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## **Brexit and Its Consequences for the European Union and Member States, With Particular Emphasis on the Visegrad Group Countries: A Neorealist Analysis**

### **Abstract**

This article focuses on analysing the consequences of Brexit for the European Union and its Member States, with particular emphasis on the Visegrad Group (V4) countries. Through the prism of neorealism theory, the changes in the balance of power and international dynamics resulting from Great Britain's exit from the EU are analysed. The aim is not only to identify specific Brexit outcomes but also to understand the mechanisms influencing relations among European states, especially in the future. In this context, neorealist analysis becomes a particularly valuable tool, allowing us to view Brexit not only as a one-time incident but also as a manifestation of broader trends in global international relations which may adopt disintegrative stances in the future.

**Keywords:** Brexit, European Integration, Neorealism, Visegrad Group Countries

### **The Theoretical Foundations of Neorealism and Its Criticism in the Context of European Integration**

Several years have passed since the passing of a decision by the British people that led to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. Since the announcement of the referendum results in 2016, Brexit has become not only a key event in the history of the United Kingdom but

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also a significant turning point for the entire European Union. Questions began to arise regarding the reasons behind the British people's decision and the potential consequences (Clarke, Goodwin, Whitely, 2017). The United Kingdom's decision to exit the EU structures has sparked a flurry of inquiries regarding the future of European integration, political stability, and the economic development or regression of the EU. In particular, the Brexit process necessitates a thorough analysis from the perspective of international relations theory, particularly neorealism, which focuses on dynamic interactions among sovereign actors in conditions of international anarchy (see Somai, 2018).

Neorealism is one of the dominant theories in the field of international relations, which analyses the world from the perspective of the structure of the international system, international anarchy, and the balance of power among sovereign actors. Key issues constituting the core of the neorealist approach to international relations include the acceptance of the structure of the international system as a key determinant of relations between states (Waltz, 1979). The structure of the system is a crucial factor explaining the dynamics and processes occurring in international relations. International systems are anarchic and decentralised (Kaczmarek, 2015), and their structure is shaped only by major actors, and, as a result of their mutual influence, states become similar to each other and adopt roles determined by their relative power, hence, new states entering the international system find it difficult to achieve their intended roles (Thies, 2010). What is also important for neorealists is to consider the balance of power and the rationality of states from the perspective of their national interest. Neorealists believe that the international system lacks central authority, thereby eventually leading to anarchy. The absence of a global government means that states must rely on their own capabilities to ensure their security. Brexit can therefore be seen as a result of the decision of a United Kingdom which decided to leave the EU structures and regain greater control over its affairs. This decision can be interpreted as an attempt to adapt to the changing international situation, using sovereignty as a way to minimise potential threats. Consequently, Brexit reflects the neorealist assumption that sovereignty and nationalist policies remain important. Therefore, when we look at Brexit and the current state of European integration from the perspective of neorealism, we must look for independent variables at the macro level of international politics and treat the entire European integration as a dependent variable (Saeidabadi, Mohammadpour, 2020).

Neorealism assumes that states seek to achieve a balance of power to avoid the dominance of other states and minimise the risk of armed

conflict. This pursuit of equilibrium leads to the necessity of reacting to the actions of other states. Brexit can thus be interpreted as an attempt by the United Kingdom to regain control over its own destiny, particularly in the context of sovereignty and immigration control, which was one of the reasons behind the entire process. As a result, the decision to leave the EU can be seen as a way to maintain a balance of power in the face of increasing European integration and the growing role of EU institutions. In the context of the European Union, larger Member States such as Germany and France seek to maintain their dominant positions within the EU structure, while smaller states, including the V4 countries, strive to secure their interests through collective action and negotiations. Within the V4, we can also observe a pursuit of a balance of power among individual countries to prevent any one entity from dominating over the others.

Finally, supporters of the neorealist approach argue that states act rationally, seeking to maximise their own interests regardless of ideologies or other types of goals. State decisions are usually the result of an analysis of the costs and benefits of decisions made and actions in international relations. While classical realism considers the maximisation of power as its main goal, neorealism puts the balance of power first (Czaputowicz, 2014). In the context of the EU, Member States make decisions based on a cost/benefit analysis, seeking to maximise their influence and secure their interests. Within the V4, these countries act collectively when they perceive it to be beneficial to their own national interests, thereby seeking to enhance their negotiating power *vis-à-vis* the EU. In the context of European integration, one could theoretically assume that the neorealist approach should effectively explain the European reality and the processes taking place within it. However, this theory mainly focuses on relations between states, overlooking the significant role of supranational institutions such as the European Commission or the European Court of Justice in the process of European integration. These institutions have the ability to influence the decisions of Member States and form EU policy, which is not taken into consideration in neorealist analysis. Neorealism assumes that states strive to maximise their sovereignty and security, which may lead to conflicts or at least a lack of willingness to cede some competences to EU institutions. However, in the case of the EU, Member States voluntarily decide to limit their sovereignty in order to reap the benefits of integration, which is not easily explained by neorealist logic. Finally, neorealism often overlooks the analysis of specific features of the international system, such as the European integration system, which is characterised by unique mechanisms of cooperation and interaction

among states. Therefore, neorealist generalisations cannot fully explain the complex integration processes taking place in the European Union, especially with a precedent such as Brexit.

### **The Political Context of Brexit From a Neorealist Perspective – Selected Aspects**

The political context of Brexit originates from societal attitudes and messages conveyed to the British people by critics of European integration and the United Kingdom's membership in the European Union. When considering this in a political context, one can use the theory of neorealism, which analyses the decisions of states in the context of the previously mentioned, i.e., international anarchy and the implementation of their own national interests, including the pursuit of sovereignty. In this approach, the key elements of the political context of Brexit include Euroscepticism and the anti-EU sentiment prevailing in Great Britain, fuelled by, among others, Nigel Farage, the main supporter of Brexit. Long-standing Eurosceptic sentiment had existed in the UK, fomented by concerns about sovereignty loss, increased immigration, and constraints on national policy. Media messages, especially in certain tabloid outlets, often emphasised the negative aspects of EU membership, reinforcing Eurosceptic societal attitudes (Simpson, Startin, 2022). In the construction of Eurosceptic narratives, the referendum campaign and the media's participation played significant roles. During the Brexit referendum campaign, both supporters and opponents of the United Kingdom's EU membership conducted intensive propaganda campaigns. Eurosceptics focused on conveying the negative consequences of European integration, emphasising sovereignty loss, uncontrolled immigration, and membership costs. On the other hand, proponents of remaining in the EU argued for the benefits of membership, such as access to the single market and strengthening the UK's international position. The media, in turn, often conveyed content favourable to Eurosceptic views, portraying the EU as a bureaucratic, controlling institution that restricts the sovereignty of its Member States. This narrative contributed to solidifying negative attitudes towards the EU and strengthening the belief in the necessity of leaving EU structures (more: Kubin, 2018).

In the political context of Brexit, it is important to note that neorealism emphasises states' pursuit of sovereignty and independence. In the context of Brexit, Eurosceptic societal sentiments were often linked to the desire to regain full control over national affairs. As a sovereign actor, the United Kingdom made the decision to leave the EU in response

to these sentiments, expressing the will to reclaim full sovereignty, which, according to Eurosceptics, was lost upon joining the European Communities. Akin to many other countries, the United Kingdom has experienced a rise in nationalism in recent years. Nationalist sentiment often coincides with an emphasis on national identity, independence, and sovereignty, with the latter lying at the heart of the Brexit referendum (Niblett, 2016). In the context of Brexit, nationalism was strongly present in the campaign of those advocating to leave the EU, arguing that the UK should regain control over its borders, the right to make independent decisions, and shape its immigration and trade policies. In this convention, Brexit reflects the neorealist assumption that sovereignty and nationalist policies remain relevant in international relations. Consequently, when examining Brexit and the current state of European integration from a neorealist perspective, one must look for independent variables at the macro level of international politics and consider the entire European integration as a dependent variable (Saeidabadi, Mohammadpour, 2020).

Brexit was also an expression of cultural and identity issues that have long been present in British society. Some proponents for the UK's departure from the EU argued that EU membership violates British national identity and traditions, and influences the country's independence in cultural and legal matters. The pursuit of sovereignty is, therefore, a bond of nationalist and cultural attitudes that contributed to Brexit. It was also pointed out that the autonomy of the UK depends more on the complex network of economic, social, and cultural interactions with the rest of the world than on the formal political power of the British government. These interactions inevitably weaken the ability of the government and citizens of the UK to make independent, unrestrained decisions (Bryant, 2018).

For the European Union, the political context of Brexit generated many difficulties and uncertainties about the future of the European project. Brexit posed serious challenges to the EU in maintaining integration and cohesion in the face of the departure of one of its largest and most important Member States. The UK's decision to leave the world's largest trading bloc was a signal to the EU that there are real threats to the European project and that EU institutions must take action to counter any further increases of Euroscepticism and nationalism. In response to Brexit, some Member States and EU institutions called for the need to strengthen European integration and build a stronger and more united Union. However, the way of looking to the future varied significantly among individual countries in this regard. For example, Germany and France spoke of the need for further convergence and closer cooperation

in areas such as defense, security, and crisis management. Authorities in Berlin advocated for the creation of a European armed forces, while France talked about the need to establish a European defense fund. On the other hand, Visegrad Group countries emphasised the need to preserve Member-State sovereignty and strengthen the role of national states within the EU. Meanwhile, among the Benelux countries, voices dominated as regards the need for EU reform, especially in the areas of economic and social policy as well as the creation of common fiscal mechanisms, a strengthening of the banking union, and combating the phenomenon of social dumping.

In other words, Brexit served as a catalyst for debates about the future of European integration (Gotham, 2019) (Fabbrini, 2021) (Moskal, 2018), prompting some states to assert their own interests and attempt to harmonise them, thereby shaping their positions within the EU and attempting to fill the void left by the United Kingdom. Therefore, the political context of Brexit for the European Union and its Member States can be analysed through the prism of the balance of power, international anarchy, and the rationality of Member States' actions, which was all very well illustrated by the example of the Visegrad Group countries. Further erosion of the EU (considered by the Visegrad countries as a guarantor of economic and political security) would pose direct threats to their security and position in Europe. Hence, some of them, such as Poland and Hungary, clearly spoke about the need for greater respect for sovereignty and the need to strengthen the national dimension of integration. This would aim to counter arguments used by Brexit supporters in the United Kingdom.

### **The Effects of Brexit on the European Union and Its Member States**

From the perspective of neorealist approach, Brexit has had and continues to have significant implications for the European Union and its Member States, both politically and economically. Brexit created a space for weakening the unity and cohesion of the entire organisation. The departure of the United Kingdom from the bloc reduced the number and strength of Member States understood as a single integrative entity, altering the balance of power within the EU itself. From a neorealist perspective, this reduction in the number of Member States leads to increased competition among the remaining states not so much for a dominant position within it, as this position remains reserved for Germany and France, but for the chance to fill the gap left by the United Kingdom. This entails competition

for influence. The reduction in the number of Member States implies less diversity among the states themselves, which, in the long run, may result in increased competition for influence and dominant positions within EU institutions and decision-making processes.

Those Member States still remaining in the EU may seek to increase their political weight and influence on decisions made at the EU level. This will likely be particularly evident during the preparation of a new European treaty, which will be yet another reform of the EU. The reduction in the number of Member States may lead to increased tensions in the struggle for a dominant position within the EU. States with stronger economic and political positions may seek to strengthen their role in EU structures at the expense of other Member States, which may lead to further divisions and conflicts. As mentioned earlier, neorealism assumes the existence of a balance of power between states in an international, anarchic system. The reduction in the number of Member States may also disrupt this balance, leading to attempts by some states to dominate others. This, in turn, may lead to the formation of alliances and counterweights among states, increasing rivalry and tensions within the European Union, eventually leading to a so-called “multi-speed” union. This is particularly significant given that Brexit and, latterly, the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted persisting divisions among Member States and a number of growing difficulties in dealing with them, considering the limitations of intergovernmental coordination (Fabbrini, 2021).

The country that theoretically stands to gain the most in the medium and long term from Brexit is Germany. From the perspective of early 2024, it is difficult to unequivocally indicate that Berlin has fully exploited the potential that was available after the UK's departure from the EU. Several factors have influenced this state of affairs, starting from a change of power and Angela Merkel's departure (being replaced by Olaf Scholz), as well as the international assessment of Germany's role in matters related to the Russo-Ukrainian war, where initially the international community heavily criticised the German government's inaction. Nevertheless, in the context of the effects of Brexit for the EU and for Germany itself, in the medium and long term, Germany is the country that has the most arguments to fill the spaces left by the United Kingdom, even though their leadership is becoming increasingly limited (Schweiger, 2018).

The government in Berlin could take advantage of the post-Brexit situation to strengthen its leadership position in the European Union, and the country's strong economy and political stability could enable them to play a more active role in shaping EU policy and deciding on the priorities and directions of European integration. The reduction

in the number of Member States implies fewer opponents and greater political power for Germany in the struggle for its interests and priorities in the EU. The growing role of Germany after Brexit can be interpreted as the result of strengthening its position in the EU at the expense of weakening another potential leader, namely, France. Germany may aim to exploit this situation to strengthen its hegemony among the bloc of EU Member States, and the increase in Germany's role may lead to competition with France for leadership in the EU. Limiting France's role could be interpreted as a consequence of this rivalry, whereby Germany may strive to weaken France's position in favour of its own interests. One's understanding of these processes is aided by neorealism, which assumes that the rivalry between states is caused by the structure of the international system and the processes taking place within it, and the main goal of states' functioning is to maximise security, understood not only in strictly military terms. Jacek Czaputowicz, in one of his works, writes that the dependent variable in the neorealist approach is "the results on the international stage", and that "states behave the same way under specific conditions" (Czaputowicz, 2014). In essence, all EU Member States (not only Germany) attempted to take the place of the United Kingdom and, as a result of Brexit, sought to achieve specific outcomes related to improving their position in the international structure represented by the EU. The issue of material and non-material resources will be crucial in determining to what extent they will be able to achieve their goals and realise their stated interests. The desire to have greater influence on EU relations is explained not by neorealism but by neoclassical realism, which assumes that the goal of a state's functioning is precisely to increase its influence in international processes. According to this approach, as the power of a given state increases, so does its activity in the international arena in order to increase its influence on the external environment in a way that is consistent with its interests and ensures its security (Taliaferro, 2006). The growing role of Germany and the simultaneous limitation of France's role can be interpreted as the effect of asymmetry, where Germany leverages its stronger position in the international system to achieve greater influence on the international stage, in this case, within the European Union. The disadvantaged parties of this state of affairs will be the smaller EU Member States whose potential significantly lags behind that of Germany and France.

The actual effects of Brexit will only be known during the negotiations of the new reform treaty and in the next perspective, when the establishing of the new Multiannual Financial Framework occurs after the end of the current 2021–2027 perspective. The increase in competition between



states as a result of the post-Brexit international structure taking shape in the form of a new balance of power in the EU may also result in a struggle for resources and funds available within the organisation. States seeking to strengthen their position will vie for a greater share in EU programs and funds, potentially leading to increased tensions and conflict among one another. Brexit thus poses a threat to the neorealist balance of power, which Member States are attempting and will continue to attempt to shape, but which, truth be told, has never truly existed in the EU.

As a result of Brexit, the structure of the international system, which to some extent is the European Union, has changed. The countries that remained attempted to revise it in order to obtain specific results in European policy, e.g., pushing through issues that were important to them from the perspective of national interests. In light of the events that occurred post-Brexit, namely, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russo-Ukrainian war, their functioning aims primarily at ensuring security based on the power they possess, consisting of a range of material and non-material resources. All these assumptions of neorealism are confirmed by the political practice of the 27 EU Member States after the departure of the United Kingdom. It is worth mentioning that the concept of European integration, in its essence, is a classical process aimed at achieving a balance of power in Europe, which, as mentioned, is fundamental to neorealism. Cohesion policy, aimed at narrowing the development disparities between Member States, or solidarity in the distribution of budgetary funds for less developed countries, is one such example. The division between net contributors and net beneficiaries in relation to contributions to the EU budget, where wealthier states allocate their resources to support poorer ones in the name of European solidarity and equalising opportunities and potentials, also serves as an illustration of building a balance of power. From this idealistic perspective, we could assume that the concept of balance of power is being implemented in the EU. However, at the political level, there is a deep asymmetry in terms of influence on decision-making processes within European institutions. Some EU Member States have greater political influence on decisions made within the Union than others, and Brexit has only exacerbated these disparities. States with strong economic and military-political positions, such as Germany and France, may have a greater influence on shaping the EU agenda, which also contributes to the imbalance of power within the EU. In the context of qualified majority voting – as noted by J. Szymańska and Sz. Zaręba – Britain's exit from the EU means that meeting the criterion of 55% of EU countries will require not 16 but 15 states, and in terms of population, the already-strong position of the most populous

states, especially Germany and France, will be further strengthened. When the EU consisted of 28 Member States, their influence was 29%, which increased to 33% after Brexit. All of this makes it much easier for large Member States to build coalitions supporting projects of the European Commission, moreover, those of a communal nature, and it will also be easier for them to form coalitions of several states to block initiatives put forward by the Commission.

It is also worth noting that Brexit does not necessarily have only negative consequences for the EU. Reflection and consideration of what does not work in the European project can be an extremely valuable contribution to preparing for its next reform, this time without the United Kingdom but with greater participation from those states that have so far relatively conservatively approached this issue, such as those gathered within the Visegrad Group. Furthermore, the departure of the United Kingdom may also bring about significant benefits to EU security and defense. Member States can pursue deeper cooperation plans and maximise their security and defense interests. Moreover, the UK's departure may, in the longer term, enable the EU to build up its military power to such an extent that it will be able to balance the power of global superpowers such as the USA or China.

### **The Effects of Brexit as Regards the Visegrad Group Countries**

The Visegrad Group has never been and will never be a cohesive bloc of states willing to sacrifice their national interests for the sake of the group itself. It is more the media and experts who have tried over the years to build the image of the V4 as a bloc that is able to transcend political and national divisions. The utility of the Visegrad Group in the formula envisaged in the joint declaration signed on February 15<sup>th</sup> 1991, outlining the goals and conditions of mutual cooperation, was exhausted on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, when the V4 countries became part of the European Union. After May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, each of the Visegrad capitals began deconstructing their positions independently in the new international structure, which was then the European Union. Over the years, they gained experience in conducting European policy on so-called “European” principles to be ready to enter – to use boxing terminology – the heavyweight category and political significance in the EU. That moment came in 2016 when Europe recognised the results of the referendum in the United Kingdom. It must be openly stated that Brexit surprised the Union, but more than that, it worried the so-called “new” Member States, including Poland,

Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, now Czechia. The departure of Great Britain from the European Union, in the opinion of the Visegrad Group countries, was a weakening and, at the same time, an undermining of the stability of the European security system, on every level, i.e., that of the political, economic, social, and military. Therefore, for the Visegrad countries, Brexit was not only incomprehensible, but for some capitals it was a great surprise, generating changes in foreign policy strategy. One such country in 2016 was Poland. It suffices to quote here a fragment of Witold Waszczykowski's expose, the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, who said at the beginning of 2016 – "We will maintain dialogue and regular consultations at various levels with the most important European partners – first and foremost with the United Kingdom, with which we share not only understanding of many important elements of the European agenda but also a similar approach to European security issues. Our common perception of European problems was confirmed during my recent visit to the United Kingdom" (Waszczykowski, 2016). Hungary, under Viktor Orbán's rule, considered the referendum results a "truly black Sunday and a sad day for the European Union". The Hungarian prime minister lamented in particular that a country that contributed a significant amount of money to the EU budget is leaving, and its absence will make the Union poorer, resulting in less money for Hungary (Orbán, 2018).

From the perspective of early 2024, it is difficult to assess the effects of Brexit on the Visegrad Group countries in the short term. No key processes have yet taken place that would allow for a clear assessment of who lost and who gained. However, it is possible to analyse the potential consequences in the medium and long term, including the place and position of the V4 countries within the EU. From the perspective of neorealism theory, the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union may have several effects on the Visegrad Group. The first effect, albeit indirectly related to the Visegrad states, is a weakening of the so-called "broader construction" of the European Union. From a neorealist point of view, the European Union is treated as a system in which states act primarily to protect their own interests. The United Kingdom was one of the main players in the EU, both economically and politically and, in this context, its departure in the long term weakens the EU structure because it leaves gaps in the dominance of states. Currently, there is no other state in the EU structure as strong as the United Kingdom which would support the intergovernmental model of European integration and which, in theory, restrains the community initiatives of France and Germany in accordance with the theory of balance of power. The United Kingdom was one of the main allies of the Visegrad Group in the EU, especially

in matters related to competitiveness, market regulation, or migration policy. Its departure weakened the potential of the Visegrad Group in negotiations and decision-making within the EU (Chojan, 2021). On the other hand, the imbalance of power in the EU after Brexit may lead to greater pressure from stronger states, such as Germany or France, on the Visegrad Group countries regarding the aforementioned policies. This, in turn, could significantly affect the autonomy and freedom of action of the Visegrad Group countries in the Union and ultimately lead to a deterioration of relations and, in an ultimate scenario, to the emergence of disintegrative tendencies (especially in an era of growing populism and the return of nationalism in foreign policies).

The above takes on particular significance in the context of the future of the EU as an economic/political entity and its international significance. After a period of strategic and conceptual drifting, and after overcoming the effects of the pandemic and ending – as quickly as possible – the war between Ukraine and Russia, the Union will have to make a decision about the direction it wants to take and which reforms to implement. One could be convinced, even border on the verges of certainty, that this will be a direction in which the integration process will be tightened and made even more communitarian, and thus, the creation of a so-called “multi-speed union” project will be carried out. In this regard, the absence of the United Kingdom may be particularly felt for the Visegrad countries, or at least for a number of them; stronger states in the EU, such as Germany or France, have significant economic dominance, giving them greater influence over forming EU economic and trade policy. Therefore, they are likely to use their position to impose their preferences on the Visegrad Group, especially in matters concerning market regulations, structural funds, budgetary policy, or even the rule of law, thus regulating what can be described as the “rules of the game” in the Union. In this regard, the potential consequences of such decisions should be cause for concern. An example in this context is the Green Deal, which, although prepared by the European Commission, is only now, at the threshold of 2024, being realistically perceived by various social groups in Member States. Mass protests by farmers, among others, in Poland calling for a withdrawal from the agreed arrangements are just a small example that not everything accepted at the community level must be accepted by the societies of Member States. The United Kingdom, as the largest of these contesting states, was a strong advocate for the Visegrad countries, but also a balance against overly enthusiastic approaches to decisions made in the EU. Many Euro-enthusiasts underestimated the existence of what

has been described as a “more contesting” group of Member States and viewed it as a sign of the European project weakening.

Finally, Brexit may have implications for the Visegrad Group itself and for its cohesion both within the European Union and in general. The effects of Brexit will be accompanied by increased competition for influence in the EU, including among the Visegrad Four themselves. This could lead to greater internal competition for a dominant position in the EU, and this may result from several presumptions. Firstly, regional ambitions are beginning to play an increasingly important role. Visegrad countries, especially those with stronger economies and greater military-political capabilities such as Poland, may aspire to strengthen their role as leaders in the Central and Eastern European region, essentially returning to the 1990s when the Visegrad Group, in reality, did not function due to similar tendencies. Secondly, there are increasingly divergent interests and approaches to the European integration process among the Visegrad countries. An example is the Polish-Hungarian alliance in the EU during the Law and Justice government’s tenure, which, as of early 2024, and following a change of government in Poland, has now become history. Poland, once a Eurosceptic country, is becoming pro-European, with a completely different political perspective than it did from 2015 to 2023, while Viktor Orbán has remained true to his standpoint to European politics based on “taking and contesting” everything that is uncomfortable for Hungary or contrary to its national interests.

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that at present, the Visegrad Group countries will not follow the path of the United Kingdom, even despite the oft-emerging Eurosceptic voices emanating from their capitals, and this even applies to Hungary under the rule of Viktor Orbán. Functioning within the European Union has become one of the tools for wielding power in those countries for the Visegrad Four, and national egotisms appearing from time to time in Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary serve more as a so-called “bugaboo” and a tool of foreign policy rather than reflecting the true intentions of the leaders of those countries. Narrative trials attempting to increase their importance and significance in European politics are a manifestation of increased competition for influence among the Visegrad countries post Brexit. From the perspective of neorealism, this reflects those countries’ aspirations to strengthen their role in the EU structure by occupying more dominant positions after the departure of the United Kingdom. However, this competition could also lead to conflicts and tensions not only between the Visegrad countries and the remaining EU Member States, but also amongst themselves.

## Conclusions

Neorealism – like any other theory of international relations – is not able to fully explain the issues occurring in the processes of European integration. This refers especially to such difficult and ambiguous issues including the voluntary withdrawal of a state from the European Union. Indeed, this theory can explain the behaviour of states within the international system in which they operate only to a certain extent. This is well illustrated by the example of the Visegrad Group countries which are trying to fill the vacuum left by the British, although given the time in which they have to do so, that task will not be an easy one. Essentially, it can be stated that the time for building positions and constructing a new balance of power in the EU is just beginning. Finally, it can be concluded that Brexit may be a necessary shock for the EU, which will not only help it as an organisation, but also help its Member States to reap even greater benefits from having an alliance which each country wants to be a part of. Perhaps in the future it will also lead to a reduction in resistance to changes occurring in the integration process.

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