108</sup> This can be viewed as a success of neofunctionalism, as much as a coincidence of one; however, the spillover of powers and ideas in Europe is only becoming more evident with each new crisis.<sup>109</sup> Although the EU is heavily criticised for these crises, it remains a powerful supranational organisation, and three years after the UK's referendum has retained all other member states.<sup>110</sup> From this perspective, the EU has managed to avoid the crisis of disintegration, in favour of a newly integrated body of member states unified against Brexit.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Cini and Verdun, 'The Implications of Brexit'.

<sup>99</sup> Walsh, 'What Happened to Brexit'.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Erlanger, 'The Messier Brexit Gets'.

<sup>102</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Moravcsik, 'The European Constitutional Compromise'.

<sup>106</sup> Cini and Verdun, 'The Implications of Brexit'.

<sup>107</sup> Erlanger, 'The Messier Brexit Gets'.

<sup>108</sup> Aje and Chidozie, 'Regional Integration'.

<sup>109</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>110</sup> Walsh, 'What Happened to Brexit'.

<sup>111</sup> Erlanger, 'The Messier Brexit Gets'.

The future of the EU can be explored in its management of integration, and through its ability to manage crises.<sup>112</sup> Brexit serves as a successful example of the EU's continued integration through crisis-developed policy and public opinion, and as an example of a hazardous approach to a potential organisation crisis for Britain.<sup>113</sup> The future of the EU is jeopardised in times of crisis, and the continued integration of national interests into supranational ones only serves to exaggerate this threat for member states.<sup>114</sup> For the EU to remain a viable supranational body during the continued integration of sovereign and organisational interests during future crises, and equally the resolution of Brexit, it has to utilise its historic strength through unity and its founding purpose of a unified front to combat external challenges.<sup>115</sup> If the EU can resist destruction from within—and turn to the crises without—it will become the world's first model for successful crisis cooperation through supranational governance, and pave the way for a higher form of international order as we progress through the twenty-first century.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> McNamara, 'Despite the Brexit Chaos'.

<sup>114</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

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