



# Union and Disunion : the UK and the EU



## En bref

- > **Mobilité d'études:** Oui
- > **Accessible à distance:** Non

## Présentation

### Description

The vote in favour of leaving the European Union in June 2016, a move finally introduced only in 2020, marks a turning point for the United Kingdom not only in its relations with the rest of Europe, with which it remains closely tied in numerous ways but also in its own nature. Indeed, the deep divisions in the United Kingdom that the 2016 vote revealed – along lines of social class, levels of education, age etc. – have placed enormous strains on the cohesion of British society. British politics has also become increasingly divided and confrontational. One of the most significant dividing lines that was shown by the 2016 referendum was that between voters in England and Wales, where a majority voted in favour of 'leave', and those in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where a clear majority voted 'remain'. This has led many observers to argue that Brexit is a phenomenon of English nationalism. For many Scots the fact that their choice, to remain in the EU, has been overridden by English votes has reinforced their support for Scottish independence. Although Scottish voters voted against independence in a referendum held in 2014 the question is now (2021) very much back on the political agenda (*Indyref 2*).

The questions of Brexit and the future of the relationship between the various nations of Great Britain – Wales, Scotland and England – are, therefore closely interrelated. Uncertainty over the future of Northern Ireland – continuing within the United Kingdom or reunited with the Republic of Ireland - has also been increased as a result of Brexit.

This course will begin by taking a brief historical perspective in an attempt to see how all these fundamental questions came to such prominence in the last decade. The roots of many of them are to be found in the history of the British Isles and this course will go back to the formations of separate national identities across the British Isles, how the relations between them evolved, and how the various 'unions' came about: by conquest, by assimilation or by unification. Conquest and occupation of Wales and of Ireland from the 12th century onwards, followed by Acts of Union with Wales (1536) and Scotland (1707), created Great Britain. The Act of Union (1800) between Great Britain and Ireland created the United Kingdom. Throughout this long period, opposing forces operated, some working towards unification and unity, others in favour of the separation and the disintegration of the unions.

The main focus of the course will then move onto the more contemporary debates, from the post-second world war period up to the present day. The end of Empire and the steady decline in Britain's industrial and economic strength after 1945 transformed both its position in the world and began to question its internal cohesion. The decision in the 1960s to seek entry into the emerging European Community, later the European Union, suggested that the country was rethinking its national identity along more European lines. At the same time both Scotland and Wales saw the emergence of well-organised, and increasingly



popular, nationalist movements that were challenging the very existence of the United Kingdom. These two parallel developments from the 1960s onwards will constitute the main part of this programme.

Today, many supporters of Brexit see a bright future for the United Kingdom: freed from what they see as the chains of the EU, they argue in favour of a 'global Britain', one able to forge new links with partners around the world. On the other side of the Brexit divide this is seen as no more than an idle dream, based on imperial nostalgia. For them Brexit threatens the break-up of the Union and the victory of a 'little England' outlook. Although it is not possible to foresee which of these two visions will prove correct this course will attempt to understand how the present situation came about.

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## Contrôle des connaissances

Présentation en cours d'un dossier sur une des questions du programme (qui pourrait être de nature historique, contemporaine ou qui relie les deux). Le choix de la question traitée dans le dossier sera laissé à l'étudiant mais devra être validé par l'enseignant auparavant. La capacité de problématiser la question et de présenter une argumentation logique et basée sur un choix de sources variées sera pris en compte dans la notation. La présentation orale sera accompagnée par un dossier écrit avec une bibliographie et certaines des sources utilisées.

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## Informations complémentaires

Ouvert aux étudiant-es en mobilité sous réserve du nombre de places disponibles.

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## Bibliographie

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