

How does Brexit affect Environmental Policy Making of the EU?

Abstract

The European Union (EU) is well known as a global leader in terms of its efforts regarding environmental protection. Although sometimes heavily debated, EU laws enabled the EU-28 countries to work together on environmental protection measures and remarkable results could be achieved in various areas (energy, climate change, biodiversity, plastic reduction,...). Furthermore, in many cases, EU laws proved to show global influence.

By March 2019, the United Kingdom is expected to leave the EU. The EU has had a profound effect on UK environmental policy and governance as the largest portion of the national environmental laws and regulations came from Brussels. Once known as the 'dirty man of Europe', the environmental situation in the UK improved rapidly during the EU membership. Many fear an erosion of environmental protection standards in the UK from Brexit. Leaving the Union increases the risk that high national standards and regulations are weakened, not regularly updated or even lost. In the long run, Brexit could lead to more lenient environmental laws in the UK.

And how about the EU? How does Brexit affect the environmental policy making of the remaining 27 countries of the Union? True, past UK governments showed a mixed record of environmental policy engagement. In the past, UK governments attempted to block or downwash several environmental regulations of the EU (e.g., habitat laws, glyphosate, energy efficiency directive, national renewable targets). But one should not forget that with Britain leaving the EU, the Union loses a wealthy and highly developed power that has extraordinary capacities in international outreach and influence. And in some issue key areas, the UK has developed into a leader for change. Accordingly, Brexit not only represents a major change to environmental governance in the United Kingdom but also for the EU.

The study seeks to reveal the consequences of Brexit in regards to environmental policy-making of the EU-27. Effects are expected in the short-term and in the long-term. What are the chances that Brexit not only weakens the power of the UK and the EU but also turns out to bad for the global environment?

Keywords: Brexit, Environmental Policy, European Union, Environmental Diplomacy

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