

Between the English National Identity and the Cooperation of the European Union

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Abstract

Between 1973 and 2020, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland were a member of the European Union. During this period, the large number of international students entering the British education system brought significant economic and cultural benefits to the country. EU Structural Funds were allocated to Member States on the basis of eligibility criteria set at the EU level. The UK's exit from the EU was the result of internal political debates and a complex combination of factors, such as migration and financial contributions to member states.

Keywords: UK, European Union, co-operation, Brexit.

JEL Classification: K33, I38

1. Introduction

The English national identity is a complex and dynamic instrument that has undergone significant transformations in the context of European integration and contemporary geopolitical challenges. This article explores the intersection between English national identity and European cooperation processes, analysing the ways in which these two dimensions interact and influence each other.

National identity is a complex, dynamic and multidimensional mechanism that has the capacity to unite multiple human groups through distinct cultural, historical and psychosocial mechanisms. This national identity does not have a natural character, but is a social creation bringing together several principles, such as:²

- Social and cultural institutions: the teaching of national history, school ceremonies, symbols in the educational environment;
- Common historical narratives: King Arthur – founder of the English identity, Magna Carta (1215) – first official constitutional document;
- Different communication processes: national day, oaths, military and state ceremonies.

The Stonehenge, Sutton Hoo and Hadrian's Wall sites are essential elements of English cultural heritage. They reflect the island's history and the cultural transformations that have taken place over the centuries, contributing to the evolution of British and English identity.³

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² Christopher Morris (1995), *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*: Benedict Anderson revised edition, pp 721–722, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0191659995904859>.

³ Mohamed Khater, Mohamed Faik. 2024. „Unearthing Identity: The Role of Archaeology in Shaping English National Identity and Heritage Interpretation”. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 50 (3): 215–25. doi: 10.1080/ 00934690.2024.2405758.

While ethnic identity refers to a concept that combines the common religion, language, national traditions and common ancestry of an ethnic group⁴, national identity is a broader concept based on citizenship and civic belonging. Thus, there may be several people who share the same national identity – English – but who have different ethnic identities, such as British or Scottish. This difference is because national identity reflects belonging to a state and a civic community, whereas ethnic identity is about the specific cultural, linguistic and traditional origins of each group.

In contemporary society, the multicultural and multi-ethnic character is evident because national unity does not imply ethnic homogeneity but respect for diversity and civic solidarity.

In the context of English national identity, the process of European integration has emphasised profound dimensions of this identity. English national identity is not a static concept, but a dynamic one that reacts and adapts to external challenges, such as the process of European integration. Debates on democratic legitimacy in the European Union have also emphasised the crucial importance of the national parliament and representative institutions in maintaining national identity and sovereignty⁵. However, the English identity⁶ remains exclusive and less inclusive of ethnic minority groups, which are often absorbed into the British identity.⁷

The process of the formation of the English nation's European identity has been an arduous one, evolving from sites marking the beginnings of British and English history to contemporary social transformations: accession to the European Union, changing social perceptions and the creation of new systems of justice. All of these have helped redefine the notion of English national identity. Today, that identity is caught between diversity and unity, between tradition and contemporary challenges, seeking to preserve both national history and civic spirit and to forge a new path in today's world.⁸

2. The impact of the UK's exit from the European Union on the education system

In 2010, the United Kingdom was a full member of the European Union, without foreseeing the changes that were to come. The English national system benefited from a significant presence of international students. In the undergraduate system, the majority of international students were from Asia (38.9%), the European Union (38.5%) and Africa (7.2%)⁹. The large number of international students who come to the UK to study

⁴ Neil Fligstein, Alina Polyakova, Wayne Sandholtz (2012). *European Integration, Nationalism and European Identity*, „JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies” Vol. 50, Issues1, pp. 106–122, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2011.02230.x>.

⁵ Yilmaz Kaplan (2018). *(Re)considering sovereignty in the European integration process*, „Asian Journal of German and European Studies” 3: 1, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40856-017-0023-4>.

⁶ Persons who are from England, while British persons signify the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

⁷ Ross Bond (2024). *National Identities among Minority and 'Majority' Ethnic Groups: Evidence from the 2021 Census in England and Wales*. „Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies” 51 (5), pp. 1120–42. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2024.2385000.

⁸ Eleni Andreouli (2018). *Constructions of Europe in the run-up to the EU referendum in the UK*, „Identities”, vol. 26 (2), pp. 241–259, doi:10.1080/1070289X.2018.1486091.

⁹ HESA: International Students 2009/10, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications/students-2009-10/introduction>, accessed on 10 May 2025.

contributes to the economic development of the UK by paying fees and gaining employment during their studies and after graduation.¹⁰

The most sought-after profiles are law, medicine and dentistry, while the lowest level is in veterinary sciences¹¹. Since 2011, the number of EU and international students has decreased from 311,800 to 307,205. This decrease was caused by the introduction of visa requirements for students admitted to the English education system.¹²

In the 2017–2018 academic year, there were only 254,000 international students enrolled at UK faculties.¹³ This was the lowest number of international and EU students enrolled in the UK during the period when the UK was still a member of the European Union.

In 2021–2022 there were 679,970 students enrolled, of which only 124,140 were from EU countries. This figure thus fell by 50 per cent to a level similar to 1994 or even lower. In total, 559,825 students were from the rest of the world.¹⁴

With the leaving of the European Union, the application rate of foreign nationals¹⁵ to British educational institutions¹⁶ has decreased. Thus, foreign nationals wishing to study in the English education system must apply for study visas. Students over the age of 16 can apply for the Student Route, which allows them to study in English institutions for up to 5 years. After completing their studies, they can apply for a Graduate Visa, which allows them to stay legally for 2–3 years. In general, only PhD graduates are eligible for a 3-year visa extension.¹⁷

Not only foreign students are affected by the impact of Brexit, but also British students who wanted to study abroad. As a result, the number of Britons choosing to study outside their home country has fallen by 38%¹⁸. When the UK was a member of the European Union, the cost of an undergraduate degree programme at the University of Manchester was around £9,250 for UK and EU students. After Brexit, fees for the academic year rose to around £22,500.¹⁹

The UK education system is one of the most sought-after by students and parents alike, thanks to the diversity of programmes and prestigious universities such as Oxford

¹⁰ Yuheng Lin, Dooruj Rambaccussing, Yu Zhu (2025), *The Impact of International Students on UK Trade of Cultural Goods*, „The World Economy”, Vol. 48 (5), 2025, pp. 1108–1126, <https://doi.org/10.1111/twec.13679>.

¹¹ HESA: International Students 2009/10, 2017, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications/students-2009-10/introduction>, accessed on 10 May 2025.

¹² Katherine Sellgren (2014). *Decline of overseas students at England's universities*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-26836962>, accessed on 10 May 2025.

¹³ UK Parliament: International students in higher education, 2024 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7976/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Giulio Marini (2018). *Higher education staff and Brexit. Is the UK losing the youngest and brightest from other EU countries*, „Tertiary Education and Management”, Vol. 24, pp. 409–421, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2018.1497697>.

¹⁶ Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes, Agnese Romiti (2024), *International student applications in the UK after Brexit*, „Journal of Economic Geography”, Volume 24, Issue 5, September, pp. 637–662, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbae019>.

¹⁷ Gov. UK: Student visa, 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/student-visa>, accessed on 10 May 2025.

¹⁸ Ronald B. Davies, Lena S. Specht (2025), *Brexit and foreign students in gravity*, „Review of International Economics”, vol 33 (1), pp. 290–333. <https://doi.org/10.1111/roie.12750>.

¹⁹ Manchester 1824: *Fees and funding*, 2025, <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/international/study-abroad-exchange/fees-funding/>, accessed on 10 May 2025.

University. Education in a new country offers the opportunity to learn English in its natural environment and discover a new culture and traditions. Parents usually send their children to these schools from an early age to facilitate adaptation and reduce the risk of anxiety.²⁰

3. The UK and Northern Ireland's contribution to the EU budget and the aftermath of Brexit

The budget of the European Union, in recent years, has undergone changes in terms of its oversight due to the violation of the rule of law and the financial interests of the European Union²¹. In terms of the source of income of the European Union budget, it is composed of several areas of income:

- Export and import between Member States
- ATV or VAT
- Other taxes

In the period 2014–2020, the budget of the European Union was €1,082.05 million for the years 2021–2027 the budget is expected to decrease due to the effects of Brexit, reaching only €107,403 million²². From this budget, money is shared out to help develop different areas of common interest, such as:

- Agriculture
- Transport
- Industry
- Energy

The European Union, after its creation, was faced with a lack of sufficient sources of income and came up with the initiative to develop an area of activity to create jobs and support agriculture²³. Thus, over time, the budget of the European Union started to be redirected to other areas, which were previously not foreseen in the planning. We believe that agriculture is an essential pillar for the proper management of development within the European Union. In this respect, it is important to note that the annual budget allocated to agriculture in the European Union is larger than that allocated in the United States.²⁴

By the time the United Kingdom left the European Union, it had been transferring tens of billions of pounds annually to the European Union. In 2018, the UK's

²⁰ Paola Palladino, Eugenio Trotta, Aurora Bonvino, Leonardo Carlucci & Milvia Cottini (2025), *How do you feel during English class? Emotions and metacognition in primary school children learning English as a second language*. „Metacognition Learning” vol. 20, article number 10, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11409-025-09414-4>.

²¹ Maria Cristina Marchetti (2025), *Identity and Values in the European Union: The Role of the 'Rule of Law' in the Construction of a European Identity*, in Maria Grazia Rodomonte, Ludovica Durst (eds.) *Judicial Review, Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law: The Construction of the European Constitutional Identity*, Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003493891>, pp 33–43.

²² Wikipedia: Budget of the European Union, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budget_of_the_European_Union, accessed on 10 May 2025.

²³ Ann-Christina Knudsen (2009), *Farmers on Welfare: The Making of Europe's Common Agricultural Policy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2009, pp. 1–309.

²⁴ EveryCRSreport.com: U.S. and EU Agricultural Support: Overview and Comparison, 2011, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R41713.html>, accessed on 10 May 2025.

contribution was no less than £15.5 billion²⁵. This was one of the main reasons why Brexit was supported in the referendum. The UK was paying one of the highest annual contributions to the European Union, but in return was receiving much smaller sums for development.

With Brexit, social, political and economic changes began to be felt in the British system. The first felt in the areas of labour and trade²⁶. At the same time, the English education system came out from under the umbrella of the Erasmus programme. Visas were also reintroduced for various reasons, such as study or work. This has raised questions about freedom of movement.²⁷

4. Conclusion

The English national identity and European cooperation are a complex mechanism of dynamic dialogue, marked by profound legislative changes generated by new contemporary social challenges. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union marked a historic moment that testifies to the fragility of the balance between national and European institutions. Through this Brexit, the tension between English national sovereignty and European integrity has been highlighted.

In essence, Brexit shows us that national identity is a fluid concept, subject to transformation. The United Kingdom has been caught between tradition and innovation, between isolation and openness, between sovereignty and European co-operation. Practically, the United Kingdom is able to respond to all of these elements.

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²⁵ Office for National Statistics: The UK contribution to the EU budget, 2019, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/governmentpublicsectorandtaxes/publicsectorfinance/articles/theukcontributiontotheeubudget/2017-10-31>, accessed on 10 May 2025.

²⁶ Gemma Tetlow, Alex Stojanovic: *Understanding the Economic impact of Brexit*, 2018, pp. 1–16. [https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/Economic impact of Brexit summary.pdf](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/Economic%20impact%20of%20Brexit%20summary.pdf), accessed on 10 May 2025.

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