

Title : Cooperation, Identity and Brexit at the Irish Border

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Abstract

This article examines the question of how cross-border cooperation at the post-conflict Northern Ireland-Ireland border can be interpreted by some communities as either a threat to or an enabler of their identity, and how the UK's decision to withdraw from the European Union has thrown this into a sharper light. It suggests that Brexit will not only lead to an abandonment of EU Cohesion policy on one side of the border, but could also potentially result in a reduction of cross-border cooperation to the purely economic, thereby underlining the significance of the border as a demarcation of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom, and reinforcing a British identity to those in the region who may have seen the pooling of sovereignty within the European Union as undermining their sense of "Britishness". Moreover, the article argues that the possibility of the narrowing of cross-border cooperation to the economic field becomes more likely as civic society's role has not been properly exploited with the failure to introduce a North-South Consultative Forum. By failing to create this Forum, which was one of the provisions contained in the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, we risk any post-Brexit cooperation being an activity reserved for the formal political structures.

Keywords

Brexit, Northern Ireland, civic society, identity, post-conflict