

Horizon Europe, Brexit and its meaning for Niedersachsen

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The view of Westminster from across the Thames is dominated by three institutes of state: the House of Commons which is the sovereign power; the House of Lords with a unique collection of experts and other representatives of British life selected to complement and scrutinise the work of the Commons; and the civil service. Together, they protect the world's oldest functioning democracy and serve the British people. The view illustrates not only the co-existence of these institutions, but also the separation of competence and function between them. Taken almost for granted in the British Isles, but quite unusual from a European perspective, a fully professionalised civil service that is completely independent from the political institutions and parties it serves is essential to the effective functioning of this most mature of democracies. This separation of function is even reflected in the English words 'politics' and 'policy': two words with different meanings that cannot be easily translated in German or French. This distinction between the acquisition and use of power (politics) and the expert conversion of political vision into change in the real world (policy) is deep rooted from centuries of practice, most notably in the principles of an independent merit-based civil service established by Northcote and Trevelyan in the mid-nineteenth century.

'Brexiters' characterise the European Union as the malign work of unelected bureaucrats living well in Brussels at our expense. They wilfully fail to admit that the functions and relationships between the major European institutions are similar in many ways on the Westminster model. What they mock as 'unelected' is actually a European civil service designed and run in a quite a British way. We just have to listen carefully to Donald Tusk to notice that the departure of the British will have consequences beyond mere budgets and the balancing of member states interests. Empowered to get things done independent of party-political interference, British civil servants' contribution to the day-to-day work of the European Union is recognised as highly professional, purposeful, delivered with pace and with humour, putting Europe first much more often than popularly portrayed. The word often used to understate this British contribution is 'pragmatic'. The departure of a significant member state that is committed to this efficient, incorruptible way of working for the benefit of Europe will have consequences not yet obvious to many of us. The centre of gravity will move east. This leaves countries like Ireland and Germany with work to do to protect proven ways of working.

But how is this relevant to the world's largest investment in civilian research and innovation that is Horizon Europe? The answer is that many of the research and innovation policy principles that underlie Europe's investment in research and innovation are rooted in principles well-established in the United Kingdom: free and fair access to investment support

based on independently assessed merit in programmes operated free of political interference. The Commission proposes to invest 100 billion EUR in research and innovation between 2021 and 2027. One tenth is ear-marked for agriculture, food, fisheries and the other parts of the bioeconomy. A more than doubling the investment from Horizon 2020 to Horizon Europe is no trivial undertaking from an administrative viewpoint. The plans to date indicate evolution rather than revolution. The Commission does listen and there are signs that it is moving to address matters raised in evaluations of previous programmes. These include the effort to widen participation and spread excellence.

Perhaps the most significant change in Horizon Europe is inspired by President John F. Kennedy's "*We choose to go to the Moon*" speech made in September 1962. He defined a clear mission that we might today regard as SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound ("*in this decade*"). In advising the Commission, Prof. Mariana Mazzucato of University College London picks up on the wider research impact that Kennedy had in mind. Such a mission can, in Kennedy's words, "*serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills*". Muzzucato also draws on Anglo-Saxon schools of policy thinking reminding us that market failure should steer public investment. She highlights the role of publicly-funded research that has driven the development of many marketed innovations that we have around us. She uses the example of the smart phone but we see the same in agriculture where for example public investment played a major role in the big breakthroughs in wheat breeding in the last fifty years.

Based on the contribution of Muzzucato and others, the European Commission regards a mission as:

"a portfolio of actions across disciplines intended to achieve a bold and inspirational and measurable goal within a set timeframe, with impact for society and policy making as well as relevance for a significant part of the European population and a wide range of European citizens".

Five mission areas have been identified. The acknowledgement of the need to organise investment in portfolios on this scale is new for the Commission and potentially very significant.

The European investment in framework programmes is informed by a great deal of public consultation. But who is really setting the agenda and deciding what is really done? Based on data from more than 2,300 projects funded over twenty years, research published by the European Commission indicates that there is significant participant incumbency in the framework programmes in Societal Challenge 2 (Agri-food and the bioeconomy).¹ Through a detailed analysis of the purpose of each of the 2,300 projects, they identified that part of the programme aimed at farmers as primary users. Relating this EU investment for farmers to the agricultural area of each member state, a huge variation in the investment in relation to the agricultural area was identified. This varied from 22 EUR/ha in the Netherlands to less than 1 Euro in many of the newer member states. Such a situation is a major research policy challenge considering the proven benefits of co-location of research for farmers and farming

¹ Murphy-Bokern, D., Moutou, K., Addeo, F., Berlinschi, R., Delli Paoli, A., Neicu, D. and Teirlinck, P. (2017). Meeting Societal Challenge 2. Expert Group Report. Published by the European Commission. ([www.murphy-bokern.com/images/Meeting_SC2 - Final report DMB website.pdf](http://www.murphy-bokern.com/images/Meeting_SC2_-_Final_report_DMB_website.pdf))

and considering in particular where the need and potential for agricultural innovation currently is. There are similar challenges in the pattern of leadership of projects as indicated by the type and location of the coordinating organisations. There is clear evidence that as the size of projects increased in Framework Programme 6, the role of non-academic organisations, mostly innovators, in coordinating research declined. Thus, as the Commission's drive to increase societal impact intensified in successive framework programmes, the role of partner organisations focused on innovation, i.e., partners other than universities and public sector research establishments, in coordination declined associated with the increased complexity and size of consortia.

Two questions arise for the average organisation considering getting involved in in Horizon Europe: what happens in framework programmes and how can we be competitive. A full answer to these questions is outside the scope of this presentation, but some general points can be made:

The framework programme is an investment in change: all partners in a Horizon Europe project must embrace the need to deliver impact for society, often within a mission. Successful engagement involves accepting some process discipline and a willingness to work in a collaborative setting. Inter-disciplinary work is often required. Scientists are trained to report what they have observed. This approach is essential to the good research practice but must be complemented by real communication with users of research in a user and impact-centred way. A successful proposal looks like a scientific report but actually has a completely different purpose: to communicate with each evaluation panel member. This requires an approach that is fundamentally different from that required to write an academic paper. One of the most important features of success is control of academic ego: *primaee donnae* have no place in these consortia. A project plan must be led by the societal impact sought rather than driven by the things that the academic partners are already doing or want to do.

Delivering on missions means using research to drive innovation. Innovation by its very nature involves taking risks and for this reason alone, innovation and enterprise are closely related. A clear message for the Commission is that if it wants innovation it must support innovators and put innovators in the lead. This means replacing some processes currently focused on avoiding and eliminating risks to project processes towards investment based more on trusting innovators with a greater emphasis in the Commission itself on project and programme outcomes.

A very important characteristic of successful consortia is a determination to win. Some academics reject the competitive time-bound process on principle. Good ideas and sound methodologies communicated to convey unique potential are very important but respecting the proposal process is also essential. Up to the start of the project, managing a proposal is a distinct process that requires complete attention to every detail of the proposal and evaluation process. Consortia that make this Olympian commitment to winning raise their chances of success from a low level of typically less than 10% to about 50%.

German scientists secure in relatively well-funded public institutions sometime struggle with this competitive approach to funding and the emphasis on societal impact. This contributes to Germany's relatively low showing in framework programmes. In contrast, the competitive ethos is embedded in the United Kingdom since the 1980s and this is reflected in the relatively large contribution that British scientists make in the framework programmes.

Analogous to the British civil servants, British scientists and innovators recognise much in the ways of working in the framework programmes.

And so back to Brexit. Why do we have Brexit even though Britain has so successfully influenced the development of the European Union? Where have we gone wrong?

There are many answers to this question, but one stands out: those of us whose lives have been shaped by the European project have not told enough of our European stories. A community lives from its stories. David Cameron made the profound mistake of presenting us with an image of Europe that is all about money. His campaign for a remain vote based on predictions of effects on British families' finances was doomed to fail. The European project is about peace and the European way of life. Across Europe today we have people from different countries and ethnic backgrounds working together in peace to repair the damage left by past dictatorships and conflicts. Even though still young, many have personal experience of war or economic collapse. We now have millions of families with several regional and national identities. Most of our grandparents could not have dreamt of the European miracle that we now take for granted. And here in Niedersachsen we have the story of how Britain helped us become European. Every village in this land has its European story of the liberation in 1945 when British soldiers advanced across Niedersachsen in that spring. The names of places of horror they found are now part of Britain's own story and the English language. Those soldiers went on to help build our state in a new Europe. Some of their sons and daughters are ours.

What is Brexit for Britain's neglected European story? It is little short of a betrayal. It is certainly a betrayal of the young in Britain who very clearly rejected it but who will live with the consequences. It is betrayal of the efforts of those British soldiers who are part of our European story. And it is a betrayal of Winston Churchill who, mindful of what British troops found here a year before, said in 1946 that:

"We must build a kind of United States of Europe. In this way only will hundreds of millions of toilers be able to regain the simple joys and hopes which make life worth living."

Churchill's vision will survive Brexit. As we have seen in the solidarity shown to Ireland, Europe might even be strengthened by it. This cannot be said for the United Kingdom.

The views expressed here are entirely those of Donal Murphy-Bokern and should not be interpreted as reflecting views held by his professional associates or previous employers.