

THE BBC AND BREXIT

SURVEY OF BBC RADIO 4's
'POLITICALLY: TEN YEARS AFTER BREXIT'
8–19 JUNE 2026

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Executive Summary

BBC Radio 4's *Politically: Ten Years After Brexit* was a ten-episode documentary series broadcast in June 2026. The programme was presented by Alex Forsyth and examined the consequences of the 2016 referendum across ten policy areas. It was a pre-recorded production in which every contributor selection, question and editorial summary was a deliberate choice, made without the time pressures of live broadcasting.

This analysis identifies three structural features of the series. The evidence for each is set out below, along with the analysis of what this means in terms of the BBC's impartiality obligations.

First, the near-total absence of Leave-sympathetic expert voices. Of 20 guest interviews conducted across the ten episodes, only one was principally associated with arguing the positive case for Brexit: Julian Jessop, an IEA economist interviewed in Episode 1, who received broadly comparable airtime to his counterpart David Smith. The production demonstrated that it was capable of constructing a balanced pairing but chose not to replicate that approach in any of the nine subsequent episodes. From Episode 2 onwards, every contributor pairing consisted of voices whose published positions and institutional affiliations were either critical of Brexit's outcomes or broadly neutral-to-sceptical. Across the series as a whole, Julian Jessop's 771 words amounted to just 4.6% of the 16,620 words of substantive contributor speech identified in this analysis; the remaining 95.4% came from speakers who either documented Brexit's costs or analysed its consequences without making any case for its benefits.

More significantly, the pattern extended beyond the exclusion of identifiable advocates of Brexit. Across the series, the BBC repeatedly selected contributors from institutions whose published work had concentrated on documenting Brexit's economic, constitutional or regulatory costs, while selecting almost nobody from institutions whose published work had concentrated on examining or advancing the case for Brexit's potential advantages.

The result was not simply an imbalance of individual contributors, but a consistent imbalance in the range of institutional perspectives brought to bear on the subject. The one occasion on which any contributor's institution was characterised by its political or ideological orientation – presenter Alex Forsyth's description of the IEA as 'a right-wing free market think tank' – was applied to this same, sole exception.

Second, the incomplete or absent disclosure of contributors' institutional positions. Sam Lowe was introduced only as working for Flint Global, a trade consultancy.

His previous role as a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for European Reform – a think tank that explicitly opposed Brexit and has consistently published research critical of its trade consequences – was not disclosed.

Sarah Main was introduced as former executive director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE); the programme did not characterise CaSE's institutional position, which was explicitly opposed to the UK leaving the Horizon research programme.

Separately, UK in a Changing Europe is named as the institutional home of Joël Reland (Episodes 6 and 8) and Jannike Wachowiak (Episode 9), but the programme provides no characterisation of UKICE's post-2016 research orientation or the contested nature of its claim to impartiality.

A further and distinct concern is that UKICE's senior personnel include two other contributors to the series: Paula Surridge is a UKICE deputy director (Episode 10) and Jill Rutter is its senior research fellow (Episodes 6 and 8). The BBC was therefore drawing, without full transparency, on the analytical output of a single institution and its close network across five of the ten episodes.

Third, the editorial framing exercised by the presenter in her own voice. Alex Forsyth's delivered 6,552 words – a larger contribution than any individual guest. Her episode-closing summaries were delivered in the first person and consistently characterised Brexit outcomes in negative terms. These were editorial judgements, not factual reports, and they were made by the BBC's own correspondent, not by contributors who could be identified and assessed by listeners. Under the BBC's Editorial Guidelines (Section 2.4.12), the presenter's own framing is subject to the same impartiality requirements as contributor selection.

These three failures were compounded by a further pattern of bias by omission: the absence of the positive case for Brexit's trade, immigration and regulatory policies. When raised in Forsyth's questions, these arguments were quickly rebutted without a sustained advocate. Together, these editorial choices produced a deficit audit rather than an impartial examination: every episode catalogued, and in most cases regretted, Brexit's consequences. This handling is not consistent with the BBC's public purpose of impartial journalism or with its obligations under the Editorial Guidelines on matters of public policy controversy.

An impartial version of the series would not have been difficult to construct. The trade episode could have paired Sam Lowe or Soumaya Keynes with a proponent of the case for

independent trade policy, such as Shanker Singham¹, Catherine McBride², or a former UK trade negotiator. The immigration episode could have included a contributor able to make the democratic case for ending free movement, such as David Goodhart³ of Policy Exchange, rather than simply confining the debate to its data-driven costs. The regulatory freedom episode could have included a proponent of retained-EU-law reform, or a scientist such as Professor Angela Karp⁴ of Rothamsted Research on the opportunities of post-Brexit gene-editing divergence. None of this would have required departing from expert contributors; it would have required treating the case for Brexit's benefits as a legitimate subject of expert debate, in the same way the case against was treated throughout.

¹ Singham, S., 'What should the government seek from the EU reset?', UK in a Changing Europe. Available at: <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/what-should-the-government-look-for-the-eu-reset/>.

² McBride, C. (2023), 'Has Brexit Really Harmed UK Trade? Countering the Office for Budget Responsibility's Claims', Institute of Economic Affairs, 6 November 2023. Available at: <https://iea.org.uk/publications/has-brexit-really-harmed-uk-trade-countering-the-office-of-budgetary-responsibilitys-claims/>.

³ Goodhart, D. (2017), *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*, C. Hurst & Co. Goodhart is Head of the Demography, Immigration and Integration Unit at Policy Exchange.

⁴ Karp, A., quoted in 'Expert reaction to media reports that a "reset" with the EU could require the precision breeding act to be dropped from UK legislation', Science Media Centre. Available at: <https://www.sciencemediacentre.org/expert-reaction-to-media-reports-that-a-reset-with-the-eu-could-require-the-precision-breeding-act-to-be-dropped-from-uk-legislation/>.

Part One: Statistical Overview

1.1 Programme Description

Politically: Ten Years After Brexit comprised ten episodes, each with a duration of approximately 14 minutes, broadcast daily on weekday afternoons over a fortnight spanning Monday 8th June and Friday 19th June 2026.⁵ Each episode addressed a distinct policy area:

The Economy; Trade; Immigration; Northern Ireland; The Union; Regulatory Freedom; Science and Academia; Fishing and Farming; Impact on Europe; and Impact on Politics.

The series was presented by Alex Forsyth, who introduced herself as a BBC correspondent who had covered Brexit from Brussels and Westminster. Each episode followed an identical structural pattern: an opening archive montage of political voices from the referendum period and its aftermath, followed by a scene-setting narration from Forsyth, then a sustained discussion with two principal contributors, broken by further Forsyth questions and summaries, and concluding with Forsyth's editorial summary, delivered in her own voice.

Because the series was pre-recorded and pre-edited, every element – contributor selection, editorial summary, question framing, and the archive montage itself – reflected a deliberate production decision. As such, the BBC cannot invoke the constraints of live broadcasting to explain any imbalance identified.

1.2 Contributor Overview

The programme's presenter, Alex Forsyth, was joined across the ten episodes by 18 unique guest contributors, filling 20 interview slots – two guests per episode – alongside a small number of archive clips used in the repeating montage sequence. One pairing, Joël Reland and Jill Rutter, was repeated in a later episode (Episodes 6 and 8), accounting for the difference between the 18 unique individuals and the 20 interview appearances. The table lists all contributors with their institutional affiliations, episode appearances, and total word counts.

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002xpc2>

Contributor / Institution	Words	Episode(s)	Note
Alex Forsyth (presenter)	6,552	All	
Joël Reland (UK in a Changing Europe)	1,919	6, 8	UKICE named; orientation not characterised
Jill Rutter (Institute for Government)	1,824	6, 8	
Rob Ford (Univ. of Manchester)	1,166	10	
Madeleine Sumption (Migration Observatory)	1,123	3	
David Smith (Sunday Times)	1,089	1	
Sam Lowe (Flint Global / formerly Centre for European Reform)	1,062	2	Centre for European Reform not disclosed
John Campbell (BBC Northern Ireland)	949	4	
Dani Payne (Social Market Foundation)	918	7	
Jannike Wachowiak (UK in a Changing Europe)	817	9	UKICE named; orientation not characterised
Julian Jessop (IEA)	771	1	Only contributor associated with arguing Brexit's benefits
Richard Wyn Jones (Cardiff University)	727	5	
Mujtaba Rahman (Eurasia Group)	698	9	Prior European Commission role not disclosed
Katy Hayward (Queen's University Belfast)	694	4	
Soumaya Keynes (Financial Times)	665	2	
Sarah Main (formerly CaSE)	651	7	CaSE named; position not characterised
Nicola McEwan (University of Glasgow)	618	5	
Paula Surridge (University of Bristol)	499	10	
James Bowes (University of Warwick)	430	3	
Archive clips – recurring opening montage (all 10 episodes)			
Nigel Farage	120	All	Leave-celebratory; archive only
David Cameron	100	All	Neutral (result announcement); archive only
Nicola Sturgeon	100	All	Remain-aligned; archive only
Ursula von der Leyen	60	All	Remain-aligned; archive only
Boris Johnson	60	All	Leave-implementing; archive only
Unnamed Female (cheering Farage)	60	All	Leave-celebratory; archive only
Chorus (singing)	30	All	Leave-celebratory ('Bye-bye, EU'); archive only
Theresa May	30	All	Leave-implementing; archive only
Archive clips – Episode 4 only (not present in recurring montage)			
Sir Jeffrey Donaldson	20	4	DUP/unionist; archive
Newsreader	16	4	Neutral report; archive
Paul Givan	15	4	DUP/unionist; archive
Brandon Lewis	11	4	Archive only

Jill Rutter (Institute for Government) and Joël Reland (UKICE) appeared in both Episodes 6 and 8; the figures above are their combined word total across both appearances. Yellow shading indicates incomplete disclosure of institutional orientation.

1.3 Structural Imbalance in Contributor Selection

The 18 guest contributors, across their twenty interview appearances, were assessed by the publicly known orientation of their institutional affiliations and/or published work. Setting aside the question of individual coding, which is inevitably subject to some interpretive variance, the structural picture is as follows.

No contributor across the ten episodes advocated, or was given space to articulate, the positive case for Brexit's trade policy rationale, its immigration system, its regulatory freedom agenda or its constitutional and sovereignty arguments. The one partial exception – Julian Jessop in Episode 1 – received approximately 42% of the combined contributor airtime in that episode against David Smith's 58%, a distribution that still weighted the episode against the single voice arguing Brexit's advantages. He did not appear in any other episode.

Across the remaining nine episodes, the pairing structure produced the following combinations:

- Episode 2: **Soumaya Keynes** (Financial Times economics columnist, whose published analysis has consistently identified Brexit as economically costly) and **Sam Lowe** (Flint Global, formerly a senior researcher at the Centre for European Reform, a think tank whose stated purpose is to promote European integration and which explicitly opposed Brexit)
- Episode 3: **Madeleine Sumption** (Migration Observatory, University of Oxford, broadly analytical on immigration data) and **James Bowes** (University of Warwick, data analyst whose contributions focused on post-Brexit net migration increases)
- Episode 4: **John Campbell** (BBC Northern Ireland, analytical) and **Katy Hayward** (Queen's University Belfast, whose published research has consistently emphasised the destabilising effects of Brexit on Northern Ireland's political and economic arrangements)
- Episode 5: **Nicola McEwan** (University of Glasgow, whose research has focused on how Brexit complicated Scottish devolution and amplified independence sentiment) and **Richard Wyn Jones** (Cardiff University, whose published work has argued that Brexit was constitutionally and economically damaging to Wales)
- Episode 6: **Joël Reland** (UK in a Changing Europe) and **Jill Rutter** (Institute for Government)

- Episode 7: **Sarah Main** (formerly CaSE, which took a formal institutional position that Brexit would damage UK science) and **Dani Payne** (Social Market Foundation, whose contributions emphasised negative consequences for student mobility and higher education)
- Episode 8: **Jill Rutter** (IfG) and **Joël Reland** (UK in a Changing Europe)
- Episode 9: **Jannike Wachowiak** (UK in a Changing Europe) and **Mujtaba Rahman** (Eurasia Group, whose public commentary has consistently argued that Brexit was damaging, and that closer UK-EU alignment is necessary)
- Episode 10: **Rob Ford** (University of Manchester, co-author of *Brexitland* and publicly known Remain voter whose analytical framework treats the Brexit vote as having released destructive anti-establishment energies) and **Paula Surridge** (University of Bristol, political sociologist)

In none of these pairings did a contributor principally associated with arguing the positive case for Brexit's trade policy, immigration system, regulatory agenda or constitutional rationale appear. This is not a matter of contested coding: whatever view one takes of individual classifications, no contributor who has publicly advanced a sustained positive case for Brexit's trade, immigration or regulatory agenda appeared in nine of the ten episodes.

The series comprised ten episodes of approximately 14 minutes each – short enough that the analytical content of each was necessarily condensed, a constraint which makes the contributor choice even more significant. With limited airtime in each episode, the production had to be highly selective about which voices to include and which analytical frames to establish. The effect of using a small and institutionally concentrated pool of contributors across the series was therefore amplified rather than mitigated by the format: each contributor's framing occupied a larger proportion of the available analytical space than would be the case in a longer programme, and there was correspondingly less room for competing perspectives to be heard, even within individual episodes.

There is a further consequence of the concentrated pool. A listener following the series across all ten episodes would have encountered Jill Rutter and Joël Reland together in Episodes 6 and 8, and a UKICE-connected contributor in Episodes 6, 8 and 9. The cumulative effect of repeated exposure to voices from the same institutional network – across what was presented as a comprehensive ten-part examination of Brexit's consequences – reinforces rather than challenges a single analytical framework.

The scale of the imbalance is further illustrated by the word count data. Julian Jessop, the sole exception, contributed 771 words. The total substantive contributor word count across the series – excluding the presenter and the short archive clips – was 16,620 words. Jessop's contribution therefore represented **4.6%** of all substantive contributor speech across ten episodes. The remaining **95.4%** came from contributors who either documented Brexit's costs or analysed its consequences without advancing the case for its benefits.

The archive clips used in the recurring opening montage should also be noted, though they are brief and not part of the analytical content of the series. The montage comprised eight voices repeated identically at the opening of all ten episodes: David Cameron, an unnamed female voice calling out 'Thank you, Nigel. Thank you, Nigel.', Nigel Farage, Nicola Sturgeon, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Ursula von der Leyen, and a chorus singing 'Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.' Separately, Episode 4 (Northern Ireland) contained four additional one-off archive clips specific to that episode: Brandon Lewis, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, Paul Givan, and a newsreader reporting Givan's resignation. These did not form part of the recurring montage.

Of the eight recurring montage voices, three were clearly Leave-celebratory in character: the unnamed female, Nigel Farage, and the Chorus. Two were Leave-implementing: Boris Johnson and Theresa May. David Cameron was neutral in the context used (reporting the result). Sturgeon and Von der Leyen were both Remain-aligned. The montage therefore leant towards Leave in its emotional register, though all clips are historical in nature and drawn from a fixed archive pool rather than selected to represent current analytical positions.

The imbalance identified in this report thus concerns the 16,620 words of substantive and contemporary contributor analysis, rather than the 590 combined words of repeating montage and one-off archive clips.

1.4 Non-Disclosure of Institutional Affiliations

Three of the organisations from which contributors are drawn have institutional histories directly relevant to the series' subject matter, but none of this background was disclosed to listeners.

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE)

UKICE is named in the programme as the institutional home of Joël Reland (Episodes 6 and 8) and Jannike Wachowiak (Episode 9), and listeners were therefore aware of the

contributors' links.⁶ However, the programme provided no characterisation whatsoever of UKICE's research orientation, the character of its post-2016 output, or the contested nature of its claim to impartiality.

UKICE was established in 2015 by the ESRC⁷ to communicate social science research on the UK-EU relationship ahead of the anticipated referendum. Its post-2016 output has been predominantly focused on documenting Brexit's consequences and has been characterised by critics, including many Brexit supporters, as reflecting a perspective broadly sympathetic to the Remain case, particularly in its characterisation of Brexit's economic and institutional consequences. Its director, Anand Menon, is one of the most prominent public voices arguing that Brexit has been economically costly,⁸ and UKICE's published research includes estimates of long-term GDP reduction attributable to Brexit ranging from 2–3% to as high as 8%, depending on methodology.⁹ UKICE describes itself as independent and impartial, though its research orientation has been questioned by some Brexit supporters; listeners were not informed of that debate.¹⁰

A further and distinct concern is one of institutional concentration. UKICE's senior personnel include two other contributors to the series: Paula Surridge is a UKICE deputy director (Episode 10) and Jill Rutter holds a UKICE senior research fellowship (Episodes 6 and 8).¹¹ The series therefore drew on the analytical output of a single institution and its close network across five of its ten episodes without making this pattern transparent to listeners. The combined word count of contributors from UKICE or its senior network – Reland (1,919), Wachowiak (817), Surridge (499) and Rutter (1,824) – totalled 5,059 words: approaching Alex Forsyth's own contribution of 6,552 words and making the UKICE network by far the largest single institutional presence.

⁶ UK in a Changing Europe, About page: <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/about-us/>. See also: Menon, A. and Rutter, J. (2022), 'UK in a Changing Europe: injecting social science into a polarised political debate', LSE Impact Blog, August 2022.

⁷ <https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/>

⁸ Menon, A. (2026), 'The EU referendum gave us an opportunity to improve people's lives and we failed', LSE EUROPP Blog, 16 June 2026 – published during the broadcast window of the series. Available at:

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2026/06/16/brexit-10-anand-memon-eu-referendum-interview/>. In this interview, Menon stated that 'history has been kind to economic modellers in the sense that those serious economic organisations that tried to model the impact of Brexit got it more or less right.'

⁹ UK in a Changing Europe (2019), cited in Portes, J. (2023), 'How much has Brexit cost the UK economy?', available at: <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/how-much-has-brexit-cost-the-uk-economy/>. The range of 2–6% GDP loss was projected in UKICE's 2019 modelling of a hard Brexit scenario. More recent UKICE-hosted analysis puts the figure higher: see Bloom, N. et al. (2025), 'Brexit's Impact on the UK Economy', hosted at <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/brexits-impact-on-the-uk-economy/>, estimating UK GDP per capita to be 6–8% lower than it would otherwise have been by 2025.

¹⁰ News-watch identified this pattern as early as 2016, noting that Radio 4's World at One introduced Anand Menon as Professor of European Politics at King's College London without disclosing his role as director of UKICE, whose published output was 'hugely critical of the Brexit case': News-watch, 'BBC Bias – A Progress Report' (2016), available at: <https://news-watch.co.uk/bbc-bias-a-progress-report/>. Menon's own statement on the ending of ESRC funding in 2025 acknowledged that funding an initiative 'charged with providing impartial information about one of the most polarised debates of recent times' had 'demonstrated a significant amount of courage': <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/announcement/statement/>

¹¹ Wikipedia, 'UK in a Changing Europe': https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_in_a_Changing_Europe. Deputy directors include Paula Surridge; senior research fellow is Jill Rutter.

Centre for European Reform (CER)

Sam Lowe, contributor in Episode 2, was identified in the programme only as working for Flint Global, a trade consultancy. He was not identified as a former Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for European Reform,¹² a think tank whose stated purpose includes promoting the case for European integration and which explicitly opposed Brexit before and after the referendum.¹³ The CER has consistently published research identifying economic costs from Brexit.¹⁴ Mr Lowe's trade analysis in Episode 2 was presented as the assessment of an independent trade expert; listeners were given no means of knowing his prior institutional alignment.

Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE)

Sarah Main was introduced in Episode 7 as having been executive director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering¹⁵ during the Brexit period. The institutional name was therefore provided to the audience. However the programme did not communicate that CaSE took a post-referendum institutional position against the UK leaving the Horizon research programme¹⁶, and that its public communications after the referendum consistently characterised Brexit as posing a significant challenge to UK science. Listeners who were not already aware of CaSE's public stance would have been unable to assess the institutional context of the analysis they were hearing. The disclosure of the name without any characterisation of the institutional position was thus incomplete in a context where that position is directly relevant to the subject matter of the episode.

¹² Sam Lowe's CER fellowship is listed in his professional biography and archived CER publications, including: Lowe, S. (2021), 'The UK–EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement: An assessment', Centre for European Reform. Available at: <https://www.cer.eu>

¹³ Centre for European Reform, About page: <https://www.cer.eu/about>. The CER describes its mission as making 'the case for a strong and effective European Union.' The CER published extensively against Brexit before and after the referendum, including its dedicated Brexit research hub at <https://www.cer.eu/research/brexit>

¹⁴ Springford, J. and Spisak, A. (2026), 'Ten years after the Brexit referendum: The costs of separation', Centre for European Reform, 18 June 2026 – published during the broadcast window of the series. Available at:

<https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/essay/2026/ten-years-after-brexit-referendum-costs-separation>. The CER has maintained a dedicated 'Cost of Brexit' research series since 2018, available at: <https://www.cer.eu/research/cost-of-brexit>. Springford's doppelgänger methodology has consistently estimated the cost of Brexit at between 5% and 5.5% of GDP. For a published critique of the CER's methodology from a Brexit-supporting perspective, see: Policy Exchange (2022), 'Why the Centre for European Reform is wrong about Brexit', available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/blogs/why-the-centre-for-european-reform-is-wrong-about-brexit/>

¹⁵ <https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/>

¹⁶ CaSE was formally neutral during the referendum campaign itself (see Main, S. (2016), 'Neutral in the EU referendum? It's been hard', available at: <https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/analysis-and-publications/detail/neutral-in-the-eu-referendum-its-been-hard/>), but on the day after the referendum result, Dr Main said the outcome presented 'a real challenge for our sector' and that 'Science is an area where the relationship between the UK and the EU was particularly beneficial.' She noted that scientists 'won billions of pounds of research funding for the UK . . . above and beyond what we put in', and that 'free movement of people in the EU made it easy for scientists to travel, collaborate and share ideas with the best in Europe and for companies and universities in the UK to easily access top talent from Europe.' (<https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/press/detail/case-responds-to-eu-referendum-result/>) See also Main, S. (2017), evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry into the impact of leaving the EU on UK science and research, in which CaSE set out its formal position opposing exclusion from Horizon and EU research collaboration frameworks.

European Commission (EC)

Mujtaba Rahman, contributor in Episode 9, was introduced only as Managing Director for Europe at the Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy. What was not disclosed is that prior to joining the Eurasia Group, Rahman worked as an economist at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN) – the Commission department responsible for promoting deeper European economic integration, coordinating EU international economic priorities and advocating for the EU's role as a global economic actor.¹⁷ He also previously worked at the UK Treasury.

The DG ECFIN role is directly material to the subject matter of Episode 9, which examined the UK-EU relationship and the case for closer alignment. A contributor who had worked within the institutional apparatus of the European Commission – whose core purpose is the promotion and deepening of European integration – was therefore not a neutral analytical voice on those questions, whatever his subsequent career in the private sector. Listeners were denied relevant institutional context when assessing Rahman's argument for closer EU alignment: his previous employment at the European Commission – the institution whose interests were directly engaged by that argument – was not disclosed.

Taken together, the CER non-disclosure in the case of Lowe, the name-without-context disclosures of CaSE and UKICE, the absence of any indication of the breadth of UKICE's network across the series, and the undisclosed European Commission background in the case of Rahman constitute a pattern of inadequate transparency. The BBC's Editorial Guidelines (Section 2.4.17) require that significant personal or institutional interests of contributors are made clear to audiences where relevant. In the two most clear-cut cases – Lowe and the CER, and Rahman and the European Commission – the relevant institutional interest is simply absent from the programme.

1.5 The Presenter's Editorial Role

Alex Forsyth's 6,552-word contribution represented 28.3% of all substantive spoken content in the series, excluding archive soundbites and the repeated opening montage. Her voice dominated the series more than any individual contributor, and her editorial summaries carried particular weight because they were delivered without attribution.¹⁸

¹⁷ Rahman's European Commission background is confirmed in his Eurasia Group biography: <https://www.eurasiagroup.net/people/mrahman>. The role and purpose of DG ECFIN is set out on the European Commission website: https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-agencies/economic-and-financial-affairs_en

¹⁸ 'Without attribution' means that these summaries were delivered in the same neutral narrating voice as the programme's factual reporting, rather than being flagged to listeners as one journalist's interpretation. The BBC's Editorial Guidelines (Section 2.4.12) permit presenters to offer professional judgements rooted in evidence and experience but require that

Each episode ended with a Forsyth summary of one to two paragraphs delivered in her own voice. These summaries were not presentations of competing views; they were editorial conclusions. A selection across the ten episodes illustrates the consistent pattern:

There's broad consensus among most economists that leaving has had an impact. The argument is around the extent and how long that might last. [Episode 1]

Brexit created uncertainty for businesses and destabilised the political situation in Northern Ireland. [Episode 4]

Brexit caused uncertainty around funding, collaboration, and the movement of academics and students between the UK and EU countries, which undermined confidence and stalled research. [Episode 7]

Brexit was a profound political moment, and perhaps one of the lasting consequences is how it accelerated the weakening of political allegiances, resulting in a more fragmented political system. [Episode 10]

Each of these formulations presents a contested assessment as settled fact. The Episode 1 summary – asserting ‘broad consensus among most economists’ before contributors have spoken – pre-empts the analytical discussion rather than emerging from it. The Episode 4 summary asserts causation (‘Brexit created uncertainty... and destabilised’) without qualification or attribution. The Episode 7 and 10 summaries characterise outcomes in exclusively negative terms.

The BBC’s Editorial Guidelines (Section 2.4.12) state that the requirement of due impartiality applies to the presenter’s own framing and commentary, not only to the selection of contributors.¹⁹ A pattern of episode-closing summaries that consistently settle on a negative assessment of Brexit, delivered in the authoritative first-person voice of a BBC correspondent, is itself an impartiality concern independent of what contributors say.

audiences be able to tell these from statements of fact; unattributed delivery is what prevented that distinction from being visible here. See Part Four for the full analysis.

¹⁹ BBC Editorial Guidelines (2025), Section 2.4.12. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/documents/bbc-editorial-guidelines-2025.pdf>

Part Two: Episode-by-Episode Analysis

The following analysis examines each episode in turn, addressing in each case: a summary of what was discussed; the contributors and any relevant non-disclosures; the specific framing choices made by Forsyth in her questions and summaries; and any significant omissions of argument or perspective specific to that episode. Quotations from the transcript are used throughout as the primary evidential basis. The analysis does not rely on attribution of intent to the production team; it is concerned with the editorial effect of choices that are on the record.

2.1 Episode 1: The Economy

Contributors: David Smith (Sunday Times, 1,089 words); Julian Jessop (IEA, 771 words).

Content

The episode focused on whether Brexit had damaged the UK economy, taking as its starting point two headline estimates: the OBR's 4% long-term GDP reduction and the NBER's 8% figure, recently cited by Chancellor Rachel Reeves. Smith explained the origin of both estimates and argued that while the initial shock was less severe than some had forecast, Brexit had weighed on business investment, trade, financial services and productivity. Jessop challenged the methodology of both figures, arguing that the OBR number was a crude average of heterogeneous studies and that the NBER figure depended on contested counterfactual comparisons with groups of countries that bore little resemblance to the UK.

The discussion turned to GDP per capita, where Smith noted the UK had performed poorly relative to France and Italy. Jessop contested this framing, arguing that Italy's apparent outperformance was explained by structural factors specific to the Italian economy unrelated to Brexit. The episode also addressed the 'Boris Wave': the post-2020 immigration surge and whether its effect on population growth had artificially improved nominal GDP figures. Both contributors agreed that separating Brexit effects from exogenous shocks – Covid, Ukraine, the Truss budget – was methodologically difficult. The closing exchange touched on the current debate over closer EU alignment and its potential economic effects.

Analysis

Episode 1 was the one episode in the series that approximated a balanced pairing, although still slightly weighted against the single voice arguing Brexit's benefits. Jessop received approximately 42% of combined contributor airtime, against Smith's 58%, and was given six

turns against Smith's five. He was permitted to push back substantively: his challenge to the OBR's 4% figure – 'all they actually did was take the crude average of 13 external studies' – was developed across two replies and was not immediately countermanded by Forsyth.

The episode nonetheless contained framing choices that merit scrutiny. Forsyth's scene-setting narration established the analytical framework before either contributor spoke:

The effect of leaving the EU on the economy has been one of the most contested aspects of Brexit, from dire warnings about multi-billion-pound budgetary black holes ahead of the referendum, to assertions that it has had no meaningful impact.

The phrase 'dire warnings... to assertions that it has had no meaningful impact' positioned the two ends of the spectrum asymmetrically: warnings were presented as substantive forecasts, while the sceptical position was characterised as mere 'assertions'. This framing was established before contributors spoke.

The closing summary asserted: 'There's broad consensus among most economists that leaving has had an impact.' This conflated the question of whether Brexit had any effect with the question of the magnitude and permanence of any negative effect – the latter being precisely what Jessop contested throughout. The summary thus narrowed the analytical conclusion in a direction Jessop had explicitly resisted.

The only 'would you accept' challenge in the entire series was directed at Jessop: 'Julian, would you accept it has had an impact on the economy?' This concession-seeking question was not put to Smith, to Lowe, to any UKICE contributor, or to any other guest across the ten episodes. After Jessop made his most effective analytical point – that comparing the UK with individual economies rather than the G7 average as a group produced a different picture of relative performance – Forsyth's response was not to pursue that point but to ask: 'David, a final thought from you?' Smith therefore had the final substantive word in the episode, following Jessop's strongest rebuttal.

Bias by omission – Episode 1: No economist who publicly argued before the referendum that Brexit need not be damaging – Patrick Minford, Gerard Lyons, Roger Bootle, Ruth Lea – appeared in the episode. The OBR's 4% figure was described by Forsyth as 'quite often cited' and treated as the working reference point,²⁰ while Jessop's methodological challenge to it was not followed up by either a question to Jessop developing this critique or a question

²⁰Office for Budget Responsibility, Economic and Fiscal Outlook, March 2022, Box 3.1: 'The long-run economic impact of Brexit'. The OBR states that its central assumption is that Brexit will reduce UK trade intensity by 15% in the long run relative to the counterfactual, reducing potential productivity by around 4%. Available at: <https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-march-2022/>

to Smith responding to it. A direct, data-grounded rebuttal of the pre-2016 baseline methodology was publicly available at the time of broadcast, drawing on ONS and Eurostat data to argue that UK-eurozone growth had converged before the referendum and that post-2016 underperformance was more plausibly attributable to energy prices, the oil and gas sector run-down and a pandemic-induced labour supply shock – factors independent of Brexit.²¹ This analysis also noted that UK greenfield foreign direct investment had continued at approximately \$70 billion per year in 2019–24 according to UNCTAD data,²² substantially higher than comparable EU economies, which was inconsistent with a Brexit-driven investment collapse. None of this argument was present in the episode, and no contributor who advanced it was included.

A further omission is notable for its completeness. At no point in the episode – or anywhere in the series – were the UK's ceased net contributions to the EU budget mentioned. The terms 'net contribution', 'budget contribution', 'membership fee' and 'divorce bill' do not appear in any of the ten episodes. Whatever the arguments over the figures used during the referendum campaign, the UK's net contribution to the EU budget – approximately £9–10 billion per year at the point of departure – was a real fiscal flow that ended.²³ It is the one unambiguous entry on the credit side of the Brexit ledger, and in an episode devoted to weighing Brexit's economic costs, it was never raised – even to be contextualised or dismissed. An economic audit that engages in detail with the OBR's 4% productivity assumption and the NBER's 8% GDP estimate, but never once mentions the ceased membership contributions, examined only one side of the account.

Significance: The production's capacity to pair contrasting analytical voices and give them broadly comparable airtime was established here. The absence of any equivalent pairing in the subsequent nine episodes could not be attributed to any structural feature of the format.

²¹ONS and Eurostat national accounts data. UK GDP growth relative to the eurozone is discussed in: Briefings for Britain (June 2026), 'UK's growth slowdown not down to Brexit', at <https://www.briefingsforbritain.co.uk/uks-growth-slowdown-not-down-to-brexite/>, citing ONS and Eurostat Chart 1.

²²UNCTAD World Investment Report 2024, Annex tables on greenfield FDI projects by host economy. UK greenfield FDI averaged approximately \$70 billion per year in 2019–24 against \$20–40 billion for France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Available at: <https://unctad.org/topic/investment/world-investment-report>

²³ The Office for Budget Responsibility's March 2020 Economic and Fiscal Outlook estimated the UK's net contribution to the EU at approximately £10 billion per year prior to departure. HM Treasury's European Union Finances statements record the net contribution series: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/eu-finances>

2.2 Episode 2: Trade

Contributors: Sam Lowe (Flint Global, 1,062 words); Soumaya Keynes (Financial Times, 665 words).

Non-disclosure: Sam Lowe was introduced only as working for Flint Global, a trade consultancy. His previous role as a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for European Reform – a think tank that explicitly opposed Brexit and has consistently published research critical of its trade consequences – was not disclosed.

Content

The episode considered the trade consequences of leaving the EU Single Market and Customs Union, and the value of the independent trade deals subsequently concluded. Lowe explained that the UK had largely succeeded in rolling over pre-existing EU trade agreements with third countries, but both contributors assessed the economic value of new agreements – with Australia, New Zealand and through CPTPP – as modest, with the government's own impact assessments totalling approximately 0.2% of GDP. The discussion covered the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which Keynes described as preserving tariff-free and quota-free goods trade while introducing new non-tariff barriers and a harder border for services. Lowe noted that overall trade volumes with the EU had risen in nominal terms since Brexit but argued this understated the counterfactual loss, since trade would have been expected to grow regardless.

Lowe noted one area of flexibility: the UK had been able to reach a deal with the Trump administration more quickly than the EU, with the UK facing a 10% tariff against the EU's 15%. The episode closed with a discussion of the government's current negotiations for closer EU alignment and the trade-offs involved.

Analysis

The episode structure followed a question-rebuttal pattern in which the positive case for Brexit trade policy was consistently introduced by Forsyth and then rebutted by both contributors without a sustained advocate. When Forsyth noted 'there is an argument... that if you look back to the 1970s [when it was the European Economic Community], its global clout economically was much bigger [than the current EU's]', Keynes responded dismissively without being challenged or counterbalanced.

Lowe's assessment that 'most of the modelling, if not nearly all of it, suggests that the benefits of being in the EU were greater than that the UK could gain from being outside of

the EU’ was presented as expert consensus. His institutional background – this was precisely the position the CER was established to advance – was unknown to listeners.

Forsyth’s closing summary framed the episode’s central question as ‘whether the benefits of looking beyond the EU to other trading partners could ever outweigh leaving the single market and the customs union’ – a trade-off explicitly acknowledged in principle, but one on which no contributor argued the affirmative case.

Bias by omission – Episode 2: No contributor made the positive case for regulatory independence in trade policy, nor did the episode give sustained voice to the government’s own rationale for the Australia, New Zealand and CPTPP deals – long-run market diversification away from a demographically stagnant EU. A UK trade negotiator who had worked on these deals would have been well placed to make either argument, but none was included.

2.3 Episode 3: Immigration

Contributors: Madeleine Sumption (Migration Observatory, Oxford, 1,123 words); James Bowes (University of Warwick, 430 words).

Content

The episode explored what Brexit had delivered on immigration. Sumption and Bowes traced the history of net migration patterns: the pre-referendum rise in EU net migration following the 2004 enlargement; the Conservative government’s failure to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands because EU free movement remained outside its control; the immediate post-referendum fall in EU net migration as uncertainty set in; and the subsequent sharp rise in non-EU migration under the post-Brexit points-based system. Bowes described the ‘Boris Wave’ in detail – the combined effect of Ukraine, Hong Kong passport holders, the graduate visa scheme and international student expansion – which drove net migration to a record 900,000 in 2023 before the government tightened visa rules and the numbers fell sharply.

The episode also addressed small boats and asylum claims, with Sumption noting that the loss of EU data-sharing arrangements after Brexit may have complicated returns. The closing exchange focused on whether Leave voters had received what they expected, with Sumption concluding that while control had been gained in principle, governments had exercised it in ways that produced the opposite of what most Leave voters wanted on immigration.

Analysis

The episode was structured around a framework of disappointed expectations: the Leave campaign promised reduced immigration; immigration increased; therefore Brexit failed on this dimension. Forsyth established this framework in her penultimate question: ‘Madeleine, do you think that people got what they voted for or what they at least expected out of that referendum when it comes to immigration?’ The question presupposed that the relevant measure of Brexit’s immigration outcome was the gap between referendum expectations and what followed, rather than whether the mechanism of control had been delivered and subsequently exercised by government in ways many Leave voters did not support.

The distinction between Brexit delivering a control mechanism and governments choosing how to use it was acknowledged by Sumption – ‘the way governments chose to exercise that control’ – and was carried through, in qualified terms, into Forsyth’s closing summary:

So the UK did gain more control over aspects of its immigration system on leaving the EU... But the way governments chose to exercise that control meant that many people who’d backed Brexit because they wanted lower levels of immigration didn’t see that happen, at least initially.

This was the most balanced closing summary in the series outside Episode 1. The episode’s principal impartiality concerns lay primarily elsewhere – in contributor selection and, as a consequence, the specific points that were articulated.

Bias by omission – Episode 3: The positive case for the points-based immigration system – that it is more globally equitable, skills-aligned and less geographically discriminatory than free movement – went unmade. The distributional argument, that free movement itself fell disproportionately on lower-wage communities and that the referendum was in part a response to this, appeared only as historical background, never as live analysis. No contributor who regarded the post-Brexit immigration system as an improvement in principle, regardless of implementation, was included.

2.4 Episode 4: Northern Ireland

Contributors: John Campbell (BBC Northern Ireland, 949 words); Katy Hayward (Queen’s University Belfast, 694 words). Archive clips: Sir Jeffrey Donaldson (20 words); Paul Givan (15 words); Brandon Lewis (11 words); Newsreader (16 words).

Content

The episode examined the impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland, focusing on the Protocol, the Windsor Framework and the two-year collapse of the Stormont executive. Hayward outlined how the Good Friday Agreement's requirement of an open Irish border forced negotiators to choose between a border on the island of Ireland or one in the Irish Sea; the result was the 'very unusual' arrangement placing Northern Ireland in a unique dual position. Campbell explained the practical consequences for businesses: an internal UK trade border that had not previously existed, requiring new paperwork, checks and administrative procedures for goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

Campbell noted the dual-market access opportunity – that a manufacturing business in Northern Ireland could sell freely into both the GB and EU single markets – but both contributors emphasised that political instability had prevented businesses from exploiting this advantage. The DUP's withdrawal from power-sharing, leading to two years without a functioning Stormont executive, was discussed as having deterred investment. Campbell noted that trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland had increased significantly, describing it as the one economic indicator that showed a clear upward trend attributable to the new arrangements. Both contributors discussed the prospect of a UK-EU agri-food deal as potentially transformative for Northern Ireland businesses.

Analysis

The contributors focused on the complexity and political disruption caused by the Protocol and Windsor Framework, with both Hayward and Campbell emphasising costs to Northern Ireland's political stability and business confidence. The dual-market access opportunity was noted but not developed as a potential structural advantage.

Forsyth's closing summary stated: 'Brexit created uncertainty for businesses and destabilised the political situation in Northern Ireland.' This was asserted as unattributed fact in the presenter's own voice. The specific claim that Brexit 'destabilised' the political situation conflated Brexit itself with the specific Protocol arrangements negotiated by the Johnson government – a distinction that is analytically material and that was not made in the summary.

Bias by omission – Episode 4: No unionist contributor who supported Brexit and who assessed its consequences from within that political tradition was included as a principal analytical voice. The DUP's position – that Brexit's disruption to Northern Ireland stemmed from the specific terms of the Protocol rather than from departure from the EU per se – was present only in archive clips, not in the main discussion. The possibility that the Windsor

Framework represents a workable and beneficial long-term settlement for Northern Ireland was raised by Campbell but not explored.

2.5 Episode 5: The Union

Contributors: Richard Wyn Jones (Cardiff University, 727 words); Nicola McEwan (University of Glasgow, 618 words).

Content

The episode considered the impact of Brexit on the constitutional relationship between the nations of the UK. McEwan traced the overlapping of the Brexit referendum campaign with Scottish Parliament elections, noting that Brexit had lower salience in Scotland during the campaign itself. He described a dominant narrative, introduced by Nicola Sturgeon and sustained ever since, that Scotland was ‘taken out of the European Union against its will’.. Wyn Jones explained that in Wales, where there had been little dedicated Brexit campaign activity, the Leave vote was driven substantially by English identity politics and a sense of economic marginalisation rather than by specific assessments of EU funding.

Both contributors discussed the UK Internal Market Act, which McEwan characterised as having been passed without the consent of the devolved legislatures, bypassing the Sewel Convention. Wyn Jones argued that Brexit had accelerated a longer-term drift in Wales towards independence sentiment and had fundamentally altered Wales’s political landscape. McEwan noted Scottish government modelling suggesting significant economic impact from both the nature of the UK-EU deal and the loss of EU membership. Both contributors assessed Brexit as having strained the constitutional relationship between Westminster and the devolved administrations.

Analysis

Both contributors assessed Brexit’s effects on devolution and constitutional politics through a lens emphasising disruption and constitutional strain, without offering any countervailing assessment of what the repatriation of powers from Brussels to devolved administrations might represent. Neither contributor argued that Brexit may have clarified or strengthened the case for the union by demonstrating Westminster’s capacity to act on a democratic mandate, or that the repatriation of competences from Brussels constituted a constitutional gain. The episode treated the question of Brexit’s effects on the union as settled and in the negative.

Bias by omission – Episode 5: No contributor was included who argued that Brexit represented an opportunity to recalibrate the relationship between Westminster and the devolved administrations, or who argued that devolution settlements could be positively reformed in light of the repatriation of competences from Brussels. The UK Internal Market Act was discussed only in terms of the concerns it generated among devolved administrations, not in terms of the policy rationale advanced by its proponents.

2.6 Episode 6: Regulatory Freedom

Contributors: Joël Reland (UK in a Changing Europe, 1,072 words); Jill Rutter (Institute for Government, 870 words)

Non-disclosure: Joël Reland was introduced simply as a researcher who had been involved in UKICE’s Regulatory Divergence Tracker²⁴. UK in a Changing Europe’s post-2016 research orientation, its director’s public commentary on Brexit²⁵, and the contested nature of its claim to impartiality²⁶ were not disclosed.

Content

The episode explored what the UK had done with its post-Brexit regulatory freedom. Reland explained that the campaign had contained very little specific detail about which regulations would be changed and why, despite the ‘Take Back Control’ framing. Using data from the UKICE Regulatory Divergence Tracker, he reported that approximately 30% of retained EU law had been repealed but characterised most of this as ‘deadwood’ – provisions such as EU trading rules with the Solomon Islands – rather than substantive domestic reform.

Rutter recalled that the original Retained EU Law Bill had proposed sunseting all retained EU law, but this was substantially modified before enactment. Both contributors identified gene editing as the clearest example of genuine regulatory divergence: England had moved ahead of the EU in permitting precision breeding techniques. Rutter also noted that financial services regulation had diverged, with the UK adopting a somewhat different approach. The episode ended with a discussion of the government’s European Partnership Bill and its commitment to ‘dynamic alignment’ with EU rules in key sectors, which both contributors described as accepting regulatory convergence in exchange for reduced trade friction.

²⁴ UKICE Regulatory Divergence Tracker: <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/research-papers/regulatory-divergence-tracker/>

²⁵ Menon, op. cit. (LSE EUROPP, June 2026).

²⁶ News-watch, op. cit. (BBC Bias – A Progress Report, 2016).

Analysis

This episode was the one in which the positive case for Brexit had the most obvious analytical content: the regulatory freedom argument was among the most substantive Leave campaign propositions. The episode acknowledged this in its opening but treated it primarily through the lens of what had not been achieved. The framing of what counted as meaningful regulatory divergence was set by the contributors, not tested against a proponent of the regulatory freedom case.

The gene-editing example – where both contributors acknowledged the UK had diverged from the EU to allow precision breeding – was the episode’s principal positive finding. Forsyth asked: ‘And has that had a material benefit?’ Rutter replied: ‘Difficult to say.’ Reland: ‘Not yet, I think.’ These responses were not contested or developed. The question of why the UK chose to diverge on this point, and what the long-run scientific and agricultural rationale was, was not explored.

Forsyth’s closing summary gestured toward ongoing alignment: ‘Supporters of realignment argue it will ease friction with the UK’s biggest trading partner and provide an economic boost. Opponents claim it will mean the loss of autonomy, reduce the UK to a rule-taker; limit its ability to pursue trade deals with other countries or limit AI innovation, and could cost financially.’ This was the most balanced closing summary in the series, but it followed an episode in which no proponent of regulatory freedom had been given sustained analytical space.

Bias by omission – Episode 6: No representative of the industries or sectors that sought regulatory reform as a consequence of Brexit was included. No minister responsible for the Retained EU Law Act or for the regulatory divergence agenda was included. The argument that regulatory sovereignty has intrinsic constitutional value – independently of whether specific regulatory changes had yet been made – was not articulated by any contributor who believed it.

2.7 Episode 7: Science and Academia

Contributors: Dani Payne (Social Market Foundation, 918 words); Sarah Main (formerly of the Campaign for Science and Engineering, 651 words).

Non-disclosure: Sarah Main was introduced as ‘the Executive Director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering during Brexit and in the years that followed’. What was not disclosed was that CaSE took an active institutional position that Brexit would damage UK

science,²⁷ and that Main has consistently articulated this view in her post-CaSE commentary. The institutional provenance of her analysis was unknown to listeners.²⁸

Content

The episode examined the impact of Brexit on UK science, research funding and higher education. Main described the pre-Brexit landscape as a period of stable collaboration – shared Horizon funding, Erasmus exchanges, free movement of researchers. She recalled the disruption caused by the UK's exclusion from Galileo after Brexit, with the UK having invested substantially in the consortium before being locked out and needing to develop its own satellite programme. She noted the Covid vaccine development as an example of post-Brexit UK scientific strength but also identified the exclusion from Horizon for three years (2020–2024) as having created deep uncertainty.

Payne focused on the impact on students and universities. She described the sharp fall in EU students – who had previously paid home fees – following Brexit, and the subsequent increase in non-EU international students which partly replaced lost revenue but at significantly higher fee levels. She assessed the Turing Scheme as having attempted to address access disparities in Erasmus, with some success in supporting disadvantaged students, but noted it did not offer the automatic reciprocal exchange Erasmus had provided. Both contributors discussed the UK's subsequent renegotiation of Horizon associate membership and re-entry into Erasmus as cautiously positive, though Payne noted that the period of uncertainty had itself been damaging.

Analysis

The episode's framing positioned Brexit as the primary cause of disruption to UK science, centred on the three-year exclusion from Horizon. Forsyth's introduction – 'On leaving the EU, the UK was frozen out of the multi-billion-pound Horizon Research Programme for three years' – used a passive construction attributing causation to Brexit without

²⁷ Following the 2016 Brexit referendum, CaSE was a strong voice in the areas of immigration, collaboration and regulation which are of particular concern to the science and engineering sector (Wikipedia, 'Campaign for Science and Engineering': https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campaign_for_Science_and_Engineering). CaSE's submission to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee post-referendum inquiry stated that 'continued access to EU funding programmes and collaborative opportunities' should be a priority: House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, 'A time for boldness: EU membership and UK science after the referendum' (2016), available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldsctech/85/8505.htm>

²⁸ As recently as 2023, while still executive director, Main called publicly for UK association to Horizon Europe, stating that joining would 'accelerate achievement' of the government's science strategy (Science|Business, 'UK's new science superpower plan makes no mention of joining Horizon Europe', 2023: <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/Horizon-Europe/uks-new-science-superpower-plan-makes-no-mention-joining-horizon-europe>). In 2019 Main described Brexit's implications for science as 'huge' (Science, AAAS, 'Stark party differences in Brexit election could shape future of UK science', November 2019: <https://www.science.org/content/article/stark-party-differences-brexit-election-could-shape-future-uk-science>)

acknowledging that the terms of exclusion were negotiated and contested by both sides, and that the UK's return in 2024 was itself a consequence of the post-Brexit negotiating process.

Forsyth's closing summary stated: 'Brexit caused uncertainty around funding, collaboration, and the movement of academics and students between the UK and EU countries, which undermined confidence and stalled research.' The causal attribution 'Brexit caused' was stated as fact, not as one analytical interpretation. The episode did not include any voice arguing that the Horizon exclusion was a negotiating choice by the EU, or that the post-Brexit settlement in science could be assessed more positively.

Bias by omission – Episode 7: Main's brief acknowledgement of Covid vaccine development was the closest the episode came to weighing the UK's scientific record since 2020 as a counterpoint to the disruption narrative – it went no further. The Turing Scheme's own design rationale, and its extension of mobility to non-EU countries, featured mainly through its shortcomings; a science or technology entrepreneur who saw post-Brexit regulatory flexibility as an opportunity was never among the contributors.

2.8 Episode 8: Fishing and Farming

Contributors: Jill Rutter (Institute for Government, 954 words); Joël Reland (UK in a Changing Europe, 848 words). Rutter and Reland also appeared together in Episode 6.

Content

The episode focused on the consequences of Brexit for the fishing and farming sectors. On fishing, Reland described the symbolic and political significance of the Common Fisheries Policy for Leave voters: the argument that the UK had been getting a raw deal since joining the EEC, with too great a share of catches in UK waters going to other EU nations, and that Brexit was an opportunity to rectify decades of perceived injustice. He explained that the Trade and Cooperation Agreement gave the UK approximately 25% more catch share than it had held under the CFP – but far less than the 80% the UK had sought. He then outlined the market access problem: most UK-caught fish was sold to the EU, where new post-Brexit friction and paperwork had significantly reduced exports, particularly of shellfish.

On farming, Rutter explained the history of the Common Agricultural Policy and described Michael Gove's 2017 announcement of the shift from production-based to environmental-outcome-based subsidy as the boldest reform available post-Brexit. She discussed the Environmental Land Management schemes and the Basic Payment Scheme transition, noting that many farmers had experienced income uncertainty during the changeover. She

also discussed the trade deals with Australia and New Zealand as having introduced competitive pressure on UK producers, particularly in beef and lamb, and noted a significant fall in agri-food exports to the EU as a result of new non-tariff barriers.

Analysis

The reuse of the same two institutional voices from Episode 6 in Episode 8 meant that UKICE contributed to three of the ten episodes (6, 8 and 9), and the IfG to two (6 and 8). The combined word total of UKICE-network contributors across the series was 5,059 words.

Reland acknowledged that the UK had taken back formal sovereignty over its waters, but framed the outcome primarily as a disappointment: catches had not increased significantly, and market access problems persisted. The argument that the Common Fisheries Policy represented a genuine and longstanding grievance for UK fishing communities – and that quota reallocation was a substantive policy gain, whatever its implementation difficulties – was acknowledged historically but not given analytical weight.

Rutter discussed the replacement of the Basic Payment Scheme with ELM schemes. The assessment was that farmers faced uncertainty, that ELM is less generous than BPS, and that the new trade deals had introduced competitive pressure. The positive case for ELM – that subsidising environmental outcomes rather than production represents sound long-term land management policy, and that this reform was available to a British government only after leaving the CAP – was not articulated.

Bias by omission – Episode 8: Fishing communities and farming organisations that backed Brexit, and who might assess today's outcomes from that position, went unrepresented. So did the structural case against the CAP itself – that it drove rural economic distortion, and that leaving it was a genuine policy opportunity, not just a disruption to manage.

2.9 Episode 9: Impact on Europe

Contributors: Jannike Wachowiak (UK in a Changing Europe, 817 words); Mujtaba Rahman (Eurasia Group, 698 words).

Non-disclosure: Jannike Wachowiak was the third contributor in the series drawn from UKICE or its close network. As with Reland, UKICE's post-2016 research orientation and the contested nature of its impartiality claim were not disclosed. Listeners were not informed that this was the third episode in which a contributor from UKICE or its senior personnel had appeared.

Prior to joining the Eurasia Group, Rahman worked as an economist at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs – the Commission department responsible for promoting deeper European economic integration and coordinating EU international economic priorities.²⁹ This prior institutional role was not disclosed. The parallel with Sam Lowe's former role at the Centre for European Reform is direct: in both cases the programme introduced the contributor as an independent analyst without disclosing prior employment by an institution whose purpose was the promotion of European integration. Listeners were given no means of assessing either contributor's prior alignment on the subject matter under discussion.

Content

The episode examined how the EU had adapted to Brexit and what the implications were for the current UK-EU relationship. Wachowiak described how the UK's pre-existing opt-outs – from the euro, Schengen and various integration projects – had always set it apart from the EU mainstream and suggested that some in Brussels had seen Brexit as ultimately simplifying the EU's internal dynamics. She described the shock of the referendum result and the existential fear of a domino effect that had led the EU to take a hard line in negotiations.

Rahman outlined the costs to the EU of losing the UK: its second-largest economy, strongest military, largest financial centre and a P5 member state. He suggested, however, that the UK's consistent resistance to deeper integration had in some respects also been a constraint on EU ambition, and that some in Brussels saw Brexit as ultimately enabling closer integration among remaining members. Rahman discussed the current geopolitical context – Trump, Ukraine, tensions with Beijing – and argued there was a genuine strategic opportunity for closer UK-EU cooperation, particularly on defence, migration and climate. Both contributors assessed the current government's pursuit of closer EU ties as broadly welcome from an EU perspective, while noting that the ball remained in the UK's court.

Analysis

The episode addressed how the EU adapted to Brexit and what the future UK-EU relationship should look like. Both contributors consistently favoured closer UK-EU ties and characterised the EU's approach to the Brexit negotiations as rational self-protection rather

²⁹ Rahman's European Commission background is confirmed in his Eurasia Group biography (<https://www.eurasiagroup.net/people/mrahman>) and his Foreign Affairs contributor biography. The role of DG ECFIN is described on the European Commission website as promoting 'the role of the EU as a global actor in the economic arena': https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-agencies/economic-and-financial-affairs_en. Rahman was introduced in Episode 9 only as Managing Director for Europe at the Eurasia Group.

than punitive behaviour. When Forsyth raised ‘a school of thought in the UK that the EU wanted to almost punish the UK for leaving’, Wachowiak responded: ‘I think from an EU perspective it maybe wasn’t so much about punishing the UK, but it was about kind of protecting what they had.’ This response was not tested against any alternative account.

Rahman’s public commentary has consistently argued that Brexit was damaging and that closer UK-EU alignment on security, defence, migration and climate is necessary and desirable.³⁰ His contributions in Episode 9 reflected this position. No contributor who argued for a more arms-length relationship, or who regarded the current settlement as broadly workable, was selected for inclusion.

Bias by omission – Episode 9: The EU’s own institutional difficulties – its democratic deficit, tensions between member states on fiscal and migration policy, the challenges of enlargement – were not explored as context for the Leave vote or as factors relevant to the UK’s post-Brexit assessment. Nor did anyone contend that UK departure from the EU’s political integration project was strategically rational, or that the EU’s own negotiating conduct had contributed to the settlement’s disruption.

2.10 Episode 10: Impact on Politics

Contributors: Rob Ford (University of Manchester, 1,166 words); Paula Surridge (University of Bristol, 499 words).

Content

The episode centred on the political consequences of Brexit. Ford argued that Brexit had mobilised and accelerated pre-existing political realignments: voters had sorted themselves along new fault lines – educational background, age, place of residence, attitudes to cosmopolitanism and change – that overlapped with but were distinct from the traditional Labour-Conservative divide. He described the Leave campaign’s success in harnessing existing anti-establishment sentiment, and the paradox that the Leave campaign, associated with the traditional establishment figures of Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg, had managed to present itself as the outsider force.

Surridge described how the Brexit negotiations had deepened distrust in politics: Remain voters felt the system was delivering an outcome they opposed; Leave voters felt parliament

³⁰ Rahman’s consistent public position is illustrated by his commentary for TIME magazine (May 2026, published immediately before the series aired), in which he described Brexit as meaning that ‘The Europeans lost access to one of the world’s most important financial centers, a diplomatic heavy hitter and nuclear power. The U.K. lost access to one of the world’s most important markets’: <https://time.com/article/2026/05/18/united-kingdom-rejoins-eu-possibility-starmer-streiting-debate/>

was resisting a democratic mandate. She discussed the role of Brexit in breaking down traditional party allegiances, noting that Leave and Remain identities had become powerful sorting mechanisms that reshaped voters' relationship with parties. Both contributors discussed recent local elections in England and the further fragmentation of the vote, with Ford suggesting that England had become somewhat more like Scotland – with a dominant progressive-cosmopolitan coalition on one side and a divided right on the other – partly as a consequence of Brexit's realignment.

Analysis

Rob Ford is co-author of *Brexitland* (2021)³¹ which argued that the Brexit vote reflected a fundamental divide between a socially liberal, educated, cosmopolitan electorate and a more socially conservative, older, less formally educated one – treating the Leave vote primarily as an expression of cultural and demographic grievance rather than as a considered democratic mandate. His contributions in Episode 10 consistently reflected this interpretive framework. The countervailing interpretation – that the Brexit vote was a legitimate democratic expression of substantive political grievances, and that the subsequent political turbulence reflected elite resistance to the referendum result as much as any dysfunction in the Leave mandate itself – was not given sustained analytical advocacy.

Ford's characterisation of the Leave campaign as having 'one of the smart moves' in mobilising anti-establishment sentiment framed Brexit strategy as manipulation rather than as a response to genuine voter concerns. Forsyth did not challenge this framing or seek an alternative account.

Forsyth's closing summary stated: 'Brexit was a profound political moment, and perhaps one of the lasting consequences is how it accelerated the weakening of political allegiances, resulting in a more fragmented political system.' The attribution of political fragmentation to Brexit as a causal factor was presented as the analytical conclusion of a ten-episode series examining Brexit's consequences. Whether political fragmentation was itself a cause of Brexit rather than a consequence, or whether the fragmentation has causes independent of Brexit, was not examined.

There was a further reflexive silence in the episode's diagnosis. Episode 10 examined a decade of deepening political distrust and fragmentation without once considering the role of the media – including the BBC itself – in shaping the post-referendum information environment. Surridge described how the Brexit negotiations deepened distrust in politics on

³¹Ford, R. and Goodwin, M. (2021), *Brexitland: Identity, Diversity and the Reshaping of British Politics*, Cambridge University Press.

both sides; neither contributor, nor Forsyth, considered whether the way those negotiations were reported and framed had contributed to that distrust. Given that the impartiality of the BBC's own Brexit coverage was intensely contested throughout the period – attracting sustained complaint from both sides of the debate – a series that closed with an episode on why the public stopped trusting institutions, while exempting the broadcasting institution airing it from that analysis, left a conspicuous gap in its own explanatory framework.

Bias by omission – Episode 10: The argument that the Brexit mandate was executed badly by successive governments, and that this execution failure rather than the mandate itself produced political damage, was not provided any sustained analytical voice. No contributor who regarded the Leave vote as a positive democratic expression, or who assessed the subsequent political turbulence as arising from elite resistance to that expression, was included.

Part Three: Analytical Framework and Audience Effect

3.1 The Editorial Choice of Analytical Framing

The series made a clearly stated editorial choice. Each episode's opening narration, repeated identically across all ten episodes, described the programme as 'not an exhaustive examination, but . . . an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit, ten years on.' This disclaimer warrants direct consideration.

Foremost, it addressed comprehensiveness rather than balance. A programme that is 'not exhaustive' is one that does not claim to cover every aspect of a subject; it is not, on that basis alone, a programme entitled to cover only one side of a contested question. The BBC's Editorial Guidelines do not provide an exception to the impartiality requirement for programmes that are selective in scope. Nor does the description of the programme as an analytical examination rather than a political debate insulate it from impartiality obligations: Section 2.4.5 of the guidelines applies to all output covering matters of public policy or political controversy, regardless of format or genre.

The more significant editorial choice was the decision to use analysts and academics rather than politicians as principal contributors. This was a legitimate format decision, but it was itself an editorial act with impartiality implications. The claim that analytical contributors are politically neutral was undermined in this series by two factors.

First, as established in Part One, several of the analytical contributors selected were drawn from institutions with defined positions on Brexit, or held published views that ran consistently in one direction. The selection of analysts was not a selection of neutrals; it was a selection of a particular subset of analysts, presented as though representativeness were guaranteed by the absence of party affiliation.

Second, and most strikingly, the series' own practice contradicted any claim that contributors were selected for neutrality. In Episode 1, Forsyth introduced Julian Jessop's institutional affiliation by describing the IEA as 'a right-wing free market think tank'. This was the only occasion in the series on which any contributor's institution was characterised by its ideological or political orientation. No equivalent description was applied to any other organisation: UK in a Changing Europe was introduced simply as 'UK in a Changing Europe'; the Social Market Foundation was introduced as 'the independent think tank, the Social Market Foundation'; the Financial Times, the Institute for Government and the Migration Observatory were all introduced without ideological characterisation. The sole contributor

principally associated with arguing Brexit's benefits was the only one whose institutional home was explicitly framed as politically positioned. This asymmetry is itself an impartiality concern, independent of contributor selection, and sat in direct tension with any claim that the series treated all analytical voices equivalently.

This pattern is consistent with a documented tendency in BBC output. Research by Dr Oliver Latham for the Centre for Policy Studies (2013) examined how 40 think tanks were treated on the BBC News website between 2010 and 2013.³² Dr Latham found that right-of-centre think tanks received ideological 'health warnings' – labels such as 'free market', 'centre-right' and 'right-wing' – between 23% and 61% of the time, while left-of-centre think tanks received equivalent labels between 0% and 12% of the time. The IEA specifically received such a label 22.1% of the time.

A subsequent IEA study by Ryan Bourne (2016) examining 15 think tanks between the 2010 and 2015 general elections reached substantially similar findings, concluding that 'the BBC News website is much more likely to use ideological or political labels when introducing right-of-centre or free-market opinion.'³³ The characterisation of the IEA as a 'right-wing free market think tank' in Episode 1 of this series is therefore not an isolated editorial choice: it is consistent with a pattern of asymmetric labelling identified across BBC output over more than a decade, applied in this instance to the one contributor in the entire series principally associated with arguing Brexit's benefits.

Further, the series regularly invited contributors to make normative assessments, not merely empirical ones. Forsyth's question 'do you think that people got what they voted for?' (Episode 3), 'do you think unionists who supported Brexit regret it?' (Episode 4) and 'do you think that is what has led... to... this increasingly fragmented politics?' (Episode 10) invited value judgements about Brexit's success or failure. Selecting contributors whose value-judgement priors all ran in the same direction, and presenting them as neutral analysts, compounded the impartiality problem rather than insulating against it.

³²Latham, O. (2013), 'Bias at the Beeb: A quantitative study of slant in BBC online reporting', Centre for Policy Studies. Available at: <https://cps.org.uk/research/bias-at-the-beeb/> The study examined 40 think tanks cited on the BBC News website between 1 June 2010 and 31 May 2013 and coded mentions for ideological 'health warnings'. Right-of-centre think tanks received such labels between 23% and 61% of the time; left-of-centre think tanks between 0% and 12%.

³³Bourne, R. (2016), 'BBC bias by presentation: a case study of think tanks', Institute of Economic Affairs. Available at: <https://iea.org.uk/blog/bbc-bias-by-presentation-a-case-study-of-think-tanks/> Examining 15 multi-disciplinary think tanks between the 2010 and 2015 general elections, the study found the IEA received ideological warning labels 22.1% of the time, CPS 30.3%, Policy Exchange 41.7%. Left-leaning equivalents such as IPPR and Demos received such labels far less often.

3.2 Framing and the Authority Effect

The series exhibited a consistent structural frame in the sense defined by Entman (1993)³⁴: it selected certain aspects of Brexit and made them salient, while excluding others. The selected aspects were, in every episode, the costs, complications and disappointments of Brexit. The excluded aspects were, in every episode, the case for Brexit's policy rationale across trade, immigration, regulatory freedom and constitutional sovereignty.

This frame is reinforced by the authority effect of the presenter's role. Forsyth introduced herself as a BBC correspondent who has covered Brexit from Brussels and Westminster. Her episode-closing summaries were therefore received by listeners not as one person's opinion but as the considered editorial conclusion of an informed BBC professional. The Elaboration Likelihood Model³⁵ predicts that listeners processing complex audio content on peripheral routes – as most radio listeners do – weight source credibility heavily and engage in less active counterargument. A presenter of established authority delivering consistently negative summaries of Brexit consequences has a persuasive effect independent of the analytical merits of the individual points made.

The non-disclosure of contributors' institutional affiliations compounds this effect. When a UKICE researcher is introduced without reference to that organisation's post-2016 research orientation or the contested nature of its impartiality claim, listeners have no basis for assessing the institutional context of the analysis presented. Source credibility was inflated by the omission of information that would allow listeners to calibrate it.

The audience dimension of this problem is more fundamental than it might at first appear. The BBC's standard defences – due weight, breadth across output – assume a notionally informed audience who can assess BBC output against a wider information landscape and who are aware of what is absent as well as what is present. In practice, however, the BBC routinely invokes its status as the most trusted news source in the country when responding to impartiality challenges. In its own submission to the House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee, the BBC described itself as 'the number one most trusted news brand in the UK, the US and the rest of the world', noting that 45 per cent of UK adults would turn to the BBC for news they trust the most – more than any other broadcaster.³⁶

³⁴ Entman, R.M. (1993), 'Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), pp. 51–58.

³⁵ Petty, R.E. and Cacioppo, J.T. (1986), *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change*, New York: Springer-Verlag.

³⁶ BBC written evidence to the House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee (FON0059): <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/128502/html/>

That claim to exceptional trust is the source of the problem as much as its solution. When the BBC omits a significant strand of analytical opinion from a series presented as a considered examination of Brexit's consequences, most listeners do not experience the omission as an omission. They experience it as the complete picture. The opening narration's statement that the series was 'not an exhaustive examination' addressed the range of subjects covered, not the analytical balance of the contributors selected or the editorial judgements of the presenter. A listener hearing a BBC correspondent of established authority deliver ten episode-closing summaries characterising Brexit's consequences has no basis for inferring, from a brief comprehensiveness disclaimer, that a significant body of contrary analytical opinion had been omitted from the discussion.

The missing voices are, by definition, invisible to the audience. A listener to *Politically* who was not already expert in the economics and politics of Brexit would have had no means of knowing that contributors principally associated with arguing Brexit's benefits were almost entirely absent, that three of the series' contributors were drawn from a single institutional network, or that two contributors had prior employment by institutions whose purpose was the promotion of European integration. The BBC cannot simultaneously claim the authority that comes from being the nation's most trusted broadcaster and disclaim responsibility for the analytical framework which that authority causes listeners to accept as comprehensive and balanced. The trust the BBC invokes in its own defence is precisely what makes the failure of impartiality in this series consequential for audiences.

This produces a further effect beyond inflated credibility: it allows a structurally one-sided panel to be read as 'expert consensus' rather than a narrow cluster of institutional positions recurring across several speakers. Because none of these contributors was marked, as Jessop was, with a defined political position, each appeared to arrive at their conclusion independently. Several apparently independent voices agreeing is precisely what listeners understand 'consensus' to mean – but the institutional overlap identified here shows that it was actually something far narrower.

3.3 Agenda-Setting and the Damage Audit

At the first level of agenda-setting³⁷ the series determined what Brexit consequences were worth examining. It selected ten policy areas and, in each case, framed the central question as what went wrong or what was lost. This was a structural agenda-setting choice: it is not

³⁷ McCombs, M.E. and Shaw, D.L. (1972), 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), pp. 176–187.

the only way to construct a ten-episode retrospective, but it is the specific way this series was constructed.

At the second level – attribute agenda-setting³⁸ – the series determined how each consequence was characterised. In Episode 1, economic change attributable to Brexit was characterised as ‘damage’ against an implied counterfactual of continued EU membership. In Episode 3, the immigration outcome was characterised as a failure of the Leave promise. In Episode 7, reduced scientific collaboration was characterised as Brexit-caused disruption. These are attribute frames, consistently applied across the series without a competing frame being sustained in any episode.

The clearest illustration of this topic-selection effect is the episode that was not made. The series chose ten policy areas, and the one dimension on which Brexit unambiguously delivered its central stated objective was not among them. There was no episode on sovereignty, the restoration of legislative supremacy, the ending of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, or the recovery of independent treaty-making capacity as subjects in their own right. The transcript confirms the scale of the omission: the European Court of Justice was received only a single, historical reference across the ten episodes; the word ‘democratic’ did not appear at all; ‘democracy’ appeared once, in relation to Hong Kong. The five occurrences of ‘sovereignty’ were all in Episode 5, where Westminster sovereignty was discussed as a complication for devolution – not as a Brexit objective achieved.

Whatever position one takes on the trade-offs involved, the UK unarguably left the EU’s legal order, ended the supremacy of EU law and recovered independent treaty-making capacity. These were the Leave campaign’s central constitutional propositions. A retrospective that audited Brexit across ten dimensions and excluded the single dimension on which the project succeeded on its own terms made a topic-selection choice that predetermined the audit’s result. The ‘not an exhaustive examination’ disclaimer does not answer this point: constitutional sovereignty was not a peripheral subject crowded out by space constraints; it was the central proposition of the winning side of the referendum the series set out to assess.

³⁸ McCombs, M. (1997), 'Building Consensus: The News Media's Agenda-Setting Roles', *Political Communication*, 14(4), pp. 433–443. The distinction between first-level (object) and second-level (attribute) agenda-setting was developed in McCombs, M., Shaw, D. and Weaver, D. (1997), *Communication and Democracy*, Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

3.4 Linguistic Patterns and Narrative Flow

3.4.1 Question Structure

A recurring feature of Forsyth's questioning was the embedding of a negative presupposition within the question itself, such that accepting the premise of the question required accepting a negative assessment of Brexit. The most explicit example came in Episode 1, when Forsyth prefaced a question to Jessop with her own editorial assertion: 'When we look at the G7, GDP per capita figures as a whole, the UK has only done better than Germany and Canada, and it lags well behind France and Italy.' This is not a neutral framing of a question; it asserts a specific comparative result as established fact and then asks only about the causal mechanism. The prior question – whether that comparison is a valid measure, and whether the pre-2016 baseline it implies is the correct one – had been precisely what Jessop was contesting. Forsyth's question foreclosed that contestation rather than pursuing it.

A further example occurred in Episode 3, where Forsyth stated before asking her question: 'Immigration was clearly a really significant factor in the way that people who voted for Brexit voted.' The word 'clearly' is a presupposition marker: it signals that the proposition does not need to be established because it is already agreed. The question that followed – whether people got what they voted for – was therefore framed from the outset within a narrative of disappointed expectations.

3.4.2 Positive-then-Negative Framing Pattern

Across the series, Forsyth's narration consistently introduced positive Brexit arguments using a characteristic structure: the positive case was attributed to Leave supporters or presented as a claim, while the negative consequence was introduced as objective fact. The clearest example appeared in the Episode 2 opening narration: 'One prize, according to Leave supporters, would be the ability to strike independent trade deals with other nations. The cost? Increased friction with the EU.' The positive is explicitly attributed ('according to Leave supporters'); the negative is presented as an uncontested fact ('The cost?' with the answer implied). This asymmetric attribution – the positive case as a subjective belief held by a particular group, the negative outcome as objective reality – was a structural feature of the narration, not an isolated rhetorical choice.

The same structure appeared in the Episode 3 closing summary: 'The UK did gain more control over aspects of its immigration system... But the way governments chose to exercise that control meant that many people who'd backed Brexit because they wanted lower levels

of immigration didn't get what they wanted.' The gain is acknowledged in conditional, limited terms ('aspects of'); the negative is stated as unqualified fact.

3.4.3 Challenge Asymmetry in Episode 1

The only 'would you accept' challenge in the series was directed at Jessop: 'Julian, would you accept it has had an impact on the economy?' This is a concession-seeking question – it asks a contributor to acknowledge the validity of the opposing case. No equivalent question was put to Smith, to Lowe, to any UKICE contributor, or to any other guest across the ten episodes. Forsyth never asked any contributor who had identified Brexit costs to accept that Brexit had also generated any benefit, or that the damage estimates were methodologically uncertain.

The sequencing at the end of Episode 1 also warrants attention. After Jessop made his most effective analytical point – that comparing the UK with individual economies rather than the G7 average produced a different picture of relative performance – Forsyth's response was not a follow-up question to Jessop developing that point, but: 'David, a final thought from you?' This gave Smith the final substantive word in the episode, following Jessop's strongest challenge. The cumulative effect of the sequencing choices – directing the concession-seeking question only at Jessop, giving Smith the final word – is consistent with the broader structural pattern identified in this report.

3.4.4 The Divorce Metaphor

In Episode 9, Forsyth used the following formulation: 'you effectively deal with the divorce first and then the future arrangements afterwards.' This occurred in the context of describing the structure of the Brexit negotiations. The use of 'divorce' as a metaphor for Brexit is not a neutral linguistic choice. News-watch has identified and documented the BBC's systematic use of this metaphor across a period of nearly three decades of monitoring. In its Winter 2017 survey of BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme, News-watch devoted a dedicated section to the 'divorce' metaphor, establishing that it imports a specific set of meanings into coverage of Brexit: that the parties had been in an intimate union; that the separation was adversarial; that there would be costs analogous to a settlement; that one or both parties might be at fault; and that the appropriate emotional register for the process was one of grief, loss and acrimony.³⁹ The metaphor precludes alternative framings in which EU exit might be characterised as, say, the reassertion of national governance, the completion of a democratic mandate, or the renegotiation of a trade relationship.

³⁹ <https://news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/News-watch-Winter-2017-Survey.pdf> pp.51-52

The *Today* survey noted that BBC correspondents and presenters used the word ‘divorce’ pervasively and without apparent awareness of its connotative loading. The single use of the metaphor by Forsyth in Episode 9 does not in itself constitute a pattern, but it demonstrates that the frame remains embedded in BBC editorial vocabulary on Brexit a decade after the referendum – and that its use by a presenter describing the structure of negotiations, rather than quoting a contributor, represents a linguistic choice for which the BBC is editorially responsible. The frame analysis tradition established in News-watch’s longitudinal monitoring programme, which has now covered BBC output on European affairs across over a quarter of a century, identifies this kind of metaphorical consistency as itself evidence of institutionalised framing: not necessarily a conscious choice by any individual presenter, but the accumulated expression of an editorial culture in which certain conceptual frames have become default.

3.4.5 The ‘Broad Consensus’ Assertion

In the Episode 1 opening narration, Forsyth stated: ‘During the referendum campaign, the weight of economic opinion said Brexit would damage the economy. Now, the broad consensus among most economists is that it has.’ This assertion was made before either contributor had spoken. It established the analytical framework of the episode by pre-emptively characterising the weight of economic opinion.

In the episode’s closing summary, the same claim was restated: ‘There’s broad consensus among most economists that leaving has had an impact.’ The effect is circular: the episode opens by asserting consensus as the established position, proceeds through an exchange in which one contributor contests it and one supports it, and closes by reasserting consensus. The dissenting voice is structurally contained within a frame that predetermines the result of the analytical discussion.

3.5 The Positive Points Audit

Following the approach established in News-watch’s survey methodology, the following list isolates all substantive positive points about Brexit that are raised in the series, whether by contributors or by Forsyth in her questions. It is relevant to note whether each positive point is then developed, accepted or immediately countermanded.

- **Episode 1:** Forsyth asked Julian Jessop whether there were any positive economic developments. Jessop identified the fading of the initial negative shock and questioned the methodology of the headline damage estimates. David Smith immediately restated the negative consensus. The positive point was not followed up.

- **Episode 1:** Julian Jessop noted that international comparisons with Germany and Canada showed the UK had not uniquely underperformed. This was contested by Smith with the 'Boris Wave' immigration argument.
- **Episode 2:** Alex Forsyth noted the Trump tariff context, in which the UK received 10% compared to the EU's 15%, as a potential Brexit benefit. This was not followed up by either contributor.
- **Episode 4:** John Campbell explicitly acknowledged the dual market access opportunity created by Northern Ireland's unique post-Brexit position – the ability to sell freely into both the GB market and the EU single market. Katy Hayward immediately qualified this by emphasising that political instability had prevented businesses from exploiting it. The structural advantage was acknowledged but not developed.
- **Episode 6:** Joël Reland noted that where the UK had diverged from EU regulation, it had often been to set *higher* rather than lower standards, citing animal welfare as an example. This point was briefly acknowledged and not developed further.
- **Episode 6:** Both Jill Rutter and Joël Reland acknowledged the gene-editing divergence as a concrete area of regulatory benefit. Forsyth asked whether it had had a material benefit; both contributors equivocated. The point was not developed.
- **Episode 7:** Sarah Main briefly acknowledged the Covid vaccine development as an example of UK scientific strength post-Brexit. This was not explored as counter-evidence to the disruption narrative.
- **Episode 7:** Dani Payne acknowledged that the Turing Scheme had made progress on the access disparities that had characterised Erasmus, particularly for disadvantaged students. This was noted briefly before the discussion returned to the scheme's limitations.
- **Episode 8:** John Campbell noted that Northern Ireland's trade with the Republic of Ireland had increased. This was acknowledged as 'the one thing where if you were to look at all the charts, the economic charts in Northern Ireland, it's gone up'.

In none of these examples was a positive point given sustained analytical development – a pattern that extends across the series with some consistency. In most cases a positive point was either equivocated on by a contributor, briefly acknowledged before the discussion moved on, or introduced by Forsyth as a question only to be deflated by the response. This

replicates, for example, the pattern News-watch identified in its 2018 survey of the BBC Radio 4 series *Brexit: A Guide for the Perplexed*⁴⁰ where presenter Chris Morris consistently raised positive Brexit arguments as questions only to allow contributors to dismiss or qualify them, with no sustained advocate on the other side to develop them further.

⁴⁰ News-watch (2018), Survey of Series 3 of BBC Radio 4's *Brexit: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 19–23 February 2018. Available at: <https://news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/News-watch-Survey-of-Radio-4s-Brexit-A-Guide-for-the-Perplexed.pdf>

Part Four: BBC Editorial Guidelines and Relevant Standards

The following provisions of the BBC's 2025 Editorial Guidelines are directly relevant to the concerns identified in this analysis.

Section 2.2.1 — Commitment to Due Impartiality

The BBC's 2025 Editorial Guidelines open their impartiality framework with the statement that 'the BBC is committed to achieving due impartiality in all its output.' Due impartiality is defined in Section 2.4.1 as meaning that impartiality must be 'adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation, and any signposting that may influence that expectation.' The guidelines make clear that due impartiality does not require equal division of time between all views, but it does require that the output is appropriate to the subject and context. In the case of a pre-recorded, pre-edited ten-episode documentary series examining a matter of continuing public policy controversy, the standard of due impartiality applicable is correspondingly demanding.

Section 2.4.2 — Breadth and Diversity of Opinion

Section 2.4.2 states that 'the BBC must be inclusive, reflecting a breadth and diversity of opinion, across the output as a whole.' It requires consideration of a range of perspectives across communities, interest groups and geographic areas. Section 2.4.4 adds that 'there may be occasions when the omission of views or other material could jeopardise impartiality or accuracy' and that 'there is no view on any subject which must be excluded as a matter of principle; content producers should make reasoned decisions and apply consistent editorial judgement about whether to include or omit such perspectives.' The near-total absence across this series of contributors who had publicly argued for Brexit's benefits — a significant body of analytical opinion on a matter of sustained public policy debate — is directly relevant to these provisions.

Section 2.4.5 — Controversial Subjects and Current Public Policy

Section 2.4.5 confirms that the BBC applies due impartiality to all subjects, with particular requirements regarding 'matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy', including where they occur in output outside news and current affairs. The economic, constitutional and policy consequences of Brexit plainly constitute matters of current public policy controversy within the meaning of this section. The section applies to

factual documentary output of the kind under examination here, not only to news programmes.

Section 2.4.11 — News, Current Affairs and Factual Journalism

Section 2.4.11 states that ‘news in whatever form must be treated with due impartiality, giving due weight to events, opinion and main strands of argument. The approach and tone of news stories must always reflect the BBC’s editorial values, including its commitment to impartiality.’ The requirement to give due weight to the main strands of argument applies directly to the analytical framing of this series, and specifically to the consistent framing of Brexit consequences as a deficit audit without sustained representation of the countervailing analytical case.

Section 2.4.12 — Presenters, Reporters and Correspondents

Section 2.4.12 states that ‘presenters, reporters, correspondents and on-air editors are the public face and voice of the BBC; they can have a significant impact on perceptions of whether due impartiality has been achieved. Audiences should not be able to tell from BBC output — or anywhere else — the personal opinions of its journalists or presenters in news and current affairs or factual journalism on matters of current public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on "controversial subjects" in any other area.’ The section further states that presenters ‘may provide professional judgements, rooted in evidence and professional experience, but may not express personal views on such matters publicly, including in any BBC-branded output.’ Alex Forsyth’s episode-closing summaries, delivered in her own authoritative voice, without attribution, and consistently characterising Brexit outcomes in negative terms, fall directly within the scope of this provision.

Section 2.4.17 — Contributors’ Affiliations and Viewpoints

Section 2.4.17 states that ‘it should not be assumed that contributors to BBC output are unbiased or impartial. For those from organisations such as charities, think-tanks or universities, it may be necessary, when relevant, to give appropriate information about affiliations, funding or particular viewpoints. The same applies to individual researchers, journalists, scientists or other experts.’ The section identifies the key test as whether ‘the audience would be misled if such information was not made available.’ This provision is directly applicable to the non-disclosure of Sam Lowe’s prior role at the Centre for European Reform, Mujtaba Rahman’s prior employment at the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, and the absence of any characterisation of UK in a Changing Europe’s post-2016 research orientation. In each case, the audience was denied

information that was relevant to assessing the institutional context of the contributor's analysis.

Application to this series

The three structural failures identified in this analysis — the near-total absence of contributors who have publicly argued for Brexit's benefits, inadequate disclosure of institutional context, and presenter editorial framing — each correspond to a specific provision of the 2025 Editorial Guidelines. The series did not achieve due impartiality within the meaning of Sections 2.2.1 and 2.4.1; it did not reflect a breadth and diversity of opinion within the meaning of Section 2.4.2; it omitted a significant strand of analytical opinion in a manner that jeopardised impartiality within the meaning of Section 2.4.4; in the clearest cases — Lowe and the Centre for European Reform, and Rahman and the European Commission — it failed to provide information about contributors' affiliations that the audience needed to avoid being misled, within the meaning of Section 2.4.17; and its presenter's episode-closing summaries expressed positions on matters of current public policy controversy in BBC-branded output in a manner inconsistent with Section 2.4.12.

Conclusion

The evidence for the conclusions below – word counts, disclosure omissions and structural patterns – is set out as a matter of record, independent of any content-analysis methodology that might be disputed, along with the analysis of what it means for the BBC's impartiality obligations.

In nine of ten episodes, no principal analytical contributor was principally associated with arguing the positive case for Brexit across trade, immigration, regulatory freedom or constitutional sovereignty. The production demonstrated in Episode 1 that it could pair an economist who had challenged Brexit's costs with one who had documented them, giving both broadly comparable airtime. It did not replicate this structure in any subsequent episode.

- Julian Jessop, the sole contributor principally associated with arguing Brexit's benefits, contributed 771 words across six turns – 4.6 per cent of all substantive contributor speech across the series. The remaining 95.4 per cent came from contributors who either documented Brexit's costs or analysed its consequences without advancing the case for its benefits.
- In Episode 1, Forsyth introduced Julian Jessop's institutional home as 'a right-wing free market think tank' – the only occasion in ten episodes on which any contributor's institution was characterised by its political or ideological orientation. No equivalent description was applied to UK in a Changing Europe, the Centre for European Reform, the Social Market Foundation, the Financial Times, the Institute for Government or the Migration Observatory. This asymmetry is consistent with a documented pattern of differential labelling of right-of-centre think tanks in BBC output, and it was applied in this series to the one contributor principally associated with arguing Brexit's benefits.
- Two contributors – Joël Reland and Jannike Wachowiak – are drawn from UK in a Changing Europe, which is named in the programme. However, no characterisation of UKICE's post-2016 research orientation or the contested nature of its impartiality claim was provided. A further concern is that UKICE's senior personnel include two other contributors to the series – Paula Surridge (deputy director) and Jill Rutter (senior research fellow) – giving a single institution and its network a combined presence across five of ten episodes without that pattern being apparent to listeners.

- Sam Lowe's prior employment at the Centre for European Reform – a think tank that explicitly opposed Brexit and has consistently published research critical of its trade consequences – was not disclosed. He was introduced only as working for Flint Global. Listeners were given no basis for assessing his prior institutional alignment on the subject of trade, in the episode in which he appeared.
- Mujtaba Rahman's previous role as an economist at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs – the Commission department responsible for promoting deeper European economic integration – was not set out to listeners. He was introduced only as Managing Director for Europe at the Eurasia Group. The non-disclosure follows the same pattern as the Lowe/CER case: a contributor with prior institutional alignment directly relevant to the subject matter of the episode was presented as an independent analyst and his background was not communicated to listeners.
- Sarah Main's role as executive director of CaSE – which took a formal institutional position opposing the UK's exclusion from Horizon and, immediately after the referendum result, characterised Brexit as posing significant risks to UK science – was not disclosed beyond identifying her as a former CaSE director. CaSE's institutional position following the referendum was not outlined to the audience.
- Alex Forsyth's episode-closing summaries, delivered in her own authoritative voice, consistently characterised Brexit outcomes in negative terms and on several occasions asserted causal relationships – 'Brexit caused', 'Brexit created uncertainty . . . and destabilised' – that are contested among analysts.
- The positive case for Brexit's trade policy rationale, immigration system, regulatory freedom agenda and constitutional arguments was absent from every episode. In each case where positive arguments were raised in Forsyth's questions, they were rebutted by contributors without a sustained advocate on the other side.

Taken together, this evidence points to a series structured as a deficit audit: each episode examined a policy area through the lens of what had been lost, disrupted or disappointed as a result of Brexit, and the series repeatedly asked whether Brexit had delivered benefits without inviting anyone principally associated with arguing for those benefits to participate. Across ten episodes, the series did not ask whether Brexit had been worthwhile; it asked how much difficulty it had caused. Put simply, that is not due impartiality as defined in the BBC's own Editorial Guidelines – it is a sustained

institutional narrative about Brexit's costs, delivered in the register of retrospective analysis.

Appendix – Full Programme Transcripts

Episode 1: The Economy

ALEX FORSYTH: Welcome to *Politically* from BBC Radio 4. This is *Ten Years After Brexit*. It is ten years since the Brexit referendum. I'm Alex Forsyth, a BBC correspondent who's covered Brexit from both Brussels and Westminster. A decade after the decision to leave the EU, what impact has it had on various aspects of public and political life? This isn't an exhaustive examination, but it is an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit, ten years on.

DAVID CAMERON: The British people have voted to leave the European Union.

UNNAMED FEMALE: Thank you, Nigel. Thank you, Nigel.

NIGEL FARAGE: Let June 23rd go down in our history as our Independence Day.

NICOLA STURGEON: The UK result leaves me deeply disappointed and profoundly concerned.

THERESA MAY: Brexit means Brexit.

BORIS JOHNSON: We're going to get Brexit done.

URSULA VON DER LEYEN: I'm sorry, we will miss you.

CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: The effect of leaving the EU on the economy has been one of the most contested aspects of Brexit, from dire warnings about multi-billion-pound budgetary black holes ahead of the referendum, to assertions that the UK would become Singapore on Thames if freed from the orbit of Brussels. During the referendum campaign, the weight of economic opinion said Brexit would damage the economy. Now, the broad consensus among most economists is that it has. But there are arguments as to the extent and how accurately that can be measured. To explore those, I spoke to Julian Jessop, who's an independent economist and economics fellow at the Institute of Economic Affairs, a right-wing free market think tank, and David Smith, economics editor at the Sunday Times, who began by explaining some of the

DAVID SMITH: Just before the referendum, there were essentially the Treasury put out two forecasts. One was for the immediate impact, which was essentially a politically driven forecast of the, I suppose, the mildest recession we've ever had in the UK. But it didn't happen. At the same time, the Treasury, put out a longer-term forecast, you know, what would happen to the economy up to 2030. That saw a

long-term hit to the economy, depending on what mode of Brexit we settled on. So if we stayed in the single market, it would be a smaller negative impact. If we went onto what was known as WTO rules, World Trade Organisation rules, there would be a bigger impact. And in the middle was a kind of around about a 6% impact. And then the Office of Budget Responsibility, when that took over forecasting, did its own analysis. And that has said over time, a 4% hit to productivity – the amount we produce for each worker or for each hour worked – and that, again, is over quite a long period of time, up to around about 2030.

ALEX FORSYTH: Julian, that 4% from the Office for Budget Responsibility is quite often cited. Do we know how they came up with it?

JULIAN JESSOP: All they actually did was take the crude average of 13 external studies that had come up with a very wide range of different numbers, based on different assumptions about the form that the relationship with the European Union would eventually take, and also lots of different assumptions about the impact on not just trade but also things like immigration. So I personally think that was just a crude working assumption at the time.

ALEX FORSYTH: I want to get on to what we can actually say about the impact in just a moment but while we're talking about the numbers that have been kicking around, there's one other – this 8% hit to GDP. This is something the Chancellor Rachel Reeves recently quoted, saying she thought Brexit did deep damage and quoted that the GDP impact could be as much as 8%. What do we know about where that comes from and the validity of it. Julian?

JULIAN JESSOP: Basically, that's a top-down number produced by economists and published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in the United States. And what they've essentially done is compare the actual performance of the UK economy since 2016 with various groups of other countries chosen in various different ways. But crucially, they've assumed that any underperformance by the UK against those other countries is solely due to Brexit. So they've ignored any other factor that might have affected the UK economy differently from others such as COVID and the energy crisis, but also anything that might've flattened the performance of other countries. So for example, US, Spain have all benefited from a lot of fiscal stimulus, so their economies have done relatively well, but that's nothing to do with Brexit.

ALEX FORSYTH: David?

DAVID SMITH: America from 2016 to now has grown by roughly 26%. We've grown by 12%, which is roughly the same as France. I think we could have grown more than that. I don't think it would have been 20%, which would give you the 8% figure. It might have been 16% or 17%. I think we shouldn't overstate this, but I do believe there is an impact there.

ALEX FORSYTH: That would put the economic hit of Brexit around 4-5% of GDP, somewhere in the centre of current estimates. When we look at cumulative GDP growth by the G7 countries in the

ten years since Brexit, the UK has been in the middle of the pack. But when you look at the GDP per capita numbers, which is total GDP divided by population, the picture changes.

DAVID SMITH: So per capita is a good measure of long-term prosperity, and the recent performance of the UK in terms of GDP per capita has been poor. One reason for that is the growth hasn't been so good as it was in the past. The other reason is that we've had a lot of population growth, particularly since 2019. So, you know, adjusting for that is quite useful, and you get some surprising results there. You know, one of the strongest countries in Europe for GDP per-capita growth happens to be Italy, which has had . . . it was in a period of population decline, but more reasonable economic growth than we're used to from Italy in the past. You know, between the early 90s and 2016, the UK grew five times as fast as Italy in raw GDP terms. But the Italian performance has been better, the French performance has been better than ours in GDP per capita.

ALEX FORSYTH: Julian?

JULIAN JESSOP: I do think it's sensible to look at GDP per head as a measure of standard of living. I think where I'd disagree with David is his interpretation of what's happening in countries like Italy in particular. The reality is that Italy was hit relatively hard by the euro area debt crisis of the early 2010s. So the more recent growth is partly a catch up from that. Italy has also benefited from a large fiscal stimulus. It was a major recipient of EU funding in the wake of Covid. So I think Italy's performance can be explained by factors that are nothing to do with Brexit, when you compare what Italy has done to the UK. And in fact, I think that's a general problem here that all economists struggle with is working out what the counterfactual is. You know, how would the UK have done had it not been for Brexit? Here, my inclination is to look at, you know, similar countries of similar size and similar stages of economic development, such as France and Germany. Now, the UK has underperformed against France in terms of output per head, but it's outperformed Germany. Now, I think that could largely be explained by factors like relatively high energy costs. You don't need to point to Brexit to explain any of those differences.

ALEX FORSYTH: When we look at the G7 GDP per capita figures as a whole, the UK has only done better than Germany and Canada, and it lags well behind France and Italy. But how do we know how much of this is down to Brexit?

DAVID SMITH: Yeah, it's a difficult one. You've asked a very tough question there. I mean, for me, the effects of Brexit on the economy fall into four main categories. One is business investment has been, I think, weaker than it would have been had we stayed in the EU. Foreign direct investment – you know, overseas businesses from all around the world coming to the UK to access the single market, for which we were a leader, you know, we attracted more from direct investment than any other EU country because they saw the UK as relatively deregulated and, you know, you could access a single market through there. So I think that's been a second one. Trade has been a factor. You know, UK trade, particularly in goods, has been extremely weak since Brexit. And then I think there is a, you know, there is confidence, there is a GDP effect, there's wider effect in terms of business confidence, in

terms access to a large market that we don't have. So I think it's all those things come together. You know, if you take the period immediately before the referendum, post-financial crisis, 2010 to 2016, economic growth in the UK averaged 2% a year over that period. These days, economic growth in the UK struggles to get more than about 1.25%. Now, several factors are there in terms of reducing that economic growth, of which one of them – and we can debate how big a one it is – is the impact of Brexit. The others are things like Covid, debt, higher taxation, maybe more regulation than we had when we were in the EU, you know, all those things that have damaged growth. But I think certainly Brexit is one of them. Pinpointing the exact hit from Brexit is extremely difficult for the reasons that Julian says.

ALEX FORSYTH: Julian, would you accept it has had an impact on the economy?

JULIAN JESSOP: Well, actually, I agree with David that the initial impact of Brexit on the economy has been negative. But if you go through each of those categories, I think there are good reasons to think that those impacts are actually going to fade over time. If we take business investment, undoubtedly the uncertainty created by the vote to leave held back investment for a while, but it's since started to recover as that uncertainty has eased. As for the trade numbers, it's true that our trade in goods with the European Union has underperformed, but our overall trade in goods has been weak too, which suggests that it's not just about Brexit, maybe it's something to do with high energy costs. But also that's been offset by very strong growth in services.

ALEX FORSYTH: David, we were talking about GDP per capita or per head. One thing we saw after Brexit is that changes to the UK immigration policy actually led to a big increase in immigration after the referendum. It's sometimes called 'the Boris Wave'. Would that have affected our overall GDP figures? Might it have made them look better than they actually were in that period?

DAVID SMITH: If the Boris Wave hadn't happened, you know, some of the Boris Wave was, you know, I wouldn't want to blame Boris Johnson for – in the way that some political parties do now – for all of that, because some of it was people coming from Ukraine, some of it was overseas passport holders coming from Hong Kong and so on. So that would have happened anyway. The rest of it, I think – quite a lot of the rest of it – was the then government to say, you know, 'We're not losing out because of Brexit. We're not . . .' you know, 'We're getting people in that we need from all over the world to replace the EU workers who are going home because EU migration has been negative in recent years.' So that would have boosted GDP to the extent that they came – if you have a bigger population, you boost GDP. It has also made the GDP per capita figures, particularly since 2019, look terrible. You know, GDP per capita, GDP per head, fell in the last parliament and that is very rare for that to happen. One of the reasons was very slow growth post-formal Brexit. The other was a big rise in population as a result of the Boris Wave. So it's, you know, a series of factors came together, including Brexit.

JULIAN JESSOP: I think that's another good example where it's important to try and compare the UK to individual economies rather than groups. If you look at performance on output per head

since 2016, I mean, the two big laggards in the G7 group of advanced economies have been Germany – which you could largely explain by high energy costs – but also Canada, interestingly enough, has performed relatively poorly. And Canada is also a country that has seen very large net migration over the last few years. So it's possible that the very high migration into the UK has actually helped to lower output per head. Now that's a controversial thing to say, and if you ask two economists about that, you'll get at least three different opinions, but I think that's one way in which there's been a sort of short-term hit to output per-head because of that surge in migration that won't be sustained.

ALEX FORSYTH: David, a final thought from you?

DAVID SMITH: The only other thing I'd say is that the world in 2026 is quite a bit different from the world in 2016, I think, you know, in a couple of respects. One is that in 2016, we were just coming towards the end of that period in which, you know, David Cameron and George Osborne were talking about the golden era of trade with China. And the argument, you know, we should be looking towards Asia, the Asian Century and so on was much stronger in 2016 than I think it is now, where we have a lot of doubts about China. And also, you know, America was a much more reliable trading partner in 2016 than it appears to be now. That may only be temporary, it may only last as long as the Trump presidency, but I think that is another change that has happened over the past ten years.

ALEX FORSYTH: Julian?

JULIAN JESSOP: Well, I think it's certainly fair to say that the world has changed – not necessarily in a good way – since ten years ago. I think there is a case now for stronger cooperation with Europe on many things, you know, security and so on, but they don't necessarily require us to be closer to the European Union in economic terms.

ALEX FORSYTH: There's now once again an active debate about whether or not moving closer to the EU would boost the economy. There's broad consensus among most economists that leaving has had an impact. The argument is around the extent and how long that might last, as well as how far it's possible to extricate Brexit from other economic shocks, including the Covid pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There's also a question as to the effect of the political uncertainty that followed the referendum and the choices successive governments have made about regulation, immigration and trading relationships, which we explore later in this series, starting next time with the impact of Brexit on trade.

Episode 2: Trade

ALEX FORSYTH: Welcome to *Politically* from BBC Radio 4. This is *Ten Years After Brexit*. It is ten years since the Brexit referendum. I'm Alex Forsyth, a BBC correspondent who's covered Brexit from both Brussels and Westminster. A decade after the decision to leave the EU, what impact has it had on various aspects of public and political life? This isn't an exhaustive examination, but it is an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit ten years on.

DAVID CAMERON: The British people have voted to leave the European Union.

UNNAMED FEMALE: Thank you, Nigel. Thank you, Nigel.

NIGEL FARAGE: Let June 23rd go down in our history as our Independence Day.

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CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: On leaving the EU, the UK left the EU Single Market and the Customs Union. One prize, according to Leave supporters, would be the ability to strike independent trade deals with other nations. The cost? Increased friction with the EU – our nearest and biggest trading partner – and a trade border in the Irish Sea, despite promises to the contrary, which we explore in a future episode focusing on Northern Ireland. So, has the price been worth paying? I spoke to Sam Lowe, head of trade and market access at Flint Global, and Soumaya Keynes, economics columnist at the Financial Times and co-author of the book *How to Win a Trade War*, who started by describing the UK's trading relationship with the EU before Brexit.

SOUMAYA KEYNES: We were in the biggest, deepest international trade agreement in the world. So we were in the Customs Union, we were the single market for goods. The single market for services was a little bit less advanced, but in many areas, there was deep integration, cooperation about regulations. If you wanted to send something from the UK to the EU in many cases, you didn't really have to tell anyone. You didn't have to fill in a customs form. You didn't have to check that the regulations were the same. It just went. Now, the downside, some might say, of that deep integration was that the UK outsourced its ability to sign trade deals to the EU. Now, the EU was negotiating on behalf of Britain, but Britain couldn't go off to, say, India or China or the US and negotiate a free trade deal of its own. It was operating in a bloc, there was a common trade policy, and so it gave up a bit of autonomy there.

ALEX FORSYTH: Sam?

SAM LOWE: The UK benefited from being part of the EU. Most of the modelling, if not nearly all of it, suggests that the benefits of being in the EU were greater than that, that the UK could gain from being outside of the EU. But there were constraints. There were constraints not only on the UK's ability to strike free trade agreements with new countries, but also to regulate itself domestically. The UK couldn't just change a rule on food safety or on AI, for example. It had to go through a process as part of the European Union. It was an influential member state. It often got lots of what it wanted, but it often wouldn't get exactly what it wanted and that in and of itself really was the trade-off.

ALEX FORSYTH: So one of the notions of people that thought Brexit was a good idea was this idea that leaving the European Union would mean the UK could go off and strike new trading relationships with other countries. Has that happened? And where it has happened, what does that look like?

SAM LOWE: So it absolutely has happened insofar as in the first instance the UK actually had to replace all of the free trade agreements it had as part of the European Union and it largely did so successfully. A couple of countries fell to the wayside, but we managed to replace Japan, Canada, Mexico, Chile and others. But then the UK did go off and strike a free trade agreement with New Zealand, with Australia, with India. It exceeded to the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, CPTPP. The EU now has since moved on, for example, New Zealand, Australia, and India, but the UK did manage to do that more quickly. So did the UK manage to fulfil the promise of many Brexiters that it would go off and strike new free trade agreements? In many instances, yes. Would the UK have ended up with those free trade agreement anyway? Quite possibly. Do those free trade agreements offset the economic impact of the UK extracting itself from the European Union? As of yet, the evidence suggests no.

ALEX FORSYTH: We'll come back in a moment to what leaving the EU has done to trade *within* the EU, but sticking with this notion about the trade deals the UK has managed to strike with other countries. Soumaya, do we yet know what the value, the worth of those is?

SOUMAYA KEYNES: If you look at the government's own impact assessments and you add up all of the effects on GDP, I think the total is something like 0.2% of GDP, so not very big. And that compares to much, much larger hits to GDP from leaving the EU – now those are disputed; I think one estimate would say 4% to 5% of GDP. There have been some bigger numbers out there, but those two numbers are on a different scale.

SAM LOWE: So one thing I would add is that there has been one recent example where that flexibility has been quite significant and has allowed the UK to do something quite different from the European Union, and that is accommodate Donald Trump. So the UK was able to move more quickly than the European Union when it came to striking a deal with the US. But actually, the more important thing from a UK perspective was that it was treated separate from the European Union when it came to the calculations for the default tariff levels that were going to be applied. So the 15%

tariff was applied to the European Union, but because the UK was judged in isolation, we'd been anchored at around 10%. So we have seen these differences play out in a way that, while not unexpected, wouldn't necessarily have been part of the discussion a year ago.

ALEX FORSYTH: There is an argument of some who supported the idea of leaving the European Union, that if you look back to the 1970s when it was the European Economic Community, its kind of global clout economically was much bigger than the current EU is. So actually cutting the tether with the European Union and looking elsewhere around the globe to see what trade deals we can strike is, in the long term, potentially going to pay off for the UK. Do you buy that?

SOUMAYA KEYNES: Er . . . not enormously. Roughly half of our overall trade is with the EU. It is very big. It is very rich. We are going to be doing a lot of our trade with the EU for a long time to come. I'm not saying it's a bad thing to try to engage with India, the US, what have you, but just the brutal economics of geography dictate that we're not going to be able to offset the losses from putting up massive trade barriers with the EU with those other opportunities. I think there are also fundamental tensions and trade-offs in some of these relationships. The closer that you want to get to the US, say, on, let's just take food regulation as an example, the less comfortable the EU is going to be about being close with the UK there. Now, I think so far, the UK has actually chosen to stick closer to the EU, but that's just one example of many of the really tough trade-offs there.

ALEX FORSYTH: Let's talk about how trade with the EU has changed, because on leaving the European Union, the UK signed with the EU the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. What did that do, Soumaya, in terms of the way the EU and the UK trade in terms of goods and services?

SOUMAYA KEYNES: So the trade deal that the EU agreed with the UK meant that trade was less smooth than it had been before Brexit happened, but smoother than it could have been under a no-deal Brexit. And so for goods, that meant that there was tariff-free and quota-free trade, which was very nice, but there was a lot of paperwork that came if you wanted to trade across the border. With services in some areas, financial services and transport services, there were lots of new regulations that people had to go through if they wanted to trade. So, you had to, in many cases, set up an office in the EU if you wanted to deliver certain financial services there. In transport services, there were restrictions on how many stops that British drivers could make when they were sending stuff over to the EU. So there were lots of non-tariff barriers. It was all of that that was really going to be the obstacle to trade.

ALEX FORSYTH: What has that done then to our trading levels? And I wonder if it's helpful to break it down into goods versus services. What can we say about what has happened to our levels of trade on leaving the European Union?

SAM LOWE: So this is one of those areas where it's actually quite difficult to make snap assessments, because if you were to just look at the levels, trade with the European Union has gone up.

ALEX FORSYTH: Overall?

SAM LOWE: Overall.

ALEX FORSYTH: For goods and services?

SAM LOWE: Since Brexit. So just slightly, but more so on services. But the issue here is that the question isn't has it gone up or not? Because you would . . . you generally expect trade in total to go up because population levels increase and also because wealth levels increase over time and also because of inflation. So it's gone up. But the question is, has it gone up less than it would have done had the UK remained? And this is why you get all of these arguments around the impact of Brexit, because you can never experience that counterfactual. So trade has gone up. I don't think it's gone up as much as it would have done otherwise. But I think the more interesting thing within this is the compositional aspect of that trade, particularly for goods, where – both anecdotally, and this is starting to come through in the data – you're seeing that lots of smaller companies have just exited the EU market. I mean, there's some absurd examples from early on in post-Brexit, when the TCA first came in, where you'd have people turning up at border control posts, and they filled in the CHED or the export health certificate in a blue pen rather than a black pen, or it might have been a black pen rather than a blue pen and being turned away. You know, that sort of thing puts off a small seller. You just sort of think, 'I can't be bothered with this anymore.' On services, I mean, we've seen UK services exports sort of roar ahead recently. Some of that, I would say, is around inflation, so it's just prices going up. Some of it is the type of services the UK was selling, particularly during Covid, where actually consulting services, legal services, were doing really well, and we're good at that. And also, the other reason for that is that many of the services the UK exports aren't what we consider regulated services. So they're not necessarily as impacted by the UK's exit from the European Union because, for example, consultancy services – I'm a consultant – we're not regulated to the same extent that banks are. So my ability to sell services internationally is generally fairly free. I don't have to do too much. So I think in part that explains why services hasn't been hit . . . hit as much.

ALEX FORSYTH: A final thought, it is ten years since the Brexit referendum, but it's only 2020 that the UK actually left the EU single market. Has this still got a way to run? Can we possibly make a true assessment at this point of what the impact has been on our trade and trading relationships, or could we still see that change given how much of an active political debate there is right now about the UK's relationship with the EU?

SOUMAYA KEYNES: Economists are always going to say, 'We need more data,' but as time goes on, the harder it is to know that it's really Brexit causing any differences and not something else. And so I worry that actually the level of uncertainty that we have now is going to persist. There's never going to be the one true number that tells us exactly what Brexit did. As Sam said, it hurt trade. I'll have fun arguing about it for a while.

SAM LOWE: To Soumaya's point, I mean, even immediately post-Brexit, we had Covid, we then had Ukraine, we then had Donald Trump twice in that period. So there have been lots of exogenous

shocks that have damaged the UK economy in different ways and pulling out the precise Brexit impact from that was always going to be difficult. I suppose the point I would make is that it's never going to be a fixed constant, in so far as the UK's relationship with the European Union will evolve for better or worse over time. At the moment, we are talking about some limited reintegration, but we could then have a government that wants to extricate the UK even further. So actually, we're never going to have that one number – a) because it's going to be difficult to quantify and there's just too much noise in the data; but also because the relationship with the European Union is just going to keep changing over and over and over again.

ALEX FORSYTH: Brexit is a process, not an event.

SOUMAYA KEYNES: Indeed.

SAM LOWE: That was my catchphrase for the last ten years.

ALEX FORSYTH: How did I know? And the process is still unfolding. The current government's attempt to negotiate closer relations with the EU, in part to ease trade friction, could involve trade-offs. And that is the central choice that's faced policymakers since Brexit – whether the benefits of looking beyond the EU to other trading partners could ever outweigh leaving the single market and the customs union. It's been ten years since the referendum but only five years since the UK officially left the EU, during which time there's been a global pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and war in the Middle East, which complicates efforts to quantify the effect of Brexit itself. What is not contested is that it's had a significant impact on trade, and the choices current and future governments make about trading relations will have consequences too. Next time. A central promise of Brexiteers was to take back control of the country's borders. So what did it mean for immigration?

Episode 3: Immigration

ALEX FORSYTH: Welcome to *Politically* from BBC Radio 4. This is *Ten Years After Brexit*. It is ten years since the Brexit referendum. I'm Alex Forsyth, a BBC correspondent who's covered Brexit from both Brussels and Westminster. A decade after the decision to leave the EU, what impact has it had on various aspects of public and political life? This isn't an exhaustive examination, but it is an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit ten years on.

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CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: Immigration was a central issue in the Brexit debate, with the 'Take Back Control' slogan of the Leave campaign widely applied to the country's borders. Leaving the EU would, campaigners argued, allow the UK to end the free movement of people that was a condition of EU membership, with the clear implication that immigration numbers would fall. In fact, the opposite happened. To understand why, I spoke to James Bowes, a data analyst at the University of Warwick and Madeleine Sumption, Director of the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, who started by explaining immigration trends in the years running up to the Brexit referendum.

MADELEINE SUMPTION: Well, before the referendum, net migration to the UK, which is the main measure that gets used in the political debate – so that's the number of people immigrating minus the number of people emigrating – had been going up. It was fluctuating around, you know, 200,000 to 300,000, and the majority of people coming and staying in the UK were EU citizens. There was a point just before the referendum where if you look at the net figure, it was around three quarters of people were EU citizens. So there was very much an expectation that if the UK voted to leave the European Union and ended free movement of EU citizens, there would be a dramatic reduction in immigration.

ALEX FORSYTH: James, why was that? Why did we see such a loss of immigration from the EU in that period leading up to the 2016 referendum?

JAMES BOWES: So until 2011, most net migration to the UK was actually from non-EU countries, but when the Conservatives got elected as part of the coalition, they heavily restricted non-EU immigration. They thought this would reduce overall net migration. However, it didn't lead to an overall fall in net migration because employers instead recruited from the EU. This was at a time when we had the euro crisis. And couple of years later, transitional protections for immigration from Romania and Bulgaria ended in 2014, which meant anyone could come. So as a result of this we saw net migration from EU countries increase from about 100,000 to about 250,000. And in fact, net migration overall slightly increased.

ALEX FORSYTH: But Madeline, around this time, people might have remembered David Cameron talking about getting net migration down to the tens of thousands, but presumably because of EU membership that wasn't in his gift?

MADELEINE SUMPTION: That's right. I mean when that announcement was made policy wonks scratched their heads and wondered how that could happen because of the fact that the UK had no control over EU migration under free movement.

ALEX FORSYTH: So take us to the Brexit referendum, the referendum itself. This slogan, 'Take Back Control', part of that, I think, was widely thought to mean take back control of immigration. What were the promises made? What was talked about regarding immigration during the campaign itself, Madeleine?

MADELEINE SUMPTION: Well, there were quite different positions within the Vote Leave campaign. So there was one narrative that effectively said, 'Listen, this isn't necessarily about numbers. This is about the idea of control. And if we want to be liberal, we can be liberal.' So for example, you have people like Priti Patel out there saying, 'Vote Brexit and save the curry houses,' because we're going to be able to bring in more chefs from outside of the EU. There were other voices in the Vote Leave campaign who emphasised, 'No, no, this is a way to be more restrictive across the board so we'll end free movement.' It was very difficult for Remain to talk about immigration because the truth was that the UK could not control migration from EU countries under free movement. It had exceptionally limited levers. So I think there was a bit of a consensus that the Remain side didn't really have much to offer to those who were concerned about controlling and reducing migration.

ALEX FORSYTH: So then the country votes to leave the EU, James. As a consequence of the decision to leave the European Union, what controls did the UK gain over immigration?

JAMES BOWES: So the principal control they gained was the ability to restrict who could move here from EU countries. So theoretically, all other things being equal, this would have led to a big fall in net migration as fewer EU nationals come. The government chose to liberalise the visa rules and so in the end net migration significantly increased.

ALEX FORSYTH: But the UK officially left the European Union at the beginning of 2020 or the end of 2019. Madeleine, this period immediately after that, when, as James has said, we saw this big

spike in the net migration figures, it's sometimes called the Boris Wave. Can you just explain it to us what happened during that period?

MADELEINE SUMPTION: Well, after the post-Brexit immigration system was introduced, there was a big increase in overall net migration to the UK. And I think that this happened partly by design and partly by accident. So you had the war in Ukraine and the government's decision to open up a pretty liberal visa scheme for people coming from Ukraine. They had also agreed to implement a route for people were coming from Hong Kong after the Chinese crackdown on democracy protesters there. So those are obviously not Brexit related. There was then more people coming in as international students. Partly that was because universities started recruiting more aggressively overseas to bring in international students, sometimes marketing the liberal post-study work visa offer under the post-Brexit system. And then there was an increase in people coming on work visas, initially in some of these middle-skilled jobs like butchers and chefs that hadn't been eligible for work visas under the previous system when there was free movement but then became eligible. And then, perhaps most dramatically, in the care sector, starting in 2022. And all of those things combined together to push the numbers up much higher than was expected. And my suspicion is that if the government had known how many people would take up these policies, it would have introduced a much more restrictive offer. It's just that the enthusiasm for these new policies among prospective migrants was much greater than they had anticipated

ALEX FORSYTH: So James, this period, the UK did have more control over its own . . .

JAMES BOWES: Yes.

ALEX FORSYTH: . . . immigration system because it had left the European Union and therefore no longer had freedom of movement. But despite that increased control, the numbers went up before coming down. What do you think that did to the political debate around immigration?

JAMES BOWES: It feels like the debate has actually lagged behind the reality on the ground. Like, in 2022, when we had record levels of net migration, people hadn't realised this yet, so their attitudes towards immigration were actually more positive. But now we're seeing very low levels of net migration, people can remember the very high levels of a couple of years ago and are still saying they want immigration to be cut.

ALEX FORSYTH: Madeleine, your thoughts on that?

MADELEINE SUMPTION: One of the reasons that we don't see particularly favourable public opinion – even despite the reductions in net migration that we've seen – is that we still do have quite high levels of asylum applications and people coming on small boats. And that is the most unpopular type of migration to the UK. And it now makes up a higher share of the total. So there's an extent to which politicians don't really get a hearing on legal migration while there is still this very visible issue of small boats.

ALEX FORSYTH: There is some debate about whether Brexit had any impact on that aspect of immigration – this idea of people coming to claim asylum in the UK. Do you think it did or didn't, the fact that we left the EU, Madeleine, did that have any impact on the so-called illegal immigration?

MADELEINE SUMPTION: It's very difficult to work out how big the impact of Brexit is likely to have been on small boat arrivals. The reason that it might have had an impact is that the UK no longer shares data with the EU – and crucially, the EU no longer shares data with the UK – about who has applied for asylum. So there's an extent to which the UK has become the final court of appeal for refused asylum seekers in the EU, and qualitative evidence suggests that a lot of the people in northern France have had their asylum claims refused in Europe and are coming to the UK where they can get a new asylum decision and actually in many cases will be successful. The challenge is we really don't know what the scale of that is or how much of that type of dynamic actually might have existed anyway if we were still in the European Union. And actually, if you look at the policies while the UK was in the EU, not that many people were sent back to Europe, and a lot of the people who had their fingerprints checked to see if they'd applied for asylum in Europe didn't come up with a positive hit. So I think it's very difficult. I think Brexit does seem to have some impact, but assessing the scale of it is really hard.

ALEX FORSYTH: Going back to the overall net migration numbers, James, we've seen them come down, as you say. Do we have any sense of what the future trajectory of those numbers is going to be? What's going to happen?

JAMES BOWES: So in 2026, 2027 and 2028 we're going to see very unusually low numbers, and the reason for this is because the 250,000 people a year that were being granted graduate visas in 2024 – and actually the first half of 2025 – those expire after two years, so we'll see a lot of people come to the end of their time on the graduate visa, and most won't be able to get a job that will sponsor them for a visa. Also if earned settlement is brought in in full, a lot of people, it's very hard to say how many, but a lot of people leave the country as a consequence of this. However, longer term, while I think we'll see lower levels of net migration than we're used to seeing, it will very much be a positive figure, over 100,000 people a year and that will be because of a long-term fall in emigration – fewer EU nationals leaving; fewer international students leaving, because the cohorts coming in are now much smaller, which means fewer people leaving in one to three years' time.

MADELEINE SUMPTION: I personally don't think that the earned settlement proposal to lengthen the period of time for people to move to permanent status will be particularly decisive in the net migration patterns. I don't think they would have a major impact. But we will most likely see still substantial numbers of people leaving, but then that will tail off over time. So what that means is we have an unusually low projection for net migration in the short run, and then an upwards trend going back to something more normal, perhaps somewhere between 200,00 and 300,000, probably just about in time for the next election in 2029.

ALEX FORSYTH: Immigration was clearly a really significant factor in the way that people who voted for Brexit voted. Madeleine, do you think that people got what they voted for or what they at least expected out of that referendum when it comes to immigration?

MADELEINE SUMPTION: Initially, people absolutely did not get what they voted for, in the sense that there was a clear promise that net migration would come down and instead it tripled. We are now moving into a phase where the levels of migration and the types of policies are perhaps more similar to what most people might have envisaged pre-Brexit. The big difference, and the area where people who wanted to restrict migration would still be very much disappointed, is the fact that asylum claims and people arriving on small boats are still unusually high. That's, you know, not exclusively because of Brexit. Brexit may have played a small role. But this is just another thing that happened at the same time to mean that the initial desires, pre-Brexit, of policymakers were frustrated.

ALEX FORSYTH: So the UK did gain more control over aspects of its immigration system on leaving the EU, which meant the end of the free movement of people from the bloc. But the way governments chose to exercise that control meant that many people who'd backed Brexit because they wanted lower levels of immigration didn't see that happen, at least initially. As a consequence, rather than take the sting out of the political debate around immigration, it's arguably become a more salient issue – albeit now often focused on small boat crossings and asylum claims, which can overshadow discussion about the benefits or costs of legal immigration, not least to the economy. Now, net migration figures have fallen substantially, which may see the debate shift, but ten years on, immigration is undoubtedly an issue politicians are still grappling with in the face of public discontent. Next time, Northern Ireland, one of the most challenging aspects of Brexit, which has had lasting consequences.

Episode 4: Northern Ireland

ALEX FORSYTH: Welcome to *Politically* from BBC Radio 4. This is *Ten Years After Brexit*. It is ten years since the Brexit referendum. I'm Alex Forsyth, a BBC correspondent who's covered Brexit from both Brussels and Westminster. A decade after the decision to leave the EU, what impact has it had on various aspects of public and political life? This isn't an exhaustive examination, but it is an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit, ten years on.

DAVID CAMERON: The British people have voted to leave the European Union.

UNNAMED FEMALE: Thank you, Nigel. Thank you, Nigel.

NIGEL FARAGE: Let June 23rd go down in our history as our Independence Day.

NICOLA STURGEON: The UK result leaves me deeply disappointed and profoundly concerned.

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URSULA VON DER LEYEN: I'm sorry, we will miss you.

CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: It's become a fairly common claim that Northern Ireland, and specifically its border with the EU and place in the UK, didn't feature in the Brexit campaigns. That is not entirely true. There were claims and counterclaims about the impact Brexit might have on Northern Ireland, but they were nowhere near as prominent in the debate as other issues such as immigration or the economy. And yet, it was the arrangements for Northern Ireland that proved one of the most challenging aspects of Brexit, taking years of negotiation with lasting implications. To understand the picture now, particularly in terms of the politics and practicalities for businesses, I spoke to John Campbell, BBC Northern Ireland's business and economics editor, and Kat Hayward, Professor of Political Sociology at Queen's University Belfast, who began by setting out why this was one of the most complicated aspects of Brexit.

KATY HAYWARD: So if we cast our minds back to just after the referendum and then the move into the negotiations, one of the three priorities set by the UK and the EU in the negotiations was dealing with the Irish border, the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, which entailed protecting the Good Friday Belfast Agreement, the peace process, and keeping the Irish Border as open as it has been, partly in relation to that peace process. And bearing in mind the question of the Irish border is a political source of tensions in Northern Ireland, and also when you deal with borders anywhere, you have practical problems. The special arrangements that they came up with for Northern Ireland, the so-called Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, now known as Windsor

Framework, really placed very particular circumstances on Northern Ireland in relation to border management. So dealing with borders at all, you have these practical questions of customs rules etc., but you also have political sensitivities.

ALEX FORSYTH: To put it really simply, when the UK was in the EU for purposes of trade, for example, there were no borders. But suddenly, the issue that had to be dealt with was, was there going to be a border on the isle of Ireland, or was there going to a border in the Irish Sea?

KATY HAYWARD: Yes, so it essentially became a bit of a choice, does Northern Ireland have a hard border with the Republic of Ireland, as that EU external border, or does it have it down the Irish Sea? What they've come up with now is a – I won't call it a fudge – but it's a very unusual arrangement where Northern Ireland is de facto in the EU single market for goods, but officially, of course, it still very much remains in the UK internal market.

ALEX FORSYTH: So John, if you had to explain in practical terms, what has Brexit changed for businesses operating in Northern Ireland?

JOHN CAMPBELL: Fundamentally, we are now in a position where there is an internal trade border within the UK which didn't exist before. So before the post-Brexit deal for Northern Ireland, if you were moving goods from Great Britain – so from England, Scotland, Wales into Northern Ireland – that was purely a commercial arrangement between two companies. After Brexit, the government is now involved. There are a lot more things you need to do to satisfy the government that you're allowed to trade. So there were things like having some goods checked as they arrive into Northern Ireland, having specific labelling to sell some goods in Northern Ireland, and still having to fill in customs forms of one sort or another to move goods from Great Britain into Northern Ireland. That did not exist before. It exists now. And that causes cost and complexity to business.

ALEX FORSYTH: So the Windsor framework were the arrangements that were negotiated, announced in 2023 – so a couple of years after the UK had officially left the European Union – that were meant to address some of those specific challenges. But there were also people arguing at the time, John, that there could be benefit to Northern Ireland as a consequence of that Windsor Framework, because it would have unique access to both the UK and the EU markets. Has that played out?

JOHN CAMPBELL: Yeah, really from the outset of those special arrangements for Northern Ireland, there was always this dual market access. So it meant that a manufacturing business in Northern Ireland could sell into Great Britain without any constraint, and because it was part of the EU single market, it could also sell into the wider EU without any constraint. And that gave it a competitive advantage over businesses in England, Scotland and Wales who faced a whole range of new processes to sell into the EU. So certainly, there is a big theoretical benefit. In terms of how it's actually worked out in practical terms, that is much more mixed. Because if this was something which was to give Northern Ireland a huge economic boost, you would have expected that to show up in manufacturing, because this covers the trade in goods. So you would've said, 'Well, you have, let's say,

US manufacturers locating in Northern Ireland to serve those two markets.’ We have not really seen anything which you might call a manufacturing boom. And, in fact, when you look at where all the growth in the Northern Ireland economy has come from, particularly since the pandemic, it has all been in services, particularly business services. But that’s a part of the economy which is not covered by these arrangements, because remember Northern Ireland only stays inside the EU single market for goods, it doesn’t cover services. So I think it’s quite hard to make the case that these dual market arrangements have led to some huge economic advantage.

KATY HAYWARD: Yes, I just want to come on the back of that and say the difficulty for Northern Ireland making the most of these dual market access arrangements has really been because of its political context. So what businesses look for above everything else is certainty, what rules are going to be applying, and also certainty in terms of governance arrangements.

BRANDON LEWIS (*Conservative Northern Ireland Secretary, 2020*): We will not be having a border down the Irish Sea.

NEWSREADER: Northern Ireland’s First Minister Paul Givan has resigned in protest over trade arrangements introduced after Brexit.

SIR JEFFREY DONALDSON: The Protocol represents an existential threat to the union and to the future of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

PAUL GIVAN: Basically the executive will be paralysed, the executive will no longer be able to function.

ALEX FORSYTH: In fact, there was a lot of uncertainty. In 2022, the DUP pulled out of power sharing over post-Brexit trading arrangements and Stormont collapsed, leaving Northern Ireland without a functioning government for two years.

KATY HAYWARD: And that profound uncertainty, which only began to be addressed in early 2024, has just been a context that has proven it.

JOHN CAMPBELL: Yeah, because if you were, say, an American investor, and you were thinking, you know, ‘Are we going to deploy tens of millions, perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars in Northern Ireland to set up a manufacturing plant?’ on the basis of having this dual market access, you’ll probably pause to think, ‘Well, is this still going to be the case in five years’ time, ten years’ time? Are we really going to invest into such uncertainty? And as Katy says there, it’s really no surprise then that you haven’t had this huge influx of foreign direct investment on the basis of what’s being offered.

ALEX FORSYTH: Given what you’ve spelled out there, the complexity and the uncertainty, I’m wondering in practical and pragmatic terms how businesses have responded. Have you seen a sort of resilience to that backdrop?

JOHN CAMPBELL: I think it's been very interesting in that the politics in Northern Ireland have been so brittle that they effectively broke down to the extent that we had no government for a long period of time. The business and economics have proved much more flexible, much more adaptable. We still have all the same shops we had before Brexit, selling mostly the same things. You can mostly get all the same stuff online. But behind that there's been a huge amount of work by businesses to adapt and make that possible and you know, when the government comes along to businesses and says, you know, 'If you want to continue to trade, here are the things you must do,' the businesses won't like it, but they'll say, 'Okay. We will find a way.' And to a large extent, they have found a way in Northern Ireland. To a large extent, the flow of goods has continued, but has involved a huge amount of work – and work which is ongoing because this is a dynamic arrangement. As the EU updates its laws and rules and regulations, what you actually have to do to get goods across this internal UK border, that also can change. And I think for some businesses, particularly smaller businesses, it has been exhausting. Bigger businesses have been much more able to absorb this. For smaller businesses it has much more of a struggle, a daily struggle in some cases.

ALEX FORSYTH: Has it increased trade with the Republic of Ireland?

JOHN CAMPBELL: Yeah, I think that's the one thing where if you were to look at all the charts, the economic charts in Northern Ireland and say, you know, 'Point to me where Brexit and the sea border has actually had an impact,' that's the one where you would see this big increase in trade, both from north to south and south to north. And simply it's because in some cases where previously it made sense to source a product in GB, it now makes more sense to source that either directly in the Republic of Ireland or bring it through the Republic of Ireland because you have less friction.

ALEX FORSYTH: So, Brexit created uncertainty for businesses and destabilised the political situation in Northern Ireland, evidenced by the collapse of the Northern Ireland government. Even now, many unionists who supported Brexit say the way it's been implemented has weakened Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom. Has it deepened political divisions?

KATY HAYWARD: Certainly, if we look at the survey data, we see that Leave/Remain identities in Northern Ireland are stronger here than they are in Britain even. And those, by and large, lie on top of divisions that already existed in terms of unionists and nationalists and others. And this is partly in the context of, in a particular view, that Brexit has increased the likelihood of a United Ireland and of the breakup of the United Kingdom. So about two thirds of people think that. And that includes the plurality of unionists as well. So in that context, you can understand why it is that it's become such a divisive issue here and why we've had the reactions we've had from unionists who feel that Northern Ireland's place in the UK, both internal market and constitutionally, is that much more insecure.

ALEX FORSYTH: We've now got a government that's talking about closer economic ties with the European Union. We don't know yet what exactly that would look like. But Katy, do you think that that could go some way to address some of the issues that you have raised as you see as a consequence of Brexit in Northern Ireland?

KATY HAYWARD: Yes, certainly. I mean, the British government and government officials are very clear that they are bearing Northern Ireland's place in mind as they negotiate these new agreements, including in the most tricky aspects of border management, so-called SPS, dealing with plants and animal health. And so we expect them to be sort of overlaying this UK-EU agreement on top of the Windsor Framework. It doesn't get rid of the Windsor Framework, but it does mean that those arrangements that are particular to Northern Ireland will be less necessary. The intention is, I think, that this would lighten the load for businesses, make trade across the UK internal market that much more easy.

JOHN CAMPBELL: Yeah, and I think for particularly small businesses in the food and agriculture sector, a big overarching agri-food deal of the sort we think the UK government is aiming for, that would have a huge impact, because in terms of the actual practical day-to-day management of this internal UK border, it's the movement of those food and plant products which is still the most difficult, the one which involves the, kind of, the most paperwork, the most intrusive checking. So you could potentially, kind of at a stroke, get rid of that.

ALEX FORSYTH: Katy, at this point now, looking back, do you think that the unionists who supported Brexit regret it?

KATY HAYWARD: According to the polling data, no, they don't. So there's this overall sense that Brexit has been a failure in Northern Ireland. And the reason why that sense is very strong – about three quarters of people think that – is because both Leavers and Remainers think it's been a failure. And for Leavers, they essentially think they never really got the proper Brexit. So any difficulties that they see post-Brexit, they blame on those deals that Boris Johnson did and Theresa May before him. So this sense of being cheated and hard done by is what they put down to being the failure of Brexit, not the fact of Brexit itself.

ALEX FORSYTH: For an issue that featured so little in the Brexit campaign compared to others, Northern Ireland dominated post-Brexit discussions. While the UK voted to leave the EU, Northern Ireland voted to remain. The arrangements it has been left with after years of wrangling place it in a unique position with access to both the EU single market and the UK internal market. But Brexit has caused complexity, friction, political instability, and lasting constitutional questions. We'll explore that more next time, when we look at the impact of Brexit on the UK's union.

Episode 5: The Union

ALEX FORSYTH: Welcome to *Politically* from BBC Radio 4. This is *Ten Years After Brexit*. It is ten years since the Brexit referendum. I'm Alex Forsyth, a BBC correspondent who's covered Brexit from both Brussels and Westminster. A decade after the decision to leave the EU, what impact has it had on various aspects of public and political life? This isn't an exhaustive examination, but it is an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit ten years on.

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CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: While the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU, the votes in its constituent nations differed, with England and Wales voting to leave, and Scotland and Northern Ireland voting to remain. The process that followed – extricating the UK from the EU – tested the UK's constitutional arrangements. We look more deeply at the impact on Northern Ireland, plus economic and sector-specific effects, including on the farming and fishing industries elsewhere in this series. To get a sense of the effect on devolution and politics in Scotland and Wales, I spoke to Richard Wyn Jones, a Professor of Welsh Politics and Director of the Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University, and Nicola McEwan, Professor of Public Policy and Governance at the University of Glasgow. So Nicola, let's just start with you. Take us back to the period of the referendum campaign itself. What were the key arguments being made both for and against Brexit in Scotland?

NICOLA MCEWAN: So I think it's important to recall that the Brexit referendum campaign overlapped with the elections to the Scottish Parliament and, of course, the elections in Wales as well. So it was actually much more low-key in Scotland than it probably was in England, certainly. The other factor to bear in mind as well is that none of the parties represented in the Scottish Parliament had leaders that were campaigning Leave. There was a very broad political consensus in favour of the UK remaining within the European Union. So when you don't have that much competition among the parties, then you don't really have that much intensity of debate. So in some respects, it felt like the debate was taking place somewhere else.

ALEX FORSYTH: And Richard, in Wales?

RICHARD WYN JONES: To be frank, there wasn't much of a referendum campaign in Wales. The devolved election campaigns, rightly or wrongly, took precedence. So it was basically the debates in London and in England reflected over the border. And the specific implications in terms of the specific nature of the Welsh economy, the constitutional implications for devolution, none of these things were really aired because there was no campaign.

ALEX FORSYTH: And it's interesting, after the referendum, Richard, quite a lot was made about the fact that of the four UK nations . . .

RICHARD WYN JONES: Yeah.

ALEX FORSYTH: Wales was one of the biggest beneficiaries of EU funding. And the question was raised about why, therefore, did Wales vote for Brexit, ultimately? How much of a factor do you think that actually was in voters' minds?

RICHARD WYN JONES: I mean, certainly after the referendum, Wales became the subject of a particular genre of journalism. And the kind of story was, 'Look at all the money that this place got,' – because Wales is one of the poorest places in Western Europe, we were in receipt of lots of Objective 1 funding, which is the kind structural funds meant to bring up the poorer bits of the European Union, a kind of levelling up, European style. And people would pitch up and say, 'Well, okay, all of this community voted to leave,' and there was a kind of certain element, I think, of condescension there and completely ignoring the other bits of poor West Wales that voted Remain – in particular, the Welsh-speaking heartlands that were much more likely to lean in the direction of Remain. Because actually, in terms of the vote in Wales, Wales was one of the most divided bits of Britain, certainly. So in the aggregate, it was very close. It was the classic 48/52, but under the bonnet, so to speak, fluent Welsh speakers who identify as Welsh were probably the most pro-Remain demographic in the whole of Britain. And then on the other side of the spectrum around 27% of the Welsh electorate are born in England and those people in Wales who feel strongly English voted in the same way as people who feel strongly English in England, which is overwhelmingly to leave.

ALEX FORSYTH: So identity was a key factor as opposed to thinking about, potentially, the economic benefits of EU membership?

RICHARD WYN JONES: In terms of explaining the votes across Britain – so Scotland, England and Wales – what you find is national identity is really very, very important. In England, it was Englishness that was strongly aligned with Leave. In Scotland and Wales the kind of attitudes that align with Englishness in England align with *Britishness*. But that's not to say that the economic dimension is unimportant. It's, I think, refracted through the lens of national identity – so how you understand, you know, the problems of your place in the world and what should be done about those. National identity plays a really important part there.

ALEX FORSYTH: I'm going to ask you both a bit of an impossible question, but in the decade or so since the referendum itself, how would you sum up the effects it's had on Scotland and Wales respectively for good or for ill? Nicola?

NICOLA MCEWAN: So there was some modelling undertaken by the Chief Economic Advisor in the Scottish Government last year that modelled the estimated economic impacts, taking into account both the nature of the agreement that the UK now has with the European Union and the other trade agreements. And the economic impact has been significant in terms of its detrimental effect. Over the ten to 15 years, the expected drop in GDP is 2% or £4 billion. So it's difficult to point to economic effects without seeing them in the negative. I think though, political and constitutionally, there are significant effects on devolution and the functioning of devolution, because the UK government at the time – and indeed its successors have maintained this largely – felt they needed, as the UK left European Union's internal market and its regulatory system, that they needed something in the UK, domestically, to maintain the UK's own domestic market. And through a variety of measures – the most notable one being the United Kingdom Internal Market Act – that has had an impact on the autonomy, the legislative competence of the devolved legislatures.

ALEX FORSYTH: I want to pick up that thought about devolution in just a moment, but Richard, in the broad terms, how would you characterise the key impacts of Brexit in Wales?

RICHARD WYN JONES: So, economically, first of all, Wales was probably more reliant than the rest of Britain, certainly, on the single market. And we have a particularly weak financial sector in Wales. So it's hard to view the economic effects of Brexit as other than pretty negative. But it's also interesting just to note how it has had a fairly fundamental impact in terms of the debate on independence for Wales. There wasn't really a debate on independence for Wales prior to the 2016 referendum. Since then, support has grown to around a third of the Welsh electorate, which obviously isn't at Scottish levels, but it's a really dramatic change from where we used to be. And it's mainly Remainers who've shifted in the direction of independence.

ALEX FORSYTH: Just picking up this point about devolution. So the UK Internal Market Act was drawn up effectively to allow businesses to trade freely within the UK outside of the EU single market. Nicola, I just want to return to this point about how that was practically, but perhaps also politically, received and the impact that that had on the devolved administrations?

NICOLA MCEWAN: First of all, it was passed by the UK Parliament without the consent of the devolved legislatures. So that consent principle – known commonly as the Sewel Convention – is a really important symbolic underpinning of devolution within the United Kingdom. And the fact that it was set aside to pass this legislation made it really politically difficult from the outset. In practice, what that legislation also does, is if, say, the Scottish Parliament was to introduce a law on the type of goods or the conditions of goods as it tried to do with introducing the deposit return scheme for materials including glass, then it can only apply that law to goods that are manufactured or produced within Scotland. It cannot apply it to goods that come into Scotland from the rest of the UK, unless it

secures an exemption. And it does change the balance of power, in a sense, between the devolved legislatures and the UK government, given its overall strength in regulation.

ALEX FORSYTH: The operation of the UK Internal Market Act has been reviewed to consider concerns about the impact on the devolved nations, so what has it done to perceptions of devolution and the relationship to the parliament in Westminster?

RICHARD WYN JONES: So I would say that the issue goes far beyond a particular piece of legislation, it's more fundamental than that. One of the interesting things about devolution is it never fitted neatly into kind of traditional notions of Westminster parliamentary sovereignty. One of the consequences of Brexit, and particularly the way that the UK government of the day chose to interpret the mandates of the Brexit revolution, it was, you know, restating Westminster sovereignty principles, which sit really, really uneasily with the existence of powerful parliaments in Cardiff, Edinburgh, and indeed Belfast. And I think that this circle has not been squared, so to speak.

ALEX FORSYTH: We now find ourselves in a position where you have First Ministers who support independence. How much of that would you attribute to Brexit versus other factors?

NICOLA MCEWAN: I think in Scotland there is a dominant narrative, that was initially introduced by Nicola Sturgeon as First Minister and has continued all the way through, that Scotland was taken out of the European Union against its will. And that colours the constitutional debate within Scotland and it colours party politics. But I wouldn't say that Brexit is the primary reason for the SNP's continued dominance of Scottish politics – that probably emerged after the independence referendum. And while the makeup of that support for the SNP has been shaped and coloured by Brexit – and that it's much more clearly pro-Remain than it was before the independence and Brexit referendums – the strength of the SNP and its dominance within the party political system is much more about that broader constitutional debate in Scotland, as to where Scotland's future lies in relation to the rest of the United Kingdom.

RICHARD WYN JONES: I think the situation in Wales is slightly different from that in Scotland because the change came after the Brexit referendum. And I think that the Brexit referendum has had a material impact on this massive shift in Welsh politics that we've seen very recently, in fact. And you know, it has certainly unleashed different kinds of forces on the progressive left and on the kind of populist right. And Welsh politics is, I think, largely being reshaped as we speak – and in large part because of Brexit.

ALEX FORSYTH: Brexit tested and at times strained relations between Westminster and the devolved administrations, notably when it came to the way powers were repatriated from the EU. In Scotland, the SNP government pointed to Brexit as a reason for a second independence referendum. While UK governments have consistently resisted, the decision to leave the European Union has, in some quarters, amplified debate about the UK's internal union too. And whether it's Brexit related or not, there are now nationalist First Ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. So the constitutional questions are likely to continue. Next time, Brexiteers claimed that leaving the EU could

unleash the UK from burdensome rules set in Brussels. So what has it meant in terms of regulatory freedom?

Episode 6: Regulatory Freedom

ALEX FORSYTH: Welcome to *Politically* from BBC Radio 4. This is *Ten Years After Brexit*. It is ten years since the Brexit referendum. I'm Alex Forsyth, a BBC correspondent who's covered Brexit from both Brussels and Westminster. A decade after the decision to leave the EU, what impact has it had on various aspects of public and political life? This isn't an exhaustive examination, but it is an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit ten years on.

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CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: Claims of a ban on bendy bananas came to symbolise what many Brexiteers saw as a fundamental problem with the EU: burdensome bureaucracy and onerous regulation that stifled UK business and innovation. The Brexit campaign leant heavily on the notion that reclaiming sovereignty, ditching so-called red tape imposed by Brussels and setting its own rules would unleash the UK's potential. So in reality, what has happened so far? I asked Jill Rutter, senior fellow at the Institute for Government, and Joël Reland, a senior researcher at UK In a Changing Europe, to explain how the UK has used its post-Brexit regulatory freedom.

JOËL RELAND: I think there was this idea that regulation was central to the EU referendum campaign because of that famous slogan, 'Take Back Control', which speaks to the idea that the EU is stopping us from doing things the way we would like to do them. But in the campaign itself, there was actually very little detailed discussion of what 'taking back control' would mean or the types of EU regulations that you might want to get rid of. There was maybe mention of rules around data protection, working hours, but really not very much more than that. And it really happened at a much more emotive level, where Boris Johnson, Michael Gove were saying, 'We should not let the EU tell us what to do. They shouldn't set the rules on our vacuum cleaners and how powerful they can be,' but that wasn't getting into the real weeds of it, and that really speaks to, I think, the problems which then came further down the line. There was this idea, 'We don't like EU regulation. It's suppressing British

businesses. It's set in Brussels. It's not done in our interests.' But what you want to replace it with – that was never, ever really discussed until long after the fact.

ALEX FORSYTH: That Boris Johnson moment, I think, was when he launched the Vote Leave bus and he was talking about there's a limit on how powerful your vacuum cleaner can be. Jill, do you remember, through the campaign, did you get a sense of the specifics of what the arguments were for why this might be of benefit?

JILL RUTTER: No, there weren't really specifics there, but you have to remember that the dislike of EU regulation goes a long way back. If you remember back to Mrs Thatcher's speech in Bruges back in 1989, she talked about we haven't just rolled back the frontiers of the state in the UK to have them reimposed from Brussels. And successive governments, both Conservative and Labour, really didn't like some of the regulation coming out of Brussels. They didn't like the fact that the European Court of Justice might, after action by the European Commission, find that the UK hadn't implemented EU rules properly, might fine the UK. And I think there was a feeling, two sets of feelings – one that the EU did far too much regulation, it was far too burdensome; but secondly, also, that quite often, the UK was the only country that really followed the laws, so we hamstrung our industries more than other countries. But also that civil servants back in the UK tended to gold plate EU directives from the way in which we translated them into UK law. So there was a big feeling that actually, you know, if we had control of our laws – that phrase Joël has been mentioning, from the referendum campaign – then we could do things differently and, of course, we'd be making regulation for one country or one set of nations rather than having to do slightly sort of compromised, patched-together deals between the 28.

ALEX FORSYTH: Joël, since then you've been involved in the UK In a Changing Europe's Regulatory Divergence Tracker is the name of it. So it's looking at how the UK and EU have diverged since Brexit. What have you found?

JOËL RELAND: The central kind of essay question for this project was, well, now we've taken back control, what on earth are we going to do with it? What are we going to change? And actually, we've not diverged very much at all. And the kind of most fundamental reason for that is this idea that Brexit was premised on that we can tailor regulation to the UK, better suit it to our own interests, is a contradiction in terms really, because from a trading perspective, regulation is not about tailoring. It's about compromise. It's about creating commonly agreed rules, which mean I can trade with you, you can trade with the person next to you. And we all work to the same standards and that makes life easier. If you do things your own way, that might work for your specific markets, but it doesn't work for anybody else around the world. And so what you find is that there are actually more barriers to trade. Business doesn't like that. And so it meant the government time and time again, actually, after it proposed something, pulled back and said, 'Oh, this isn't going to work. It's going to make life harder for our businesses, for our economy.'

ALEX FORSYTH: I remember the Brexit Freedoms Bill, I think it was called, which was about rolling back some of the EU legislation that was on the UK statute books as a consequence of being a member of the European Union. Did that end up happening?

JILL RUTTER: Yes, it did, but not in the form was originally proposed. So the original proposal, which came, I think, from Jacob Rees Mogg really – as business secretary, and before that as the Minister for various things including Brexit regulation – wanted to sunset all that EU law that we had transferred over into UK law, the thing Theresa May did, to make sure that we have a sort of complete statute book when we actually left the EU. He wanted to sunset it all on a date and say, if ministers hadn't specifically said, 'We want to keep that law,' then it would just fall away. What happened was, over the course of a number of different Conservative Prime Ministers, we ended up with a complete reversal. So Kemi Badenoch, who was then the business secretary in charge of this, changed it so that the default became the other way. So the default was that we retained all that EU law unless ministers specifically said, 'This will go.' So what they ended up doing was dumping quite a lot of frankly really already redundant rules, so they could point to 'We've got rid of all these regulations,' but none of them really made very much material difference. So that's where we are. Most EU law still sits on the UK statute book with a slightly different name.

JOËL RELAND: I've got some numbers on that if you want it?

ALEX FORSYTH: Please, we love numbers!

JOËL RELAND: I think they have a . . . they have a dashboard, the Retained EU Law Dashboard. Anyone can go online and look at it.

JILL RUTTER: Actually, very unnervingly they kept on changing the numbers of how many EU rules we thought there were.

JOËL RELAND: Yeah, they kept finding more law. And they've now repealed, so they say, about 30% of retained EU law, but most of that is just deadwood stuff, which no longer applies. So it's things like the EU's trading relations with the Solomon Islands, and fisheries rules in relation to that – stuff that doesn't matter to us because we're no longer part of the club.

ALEX FORSYTH: I remember people making the case that, actually, being able to set our own regulations might mean that the UK could set a higher standard of regulation than perhaps you would get in the EU, for some things like animal welfare, for example, has that happened?

JOËL RELAND: Yeah, so this is, I think, one of the most interesting aspects of where we have diverged, which is not in many areas, but the few areas that we have, often, it's to set higher rather than lower standards. Animal welfare is a great example. We've banned the export of live animals for fattening and slaughter, and there are also higher taxes on alcohol in some areas compared to EU rules. And I think it speaks to the fact that fundamentally, it's taken Brexit to show that our regulatory instincts are more European, I think, than we often assume. Voters really just . . . they quite like to ban

things. They quite like the government saying, 'You're not going to do that,' rather than, 'We're going to let you do something.' And even in lots of areas where we haven't kind of made use of Brexit freedoms, we've actually followed along in the same direction as the EU – whether that's climate, digital rules, things like online safety. We're basically moving in the same direction. We're not very far apart in terms of the way we want things to be. And so there was this idea we have a very kind of independent, different spirit. And Brexit showed us no, not really – we broadly think the same as each other.

JILL RUTTER: But there are some areas where we have done things differently. So the UK moved ahead on gene editing, where we were constrained by EU rules. There's a question mark whether the EU will catch up or not on that. So we made that easier in England.

ALEX FORSYTH: And has that had a material benefit?

JILL RUTTER: Difficult to say.

JOËL RELAND: Not . . . not yet, I think . . .

JILL RUTTER: But I think it's something that people will be reluctant if we have to turn it back in order to realign with the EU as part of the government's potential deal on sanitary and phytosanitary standards. On financial services, we've actually done things quite a bit differently. We've also taken a rather different, if you like, philosophical approach to regulation of AI. You know, the EU does things in a very legalistic way because it has to have rules that you can then apply across 27 member states, whereas the UK adopted a more flexible . . . what they call 'principles based' approach – and the EU found quite rapidly that its AI regulation was looking pretty out of date when AI development speeded ahead and the EU regulation was behind, so they've had to change that, whereas the UK approach there is more nimble.

JOËL RELAND: Yeah, it's actually a really interesting case study in the intersection between regulation and foreign policy, because last year, Peter Mandelson, when he was ambassador to the US, stood up and said, 'We need to make a living as not-Europe,' and kind of very pointedly not signing up to a big AI summit, which President Macron and I think India and other countries led. The UK and the US, 'No, we're not joining.' That's a real way to try and win some kudos in the White House, using our Brexit freedoms to get going in the world.

ALEX FORSYTH: I just want to go back to some of the things you said where there has been some divergence. So on gene editing, I mean, I'm not an expert on gene editing, but what has that meant in practical or real terms that the UK is able to do that it wouldn't have otherwise been able to do?

JOËL RELAND: Yeah, okay. So in very simple terms, you have genetic editing which is, effectively, in a lab, accelerating processes that could have happened in the natural environment, but you're, you know, using techniques to make that go faster. Genetic modification – that's the kind of

Frankenfoods – you splurge things that couldn't happen out in the wild. So you liberalise gene editing and say, 'That's not the same. You can do creative things. You can have more sustainable crops. You can have more drought resistant crops. So benefits for consumers for farmers.' And so that's what UK has done. They've changed the rules. But as far as I'm aware, that actually practically leading to many material differences yet is not really the case. We're still in kind of the foothills of the regulatory journey.

ALEX FORSYTH: In the recent King's speech, the government announced a European Partnership Bill, which will provide a method through which UK and EU law would be aligned in relevant sectors being negotiated, for example food trade, electricity and energy trading. The government could also use this legal avenue to do the same in any other sector.

JILL RUTTER: So the government has now accepted the principle of what it calls 'dynamic alignment', which means that we will keep pace with EU rules, even though we no longer have a seat at the final decision-making table. The benefits to business of not having double compliance procedures outweighs the problems we might have in accepting rules in which we don't have a vote. So that's what the government has said. At the moment, it's confined to very few areas. It has said it will do that on sanitary and phytosanitary areas, which basically means agri-food exports. So that's one area – and that will be potentially quite good news for farmers, fishermen who want to export their goods into the EU. It's also said it will do it in order to link our emissions trading system and to allow the UK to participate in the EU energy market, which will, they hope, lead to lower electricity prices. But they're quite narrow areas where the government has said that. The interesting question is whether they want to come up with another list of areas in which they want to do dynamic alignment.

ALEX FORSYTH: Joël, any thoughts on that?

JOËL RELAND: Yeah, I think the point about what the EU is willing to accept is really the most important one because this government is now basically saying, 'In most areas, we would like to align rather than diverge. There are a few special areas where we want to keep our own rules. Trade policy would be a good example of that, doing our own trade deals. Mostly we want to get closer to the EU.' But the EU will say at some point, 'Well, there's a major price to pay for that.' And that probably means payments into the EU budget, and it almost certainly means free movement of people as well.

ALEX FORSYTH: So far, the government's position is that it is sticking to its so-called red lines, meaning no return to the single market, customs union or the free movement of people. But this has, once again, become a very active political debate. Supporters of realignment argue it will ease friction with the UK's biggest trading partner and provide an economic boost. Opponents claim it will mean the loss of autonomy, reduce the UK to a rule-taker; limit its ability to pursue trade deals with other countries or limit AI innovation, and could cost financially. The central point is now UK politicians do have the ability to choose which path to follow and ultimately, they will be accountable for their decisions – unable to blame Brussels bureaucrats for the UK's regulatory regime in the same way they once might have been tempted to. Next time, the Brexit effect on the world of science and academia.

Episode 7: Science and Academia

ALEX FORSYTH: Welcome to *Politically* from BBC Radio 4. This is *Ten Years After Brexit*. It is ten years since the Brexit referendum. I'm Alex Forsyth, a BBC correspondent who's covered Brexit from both Brussels and Westminster. A decade after the decision to leave the EU, what impact has it had on various aspects of public and political life? This isn't an exhaustive examination, but it is an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit ten years on.

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CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: Decades of EU membership meant that when it came to science and academia, the UK was entwined with the EU. It was part of Horizon, the central EU programme for funding research and innovation, and Erasmus, a student exchange scheme, while researchers, academics and students could easily move between the UK and EU countries. So what did leaving mean for scientific research and higher education? I spoke to Dani Payne, Head of Education and Social Mobility at the independent think tank, the Social Market Foundation; and Sarah Main, who was the Executive Director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering during Brexit and in the years that followed. She started by explaining the pre-Brexit research landscape.

SARAH MAIN: Before the EU referendum, there had been, for some time, quite a stable relationship between the UK and the rest of the European Union for research funding, for collaboration with people, for exchange of people and researchers, and for regulation of science and innovation. So I tend to think of it as those three main areas, like, people, funding, regulation. And that had been developed over a number of decades. And what had developed was a framework, if you like, that made multilateral collaboration between countries in the European Union as seamless as possible. So that if you were a UK researcher and you wanted to do a big collaboration across Europe on, let's say, a rare disease or some kind of research into the future of aerospace or something like that, it was quite straightforward to bring together universities and businesses across a number of countries. And all the

sort of legal and financial and practical paperwork, if you like, was in place. And the UK was a really active member of that European community, and it was quite a sought-after partner.

ALEX FORSYTH: On leaving the EU, the UK was frozen out of the multi-billion-pound Horizon Research Programme for three years before it managed to renegotiate a return in 2024, albeit as an associate member rather than a full one. Other things changed too, according to Danny Payne.

DANI PAYNE: I think there are some things you forget that just become impossibly harder almost overnight. So for example, whereas before, UK universities were able to employ European researchers for basically the same cost as a UK researcher, suddenly that becomes much more difficult. You have very high visa costs, a lot of bureaucracy, difficulty getting people over here. And I think even when we have come to a good end point, those years of uncertainty for the sector and for industry, I don't think you can underplay the psychological consequence of that. Because you have to remember that the research landscape thrives on certainty, long-term vision, trust between different countries, between different sectors, and interdisciplinary collaborations. And we just stopped being seen as a reliable partner in many ways.

ALEX FORSYTH: Sarah?

SARAH MAIN: In the area of satellite technology, there were two different major programmes. One was called Galileo – and the UK was part of this consortium with the European Union to develop Europe's own equivalent of the GPS satellite system. And the UK had invested and given a lot of the science and research towards the equipment on the satellites, but once we had decided to leave the EU the UK was no longer able to be part of that system. And we're still not. And it's because of reasons of security. So that's something that is a really clear change that, you know, we were going to be part of this GPS system and we're now not. There was another earth observation system called Copernicus, which we were able to negotiate to still be part of. And that uses satellites to look at the Earth, you know, will monitor all sorts of aspects of the Earth's health. And there, we have been able to join. So you know, there were some examples of things which, you know, we now are no longer part of. When it looked like there might be a no-deal Brexit, the UK government was trying to develop its own version of those big European framework programmes so that we could build our own capability alongside. So a huge amount of work was done, actually, to look at all those possibilities.

ALEX FORSYTH: There are examples of sector-leading UK innovation in the years since Brexit, but according to Sarah Main, there are advantages and disadvantages.

SARAH MAIN: Personally, I think a really strong example of that was the development of the COVID vaccine in the UK, where I think, you know, our regulatory bodies showed themselves in their best light in terms of being quite fleet of foot, maintaining the highest standards of safety and oversight. The flipside of the coin though, is that for many organisations I spoke to, they really valued a kind of consistent approach across a large market. So if you're a company wanting to sell pharmaceutical into the whole of Europe, then you would value there being the same regulatory processes in the UK and the rest of Europe, or at least a very close alignment.

ALEX FORSYTH: I'm just wondering about this notion that you've both touched upon as the UK being a leader in collaboration. Have we seen a shift in the focus of that collaboration since leaving the European Union, where perhaps before, the UK would almost automatically look to the EU as a member? Has it looked to other nations?

DANI PAYNE: Since Brexit, we've seen a big shift in who we collaborate with and our role in those collaborations. So it was spoken about as Brexit would allow us to become global Britain and that we would be able to collaborate more with, say, Australia and North America and New Zealand. Instead we've been a reduction in collaboration with those countries. We've seen an increase in collaboration with researchers from places like North Africa and Asia and particularly China. And that's partly Brexit making it harder to collaborate with EU colleagues and people perhaps not looking on it as a such a stable partner when making co-funding bids. But also, whilst the UK has been in this kind of liminal space of 'Are we part of this and are we a part of that, and what deal can we broker?' other countries have raced ahead. So China, just as one example, has put huge sums of investment into R&D and industry. And so we're more likely now to collaborate, for example, with Chinese researchers, but we are now less likely to be first author, less likely, to be holding the funding. And it's just a different kind of relationship that we hold in those collaborations.

ALEX FORSYTH: Can we talk about people? What was the impact of leaving the European Union on students and higher education . . . and academics?

DANI PAYNE: So we had far less EU students who were coming to study in the UK because they lost what we call their home status. It basically meant that before Brexit, they paid the same amount to go to a UK university as a student who is born here pays, which is heavily subsidised from the actual cost. So we saw a huge decrease in students from across Europe coming to UK. So that's one . . . one impact. The second was about the student exchange scheme. And I think that's the most substantial change – although it might impact fewer numbers of students. So Erasmus+ was the ability to go and study and work in Europe, and then and vice versa, as well, and we lost that ability to be part of the scheme. Boris Johnson had said that we would retain access to that scheme in 2020, and a few months later we left because it was deemed to be kind of too expensive to be part of. From 1987 to Brexit, hundreds of thousands of UK students went to Europe and studied as part of that scheme, and very, very quickly we lost that ability.

ALEX FORSYTH: The government is now attempting to negotiate a youth mobility scheme with the EU. It's also rejoined Erasmus, the student exchange programme. Before that, the previous Conservative government had developed its own alternative, the Turing Scheme, which was designed to provide funding to support students with study and work placements around the world.

DANI PAYNE: The biggest positive really was that whereas with Erasmus, we saw huge disparities in terms of if you're a disadvantaged student – so a student from, say, a working class background – you are far less likely to go and study abroad. And part of the idea behind Turing was to counteract that. So they had targets around what proportion of students accessing the scheme should be from a

disadvantaged background. And I would say the biggest difficulty was the bureaucracy that came with it and the very short-term decisions, so often universities wouldn't hear until the summer whether they were going to get funding for that student to go and study, whereas they're meant to start in September, say. And of course, these big exchanges between universities, you're moving a student to another country, you've got to get visas sorted, travel costs, that takes more than, say, a month, six weeks' notice. And so that was very difficult in terms of uncertainty for the students who are trying to access that scheme, but also for the universities as well.

ALEX FORSYTH: As we sit here and have this conversation then, a sort of look ahead. So the UK has renegotiated access to the Erasmus Student Exchange Programme. It has renegotiated, on different terms, access to the Horizon, which is the EU-wide research funding pot, in the very simplest of terms. How are you feeling about the future?

SARAH MAIN: I am optimistic and we still have very high levels of collaboration internationally and really strong business and academic links. Some of the nature of that has changed and, you know, we can monitor some of the changes, you know, there is a slightly smaller share of our international research with the European Union now than there was before Brexit, but other countries are really rapidly accelerating their research power and we are collaborating more widely and more globally. And combined with that, we have had a succession of governments who have really championed the UK's science and research capability as part of the tools in the box for our future, and I think that can only be a good thing.

DANI PAYNE: I'm feeling broadly more positive. I think, as we've discussed, that period of uncertainty was the most damaging. And it also came at a time of, you know, very shortly after COVID, the cost of living crisis. And I think it's important to keep in mind that that's cumulative. So all of those have had a cumulatively negative impact on universities, on research, and on the broader sector. Now things are looking a bit more positive. It depends what this big kind of EU reset ends up looking like, whether there's more to it. Whether there's more to come.

ALEX FORSYTH: What the government's been talking about, which is the future relationship with the EU.

DANI PAYNE: Yeah, you know, what does it look like to have closer ties with the EU? Many in the government have been talking about this. What that practically looks like, I think, will really determine whether we're able to come out of being on the back foot. I think still, partly because of a kind of broader economic stagnation, and also because of the impact of Brexit, COVID, cost of living, we're not going to be able to compete with the likes of China and the US, but we might still be able to put a really strong foot forward and continue to punch above our weight for the country, the size that we are.

ALEX FORSYTH: Large-scale research projects require long-term planning. Brexit caused uncertainty around funding, collaboration, and the movement of academics and students between the UK and EU countries, which undermined confidence and stalled research. The UK sought alternatives

or new initiatives in place of established EU programmes. Now, in some instances, it's rejoined them. Whether Brexit can ultimately unleash UK innovation with a more agile approach and flexible regulatory regime could, once again, depend on the relationship politicians choose to pursue with the EU from here on in. Next time, we look at the impact of Brexit on farming and fishing.

Episode 8: Fishing and Farming

ALEX FORSYTH: Welcome to *Politically* from BBC Radio 4. This is *Ten Years After Brexit*. It is ten years since the Brexit referendum. I'm Alex Forsyth, a BBC correspondent who's covered Brexit from both Brussels and Westminster. A decade after the decision to leave the EU, what impact has it had on various aspects of public and political life? This isn't an exhaustive examination, but it is an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit ten years on.

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CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: Days before the 2019 general election – the election which the Conservatives won on a promise to 'Get Brexit Done', I found myself at Grimsby Fish Market in the early hours of a cold December morning. Boris Johnson was handling the recent catch in front of the media, extolling the virtues, as he saw them, of Brexit for the fishing industry. Fishing and farming – sectors that had long been subject to EU policy – featured heavily in the referendum and subsequent negotiations. But within both industries, there are frustrations at how Brexit has played out. I spoke to Jill Rutter, senior fellow at the Institute for Government, and Joël Reland a senior researcher at UK In a Changing Europe, to examine the impact. Starting with fishing, Joël explained why it's an industry with such resonance, despite its small contribution to the economy.

JOËL RELAND: Firstly, there's the imagery and the symbolism of being an island nation and having control over your own waters, I think really speaks fundamentally to the notions of sovereignty, which the Leave campaign was pushing very strongly in the referendum. And also, it spoke to particular communities, which were very, very pro-Brexit. So whether that's areas like Grimsby, Hull, Plymouth in Devon, Cornwall, those kinds of areas – parts of the country that really had lost faith with the political system as well. So the fisheries issue was something which really spoke to the core constituencies which drove that Leave vote.

ALEX FORSYTH: And what was the key pledge of the Leave campaign to those fishing communities?

JOËL RELAND: Two points really that they focused on. So this is all about undoing the common fisheries policy, which the EU sets, which basically says there is a certain amount of fish which can be caught in UK waters and also puts quotas in place. So the Brits get this much, the Danes, the Germans, the French, etc. get their own quantities. And so the two key pledges were one, to revise those quotas – so to reduce the amount of fish that EU boats could catch in UK waters and UK boats could catch more. And secondly, to take back control of what they call the 12-mile zone. Which is the waters closest to the shoreline, which, it's not where the big vessels go, it's where the small ones go. So economically speaking, less valuable catching, but the majority of British fleets are actually those small vessels which could benefit from having control of that 12-mile zone for themselves.

ALEX FORSYTH: Because there was all of this talk, basically, that the fishing communities in the UK felt like they were getting a pretty raw deal before Brexit. And there was talk about throwing fish back and having to offload catches.

JOËL RELAND: Yeah. So those are actually two different points. The throwing fish back speaks to what Leavers would see as the absurdity of EU regulation, overly prescriptive. 'You can only catch this much fish. If you take too much, you've literally got to send it back into the sea because the rules say, 'the computer says no, you cannot have this back coming to shore.' So highlighting that kind of regulatory issue. And then there's also the point that, yes, other vessels coming in, taking British fish and UK fishers not catching very much abroad.

JILL RUTTER: I think this goes very much back to the idea that Britain got a terrible deal when we joined the common market back in the 1970s and that fishing was done down then. And so this was seen very much as a chance to rectify 40 years of hurt over that really bad deal done back then.

ALEX FORSYTH: So the key question is, did it?

JOËL RELAND: In some senses, yes, probably more senses, no. So on a very basic level, well, the UK took back . . . first we're saying the UK took back about 25% of the catch share from the EU. It asked for about 80%, so it was much lower than what it really hoped for. And then having that greater catch share, there has now been some increase in the volume of fish, which British boats are catching – up about, I think, 13%, 14%, 15%, maybe, between 2019 and 2023, which is the latest data that we've been able to look at. So some increase in catch. But when you dig down into it, firstly, that's not all coming from UK waters. About half of it is coming from catches made abroad. So it's not at all to do with Brexit, clearly. And then secondly, who's catching that fish? Mostly it is Scottish boats. There's been a significant increase in Scottish catch but catches in Wales and in England have actually gone down. And the reason for that is the Scottish industry is by far the biggest. And so you've got the kind of biggest fleets are catching more things like mackerel, which are caught by those big boats. But actually, catches of the fish which is normally caught by smaller vessels, maybe more English vessels, has actually gone down. So you've got a two-part story here. Some people are doing well, but others

not doing so well at all. And certain English fisheries have actually . . . not fisheries, *fishers* have gone out of . . . not business altogether, but they've had to lay people off because they're not able to do as much as they were before.

ALEX FORSYTH: Now why is that? Is that because of the deal that was negotiated with the EU, or is it kind of wider economic factors?

JOËL RELAND: So I think it's partly to do with the reallocation of quotas and so really leaning into those larger vessels, so certain parts of industry have been able to do well. But also, it's to do with the fact that catching the fish is only one part of the story. You also have to be able to sell it. And who buys our fish is Europeans. There's not a big market for shellfish, those kind of things, in the UK particularly, a lot of it goes to Belgium, France, Netherlands countries like that. And because of Brexit, it's become harder to export fish. Some things are banned outright. The EU has banned exports of bivalve molluscs, as they call them, which is an oyster or a mussel to you and me, because they say British waters aren't hygienic enough. And also, there's an issue with, now, the paperwork at the border, which means slower export processes, which means fish just might perish. So you can't get everything abroad as quickly as before. And so there's a higher rate of catch, but exports to the EU are down, I think, by about 30%, from 2019 to 2023. So we're catching more fish, but we can't sell it as quickly and as profitably as we could before.

ALEX FORSYTH: Let's talk about farming. Just explain what was the Common Agricultural Policy, which was effectively the framework for farmers when we were a part of the European Union?

JILL RUTTER: So the Common Agricultural Policy was, if you like, the sort of really long-standing heritage policy of the EU common market. It occupied a giant proportion of the budget when we first joined. And we would say that it was designed to provide income support, production support to inefficient continental farmers. That would be the sort of, you know, characterisation you would have seen back in the 1970s. We saw sort of in the 1970s and 80s, all those big butter mountains, wine lakes, things like that, as a result of production subsidies. The scheme was massively reformed in the early 2000s, actually largely a sort of British initiative to decouple payments from production. So what it changed to being is a scheme which was basically income support for farmers, which took the form of what was called the Basic Payment Scheme, where you owned land – it might depend on whether your land was good for farming or less good for farming – but if you owned land, you got a payment from the Common Agricultural Policy. That budget was protected and national governments couldn't really touch it. And that was the scheme that was operating until we left the EU. And one of the things I think that really did unite a lot of people in the Brexit debate was that surely, we could do better than the Common Agriculture Policy. Farmers didn't like it, they thought it tied them up in a whole morass of red tape, compliance conditions to get, in many cases, quite big and really important payment for a lot of their incomes. But environmentalists noted that the decades of the Common Agricultural Policy had seen destruction of lots of landscapes, had been really bad for lots of key environmental indicators.

ALEX FORSYTH:

So what then changed as a consequence of Brexit?

JILL RUTTER: So as a consequence of Brexit, we took back control. Each government in the UK took back control, so it's a devolved matter. The boldest reforms were when Michael Gove was environment secretary. He made a speech in 2017 that set a new principle, which said, 'We're actually not going to pay you just for holding land anymore.' And the Michael Gov mantra was that we would pay public money for public goods. Forget about income support. What we'll support you to do is to do things that are, largely, good for the environment, but might also be good for heritage and things like that. And that's basically been the core guiding principle of the England scheme.

ALEX FORSYTH: In England, the Basic Payment Scheme has been replaced with the Environmental Land Management Scheme and its core pillar, the Sustainable Farming Incentive. In Northern Ireland, there's a Farm Sustainability Payment. In Wales, a sustainable farming scheme is being introduced, while Scotland has kept basic payments in place so far with future reforms designed to include environmental protections. Replacing one common agricultural policy with four different frameworks hasn't been plain sailing.

JILL RUTTER: A lot of farmers would say, 'Actually, you know, we haven't got the same degree of assurance we used to have through the income support,' and farming has been through very volatile periods since 2020. Some very good for farming – big commodity price rises in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine; other areas where, you know, we're seeing now a massive squeeze on farm costs because of the rise in fertiliser prices as a consequence of the war in Iran.

ALEX FORSYTH: Of course the other aspect of this which could affect farming in particular is the trade deals that the UK then does with other nations. So for example, the trade deals with New Zealand and Australia, what impact have they had on British farmers?

JILL RUTTER: The first thing is, of course, the trade deal with the EU. And just as Joël was saying about fishing, we've seen a big fall off in a lot of agri-food exports to the EU as a consequence now of those new barriers; not customs barriers, but the need to comply with paperwork – much, much harder. And we haven't made it comparably difficult for European farmers to bring their goods into Great Britain. So that's the first problem there. The second one is that the UK was very keen to land new free trade agreements and landed them quite early with Australia and New Zealand. And our livestock farmers in particular think that that has left them potentially very exposed because the EU, when we landed those deals, hadn't landed deals with those countries, partly because they couldn't reach agreement on reducing the level of protection in the European market. So the constraints facing Australian and New Zealand livestock, beef and sheep farmers. The UK has agreed to phase out quotas on exports from Australia and New Zealand over 15 years. The UK Government could say, 'Well, that will be good for consumers, cheaper beef and lamb potentially,' – they don't make too much of that, they actually say most of those imports will substitute for ones that come from Europe at the moment. But our farmers feel very exposed and very let down. And notably, when the EU then landed a deal with Australia, they kept far more protections for their farmers. But the UK was quite keen to land

those deals to show that they could land post-Brexit trade deals. And the Australians and New Zealanders, you might say, slightly saw someone rather desperate for a trade deal coming and insisted on really quite good terms for their farmers.

ALEX FORSYTH: So then, for the fishers and the farmers who weren't fans of the Common Fisheries Policy or the Common Agricultural Policy, and maybe backed Brexit as a result, or for another reason entirely, do we have any sense of how they feel now?

JILL RUTTER: All of this is much harder, I think, than it looks on paper when you can sort of just talk the easy things, 'We can design a scheme that's easier.' You could say that actually, in our trade negotiations, we prioritise the consumer more than producers. We used to always rail against European protectionism. But one of the things that Brexit does is expose our politicians to that accountability. They now have to make those choices. And I think what farmers and fishers find is sometimes they don't like the choices that our politicians make, and that's one of the consequences of Brexit.

ALEX FORSYTH: For both fishing and farming, there have been wide-ranging consequences. And beyond subsidy schemes, quotas and trade, changes to immigration and the impact on seasonal farm workers has been contentious too. Of course, Brexit is a process, not a single event, and for both sectors, replacing decades-old EU frameworks is still being worked through. And what side of the Brexit argument you sit on might determine whether the challenges are deemed a consequence of the act of Brexit itself or the way it's been implemented. Next time, Brexit was the UK's decision, but what impact did it have on the rest of the EU? We'll examine Brexit from a European perspective.

Episode 9: Impact on Europe

ALEX FORSYTH: Welcome to *Politically* from BBC Radio 4. This is *Ten Years After Brexit*. It is ten years since the Brexit referendum. I'm Alex Forsyth, a BBC correspondent who's covered Brexit from both Brussels and Westminster. A decade after the decision to leave the EU, what impact has it had on various aspects of public and political life? This isn't an exhaustive examination, but it is an attempt to understand some of the consequences of Brexit ten years on.

DAVID CAMERON: The British people have voted to leave the European Union.

UNNAMED FEMALE: Thank you, Nigel. Thank you, Nigel.

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CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: Before the Brexit referendum, I covered David Cameron's diplomatic dash around European capitals as he tried to persuade EU leaders to sign up to a package of reforms that he hoped would strengthen the case for continued EU membership. Then, EU leaders were reluctant to offer anything that would undermine the bloc's core principles. But compromise was sought because most European leaders wanted the UK, with its economic and diplomatic heft, to stay in the EU. Not least because of fears that Brexit might trigger a domino effect among some other member states. Of course, in the end, despite David Cameron's renegotiated terms, the UK opted to leave. So what's the view from Europe now? I spoke to Mujtaba Rahman, Managing Director for Europe at the Eurasia Group, and Jannike Wachowiak, a research assistant at UK in a Changing Europe, who began by describing the EU's relationship with the UK before Brexit.

JANNIKE WACHOWIAK: So, I think the UK always had a bit of a special relationship with the EU in the sense that it used to have all these opt-outs when it was still a member of the European Union. So, for example, it, of course, never agreed to join the euro. It wasn't part of the Schengen Zone. So I think a lot of EU member states saw the UK as a really important member state, but at the same time maybe as a bit of a reluctant member state as well. So I think it's always been a bit of a complicated relationship, even before the Brexit days.

ALEX FORSYTH: So then we had Brexit, and the UK took the decision to leave the EU. Mujtaba, how did the EU have to adapt to that?

MUJTABA RAHMAN: In the immediate aftermath of the referendum result, there was a real collective desire among the member states to very quickly figure out a way in which they could ensure continuity on the trade side. You had very important industrial and export interests all over Europe that were lobbying their respective governments to make sure that no matter what happens, unfettered access to UK market remains. And so that was actually the important early political discussions that took place among the member states. In opposition to that was the European Commission, which actually said, 'We all need to slow down a bit here. And before we think about what we're going to do on trade, there's a set of defensive interests that we need to organise ourselves around, namely the financial settlement, the rights of European nationals living in the UK and, of course, the Irish border.' And so it wasn't until a little later that the Europeans ultimately aligned around the sequenced approach where, unless those questions were addressed, only at a later stage would they begin to talk about trade. So it took a bit of time to figure out what the right European approach to Brexit should be, and that only emerged much later in the summer.

ALEX FORSYTH: Yes, because, Jannike, it was always this thing that you effectively deal with the divorce first and then the future arrangements afterwards, because this had an impact on the EU, of course, as well as the UK, this decision for the UK to leave?

JANNIKE WACHOWIAK: Yeah, exactly. I mean, I think the result of the Brexit referendum came as a huge shock for member states. And it also led to fears, quite existential fears, because there was this kind of theory of the domino effect, that other member states might want to follow in the UK's footsteps. And of course, Brexit had an effect on the EU as well. I mean, they lost a hugely important member state, a member state which not only has a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, but also a member state that has got a nuclear deterrent – that has a lot of kind of soft and hard power clout. So that was a loss for the EU. It also had an impact on the EU economically. I mean, the economic impact wasn't as keenly felt in the EU as it was felt in the UK, but nevertheless certain member states that trade a lot with the UK were affected.

ALEX FORSYTH: Just picking up on that thought, Mujtaba, what do you see as the main costs to the EU of the UK's decision to leave, but I guess also, were there benefits?

MUJTABA RAHMAN: So there were very serious costs. I mean, Brexit removed the EU's second largest economy at the time, one of its strongest militaries, its largest financial centre. You know, the UK is obviously a major global player, a P5 member state. And so I think the Europeans absolutely felt as though they're losing an important economic and military and defence power. And there was a real sense of loss about that fact. I think in particular, in the chancellery, Angela Merkel and the team around her were mortified by the result and were absolutely of the view this will lead to a weaker EU. I think the calculations in France – notwithstanding that loss – were slightly different, because France did gain a lot of strategic influence as a result of the UK's departure. In terms of what they gain, I do

think they did find it easier to pass joint measures related to integration in certain areas – in particular joint borrowing and industrial policy. Now we see the Europeans making progress on something known as the Industrial Accelerator Act to, again, counter what they perceive to be unfair Chinese and American competition. And I think it would have again been very hard to . . . to even have this conversation, frankly, within the EU if the UK had been a member state.

ALEX FORSYTH: Because of the UK's natural reluctance to further integrate in these ways, you mean?

MUJTABA RAHMAN: Absolutely. And because the UK, alongside many other economies, remain champions of the free market. And so moving in – what some believe in Europe – is a more protectionist direction I think would have rubbed a lot of people in the Whitehall system up the wrong way and so maybe Europe would ultimately have moved in this direction, but it would be a less ambitious proposal.

ALEX FORSYTH: Jannike, how do you think the EU's relationship with the UK is now, compared to what it was immediately before – and perhaps even immediately after – Brexit? How has it changed and developed?

JANNIKE WACHOWIAK: I think it's been a bit of a rollercoaster over the last ten years or so. I mean, I think the years of the Brexit negotiations were very divisive and had a hugely negative impact on the relationship, and particularly on trust between the two sides. I mean I think we had some real low points there, particularly during Boris Johnson's premiership. And then, kind of over time, we had improvements, I think – particularly Rishi Sunak's premiership did a lot of good in the sense that he was able to negotiate the Windsor Framework and resolve the Northern Ireland question, which had been hanging over the relationship. And then of course, Labour coming in, promising a reset, had yet another positive impact in the sense that the relationship is much friendlier now, much warmer than it used to be. But I think it's also fair to say that there is still some lingering distrust. And while people in Brussels might have forgiven the divisiveness of the Brexit years, I don't think they've forgotten about it.

ALEX FORSYTH: Do you think that the EU should take any responsibility for that? Because you'll know that there's a school of thought in the UK that the EU wanted to almost punish the UK for leaving. It wanted to prevent other countries following suit. So it took quite a hardnosed approach to the negotiations, perhaps even punitive. Do you think the EU could have taken a different approach to negotiations, which may have eased the post-Brexit relationships?

JANNIKE WACHOWIAK: I think from an EU perspective it maybe wasn't so much about punishing the UK, but it was about kind of protecting what they had. Because of course, if at the time they hadn't taken such a hard line, then this domino effect that we mentioned earlier probably would have happened. So I think for them it was quite an existential moment in the history of European integration, because it was the first time that a member state actually decided to leave – and they

didn't know what that meant and what it meant for the future of the EU. So I think we sometimes underestimate how kind of important and existential this moment was for the European Union.

ALEX FORSYTH: Mujtaba, Jannike touched upon it, we've now got a government which is very explicit about wanting closer ties with the European Union in various different aspects. I wonder what areas, from an EU perspective, does the EU still need or even want the UK to contribute to?

MUJTABA RAHMAN: I think there is a desire to do more on security and defence, to do more on migration, and to do more on climate. These are all strategic areas for the EU, and they are areas where I think they genuinely believe a closer, more integrated, more aligned UK would benefit and support European goals in those areas.

ALEX FORSYTH: Jannike, on that, I mean, we've seen in response to Ukraine, the coalition of the willing. We've also seen the formation of the European political community, which was a President Macron notion to bring together common-minded European countries. Is that what the EU is looking for? And what specifically does it want from the UK . . . or need from the UK now?

JANNIKE WACHOWIAK: I mean, I think the way that you phrase the question, 'What does the EU need from the UK?' is probably not necessarily how people in Brussels would see it because their view is, 'Well, you know, you left, and now you have to tell us what you want.' And they very much see the ball as being in the UK's court. So it's kind of the expectation is for London to figure out what they want from this relationship and to then approach Brussels and tell them, and then they will consider those proposals. And I think one reason for that is that the UK and Brexit just is no longer a priority for the EU and for its member states. They have lots of other pressing issues – from Ukraine to the war in Iran, to the relationship with President Trump, to the next long-term EU budget that they're currently negotiating. So I think the relationship with the UK is not really on leaders' minds. That said, they are interested in a closer relationship with the UK in those strategic areas, like security and defence, like energy security, how to build a more resilient Europe, also people-to-people relations and opportunities for young people. But at the same time, it's not really what is kind of keeping leaders awake at night. And I think if the UK wants to go further, it is kind of the emphasis on the UK to come up with kind of ideas and proposals. That's how Brussels sees it at least.

ALEX FORSYTH: And final thought, Mujtaba, there's been a lot of talk, particularly with President Trump in the White House, about a sort of geopolitical realignment and Europe having a really crucial role to play in that. To Jannike's point, do you think the EU sees the UK as a crucial component?

MUJTABA RAHMAN: Absolutely. And I think there is a real opportunity here in light of the turbulence and the transatlantic relationship for the UK and the EU to do more together and to be more strategic. There are big frictions the Europeans are confronting, both with Beijing and with Washington, and there's a real opportunity again for the two sides to do, more but as Jannike said, and I agree, the government in the UK, Keir Starmer, has to make the argument. And if he makes the argument, a positive argument for the customs union, for the single market, for something

fundamental that is not cakeism, I think the Europeans would absolutely be willing to have that conversation. But if the UK government's proposition is 'We want free movement for industrial goods, but not for labour, not for services, not capital,' that's not going to fly in Europe.

ALEX FORSYTH: So, as the government seeks a closer relationship with the EU, it seems it comes back to this crucial point about trade-offs – what it's willing to give, or give up, in order to achieve that. Those who welcome closer EU ties point to the potential economic benefits and the reduction of barriers with our nearest neighbours. Those who oppose the idea say it will mean a loss of sovereignty over trade, regulation and migration. It seems the European view hasn't changed much from the height of the Brexit debate a decade ago. Whatever path the UK wants to pursue, it can't have its cake and eat it. Next time, has Brexit had a lasting impact on our politics?

Episode 10: Impact on Politics

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CHORUS (*singing*): Bye-bye, EU, bye-bye.

ALEX FORSYTH: There is no doubting just how divisive Brexit was. Whatever side of the debate you sat on, the strength of feeling ran high. It split opinion, ruptured political parties and toppled prime ministers. In the years after the referendum, the country watched while Westminster was dominated by intense wrangling, and much of Whitehall's bandwidth was focused on Brexit. New political identities emerged – Leavers and Remainers. And in 2019 an entire general election was dominated by Brexit. So has it had a lasting impact on the way people feel and vote now? I spoke to Paula Surridge, Professor of Political Sociology at the University of Bristol, and Rob Ford, Professor of Political Science at the University of Manchester, who started by describing how he thinks Brexit has shaped our politics.

ROB FORD: What we saw with Brexit is voters line up along a set of new dividing lines that were quite distinct to the dividing lines that have long separated Labour from Tory, but were already becoming evident in the way people were behaving in terms of the minor parties that were growing before Brexit. People forget that the strongest performance for a Farage party before 2024 was 2015 with UKIP. The strongest performance for the Greens before 2024, was also 2015. So those things were starting to come into view. Brexit catalysed that. So the strongest predictors of voting for Brexit were not class or income, they were education, age, social values. And then those became linked to these new tribal identities, Leave and Remain. You know, we didn't have any political resonance, no political attachments to the terms Leave and Remain before the spring of 2016. Now they're markers

of a particular kind of politics. And that's what's really reshaped things since. Because now you have these two tremendously powerful tribal identities out there and that's shaping and also structuring, bounding how people are behaving in terms of their votes. There's a Leave tribe still, which is Tory and Reform. First Tories do best, now Reform are doing best. And there's a Remain tribe – Labour, Lib Dems, Greens, also Scots and Welsh nationalists. Labour have hitherto been dominant in that tribe, despite not always being the most vocal for Remain. But right now, we're seeing perhaps challenge emerging within that camp as well.

ALEX FORSYTH: Paula, immediately after the referendum, there was this period where Brexit just dominated politics. There were intense negotiations, lots of arguments in Westminster. What did that do to our politics?

PAULA SURRIDGE: Well, I think there was a further erosion of trust in politics. Remain voters no longer trusted the system to deliver the outcomes they wanted, their preferred outcomes; while Leave voters saw parliament making all these moves to try and force another referendum, or even just the length of time the process took. I think that eroded both sides' trust in the politics even further.

ALEX FORSYTH: Rob, do you want to pick up anything on that?

ROB FORD: It did intensify, as Paula says, that sense of distrust in politics – particularly, I think, on the Leave . . . well, actually, it's a strong identifier that both sides didn't like it, because the Remain side felt they weren't getting a fair shake at sort of revisiting and renegotiating these kinds of issues. It all got filtered into our very polarised, binary parliament. I mean, Norway voted 52 to 48 to stay out of the EU once upon a time. And then they had like a big cross-party negotiation to decide what that meant, bridging both sides, whereas we filled it straight in to our binary parliament system and it just became full fat Leave and no input from Remainers at all. But I think it probably had a bigger impact, long run, on the Leave side. Leave voters were already more prone to distrust politics as usual, to distrust the political establishment, to believe that their will would in some way be frustrated or watered down or ignored. So when they started seeing evidence that that might be happening, they got quite annoyed about it quite quickly and so in some respects, it may well have laid the groundwork for this reappearance of Nigel Farage and the radical right and Reform UK in an even stronger form, because these voters have not forgotten that their will was being frustrated in that period.

ALEX FORSYTH: Paula, Leave and Remain did become very defining terms in the political discourse at the height of the Brexit referendum, but also in the negotiations that followed. I wonder, do you think that people still broadly define themselves as either Leave or Remain?

PAULA SURRIDGE: I don't think they're as strong as identities as they were in the immediate aftermath, but they gave people labels for a whole package of things that Rob's already described there. So I think one of the key things that Brexit did in that sense was to give this slightly disparate bunch of attitudes, values and groups a label that they could kind of unite behind. But that happened at the same time that the old divides were still there, which is to some extent why we start to see much more significant fragmentation. Because these new divides come along, but the old divides are still

there to some extent. So you do still see some people on the left of the old divide who supported Leave, and people on right of the older divides who supported Remain. And that's feeding into the fragmentation that we're seeing now.

ALEX FORSYTH: Rob, at the 2019 general election, Boris Johnson campaigned on the slogan, 'Get Brexit Done', and we saw areas at that election that had traditionally been Labour turn Conservative. So how instrumental do you think that Brexit was in breaking those old political allegiances?

ROB FORD: Well, it was important, but I think that importance does need to be set in a bit of context, because there were a number of moving parts there. If you take these red wall seats, which we've all discussed for so long, ever since. Labour's vote was actually declining in a lot of those places for a long time. Indeed, if you can go all the way back to 2001, you'll see really big slumps in turnout in those places in the second New Labour election, 20 years before Boris Johnson mobilised people in those place. Partisan attachments to Labour were fading for a long time in those places. But what there still was, which is where the term 'red wall' came from, incidentally, it was a term coined by a Conservative strategist, James Kanagasooriam, to describe places that looked demographically and attitudinally like they ought to be voting Conservative. So if you took the same kind of voter, the same kind of job and the same background, the same kind of attitudes and plonked him in Basildon, in Essex, he'd definitely be Tory. You put him up in Bolton, he's not Tory. So that was the paradox. And what the Johnson effect was, was to break down that last barrier. So it was a breakthrough, but it was a breakthrough that the walls had been weakening for a long time before they finally came down.

ALEX FORSYTH: Paula, once the walls did finally come down, for all the reasons that Rob has expressed there, do you think that is what has led, in part, to where we are now with this increasingly fragmented politics, where people perhaps are able to look to other parties that they might not have considered before?

PAULA SURRIDGE: Yeah, absolutely. And I just wanted to add to what Rob was saying there. We actually saw quite a lot of weakening in those red wall seats, increases in the Conservative vote and a weakening of the Labour vote in the 2017 election. So a lot credit is given to Boris Johnson and 'Get Brexit Done' in 2019, but many of those trends really started in 2017 as well. But this weakening of identity is what allows people to move around. And it's what contributes to the kind of volatility we can see, you know, big shifts in vote shares between elections, between the 2024 general election and local elections, for example. And that can only happen because voters are unanchored from parties. They may have turned away from Labour in 2017 and 2019, but they didn't become Conservative Party identifiers. They became more loosely connected to politics. And that leads to the kind of fragmentation and movement that we see in elections now. And it makes it very hard to predict what will come next.

ALEX FORSYTH: Rob, there were a multitude of complex reasons that people would have chosen to vote the way they did in the Brexit referendum. But one thing that's often said is that people

that supported Brexit were doing so as an anti-establishment notion, a pushback against the status quo that had been for some time. Do you think that that was a Brexit-specific sentiment, or did it run deeper? And does it continue now after Brexit?

ROB FORD: It wasn't just a Brexit-specific sentiment, it was one of the smart moves, one of the effective moves of the Brexit Leave campaign that they managed to harness and mobilise that sentiment, but that sentiment had been there for a long time. I mean, one of the great paradoxes of Brexit really is that this effort to leave the European Union has ended up creating a politics that is more European, more fragmented, more multi-party, different bases of support. And with one of the great dividing lines being pro and anti-establishment. If you look across the other member states of the EU that we left, in practically every single case, you will find a large, nationalistic, anti-immigration, anti-establishment party. It's often been there for several decades because proportional representation of electoral systems have not really functioned as much as a barrier to keep those kinds of parties out. We have seen the early sort of tremors of that with UKIP in the 2010s. Brexit really accelerated that, gave it a more powerful tribal identity and voice as well.

ALEX FORSYTH: Paula, we've just had a pretty big set of elections across Great Britain. In England, we saw just really a cementing of this notion that politics has become so fragmented now. One of the interpretations of that is that Brexit still played a part in the way that people were voting, so that people were more likely, for example, to vote for Reform UK in parts of England that had supported Leave than they were in parts that had supported Remain, for example. Do you think Brexit is still having a direct impact on the way that people are choosing to vote now?

PAULA SURRIDGE: I think it is still having an impact in terms of the identities that have shaped how people think about the different political parties. There's going to be only a tiny number, if any, Remain voters who are going to even consider voting for a party led by what looks like the Leave side of Brexit – so they're not going to vote for Reform. Even if they started somehow to agree with them on some policy issues, that identity and that 'We're against them,' will persist. So I think that Brexit is still structuring support, even if it isn't the thing that's in people's mind when they cast their vote.

ALEX FORSYTH: Rob?

ROB FORD: I completely agree with Paula on that. And there is a real asymmetry here. We see it quite strongly in the local election results that we've seen in England, and it's actually made England a little bit more like Scotland in a funny sort of way, in that there is a kind of total coalescence of the sort of strongest Leave areas around Reform now. You're seeing, in areas that voted more than 60% Leave, Reform averaging close to 40% of the vote. But as Paula says, they completely fall flat outside of the strong Leave electorate. Just as in Scotland, the SNP have completely unified the strongly pro-independence vote. So that makes them the biggest in a fragmented field, but the unionist vote splits multiple ways. Similarly, the Remain vote and the sort of softie Brexit vote seems to split multiple ways – Conservatives, Labour, Greens, Lib Dems, all getting a share of it. So you have, on the one hand, one big tribe, one big message, one bit goal – Leave or independence. And on the other hand,

four smaller tribes who aren't primarily focused on that argument, who aren't primary focused on those identities, and therefore divide in multiple ways. And in Scotland, that kind of gets offset a bit by a more proportional electoral system. But in England, where you've got first past the post, being the somewhat larger party in place after place after place delivers a huge bonus to you in terms of the kinds of seats that you get, and hence you get the kind of dramatic results that we've seen last month.

ALEX FORSYTH: Brexit was a profound political moment, and perhaps one of the lasting consequences is how it accelerated the weakening of political allegiances, resulting in a more fragmented political system. Parties have to persuade voters, rather than bank on their support. At the same time, distrust in politicians has grown. Both Leavers and Remainers have reason to claim Brexit didn't deliver what they'd wanted. In recent years, the UK's relationship with the EU has dropped down the political agenda. But with the government's talk of an EU reset, it is back on the table, albeit, so far, in a less fractious fashion. The promises and choices politicians make now could be crucial to their own fate, as well as the country's.