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Adler-Nissen, Rebecca; Galpin, Charlotte; Rosamond, Ben

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Still Awkward After Brexit? Re-thinking Britain's Role in Europe with the Help of Comparative Regional Integration

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10 **Still Awkward After Brexit? Re-thinking Britain's Role in Europe**
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12 **with the Help of Comparative Regional Integration**
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20 KEY WORDS

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22 Brexit, European integration, awkward states, comparative regional integration, comparative
23 regionalism.
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28 1: INTRODUCTION - BREXIT AND AWKWARD STATES IN REGIONAL
29 INTEGRATION
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32 The UK is due to leave the European Union (EU; the Union) on 29 March 2019. At the time
33 of writing, the details of this departure remain to be decided, and important questions such as
34 the nature of the UK's subsequent trading – and other - relationships with its erstwhile
35 partners remain unclear. There are myriad other matters to be settled before the future UK-
36 EU relationship can safely be understood, but even once completed those negotiations will
37 not fully resolve the matter of the UK's role in regional integration.
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43 This is because European integration and the EU are not the same thing, even if
44 popular discussion usually elides them. Just as in other parts of the globe, the regional
45 integration of Europe is best understood as a matrix of institutions, norms, and processes,
46 with overlapping memberships and functions: the EU is simply the most encompassing and
47 supranational of such bodies. When it comes to other bodies or structures in Europe, the UK
48 will continue to be a member, *inter alia*, of the Council of Europe and NATO. Further, it has
49 been noted that 'non-membership should not be confused with non-integration and non-
50 cooperation with the EU', as Norway and other states are in the European Economic Area
51 despite not being member states of the EU (Sitter and Sverdrup, 2017, 1). Indeed, as a result
52 of Brexit, the UK will problematise the status quo for Europe's pan-continental structures,
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3 since it will, at the very least, require them to rethink their previous relationships with
4 London and to engage with a state that may not share overlapping membership of the EU
5 with some of their members Thus, while the exact ways in which the UK will continue to be
6 an awkward partner (George 1998) in European integration are difficult to predict, the fact of
7 its ongoing awkwardness is not in question.
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12 In this article, we draw on the growing work on awkward states within comparative
13 regional integration/regionalism studies (Murray, Warleigh-Lack and He 2014; Stegmann
14 McCallion and Brianson 2017), as well as comparative regionalism studies more broadly.
15 Our intention is not to deny the particularities of the UK context and Brexit, such as its
16 implications for Scotland and the Northern Irish peace process. Rather, we seek to examine
17 the post-Brexit context, in which the UK's current approach, as an EU member state, to
18 manage its awkwardness by relying heavily upon opt-outs and participation in complex EU
19 diplomatic processes (Adler-Nissen 2014), will no longer be available. This is a context in
20 which Brexit will have changed the way in which the UK is seen by third countries in ways
21 that are often likely to be critical (Adler-Nissen, Galpin, and Rosamond 2017). Our argument
22 is that, although the UK is quite capable in principle of managing its ongoing regional
23 awkwardness, to do this successfully, it will need to reimagine itself as a middle power in a
24 way that corresponds to whichever variant of regional integration it secures from among the
25 range of possibilities we present.
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36 We fully accept that behaving awkwardly in regional integration can serve states'
37 objectives, particularly if they are, in geopolitical terms, 'small' and otherwise struggling to
38 secure their interests in multilateral settings (see Wivel, 2017). In this article, however, we
39 view awkwardness as an essentially negative phenomenon, that is, as one which brings non-
40 trivial costs, both material and otherwise, to the state in question that would not otherwise
41 arise and which require management or off-setting. This follows from the definition of
42 awkwardness that we employ (see below), which speaks to issues of ontology as well as, and
43 perhaps more than, context- or issue-specific decisions. Thus, the 'great English tradition that
44 is sceptical, egalitarian, independent-minded and gloriously awkward' (O'Toole, 2017), a
45 description of a cultural rather than a political phenomenon, and territorially limited to one
46 part of the UK, does not feature in our definition.
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55 Existing work sets out a helpful understanding of 'awkwardness' in regional
56 integration, as well as the independent variables to guide comparative study of the
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3 phenomenon. This article invokes this work for the purposes of clarity and precision while
4 avoiding the reinvention of the wheel. Murray, Warleigh-Lack and He (2014: 280) hold that
5 awkwardness denotes ‘an uncomfortable state of affairs in which a state strives to participate
6 in a region but lacks full belonging in and commitment to the goals of the latter.’ Importantly,
7 awkwardness encompasses both obstructiveness and maladroitness, and hence both deliberate
8 and inadvertent problem-generation, but it is not primarily an objective phenomenon. It is
9 ultimately a social condition, the function of the perceptions and judgement of state actors
10 (leaders and officials) and their regional partners, produced by the interaction of various
11 factors that themselves stem from both material and ideational origins. By ‘material factors’
12 we again follow Murray, Warleigh-Lack and He to include power relations, institutional and
13 policy preferences, economic objectives, policy achievements, security concerns and
14 domestic politics; by ‘ideational factors’ we similarly adopt their suggestion to include
15 identity (whether or not a state considers itself, and is considered by others to be, fully part of
16 its region) and vision, that is, how awkward states would like their respective regions to
17 develop, and the role they would like to play in that process (Murray, Warleigh-Lack and He
18 2014: 283).

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The rest of the article is structured as follows. In section 2, we apply the most germane independent variables set out in existing work on awkwardness to the UK case, to show how British awkwardness in European integration can helpfully be understood from the perspective we advocate. In section 3, we introduce a model for thinking about Britain’s post-Brexit role in European integration that draws on comparative regionalism literature, and in section 4 we show how and from where Brexit offers opportunities to draw on the experiences of other awkward states. Section 5 concludes the article.

2: BREXIT AND BEYOND: THE UK AS AN AWKWARD PARTNER

The literature on the UK’s relations with the EU, and role in European integration more generally, is vast and incapable of full review in this article for reasons of space (see inter alia Bache and Jordan 2006, Gamble 2003, George 1998, Smith 2017, Wall 2008). In this section of the article, we therefore focus on the ways this literature highlights and explains the UK’s

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3 awkwardness in its regional context, paying particular attention to the issues that will
4 continue to be salient after Brexit.¹
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7 Atlanticism has been at the heart of UK strategy towards European integration in general
8 and the EU in particular (Gamble 2003). Facing the end of Empire, London sought to join
9 what became the EU in order to please Washington, and to avoid falling behind a potential
10 US-USSR-EEC triumvirate that would divide the world's interests and politics between
11 themselves (George 1998; Young 1999). The need to preserve that transatlantic relationship
12 at almost any cost for the purposes of prestige – and a sense of British distinctiveness - meant
13 that even when it had the ability and will to lead in EU politics, the UK's Atlanticist
14 preferences effectively limited the possible success of such efforts (James and Opperman
15 2009). After Brexit, this preference could generate ongoing awkwardness in the UK-EU
16 relationship, because the UK's security dependence upon the US will continue to jar with its
17 economic dependence upon the EU, if the UK remains part of the single market and customs
18 union, or with the problems caused to the British economy if it leaves them. Moreover, as a
19 member of NATO, the UK will continue to have a role in deciding important elements of EU
20 external policy, since the EU Treaties currently make EU use of military personnel and
21 resources dependent upon NATO agreement. The potential for disruption here is clear.
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32 Although Brexit will take the UK out of the EU, it remains to be seen whether this
33 withdrawal will change the dominant narrative about the UK's role in European integration.
34 This discourse is primarily one of costs, both economically in terms of contributions to the
35 EU budget, and less materially in terms of loss of autonomy. In principle, secession from the
36 EU should change this narrative, and even constitute a moment at which a replacement story
37 of *costs and benefits* could be generated, because the UK will either cease paying into the EU
38 budget once it leaves the Union or pay less into it, in direct exchange for participation in the
39 single market and particular flanking policies, depending upon the eventual Brexit agreement.
40 However, it is wise to recall that narratives about Brexit are constructed and disseminated in
41 the context of political struggles (Adler-Nissen, Galpin, and Rosamond 2017), and it is
42 plausible that the issue of costs could continue to dominate UK thinking about European
43 integration, particularly if the Brexit negotiations are portrayed domestically in the same
44 zero-sum and confrontational way as has prevailed so far in the UK's public debates about
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55 ¹ Thus, for instance, the UK's recent record as a frequent 'uploader' of environment policy in the EU (Jordan
56 2006) is not directly pertinent as the UK is leaving the EU, although it could have indirect pertinence if it helps
57 the remaining EU states see Britain as a state that can bring constructive, useful solutions to regional
58 problems.
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3 the EU (Wall 2008; Oliver 2016). The Brexit negotiations with the EU to date illustrate an
4 ongoing problem of awkwardness as demonstrated by a lack of a deep or comprehensive
5 understanding of the EU, and a continued perception of costs being imposed on the UK due
6 to its exit. The narrative that has been apparent regarding what is being dubbed the divorce
7 bill is that of being saddled with an invoice for that 'divorce' (European Commission, 2017).
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11 Identity is a key issue in the evolving UK relationship with European integration.
12 'Europe' remains for many UK politicians somehow elsewhere, rather than a continent of
13 which UK political actors have felt truly part; as one senior EU politician put it, UK
14 politicians almost always portray and think of themselves as 'negotiating *with* Brussels,
15 rather than *in* Brussels', a small preposition denoting a wealth of implications (de Vries, cited
16 in Pappamikail Brown 1998: 220). Most Britons have not considered themselves European
17 (Smith 2017). Moreover, popular Euroscepticism in the UK is by no means recent, and even
18 at its peak in 1997, the levels of pro-Europeanism reported by UK citizens in Eurobarometer
19 data, if we take as a proxy those citizens who say they think their country's EU membership
20 is on the whole a good thing, was a full thirty per cent below the EU average (Goodwin and
21 Milazzo 2015).
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31 After Brexit, this popular lack of identification with European integration could become
32 less salient, if UK involvement in its region is equipped with a more supportive narrative, as
33 per the discussion above. However, it could also serve as fertile soil in which further UK
34 awkwardness could germinate, since either elite absence from regular meetings with EU
35 peers or a lack of regular elite socialisation may increase the sense of distance and ignorance
36 that has in the past facilitated Euroscepticism (Wall 2008). At the popular level, it could
37 easily prove the case that Euroscepticism increases, generating thereby a constraint on
38 government action: UK citizens have tended to view even the EU as an irksome meddler of
39 secondary importance, for which it was illogical to make significant concessions (Geddes
40 2002), and this may imply even less appetite for any such perceived sacrifice to or for less
41 powerful regional institutions. The perception of the EU as a 'meddler' has certainly persisted
42 in both some Eurosceptic media reporting, and successive government pronouncements,
43 including comments by Theresa May regarding EU interference in the June 2017 general
44 election. Nor has the EU's peace narrative proven to be persuasive to many UK politicians.
45 As Daddow (2017) comments, 'Conservative leaders since Heath have never fully bought into
46 the EU's self-identity as a regional peace-bringer'.
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3 Unlike member states that sought to bring about a form of transnational Europeanisation
4 of norms, such as Poland under Donald Tusk (Klatt, 2012), the UK sought neither to
5 internalise EU norms nor to diffuse its own across the member states or at the EU level
6 (George 1998; Smith 2017). There is equally an enduring inability to comprehend the EU's
7 governance mechanisms on the part of UK political elites, even if UK officials have often
8 been more adroit (Wall 2008).² These failings are likely to generate significant awkwardness
9 for and of the UK after Brexit, even though it will no longer be part of the Union as such -
10 particularly if the attention paid to understanding EU politics and processes after secession
11 reduces further from its present, rather low, levels. The UK has always been better at stating
12 what it does *not* want from European integration than what it does (Armstrong and Bulmer
13 2003). London-Brussels normative dissonance could easily increase after Brexit, since not
14 only will the UK have finally rejected the core EU value of 'ever closer union', but it will
15 also have created distractions and problems for its erstwhile partners that they will at the very
16 least consider unwelcome, even if Brexit also serves discursively to strengthen EU-27 unity
17 (Adler-Nissen, Galpin and Rosamond 2017). We note here recent proposals for a Defence
18 Union indicate a commitment to enact plans that were not previously feasible due to UK
19 opposition. Recent opinion polls across Europe also indicating a rise in support for the EU
20 suggest that Brexit may serve as a cautionary tale in other member states.
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36 3: THE UK AND EUROPE AFTER BREXIT: TWO POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

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38 We now turn to a typology of the varying kinds of region that exist today, in order to discuss
39 the prospects for the UK in European integration after Brexit. We assume for present
40 purposes that the EU itself remains in its current form, and exclude three points on the
41 regionalisation spectrum developed by Warleigh-Lack (2006) because they are not relevant
42 here.³ Brexit is by definition taking the UK out of an instance of structured regionalisation
43 (the EU), and dominance regionalisation requires a tightly bound membership organisation
44 under the leadership of a hegemon, which again is not pertinent to our discussion because the
45 UK will be leaving the EU and seeking to create a relationship with it in a new capacity as a
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53 ² Both the present authors have professional experience in EU politics and policy-making, and can attest to this
54 problem's longevity. Craig Oliver's (2016) memoir is an unwitting testament to its continuing existence, and
55 officials from both the EU institutions and the EU-27 frequently raise this as an impediment in the Brexit
56 negotiations that have taken place at the time of writing (Carswell 2017).

57 ³ Warleigh-Lack uses the term 'regionalisation' to express the fact that regions are often dynamic processes,
58 and to transcend the division in the literature between proponents of 'regional integration' and 'regionalism'
59 as understandings of the phenomenon to be studied.
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3 non-member state. Network regionalisation is driven fundamentally by a sense of shared
4 identity which, as we have discussed, is effectively absent in the case of the UK and its
5 European regional engagement. This leaves security regionalisation and conjoined
6 regionalisation as germane points on Warleigh-Lack's spectrum. In Table 2 we envisage a
7 maximalist and minimalist version of both, to incorporate 'hard' and 'soft' forms of Brexit
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TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

In security regionalisation, the key question is whether and how the UK is able to reach comprehensive agreements with the EU-27 regarding ongoing cooperation in both economic and hard security terms. In principle, the maximalist version of this relationship would have little substantive change from the present arrangements, with the exception of a reduced contribution from London to the EU budget, non-participation in measures such as the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies, and new sectoral limits being placed on the jurisdiction in the UK of the EU Court of Justice (CJEU). British awkwardness here would centre on divergence of threat perception or worldview, reluctance to commit resources (including personnel), and failure to admit the implications of mutual dependence with European partners for national policy-making or strategic choices.

In the minimalist version of this scenario, the UK would have a bespoke, cross-sectoral trade relationship between London and Brussels that nonetheless falls short of the EEA in scope. Awkwardness from the UK here would centre on the wish to pursue independent, or divergent, policies in other sectors of the economy which undermine the integrity of the trade agreement it had reached. Britain would have security relationships with its erstwhile partners mainly via NATO, albeit with possible *ad hoc* participation in EU security measures undertaken by mutual agreement. One option here would be to cooperate with the EU-27 on civilian crisis management, similar to those agreements signed by the EU with the US, Chile, and Australia as well as other states. Unless special arrangements are negotiated between the UK and the EU as part of its exit, the UK could thus negotiate a Framework Partnership Agreement on Crisis Management with the EU to enable it to participate in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP) military and civilian crisis management missions (Murray, Allison-Reumann and Matera, 2017).

Conjoined regionalisation, on the other hand, would see the UK focus on the economic aspects of a future relationship with the EU, leaving the hard security aspect of the

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3 relationship undeveloped other than via bilateral links identical to those it has with other
4 NATO states, and possibly place additional emphasis on alliances with partner states such as
5 those in the Five Eyes intelligence alliance with Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the
6 United States. The maximalist form of this conjoined economic regional relationship would
7 comprise a limited number of sectoral economic deals with the EU-27, perhaps including
8 regarding the role of the City. London itself would be awkward in this context by isolating
9 key aspects of the British economy from the agreement, preferring to pursue divergent
10 policies in the hope of competitive advantage. The minimalist version of this scenario would
11 see the UK falling back on WTO rules to trade with the EU-27 entirely as a third country. In
12 this situation, British awkwardness would be primarily in the form of a Brexit negotiation
13 failure, and subsequent privileging of deeper trade relationships and agreements with states
14 outside the EU and EEA. The costs of non-membership of the EU would thus be starkly
15 revealed.
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28 4: COPING WITH AWKWARDNESS – BRITANNIA IN THE COMPARATIVE 29 REGIONALISM LABORATORY 30

31 What does the comparative regionalism literature indicate about how to manage
32 awkwardness in such instances? In this section of the article, we put forward deductions from
33 the literature that appear generally applicable to awkward states in regional integration,
34 tailoring them to the particular context of the post-Brexit UK, before presenting brief case
35 studies to illustrate how three other awkward states have sought to manage the condition. It
36 bears emphasising here that underlying each version of the scenarios sketched in Section 3
37 above is an unequal and asymmetrical future partnership between the UK and the EU, in
38 which the UK has far more to gain from an ongoing mutually-beneficial arrangement than the
39 EU. An exit is far more than a collection of opt-outs from a regional body while retaining
40 membership of that body. It constitutes a change to the status of the UK within its own
41 region, to its representation as an active member of a regional body in international forums,
42 and to its ability to identify with its neighbours as partners in policy-making. It is no longer a
43 constituent part of the most important regional club of Europe, if not the world. The UK will,
44 after March 2019, find itself interacting with the EU as a third country rather than a full
45 member whose population size and diplomatic capacities effectively gave it a larger say in
46 EU policy-making than had many of its partners, although in the maximalist version of the
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3 security regionalisation scenario there may be some fuzzy boundaries here around
4 participation in Europol, especially on counter-terrorism cooperation, or EU security
5 missions. The fact remains that the UK will no longer be a peer or EU partner in EU
6 decision-making, but a *demandeur*. Its former partners will now be in a position to assess any
7 requests it may wish to make from their position within the EU club and not *with* a club
8 member. This analogy suggests that non-membership entails costs (of exclusion) and not
9 necessarily benefits of regional belonging in Europe. Such costs are both material (and
10 financially costly too) and ideational. Although the UK was always reluctant to act as a
11 *primus inter pares* within the EU as it forsook opportunities for leadership (apart from
12 Margaret Thatcher on the Single Market) it nevertheless had the capacity to do so, and this
13 capacity is no longer relevant.
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22 Moreover, Brexit problematises relations between the UK and the EEA states; again,
23 in the maximalist version of the security regionalisation model, these relations can be
24 managed, but of course the UK's staying within the EEA (and at the same time outside of the
25 EU) requires the assent of not only the EU but of all of the EEA states too. The UK's future
26 successful management of its awkwardness will thus require an obvious but essential first
27 step: it will have to wish to do so, and be prepared to make compromises and concessions for
28 this purpose. This step is in fact more difficult than it appears, because it requires the
29 abandonment of one near-constant in the UK's relationship with the EU in particular and
30 European integration in general, namely its domestic framing of relevant narratives as centred
31 on costs, difficulties, and battles, rather than more realistic narratives that also feature the
32 benefits and gains of engagement with European integration. This would represent a shift in
33 elite thinking that could potentially alter popular opinion too. This article suggests it could be
34 predicated on a constructive vision for the continent's future and the role the UK would seek
35 to play in that future. We suggest that a British government would then be in a position
36 where the Brexit deal is presented as an historic turning point that ushers in a new
37 relationship that is better suited to the UK's interests or needs (than past membership of the
38 EU) while seeking at the same time to contribute to meeting the needs of the region itself. It
39 would see the UK embracing a form of regional belonging that is broader yet positive for
40 national interests – economic and security interests in particular. This constructive approach
41 is a paradoxical feature of successful awkward states in asymmetric power relations with
42 their regions (see below). At the time of writing, signals from some parts of the UK policy
43 elite are becoming more hopeful in this regard, with for instance the publication of the UK's
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3 position paper of 23 August 2017 on the future jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice,
4 which appears to resile from its previous implacable antipathy to the Court.⁴
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7 A second factor of general applicability to awkward states in regional integration is
8 their liminality, which can be geographical, cultural, or strategic – or indeed any combination
9 of the three. In the UK case, this refers to the sense that Europe is ‘elsewhere’, and that the
10 state itself is fully part of no single region. It is consistent with the Atlanticism we discussed
11 in Section 2 of the article. Again, the key to successful management of this ambiguity is overt
12 acknowledgement of the difficulties it can create, while seeking to minimise their impact
13 and/or offset them by enlisting its more positive aspects in the service of the European region
14 (and not simply the EU) rather than just the state in question. In the UK’s case, Brexit
15 appears to put an end to London’s role as Washington’s friend in Brussels, at least in EU
16 Brussels, but an alternative could be constructed if close enough relations with the EU-27, as
17 well as the US under its 45th President, are maintained by the UK even while EU defence and
18 security integration deepens and while many EU states and the EU remain in NATO. The UK
19 could potentially remain the US’s friend in NATO Brussels, for example.
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29 A third general factor of pertinence here is the need for awkward states to keep close
30 diplomatic ties with their regional neighbours, and remain up-to-date with the workings and
31 agendas of regional bodies in which they do not take part. In the UK case, this would mean
32 maintaining excellent relations not only with key member states of the EU, but also with the
33 EU institutions themselves, since there is often a knowledge gap between what national
34 government departments do, and what current thinking in the relevant policy areas is in
35 Brussels. In other words, Brexit requires, in all likelihood, turning the current Permanent
36 Representation of the UK to the EU – in effect, the British embassy to the Union - into an
37 even more important entity, unless the outcome of Brexit negotiations is in keeping with the
38 minimalist conjoined regionalisation scenario. This is not very different from how many third
39 countries monitor events and outcomes in the EU, and their relevance to these countries.
40 Building alliances in Brussels will be required of the UK just as it is for other third states.
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50 Norway is a case study for the maximalist security regionalisation option, in view of
51 its EEA membership and relations with Nordic states that approximate those of the UK with
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55 ⁴ The UK government’s rolling collection of policy papers on Brexit is available at
56 <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/brexit>. We refer here to two papers, both accessed on 24 August
57 2017: ‘Enforcement and Dispute Resolution – A Future Partnership Paper’, and ‘Providing a Cross-border Civil
58 Judicial Cooperation Framework – A Future Partnership Paper’.
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3 Ireland.⁵ They have tailored their relationship with the EU in a manner that suits their own
4 awkwardness and identity. Like the UK, Norway has twice voted on EU membership,
5 although Norway opted not to join at all. Gänzle and Henökl (2017) note that Norway has
6 had a close link with the EU since 1994, actively participating in a large number of EU
7 policies and programs and effectively forging a close partnership that has in itself become
8 increasingly “awkward.” The Norwegian option includes membership of the Single Market
9 with its four freedoms, which was itself a major achievement of the UK as a key driver and
10 which was subsequently considered particularly problematic for the UK after the Brexit
11 referendum. Given the results of the UK June election in 2017, this could be considered as
12 an option. Although Norway does not have to pay EU tariffs for access to the Single Market,
13 or deal with EU quotas, it is obliged to pay the Union for this privilege. It is obliged to deal
14 with EU as unit, relating to customs and legal requirements. It complies with many EU
15 policies (although not the Common Agricultural Policy or fisheries policy). However it does
16 not frame the regulations that it must adhere to. It does not actively participate in EU law-
17 making and has no vote – or veto - in EU institutions. It is worth recalling that:

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29 An important difference between EU membership and EEA member-ship is that a
30 country with full membership of the EU has access to all the EU bodies. Participation
31 by the EEA countries is primarily restricted, however, to preparatory and
32 implementation committees connected with the Commission (Lægreid, Steinhörsson,
33 Thorhallsson 2004, 354).

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38 Although Norway contributes to the EU budget there are substantial benefits that at
39 present render this option a potentially attractive one for the UK. These include cooperation
40 in ‘research and development, education, social policy, the environment, consumer
41 protection, tourism and culture, collectively known as “flanking and horizontal” policies.
42 Furthermore, the EEA guarantees equal rights and obligations within the internal market for
43 citizens and economic operators’ (Gänzle and Henökl 2017). A Norwegian option would
44 mean that the UK would not need to rescind all EU-derived legislation since 1973, as much
45 of it would remain intact in either a Single Market or an enhanced arrangement such as that
46 which pertains in Norway at present. The Norwegian approach of ‘pragmatic participation’,
47 which is framed as ‘pragmatic cooperation in low politics, not the high politics of
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⁵ We do not include a case study suggestion for the minimalist conjoined regionalism context since this is predicated on the UK-EU relationship effectively ending. In addition, space limitations constrain the depth of the case studies that we can undertake here.

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3 sovereignty' which nevertheless are 'often not about maximising one's own interests, but
4 rather... about finding solutions that are acceptable' (Sitter and Sverdrup 2017) may well
5 provide a useful template for the UK.
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9 Japan is a case study for the minimalist security regionalisation option in terms of its
10 relations with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian States) states; its participation in the
11 ASEAN Plus initiatives such as ASEAN Plus Three (with China and South Korea); the
12 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS) and its membership of APEC,
13 the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. Like the UK, it considers the US as a major
14 ally. For Japan, like South Korea, the US has long been a security guarantor in the Asia
15 Pacific. Like the case of the UK, some partners in the Asia Pacific have not regarded Japan as
16 belonging in the region, due to the role it played in World War II, and particularly in Korea
17 and China. Significant tensions remain and often are heightened in these relations.
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21 Japan has sought to confront its liminality through postwar reparation payments and
22 generous development assistance to the region, and also support for Asian states in the
23 aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis. It was an active proponent of the Chiang Mai
24 initiative on currency swaps and of the ASEAN Plus Three process. It has also proposed
25 initiatives for a regional body (minus the US) such as that advanced by then Prime Minister
26 Hatoyama whereby Japan is 'to become a "bridge" for the world, between the Orient and the
27 Occident' (Hatoyama 2009). He spoke of 'an East Asian community taking shape as an
28 extension of the accumulated cooperation built up step by step among partners who have the
29 capacity to work together, starting with fields in which we can cooperate—Free Trade
30 Agreements, finance, currency, energy, environment, disaster relief and more' (Hatoyama,
31 2009). Despite a perception of awkwardness in the region, and a difficulty with embracing
32 'the apparent advantages of regionalization', Japan and Australia were 'the prime movers
33 behind the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum' (Beeson and Hidetaka 2007,
34 230; 228). Japan is plagued by its difficult history and contested Asian identity. The UK has a
35 less contested history yet its relationship with its EU partners remains influenced by its
36 distinctive experience of war, its perception of regional differentness, and its alignment with
37 the US.
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53 Australia is a case study for the maximalist conjoined regionalisation option in terms
54 of its relations with ASEAN states and regional bodies such as the ARF and EAS and its
55 support for ASEAN regionalism. It seeks to be actively involved in all regional bodies of the
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3 Asia Pacific and was a leader of the APEC initiative. Yet it too struggles to be recognised as
4 a leader or partner in the region due its close relationship since the end of World War II with
5 the US. Its ties with the UK also remain remarkably close, giving it two significant extra-
6 regional partners in a way which does not always help its aspirations towards regional
7 belonging.
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12 There are considerable ideational and material differences of Australia and its region
13 (Murray, Warleigh-Lack and He, 2014) yet its participation in APEC, ASEAN Dialogues, the
14 East Asia Summit and other bodies point to a clear commitment to engage in both security
15 and economic regional bodies. It has also signed major free trade agreements with China,
16 Japan, South Korea, the US, and ASEAN.
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21 Although an awkward partner in the region, it seeks nevertheless to play a role as a
22 middle power – a role that the UK may wish to consider. Beeson (2011, 567) comments that
23 ‘middle powers such as Australia can do little to influence the larger geopolitical structures
24 but they can make material and ideational choices that have a powerful impact on their
25 own welfare and help to legitimate the extant international order’. On the other hand,
26 Patience (2014, 455) argues that ‘Australia’s middle power imagining is, in part, a product of
27 deep nostalgia for the golden age of Empire — for what was perceived as far away Britain’s
28 cultural superiority and civilizing destiny in a world becoming bewilderingly cosmopolitan
29 and fearfully foreign’. It has been proposed that, as a middle power, ‘Australia’s policy
30 settings need to be robust and adaptable to a range of possible futures’ in its own region
31 (Wood, 2016, 139). States such as Canada, South Korea and Japan are also regarded as middle
32 powers.
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41 Patience (2017) and other scholars identify three kinds of middle powers: dependent
42 middle powers; regional middle powers; and middle powers as global citizens (such as
43 Scandinavian states). Of particular interest here are dependent middle powers, ‘states that are
44 treated warily by partners and contenders alike because of their alliances with great powers’.
45 The example of Australia and its relationship with the US comes to mind – where dependent
46 middle powers will generally be expected to align their policies with their great power ally’s
47 foreign, international trade, and security policies (Patience 2017). A regional middle power,
48 on the other hand, holds power by virtue of being a member of that region, for instance *qua*
49 member state of the EU.
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3 These observations are worthy of consideration in the comparative regionalism
4 laboratory that the UK may step into over the next few years. At the same time Australia and
5 the UK are seeking closer relations in the context of Brexit, with references to both the
6 Commonwealth and the Anglosphere. There is talk of the UK and Australia actively forging a
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8 'network of nations' of the Commonwealth, and of Britain working with 'like-minded
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10 partners' such as Australia (Matera, Allison-Reumann and Murray, 2017). There are already
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12 established strong security and defence ties between the two nations. Yet the UK may wish to
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14 reflect on the fact that Australia seeks a multifaceted approach to its international role and
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16 linkages, based on FTAs and multilateral fora as well as regional bodies. Unlike the UK,
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18 Australia joins regional bodies, such as the East Asia Summit, with enthusiasm. The UK may
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20 observe that Australia seeks active engagement or leadership in APEC and the G20, for
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22 example. It remains an awkward partner while effectively being an avid joiner of, and
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24 participant in, organised bodies and institutions.

25 26 27 28 5. CONCLUSION: AWKWARD MEANS AWKWARD?

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30 This article has sought to show the value of engaging with the comparative regionalism
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32 literature to understand how the UK can manage its role in European integration after Brexit.
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34 The UK choice of exit from the EU after the June 2016 referendum has not been emulated by
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36 other states in the Union. However, there are states that have left their respective regional
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38 bodies for a number of reasons; some of them have found their way back again, such as
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40 Morocco's re-joining of the African Union in 2017. It may be that whatever relationship is
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42 negotiated between London and Brussels during and after the Brexit talks is temporary, and
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44 not just because there may well be agreement on a transitional deal, but because over time the
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46 UK changes its mind and reaches a different future understanding of and accord with the
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48 Union. It may even be that Britain re-joins the EU; certainly, senior EU figures have
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50 suggested this is possible, and others have expressed a hope along these lines, viz. Danuta
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52 Huebner (2017):

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55 It's never too late to understand what you are going to lose. I hope it will be a learning
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57 process, which of course might make some people rethink the whole thing.
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Moreover, British awkwardness can in principle be mitigated by following similar
strategies to those identified in Section 4. Taken together with an appreciation of the new

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3 power dynamics of the post-Brexit context and a sincere, if partial, invocation of the relevant
4 shared norms, the UK is quite capable of minimising the negative consequences of Brexit for
5 its regional engagement beyond the unavoidable disruption of the Brexit process and
6 negotiations. There may be some cause for optimism here in that formal exit from the EU
7 finally puts to bed the sense that British grandeur and autonomy was lost in 1973 – that it
8 encountered in the EU continental intransigence and a plethora of costs. Has that wound
9 finally been cauterised, making London in future a much more content European player,
10 albeit a more marginal one? Because it will remain a European player – in NATO and in the
11 Council of Europe and even perhaps in EFTA and the EEA.
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19 The UK could choose to play a role in Europe as a pragmatic participant, like
20 Norway, or as a dependent middle power, as Australia has been characterised. If a dependent
21 middle power, its links with the US cannot be assumed in an era of a Trump presidency and
22 apparent great power rivalry. If the UK wishes to be a regional middle power, in a broad EEA
23 configuration, it would need to deal with the consequences of its past low levels of elite
24 socialisation within the EU and to develop a new socialisation strategy based on pragmatic
25 coalition-building or alliance-formation along policy lines, for example in the EEA and with
26 at least some selected allies (perhaps Nordic ones) within the EU as part of that EEA. The
27 legacy – or even burden – of memory remains a feature of the UK's position and positioning
28 in Europe – and that includes memory of its own international past and the memories of its
29 interlocutors over more than four decades of EU membership and more recent recollections
30 of difficult Brexit negotiations.
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42 Our sense is that too much optimism is unlikely to be proven correct in the short or medium
43 terms, unless the Brexit negotiations themselves take a far less combative tone, because they
44 presently signal no, or very limited, recalibration of norms and identity on the part of UK
45 elites. Without such a shift, and as Theresa May might put it, awkwardness in the case of the
46 UK's regional role will really mean 'bloody difficult.'
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For Review Only

Table 1: UK Awkwardness after Brexit

<i>Element of Awkwardness</i>	<i>Material or Ideational?</i>	<i>Post-Brexit Relevance</i>
Atlanticism	Material and ideational	NATO membership could be used to frustrate EU action; 'special relationship' as source of prestige
EU membership narrative of costs	Primarily ideational	Need to develop narrative of '(costs and) benefits'
Identity (both elite and popular levels)	Ideational (Euro scepticism)	Sense of superiority or difference less salient?
Low internalisation of regional norms	Ideational	Poor elite understanding of Brexit's diplomatic impact

For Review Only

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Table 2: UK Awkwardness after Brexit

Type of Region	Maximalist version	Minimalist version
<i>Security regionalisation</i>	UK collaborates in EU policing, defence and security policies as well as NATO; UK accedes to EFTA and the EEA,	UK participates only in NATO; no cross-sectoral economic agreement with EU
<i>Conjoined regionalisation</i>	Bespoke UK-EU trade deal or, post 2017 general elections, seeks access to Single Market on Norwegian lines.	Small number of sectoral economic relationships only

Source: Authors, adapted from Warleigh-Lack 2006