

## 7 Canada's two Europes

### Brexit and the prospect of competing transatlantic relationships

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#### Introduction

For the past five decades, Canada's relationship to Europe was based on two main pillars: collective security through membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and economic cooperation through bilateral agreements with the European Communities (EC) and later the European Union (EU). In the context of each pillar, Canada's link to the United Kingdom (UK) was fundamental. While the UK was an EU member state, it was clearly Canada's most trusted partner in Europe – its main ally in the field of security, preferred intermediary when dealing with the EU politically, and principal entry point into the Single Market. Canada's closeness to the UK remains, but Brexit has put into question this established pattern of interaction. It creates the need for Canada to forge separate economic, political and perhaps even security relationships with the UK and the EU-27.

This chapter assesses the impact that the Brexit process has had on Canadian perceptions of the EU. It develops its argument in three main steps: first, it retraces the development of Canada's relationship to Europe since the Second World War (Section 2). This discussion shows how Canada's involvement with Europe reflects the country's history as a part of the British Empire, in addition to being shaped by attempts to counterbalance the influence of the United States (US). In a second step, the chapter discusses how this peculiar relationship to Europe has affected Canadian views of European integration (Section 3). Building on this volume's distinction between exogenous (EU-related), endogenous (Canada-related) and global influences on external perceptions of the EU, it argues that Canadian assessments of the EU have depended less on EU policies or activities than on endogenous and global factors. In a third step, Brexit is incorporated into this analysis (Sections 4–5). The analysis presented in this chapter focuses on discursive contributions by Canadian politicians, which highlight the role that Brexit has played in Canadian party politics.

As debates on Brexit are ongoing, both in Europe and in Canada, and it is unclear which form Brexit will take (for instance, what kind of trade agreement – if any – will be concluded between the EU and the UK), it is too early for a definitive assessment of how Brexit will reconfigure Canadian perceptions of the EU. The

analysis in this chapter suggests, however, that Canada–Europe relations post-Brexit could become increasingly politicized, with links to the UK and to the EU-27 being pitted against each other. In this respect, emerging fault lines run between Canada's main political parties at the federal level – the traditionally multilateralist Liberals and the more UK/Commonwealth-friendly Conservatives – as well as to a lesser extent between the Francophone and the Anglophone populations. The result for Canada may be the emergence of two competing visions of the transatlantic relationship, each based on its own specific perception of the EU, whose popularity and influence on public policy shifts based on short-term factors such as domestic election results. The chapter concludes by discussing how the EU, through its external policies, can help counteract this development.

#### Setting the context: Canada's post-war relationship with Europe

Canada established its independence as a foreign policy actor during the first half of the 20th century (Nossal, Roussel and Paquin 2015, 138–155). While the British North America Act of 1867 formally created the country as a self-governing entity within the British Empire, Canada did not achieve external sovereignty until the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931. The country built its reputation as an international actor through its participation in the First and Second World Wars. Participation in these “European” wars was controversial within Canada, especially among French Canadians. Nonetheless, it was largely with reference to the country's war efforts that Canadian foreign policy-makers insisted, after 1945, that Canada should be recognized as a “middle power” in international relations that deserved a seat at the table in efforts to rebuild regional and global institutions (Nossal 2010).

With respect to the relationship with Europe, Canada participated particularly actively in the creation of NATO (Haglund 1997; Jockel and Sokolsky 2009; Pentland 2004). Initially, Canadian negotiators conceptualized the alliance as significantly more than a defence pact. Canada was the main driving force behind Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty, sometimes called the “Canadian article”, which commits NATO states to various forms of political and economic cooperation. Canada's enthusiasm for NATO stemmed from the expectation that, in addition to providing security, membership in the alliance would protect Canada's political role in international relations, by forging an institutional relationship with its Western allies, including the US, while counterbalancing excessive American influence. As Jockel and Sokolsky (2009, 317) point out, this “meant nothing less than trying to make the NATO Europeans into a substitute for Britain”. What was particularly attractive, in this context, was that, in contrast to the colonial role in the British Empire, NATO membership did not threaten to sow internal discord between English and French Canadians (Haglund 1997, 467). However, as Canadian policy-makers soon came to realize, NATO never did develop a meaningful economic and political dimension. While Canada has remained



strongly committed to NATO as the main pillar of its international security policy, it was clear that, in the economic and political fields, another institutional basis needed to be found to facilitate Canada–Europe relations.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Canada's bilateral relations with the UK, now governed through the Commonwealth and its preferential trading scheme, remained paramount. Given the importance of trade with the UK, Canada's reaction "bordered on the hysterical" (Mahant 1981, 268) when the UK, in 1961, submitted its first application for membership in the EC. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and his Conservative government heavily lobbied the UK to abandon the idea of EC membership, which would have meant the end of Commonwealth trade preferences. The delays in the UK's membership – primarily due to a veto by French President Charles de Gaulle – gave Canada time to revise its position. After the Liberal Party, led by Lester B. Pearson and later by Pierre Trudeau, had regained power, the government gradually warmed to the idea that Western Europe as a whole – and the EC as its institutional embodiment – could become a privileged economic partner (Mahant 1981, 268–271; Potter 1999, 28–34).

The decision by US President Nixon in 1971 to impose a 10 per cent tariff on imported goods provided additional impetus for this shift; it led Canada to adopt a strategy of economic diversification – labelled the "Third Option" – which combined measures of economic nationalization with a turn towards new international partners. Along with the European Commission's interest in expanding its own powers *vis-à-vis* the member states, this strategy gave a decisive push to the negotiations for a Canada–EC "Framework Agreement for Commercial and Economic Cooperation" (Mahant 1981, 271–275; Pentland 1991, 127–129; Potter 1999, 34–40). After difficult negotiations – complicated *inter alia* by tensions between Canada and France that originated from Charles de Gaulle's advocacy for Quebec separatism (Black 1996) – the agreement was eventually concluded in 1976 as the first formal cooperation agreement that the EC had ever made with an industrialized country.

The policy effects of the Framework Agreement were modest. It led neither to a reduction of Canada's economic dependency on the US, nor to a significant diversification of Canada's trade with European partners beyond the UK. The Framework Agreement did not include specific trade liberalization measures, and its consultation mechanisms proved ineffective in dealing with a series of bilateral economic or political "irritants" between Canada and the EC/EU (or individual member states) that developed in the 1980s and 1990s – particularly over fisheries in the North Atlantic (Barry, Applebaum and Wiseman 2014) – which often overshadowed, though never comprehensively undermined, the friendly and constructive nature of the bilateral relationship (Dolata-Kreutzkamp 2010; Long 1998).

Canada began to abandon the "Third Option" in the late 1970s, and in the 1980s – under Brian Mulroney's Conservative government – fully embraced a continentalist foreign policy approach, which led to the conclusion of the Canada–US Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA) in 1988 and the North

American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1992. Particularly the CUSFTA was highly contentious in Canada. While Mulroney's victory in the 1988 federal election was interpreted as a popular mandate for proceeding with the agreement, critics feared that it would expose Canada's economy and culture to overbearing US influence (Bow 2015; Potter 1999, 51–65). After the end of the Cold War had put Europe back on the Canadian political agenda (Pentland 1991; Potter 1999, 70–91), and political power had shifted once more to the Liberal Party with the 1993 federal election, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien sought to address these concerns. While Chrétien had no intention of undermining NAFTA, his government attempted to return to the traditional "counterbalancing" logic of Canadian foreign policy by embracing the idea – first flouted by Mulroney's foreign minister Joe Clark in 1990 – of a Canada–EU free trade agreement (Potter 1999, 198–218). The EU was initially opposed to pursuing bilateral trade negotiations with Canada, since it feared these would undermine the ongoing multilateral trade talks in the context of the World Trade Organization (WTO). It was not until 2009, when the failure of the WTO's Doha Round had become undeniable, that negotiations for the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) were formally launched (Deblock and Rioux 2010).

In the process of negotiating the agreement, Canada – now governed by the Conservative Party, led by Stephen Harper – once again found its most reliable European ally in the UK, with its traditionally free trade-oriented position (Hübner, Deman and Balik 2017, 848–849). The Harper government weakened Canada's traditional commitment to multilateralism, and instead pursued a foreign policy that more aggressively sought to promote what it defined as Canadian interests and values (Chapnick 2011; Paris 2014). This approach contributed to an intensification of Canada–EU conflicts (Dolata-Kreutzkamp 2010). These concerned bilateral issues – such as the EU's ban on seal products, the emissions classification of the Alberta oil sands in the EU's Fuel Quality Directive, or the Canadian visa requirements for citizens of Bulgaria and Romania – but also broader multilateral policies, including the EU's push for permanent observer status in the Arctic Council (which Canada opposed), and Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Accord (which upset the EU), and the EU's failure to support Canada's application for a UN Security Council seat in 2010. The CETA negotiations, however, were successfully shielded from these disagreements. After some delays, the agreement was signed in 2014, then partially revised in response to European pressure, and provisionally entered into force – along with a new Canada–EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) that the EU had pushed for – in 2017 (Hübner, Deman and Balik 2017; White 2017). CETA and SPA mark a high point of economic and political relations between Canada and the EU (Bendiek et al. 2018), a positive trajectory that was further reinforced when, in 2015, the Liberal Party under Justin Trudeau returned to power and the above-mentioned Canada–EU conflicts largely subsided.



### EU perceptions research in Canada: four factors that shape dominant views

This brief history of Canada's relationship to Europe is essential to understanding Canadian perceptions of the EU in the pre-Brexit era. Relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to such perceptions, and only three research projects have examined them systematically: a study on parliamentary debates, government documents, public opinion, newspaper reporting, and publications from non-governmental associations between 2000 and 2009 (Croci and Tossutti 2007, 2009); a study of newspaper discourses on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome in 2007 (Gänzle and Retzlaff 2008; Retzlaff and Gänzle 2008); and a study based on a public opinion survey, print media analysis, and elite interviews conducted in 2015 as part of a comparative project funded by the European External Action Service (Chaban, Kelly and Rayroux 2018; Rayroux 2019). This research paints a fairly consistent picture of Canadian views of European integration in the past two decades. Four fundamental determinants of these perceptions deserve to be highlighted.

The first is the country's *postcolonial relationship to the UK*. While immigration and multiculturalism have undermined conceptions of Canada as "British North America", the cultural connection to Britain continues to be an important reference point for many Canadians' collective identities (Resnick 2005). Economically, the UK is by far Canada's most important economic partner in Europe: in 2016, it alone accounted for 42 per cent of Canadian merchandise exports, 37 per cent of Canadian service exports, and 37 per cent of Canadian foreign direct investment (FDI) into the EU (Statistics Canada 2019). Politically, Canada's relations to the EU are also strongly dominated by British perspectives. This is due to similar political institutions and policy philosophies, but also to the fact that English-language news outlets in Canada often draw on British news agencies and London-based correspondents when reporting on Europe (Chaban, Kelly and Rayroux 2018; Gänzle and Retzlaff 2008). As a result, Canadian media reporting about the EU usually reflects British preferences for a predominantly intergovernmental form of European integration.

The cultural, economic and political influence of the UK is, of course, less pronounced among the French Canadian population, especially in Quebec. However, compared to the UK link, the relationship with France – Canada's other colonial power – has left less of an imprint on Canada–EU relations. The main reason is that, especially in the 1960 and 1970s, but continuing in the following decades, the Canadian–French relationship was overshadowed by France's ambiguous position on Canada's integrity as a sovereign state (Bastien 1999; Boshier 1999). This changed fundamentally only after 2000, when Quebec separatism declined and the province's Premier Jean Charest emerged as a major advocate of CETA (Deblock and Rioux 2010). Despite the positive development of the relationship in recent years, including a good personal rapport between Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and French

President Emmanuel Macron, Canada's economic links to France remain significantly weaker than those to the UK – in 2016, they accounted for no more than 9 per cent of Canadian merchandise exports to the EU, 16 per cent of Canadian service exports, and 2 per cent of EU-bound FDI (Statistics Canada 2019) – and French approaches towards European integration have not developed a strong influence on popular perceptions of the EU outside of Quebec.

The second main determinant of Canadian perceptions of the EU is the country's *dependency on the US*. The US is Canada's only real neighbour – but nine times its size in terms of population, twelve times its size in terms of GDP, and a trading partner that accounts for three quarters (in value) of Canada's merchandise exports. Since the end of the Second World War, Canadian governments have oscillated between embracing and attempting to counterbalance the resulting dependency, usually opting for some kind of combination of both approaches (Mérand and Vandemoortele 2011). The EU and its predecessor institutions have entered Canadian public debates primarily as "instruments" that might be employed in counterbalancing strategies, especially as alternative economic partners to whom Canada's trade relations might be diversified. This has resulted in public perceptions of the EU that are overwhelmingly positive, but quite shallow in terms of their substantive foundations (Rayroux 2019, 61–66). In a Eurobarometer survey conducted in February 2017, 79 per cent of respondents reported a positive view of the EU, slightly more than in the US (75 per cent). However, only 14 per cent of respondents – compared to 25 per cent in the US – described their view of the EU as "very positive", while 65 per cent held a "somewhat positive" view (European Commission 2017, Table Q6).

The third determinant of Canadian perceptions of the EU is Canada's strong *emphasis on NATO* in the security pillar of the relationship, which has not weakened following the end of the Cold War (Haglund 1997; Jockel and Sokolsky 2009; Pentland 2004). It implies that the EU is overwhelmingly perceived as an economic, but not as a foreign and security policy actor (Croci and Tossutti 2007, 2009; Rayroux 2019). While Canadian diplomats do of course interact with the EU in the context of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) – Canada has even made small contributions to selected Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions – and also work with European partners on policy-specific issues (Bendiek et al. 2018), the EU's foreign policy role has little influence on how Europe is perceived in Canadian public discourse. In the above-cited Eurobarometer survey, 47 per cent of Canadian respondents mentioned the EU's "economic, industrial and trading power" as one of its two main assets – more than in any other of the eleven states included in the survey. By contrast, only 18 per cent mentioned the EU's "ability to promote peace and democracy outside its borders" (European Commission 2017, Table Q1T). Such perceptions have complicated attempts by the EU to broaden the bilateral relationship beyond economic issues (Dolata-Kreutzkamp 2010; Rayroux 2019).



The fourth and final determinant of Canadian perceptions of the EU has do to with *Canadian party politics*. Control of Canada's federal government has, for the country's entire history, alternated between two main parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives (Johnston 2017; Wiseman 2016). In the period since the Second World War, the Liberal Party emerged as the dominant party, with a particularly solid base in Quebec. Its international policies are grounded in the ideas of liberal internationalism, first formulated by Lester B. Pierson in the 1950s, which emphasize multilateralism, international institutions and respect for international law (Keating 2012; Nossal, Roussel and Paquin 2015, 150–155). Since the 1970s, the Liberals have combined these ideas with economic policies that aimed at reduced dependency on the US (Christian and Campbell 1990, 68–93; Mérand and Vandemoortele 2011, 431–436). These positions have made the Liberal Party a strong proponent of Canada's membership in international organizations – including NATO – and of diversification strategies that counterbalance US influence. They have also contributed to a general sympathy for the multilateral project of European integration and to a willingness to pursue joint projects with the EU as a partner.

The international policies of the Conservative Party, which controlled the federal government at important junctures in 1957–1963, 1984–1993 and 2006–2015, are rooted in a strong attachment to the British tradition. In the 1950s and 1960s, loyalty to the UK and the Commonwealth made the party a staunch critic of US influence, but this position shifted in the 1980s, when Prime Minister Mulroney embraced continental free trade (Christian and Campbell 1990, 150–165; Mérand and Vandemoortele 2011, 433–437; Woolstencroft 2016). For the Conservatives, this position was not perceived as being anti-British (or anti-European); rather it was rooted in an ideological preference for economic liberalization. In the 2000s, under Prime Minister Harper, relations with the US and many multilateral organizations deteriorated, but the Conservative government continued to pursue a free trade strategy and explicitly affirmed its link to the UK through a number of symbolic policies emphasizing the British monarchy (Paris 2014, 277–286). Based on these convictions, Conservatives have in the past decades also supported closer Canada–EU cooperation – in large part because the UK was a member of the EU, and as long as bilateral relations were primarily economic in nature.

In short, according to the dominant, pre-Brexit Canadian perception, the EU is (a) conceptualized through a British lens as an *intergovernmental organization*, rather than a supranational actor; (b) perceived in vaguely favourable terms because it may provide a *counterbalance to the US*; (c) approached primarily as an *economic and trade entity*, rather than as a global player in political and security affairs; and (d) viewed as an *international partner for Canada* by actors across the political spectrum, because it is situated at the intersection of Liberal and the Conservative foreign policy priorities. This perception of the EU is of course not universally shared, but it does describe the general tendency with which both Canadian policy-makers and the interested public have approached the EU over the past decades.

How can we classify the main factors that have shaped this perception? Building on the distinction between exogenous (EU-related), endogenous (Canada-related) and global factors developed in the Introduction to this volume (Speyer, Chaban and Niemann 2020, 10–12), one striking insight is that the EU's own policies and activities have had a relatively limited effect on Canadian perceptions. Such *exogenous factors* have sometimes been at the root of short-term “irritants” in the Canada–EU relationship, such as the controversies over fisheries, the Arctic, the Alberta oil sands, or visa reciprocity. They have thus been triggers for debates about Canada–EU relations, but longer-term interpretations of the bilateral relationship – and hence the overall Canadian perceptions of the EU – have been shaped primarily by more deep-seated *endogenous factors*. These include Canada's colonial traditions as well as political party ideologies. In addition, *global factors* such as Canada's membership in NATO and its dependency on the US have also been influential. As we shall see in the following sections, Canadian debates about Brexit follow the same pattern: the UK's decision to leave the EU, an exogenous factor, has triggered debates about Canada's relationship to Europe, but the content of these debates reflects endogenous and to a lesser extent global factors.

### Researching Canada's perceptions of the EU after Brexit: a focus on elite discourse

Unsurprisingly given Canada's historical link to the UK, Brexit has been extensively discussed in Canadian media reporting, especially when compared to other EU-related developments. However, public attitudes remain in flux. According to an opinion survey published in August 2016, most Canadians see Brexit in a negative light; strong pluralities of respondents characterized it as the wrong decision for both the UK (44 per cent) and the EU (47 per cent), with negative effects on both entities' economy and influence on the world stage. Yet when asked if Brexit was the right or the wrong decision *for Canada*, a large majority of respondents (61 per cent) chose the “don't know” option (Ipsos Mori 2016, Tables MG1\_1–3 and MG3).

In the light of this ambiguity in public opinion, this chapter examines positions taken by Canadian parties and politicians in debating Brexit. This focus on political elites is appropriate in a constellation in which most members of the public have not conclusively made up their minds about the impact of Brexit, and in which attempts by opinion leaders to push the reconfiguration of public perceptions into a specific direction hence have the potential to be particularly consequential. This chapter analyses public statements on Brexit by representatives of Canada's two main parties, the Liberal Party (which at the time of writing forms the federal government) and the Conservative Party (which forms the official opposition); it provides a qualitative analysis of how the EU and the UK are portrayed, and which implications for the future of Canada–Europe relations can be drawn from the respective discourses.



In contrast to the ambiguous attitudes in the broader population, Canadian politicians have not shied away from taking clear positions on Brexit, which differ substantially between political parties. In line with most of the UK's Western allies, the Liberal government led by Justin Trudeau sided with British Prime Minister David Cameron and the "Remain" side in the referendum (CBC 2016). After the Brexit vote, Trudeau issued a short statement, affirming that Canada and the UK are linked by "deep historical ties and common values" and pledging that Canada would "build relations with both parties as they forge a new relationship" (Trudeau, cited in *Maclean's* 2016). Trudeau has made a firm commitment to negotiating a post-Brexit trade agreement with the UK, which he argues should be based on CETA, but could subsequently be expanded (*National Post* 2017). Yet in spite of this commitment to positive relations with the UK, he has in his public statements also alluded to the fact that he sees Canada more closely aligned with the EU-27 than with the post-Brexit UK. In a press conference during a visit to Ireland in July 2017, he expressed indirect criticism of the UK as follows:

There are tremendous opportunities for countries like Canada and Ireland at a time where perhaps our significant allies and trading partners, in the case of the UK and US, are turning inward or at least turning in a different direction, to make the pitch that Canada and Ireland are places that are exciting and open to the world in a positive, progressive way.

(Trudeau, cited in *Irish Times* 2017)

In February 2017, Trudeau travelled to Strasbourg to address the European Parliament (EP) – he was the first sitting Canadian Prime Minister to do so. The occasion was the EP's ratification vote on CETA, but Trudeau went out of his way to portray the EU as much more than just an economic partner for Canada:

[O]ver the course of our historic partnership, Canada and the EU have stood side-by-side on the things that matter. Things like maintaining global security. Advancing the values of peace and justice. And ensuring our peoples' prosperity through trade and investment. We've worked together on issues like climate change, and the rights of women and girls around the world. And, ladies and gentlemen, I am confident that we will achieve tremendous things together in the years to come [...]. The European Union is a truly remarkable achievement, and an unprecedented model for peaceful cooperation. Canada knows that an effective European voice on the global stage isn't just preferable – it's essential.

(Trudeau 2017)

As the *New York Times* remarked in reporting on the speech, Trudeau "did not once mention Britain, the Commonwealth [...] or the United States", a fact that the paper's correspondent, James Kanter, interpreted as "a subtle indication, perhaps, of the reshaping of the trans-Atlantic order, and the

world itself, by the political events of 2016" (*New York Times* 2017). It certainly suggests that Brexit, along with the Trump presidency in the US, has made Canada's current government more, rather than less, appreciative of the importance of the EU as a like-minded, multilateralist partner on a broad range of policy files, well beyond CETA.

On the Conservative side of the political spectrum, Brexit has triggered the opposite sentiment. During the referendum campaign, Interim Party Leader Rona Ambrose took a neutral stance, but a number of candidates in the leadership race to replace her explicitly supported the "Leave" campaign. These included Deepak Obhrai, a former Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, who accused the EU of "ganging up on us" in the 2010 vote for a UN Security Council seat (*Huffington Post* 2016), but also – and more significantly – Andrew Scheer, the eventual winner of the race and current party leader. In a newspaper column published three days before the referendum, Scheer presented himself as "an admirer of British political traditions", which he argued are increasingly undermined in their mother country:

Local decisions by local representatives – that's the core of the Westminster system of responsible government that we inherited from Britain. Yet that's no longer what's practised in the UK. The supremacy of Parliament – the will of the people expressed through their elected representatives – is increasingly being replaced by the dictates of EU bureaucrats in Brussels. The consequence is less self-determination, less local decision making and less economic dynamism. Britain's foreign economic relations with historic partners such as Canada are now subject to an effective veto from countries such as Romania and Bulgaria. Then there's the host of EU regulations covering everything from hair dressers to vacuum cleaners and olive oil. [...] A stronger, more independent and economically dynamic United Kingdom would not only be good for the country itself, it would also be good for Canada and the entire world.

(Scheer 2016)

Since the referendum, Scheer has posted repeated Twitter messages reminding his followers of his pro-Brexit stance. He has made a post-Brexit Canada–UK trade agreement one of his foreign policy priorities and even travelled to Britain with the explicit purpose of symbolically promoting the idea (CBC 2018). At the Conservative policy convention in August 2018, Scheer invited British MEP Daniel Hannan, a prominent Brexiteer and supporter of closer cooperation between the "Anglosphere" countries Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK (CANZUK), to give a keynote speech, and the party passed a resolution calling for closer cooperation "among CANZUK countries" (Bell and Vucetic 2019). All of this suggests that Scheer sees Brexit primarily as an opportunity to embrace Canada's British traditions, while he has, since becoming party leader, not made any meaningful statements on Canada–EU relations.



It is important to note that there are few obvious policy differences between Liberals and Conservatives when it comes to Canada's relationship to Europe: both parties have expressed support for close ties with the UK after Brexit, including a new trade agreement if necessary; neither has suggested that Canada should walk away from CETA and its strategic partnership with the EU. And yet, both Trudeau and Scheer have been quite eager to employ references to Brexit to mobilize their respective political base. This became evident, for instance, in the House of Commons in January 2019, when Trudeau deflected a question by Scheer on Canada-China relations by stating that he would "take no lessons from the Leader of the Opposition, whose only pronouncement on foreign policy has been to come down on one side of the most divisive, destructive debate to happen in the UK for an awfully long time", to which Scheer retorted that "[t]he Prime Minister came down on the losing side of that debate" (House of Commons 2019). In the run-up to the October 2019 election, in which Trudeau's Liberals were reduced to a minority government, the prime minister referred to Scheer's pro-Brexit stance as evidence that the opposition leader would bring "far-right, American style politics" to Canada (Twitter post, 7 October 2019). In discourses of this kind, references to Brexit are not necessarily meant to make a policy statement on Canada-Europe relations – but they convey messages about perceptions of the EU and the UK which are potentially highly consequential.

### Discussion: towards competing transatlantic relationships?

Even if we acknowledge that public pronouncements by politicians on foreign policy often serve primarily symbolic purposes, the preceding discussion suggests that Brexit has triggered a shift in Canadian political discourse about Europe. The statements by Trudeau and Scheer are evidence of a *politicization of Canada-Europe relations* that undermines the long-standing domestic consensus on transatlantic relations. We can speak of a politicization in two senses. First, while relations to the EU have previously been perceived by both parties as predominantly economic in nature, it is noteworthy that both party leaders emphasize political considerations and assessments. Second, their statements raise the prospect that each of Canada's main parties might embrace a different one of two European relationships, which are – at least implicitly – conceived as competing. This implies that the long-standing functional distinction between the two pillars of Canada's European relationship – security-Europe (via NATO) and economy-Europe (via the EU) – could be overshadowed by a geographical, but strongly politically charged, distinction between EU-Europe (endorsed by the Liberals) and UK-Europe (endorsed by the Conservatives).

While neither party argues for cutting off relations with the less positively perceived European entity, this politicization could mean that Canada's foreign policy priorities shift back and forth between EU-Europe and UK-Europe based on short-term factors, such as domestic election results. This kind of political confrontation would be reflected in a bifurcation of Europe-related

perceptions in Canada's political elites, and most likely also in the broader population. The model of EU-Europe would embrace the EU as a beacon of multilateralism and enlightened/progressive values, and hence a partner for far-reaching economic and political cooperation, while the UK would be presented as an important economic partner, but with less stellar political credentials. By contrast, the model of UK-Europe would be based on a perception of the UK as Canada's oldest and closest political and economic ally, tied to Canada by the Westminster system, the monarchy and perhaps a reinvigorated Commonwealth (or a CANZUK cooperation), whereas the EU would be presented as a bureaucratic Moloch that one can surely do business with, but whose overzealous market regulation and embrace of "leftist" political causes (from environmentalism to gender equality) make it unattractive as a political partner. Such a competitive relationship between two "Europes", if it were to fully develop, would also have repercussions for Canada's regional and linguistic communities. EU-Europe would likely have more appeal for French Canadians – in spite of the fact that some separatists in Quebec were, at least initially, sympathetic towards Brexit (Hébert 2019) – while UK-Europe would be embraced particularly in the (staunchly Conservative) west of the country.

Global factors could provide an additional complication. Canada's relationship with NATO – which the UK as well as 21 of the EU-27 states also belong to – would probably remain an area of consensus between the two models, though advocates of EU-Europe might be willing to explore new bilateral, non-NATO security policy initiatives with the EU. The US is a greater source of uncertainty, especially as long as Donald Trump remains president. Trump's unilateralist and protectionist sentiments are at odds with the convictions underlying both EU-Europe and UK-Europe. However, Trump has also expressed sympathies for a post-Brexit trade agreement with the UK (*The Telegraph* 2018). This raises, at least theoretically, the possibility of a trilateral US-UK-Canada trade deal – a revival of what was previously called the "North Atlantic Triangle" (Brebner 1966) – which would likely be embraced by supporters of UK-Europe, while supporters of EU-Europe would be sceptical.

From the vantage point of the EU, but also from the perspective of Canadians interested in stability, reliability and domestic consensus on their country's external partnerships, this politicization scenario describes a rather unattractive trajectory. Given that the Brexit process still has not concluded, it is by no means certain that Canada's relations to Europe will take this turn. A "soft" Brexit that would see the UK remain closely aligned to the EU's Single Market, for instance, would greatly reduce competition between EU-Europe and UK-Europe in the economic sphere. However, recent political debates in Canada suggest that the shift towards two competing "Europes" in Canadian perceptions of transatlantic relations is a realistic possibility, and likely the greatest danger that Brexit implies for Canada-Europe relations.



## Conclusion

As the discussion in this chapter has shown, Brexit could be extraordinarily disruptive for Canada–Europe relations. This danger lies less in the policy consequences of Brexit, which appear entirely manageable, but in its potential to trigger a domestic politicization of Canada–Europe relations. This politicization would pit two competing visions of Canada's transatlantic relationship against each other (labelled here EU–Europe and UK–Europe), which are each based on their own set of perceptions of the EU and the UK. This scenario would not only create domestic political conflict within Canada; it would also undermine the longer-term stability and predictability of the Canada–Europe relationship.

The ability of EU external policies to counteract this development is limited, but far from non-existent. To be sure, Canadian views of the EU have, as we have seen, for decades depended mainly on endogenous and global factors, rather than on EU policies or activities. However, EU and UK negotiators can influence the form that Brexit takes, and this is clearly not irrelevant to Canadian perceptions. Most importantly, political confrontation between competing conceptions of Europe would be less likely – or at least less divisive – if an amicable EU–UK relationship developed post-Brexit. It would also be beneficial for Canadian perceptions of the EU if European and British negotiators explicitly developed institutional openings for Canada (and other external partners) to opt into selected provisions of their post-Brexit relationship, so that Canada's relations to the EU and to the UK are not perceived as mutually exclusive. At a more pragmatic level, EU diplomats in Canada are well advised to engage not only with the current Liberal government, but also with the Conservative opposition, among whom the model of UK–Europe enjoys considerable attraction. While the EU has thus far understood Brexit primarily as an internal challenge, it is important that EU policy also acknowledges its external dimension.

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