

Brexit Day: Why an LSE-trained Academic is Deeply Sad in Germany

Description

By [Achim Goerres](#)

This is a rather personal contribution that does not fit the usual remit of our blog.

I am deeply sad today. Today is Brexit Day, the 31st of January 2020. At midnight Brussels time, the United Kingdom will leave the European Union.

The United Kingdom is my second home, and I sense that that feeling is somehow compromised by her leaving the EU. I know that Brexit does not really change much about my academic future: I can still visit the UK as often as I like, I can work together with British colleagues, I can become a visiting professor, or I can work in the UK even though I will have to apply for a permit in the future.

In contrast to all that remains the same, Brexit Day really makes me reflect about my academic past.

I am who I am academically (and probably personally, too) because the UK was a member state of the European Union in my formative educational years. In late September 2001, I arrived via Eurostar at London Waterloo from my hometown of Dueren (30 km off Aachen). Recently graduated with a BA in European Studies from the University of Osnabrueck, I had two pieces of luggage weighing more than 40 kg (no weight maximum being one of the thrills of the Eurostar), a spot to study for a Master of Science in Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics and a full stipend to cover fees and living expenses.

This started my British academic upbringing that finally amounted to an MSc, a PhD and a Postgraduate Certificate of Teaching in Higher Education, all from the LSE. For a total of four years, broken English was my first language.

I lived a privileged, metropolitan life in London. Pampered with numerous stipends from Germany, the UK and the LSE, I took in the full breadth and depth of LSE academic life. I benefitted both from British and German tax-financed stipends, such as an ESRC

studentship or from the German Academic Exchange Service.

During my three PhD years, I was a politically fully integrated EU citizen in the United Kingdom. Tony Blair was *my* prime minister, too. Excitedly, I went to the voting station close to King's Cross to vote for London Mayor, the London Assembly and the European Parliament in 2004. I remember meeting various other voters from EU countries and former Commonwealth countries at the station with whom I shared the honour of voting in a country of which we were not nationals.

All this great academic and political experience – I would not have had most of it without the UK having been an EU member state.

When I decided to pursue a PhD at the LSE in 2003 (after one year back in Germany), it was a necessary condition that my partner, also a German citizen, and I could easily transition from being students to working. As EU citizens in an EU country, we were certain about the ease of that transition and did not waste a single thought on this. For us to be able to work in the UK in 2003 meant we only had to get a National Insurance Number, a time effort of about 30 minutes at a local branch of the Department of Work and Pensions.

If I was in the same personal position in the year 2020 as I had been in 2003, I would not choose to study for a PhD in the United Kingdom, simply because the uncertainty and burden of getting work permits and residence permits would have been too much for this alternative me and his partner.

This alternative me would not have studied at the LSE, would not have benefitted from all the academic privileges, would not have been shaped to be a British academic and would not have developed such a strong emotional bond with the United Kingdom.

This alternative academic me would not have been the same. Other aspiring academics in Germany today will not be able to walk the easy path that was open to me almost two decades ago.

This is why I am deeply sad today.

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