



# In Focus

## Potential Effect on Peace and Security of the United Kingdom Leaving the European Union

### Overview

On 23 June 2016, the UK voted in a national referendum to leave the EU. The Prime Minister, Theresa May, has yet to invoke [Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty](#), which would give the UK two years to formally leave the EU. At present, EU member states have committed to a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which in the case of the UK will continue to have effect until the country leaves the EU.

On 18 October 2016, the House of Lords will debate the “potential effect on peace and stability in Europe and around the world of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union”.

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### EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

The EU’s CFSP entered into force under the [Maastricht Treaty](#) in 1993 and has since been reinforced by subsequent treaties, such as the Lisbon Treaty which took effect in 2009. The EU’s European External Action Service (EEAS) state that the aim of the policy is “preserving peace, strengthening international security, promoting international cooperation and developing and consolidating democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”.<sup>1</sup> It provides the EU with the framework for both the implementation of sanctions towards those violating international laws or human rights; and the conducting of military and civilian missions and operations.

According to the EEAS, the policy has historical roots. The idea of a common defence policy for Europe dates back to 1948 when the UK, France and the Benelux countries—Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands—signed the [Treaty of Brussels](#), which sought to keep Europe safe following the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

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### Commentary on Domestic Security

In the run up to the referendum, several former heads of the security services anticipated the effects that leaving the EU could have on domestic security, with Baroness Manningham-Buller stating that it would “present real risks to our security and safety”, whilst Sir Richard Dearlove argued that “from a national security perspective [...] the cost to Britain would be low”.<sup>3</sup>

In April 2016, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee published a report examining the implications of the referendum on the UK’s role in the rest of the world. In terms of foreign policy cooperation, the Committee concluded that even outside the EU framework, future UK governments were likely to continue cooperating with the country’s European allies. It also noted that, on the assumption that the UK’s foreign policy values remained “largely similar” to those set out in the [2015 National Security Strategy](#), the UK and EU would “continue to share many common interests”, such as

tackling extremism and dealing with Russia and the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the Committee stated that the need to cooperate with European partners would “undoubtedly continue after leaving the EU”,<sup>5</sup> despite no longer being able to issue a [European Arrest Warrant](#) or being a member of [Europol](#). However, the director of Europol, Rob Wainwright, has argued that leaving the EU “has the potential to harm the UK’s ability to fight terrorism and crime, because of the extent to which police cooperation information systems and other capabilities in the EU have become embedded in the [British] police community and, to a lesser extent, the intelligence community”.<sup>6</sup>

Examining the impact leaving the EU would have on defence and security, the Foreign Affairs Committee stated that since EU defence cooperation remained intergovernmental, there would be a “relatively minor impact” on the UK’s defensive capabilities. It also noted that the UK would still remain an “important” member of NATO.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, the Committee argued that after a UK exit, “the effectiveness and cohesion of NATO as a whole would be affected by the trajectory of EU foreign and defence policy” and that the UK’s departure could “damage the development of a common defence policy”. However, the Committee also suggested that the UK’s exit from the EU could free up the EU to “pursue a more cohesive and effective common defence policy”, with the Committee noting that the UK Government has previously expressed its [opposition](#) to the idea of a European “army”.<sup>8</sup>

The Committee’s conclusion was echoed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, [Federica Mogherini](#), in September 2016, stating that “while NATO exists to defend its members—most of which are European—from external attack, Europeans must be better equipped, trained and organised to contribute decisively to such collective efforts, as well as to act autonomously if and when necessary”.<sup>9</sup> This view was reiterated by the President of the European Commission, [Jean-Claude Juncker](#), in his annual State of the Union address, calling for the establishment of a “single headquarters” for civilian and military EU missions.<sup>10</sup>

On 5 September 2016, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, was asked in the House of Commons whether he agreed that there was key interest for the other 27 EU member states in continuing engagement with the UK after the country leaves the EU. Mr Davis responded:

There are very strong security, foreign affairs, foreign policy and environmental relationships, and a whole series of other relationships that will continue to apply long after we have left the EU, to the benefit of both the EU and the UK.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> European External Action Service, [‘Foreign Policy: Aims, Instruments and Achievements’](#), accessed 11 September 2016.

<sup>2</sup> European External Action Service, [‘Shaping of a Common Security and Defence Policy’](#), accessed 7 September 2016.

<sup>3</sup> *Economist*, [‘Brexit Brief: Security Concerns’](#), 14 May 2016.

<sup>4</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, [‘Implications of the Referendum on EU Membership for the UK’s Role in the World’](#), 26 April 2016, HC 545 of session 2015–16, p 26.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p 29.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Rankin, [‘Europol Chief Says Brexit Would Harm UK Crime-Fighting’](#), *Guardian*, 22 June 2016.

<sup>7</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, [‘Implications of the Referendum on EU Membership for the UK’s Role in the World’](#), 26 April 2016, HC 545 of session 2015–16, p 26.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p 27.

<sup>9</sup> Chris Johnston, [‘EU Reveals Plans for Military Cooperation Following Brexit Vote’](#), *Guardian*, 8 September 2016.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, [‘State of the Union Address 2016: Towards a Better Europe—A Europe that Protects, Empowers and Defends’](#), 14 September 2016.

<sup>11</sup> [HC Hansard, 5 September 2016, cols 38–74.](#)

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