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### Country Response: The United Kingdom

To what extent can even the most powerful states preserve their sovereignty in a globalized world? What specific advantages and obstacles do they face?

“Sovereignty,” as defined by the Encyclopædia Britannica, is the “authority in the decision-making process of the state and in the maintenance of order” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). The United Kingdom has confronted many challenges in maintaining sovereignty over their vast expanse of territories, yet through centralization and a strong unitary state, they continue to maintain their sovereignty in the modern world, though it has not come without significant obstacles and challenges.

The U.K. consists of four constituent countries, with them being England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. For the time being, the state is still a member of the European Union, the economic and political union of 28 European countries, though the consequential “Brexit” vote on 23 June 2016 will result in the U.K.’s departure on 31 October 2019. Even though research shows that the British citizenry was largely uninformed about the ramifications of this vote (“After Brexit Vote, Britain Asks Google: ‘What is the EU?’”), pro-Brexit politicians and influential citizens cited the preservation of British sovereignty as a primary reason for the necessity of the departure of the United Kingdom. Those against the EU believe that the multinational organizations created after World War II, such as the IMF, NATO, and the EU, no longer serve a purpose in the modern world and that they actively take away individualized control from member states (“3 Reasons Brits Voted For Brexit”).

The U.K. also faces obstacles from their constituent countries as a result of Brexit, as they seek to gain further sovereignty and even independence from a seemingly unstable state. In 2014, a Scottish independence referendum failed, with “No” votes at 55% against “Yes” votes at 44%, a prospect that nonetheless frightened many citizens of the U.K. But now with the Brexit vote looming, Wales and Scotland, where devolved governments offer them some level of autonomy and self-governance, are weighing the option of independence, with Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon indicating that she will hold another referendum on independence in 2020 (“Nicola Sturgeon says opposition to. . .”) and with large-scale protests in the Welsh cities of Merthyr Tydfil, Caernarfon, and Cardiff calling for independence (“Welsh independence: ‘We need to talk about a post-Brexit future’”). Conversely, the prospect of direct rule is being considered in Northern Ireland after Brexit (“David Lidington says direct rule. . .”), where a devolved government has not existed since January of 2017. Advantages do accompany the U.K. maintaining these three constituent countries, namely their historical tradition, the geographical advantages, and the relatively small size of Great Britain. But Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are incredibly costly to the U.K. (the U.K. gives excess of £9 billion to Scotland annually, £1,700 per capita (“Scotland is better off in the UK. . .”)), the countries often face significant disputes within the group, particularly within the issue of staying in the EU, and several outcries and referendums for independence have created fierce tension within the U.K.

Ultimately, sovereignty has been a hard-fought but well-maintained part of the U.K. in its modern history. But as Brexit grows ever closer, it will be interesting to see the long-term effects of this decision on the stability and integrity of one of the more powerful states in the world.

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