

European Union and Britain Exit: Policy Implication for Economic Community of West African States

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Abstract

The mid-20th century, specifically after the end of World War II, witnessed large numbers of integrative economic organizations all over the world. For instance, the 1950s saw the formation of the European Economic Community which later translated into the European Union (EU) while the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) emerged in the 1970s with policies aimed at ensuring economic gains among members such as single market, free movement of people, goods and services across borders, common tariff, common currency and peace and stability etc. The study examines the EU and the planned British exit (BREXIT) with regard to policy implications for ECOWAS. This is important because the EU and ECOWAS shared a common goal of promoting political and economic interests among member states. It therefore becomes necessary for ECOWAS to learn from policy loopholes and complacency of the EU especially as it affects member state(s) economic and internal security problems which is common today among EU and ECOWAS member states. This problem and others could have been promptly addressed by EU, but failed to do so which prompted the BREXIT plan to enable it face its internal problems squarely. The study adopted historical and descriptive method in collecting data. The findings revealed that member states within EU and ECOWAS have benefited for many years in the areas of free trade of goods and services, freedom for its citizens to live and work anywhere and maintaining of peace among member states etc. The study also revealed that the recent happening in the world scene such as global economic recession, religious extremism, insurgency, terrorism, trans-border crime, refugee crisis and most importantly, immigration problem have greatly affected individual member's internal economy and security. On this, the study recommended that ECOWAS should not allow its members to be at a disadvantaged position. Also, complaints that affect economic and internal security of its members within the community should be handled promptly to avoid European Union experience with Britain otherwise known as Brexit.

Keywords: European Union, Britain, Exit, Implication, ECOWAS.

Introduction

The catastrophes that engulfed Europe following the first and the Second World War, greatly inspired the founding of what was later to become the European

Union to increased their determination to rebuild Europe and to eliminate the possibility of another war. This sentiment eventually led to the formation of the European coal and steel community by West Germany, France, Italy and the Benelux Countries. The first full customs union was originally known as the European Economic Community (informally called the common market in the United Kingdom) established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957 and implemented on 1st January, 1958. This later changes to the European Community which is now the “first pillar” of the European Union created by the Maastricht. The outcome of Maastricht was an agreement to create European Union, consisting of three European communities. The New European Union like the Old European Communities from which it is emerging offer a beacon of attraction to the rest of Europe (Pinder, 1991, Booker and North, 2003).

From a wider context, it is obvious that the mid-20th century, specifically after the close of the Second World War has witnessed large numbers of integrative economic organizations all over the world. In other words, every region of the world has embarked on economic integration, which as many scholars have argued, is an important response to globalization by nation-states. Among these integrative economic organizations include the European Economic Community (EEC) which later in 1993 translated into European Union (EU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 28 member states that are located primarily in Europe. The EU policies aim is to ensure free movement of people, goods, services, and capital within the internal market, enact legislation in justice and home affairs, and maintain common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries, regional development, abolition of passport control, a monetary union, health, education, urbanization and infrastructure, military, security, humanitarian, energy and sport etc (Joseph and Corcell, 1989, McComick, 2007, Yesilada and Wood, 2009).

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional body created on 25th May, 1975 during its first conference in Lagos, where its treaty was signed. The idea of having a United West African body was first proposed by the then Nigerian head of state, Yakubu Gowon. His idea was to collectively achieve a self-sufficiency through integration of the sixteen West African Countries into an economic block with a single market controlled around an economic and monetary union. The community started with 5 members. Later on Cape Verde joined in 1976, but Mauritania withdrew its membership in December 2000. At the moment, the commission has 15 members namely: Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Cape Verde and Burkina Faso. Niger and Guinea have both been suspended due to coup d'état incidences.

The main objective of ECOWAS is to promote cooperation and integration in order to create an economic and monetary union for encouraging economic growth and development in West Africa through: the suppressions of custom duties and equivalent taxes; the establishment of a common external tariff; the harmonization of economic and financial policies; and the creation of a monetary zone and to serve as a

peace keeping force for the region. Technically, the initiative to create ECOWAS grew from the assumption that because of the growing unfavourable world economic trends toward the developing countries and the declined in the economics of the countries within the sub-region, the projected economic community would bring benefits to the individual members by promoting their long-term development needs. However, due to the slow pace encountered in implementing this treaties, the treaty was revised in Cotonou in Benin on July 23, 1993. The new treaty adopted a less rigid collaboration. It subdivided ECOWAS into The Commission, The Community Parliament, The Community Court of Justice, ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID). These institutions are intended to be the tools used to implement their policies (Abubakar, 2001, Ibok, 2015; UK Essay, 2018).

A closer examination of European Union from its inception till 2016 reveals that member states have benefited greatly in various areas of cooperation such as; single market, climate, environment, health, education, research, agriculture, culture etc. However, despite these gains recorded, certain issues have developed as a result of global economic crisis and its effect on members' internal economy and security such as insurgency, terrorism, immigrant and refugee crisis. These problems have not been given prompt attention, hence Britain decision to leave the Union. This study therefore aims at finding out policy implication of Britain exit on ECOWAS.

Theoretical Framework

Observers and theorists have associated phases of European Communities now European Union in their evolution with particular approaches to the study of European integration. Loosely, a linear development has been identified with decades marking the transition from the low politics to the high politics of integration. Under this scheme, the 1950s are characterized as a period when functionalism reign; the 1960s as the time of neo-functionalism; the 1970s as the phase of confederalism and inter-governmentalism and the 1980 and 1990s as a time of resurgent federalism or neo-federalism (Hass, 1964, Lodge, 1994).

However, this work is predicated on "Neo-Federalist" view of European Integration as advanced by John Pinder who tries to deal with the intermediary steps between inter-state relations and a fully-fledged federation. It was believed that European Union and federation would solve the problem facing Europe. This therefore entails that the European Union would require a single market, economic and monetary union, a common external policy with cooperation on security; while federation also needs control of armed forces. Both would involve federal institutions, with majority in the council, co-legislation by the council and the European Parliament aid "full executive competence". For the commission, member state would keep control over domestic policies (Pinder, 1991).

European Union and Britain Exit

The attainment of European Union nevertheless remains a goal of all EC now EU states. EU members are bound together through a web of relationship in a range of different policy areas and through participation in a range of different

organizations. The distinguishing features of their participation in the EU is that whereas participation in other European and international organizations is the product of co-operations, in the EU they are committed to common endeavours sustained and entrenched by a unique supranational system under which national sovereignty is voluntarily constrained. Power and authority no longer rest only with the members themselves. Instead, it is shared with independent supranational actors (Lodge, 1994).

A closer look at EC now EU performance for the past 66 years before planned Britain exit revealed that the Union has recorded tremendous success in various key areas even though there were some grey areas that needed prompt attention. Some of the benefiting areas are:

- The European Union is built on the rule of law; everything it does is founded on treaties, voluntarily and democratically agreed by its member countries.
- Abolition of border controls; people can travel freely throughout most of the continent which has made it much easier to live, work and travel abroad.
- Common agricultural policy (CAP): This came as a result of Rome Treaty of 1957 which aims were to ensure a fair standard of living for farmers, to stabilize markets, to ensure that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices and to modernize farming infrastructure. These have largely been achieved. Although these subsidies paid for by EU tax payers secures the standard of living for farmers in EU countries, but most importantly endangers Third World jobs, potentially causing increased poverty and malnutrition.
- Single Market: Many policies of the EU relate to the development and maintenance of an effective single market. Significant efforts have been made to create harmonized standards designed to bring economic benefits through creating larger and more efficient markets. The single market has both internal and external aspects thus:
 - Internal policies: Free trades of goods and services among member states; A common EU competition law controlling anti-competitive activities of companies through antitrust law and merger control and member states through the state aids regime; the Schengen treaty which allowed removal of internal border controls and harmonization of external controls between its member state. This excludes the UK and Ireland, which have derogations; freedom for citizens of its member states to live and work anywhere within the EU with their spouses and children, provided they can support themselves; free movement of capital between member state; harmonization of government regulations, corporations law and trademark registrations etc.
 - External policies: A common external customs tariff, and a common position in international trade negotiations; funding for programmes in candidate countries and other Eastern European countries, as well as aid to many developing countries; the establishment of a single market energy community by means of the Energy Community South East Europe Treaty; the establishment of a Single Market Aviation area; the establishment of a European Defence Agency; and the establishment of a European Rapid Reaction Force etc.

Cooperation and harmonization in other areas include; freedom of citizens of the EU to vote in local government and European parliament elections in any member state; cooperation in criminal matters, including sharing of intelligence through EUROPOL and the information system, agreement on common definition of criminal offences and expedited extradition procedures; a common security policy as an objective, including the creation of a 60,000 member European Rapid Reaction Force for peacekeeping purposes, an EU military staff and an EU satellite center for intelligence purposes, common policy on asylum and immigration; common funding of research and technological development; European social fund used to finance vocational training and to help people find work; cohesion fund used in financing transport infrastructure and environmental projects in EU countries whose GDP per capita is lower than 90% of EU average (Bennett, 1986, Lodge, 1998, Pascal, 2014).

However, despite these gains recorded, certain happenings seem to threatened the continued existence of EU especially as it bothers on why of BREXIT. Reasons range from global economic crisis, religious extremism, terrorism, insurgency, refugee as well as immigration problem. These developments needed concrete policies to tackled them. No wonder the supporters of BREXIT argued that:

- UK was being held back by the EU which imposed too many rules on business and charged billions of pounds a year in membership fee for little in return;
- They wanted Britain to take back full control of its borders and reduce the number of people entering Britain to live and or work.
- High levels of immigration – this remains one of the serious issues which the union could not resolve, so Britain is committed to getting net immigration. That is, the differences between the number entering and leaving UK to a sustainable level, which in reality should be below 100,000 a year. But currently running at 330,000 a year of which 184,000 are EU citizens, and 188,000 are from outside the EU.
- UK wants to limit outward flow of Britain national which is against the EU main principles binding EU membership which is “free movement” meaning that you don’t need a visa to go and live in another EU country. This may lead to brain drain which Britain is not favourable dispose to.
- The recent mass movement or migration from poorer and war ravaging countries like Syria to peaceful richer countries has also raised question about the free movement route (www.bbc.com 28/1/2017, www.bookshop.eur.opa.eu 17/4/2017).

In view of the above, coupled with recent reality that bothers on economy, internal security, immigration etc. BREXIT therefore entails that;

- i. an independent Britain will be better able to cope with those strains.
- ii. As member of EU, it costs the UK over £350 m each week – nearly £20 bn a year. Such amount as argued could be used to enhance domestic economy and security etc.

- iii. BREXIT will create hundreds of thousands more jobs in the UK by negotiating trade deals with countries individually.
- iv. Britain can never control immigration until it leaves the EU, because freedom of movement gives other EU citizens an automatic right to live in the UK. Most important, EU does not have the legal structures needed to cope with the current migrant crisis. So if leave, Britain will take back control.
- v. Britain is the World 5th largest economy and also a member of UN Security Council and possessor of a nuclear arsenal, hence, does not need EU to be a key player on the international stage.
- vi. Freedom to rescind EU laws and regulations and:
- vii. To save the lion share of Britain contribution to EU which stood at £9 bn a year eventhough it represents a palsy sum of 0.5 PC of the UK GDP (www.telegraph.co.uk17/4/2017).

The above points started as a problem which could have been swiftly addressed by EU but failed to realize the dynamic and changing nature of the world that what was acceptable 20-50 year ago may not be acceptable today. Hence, the need to response to such issues by amending the existing laws or making new ones to address the problems. Since EU was complacent and satisfy with the status-quo, Britain therefore decided to quit to enable her address those problems and save her economy as well as its internal security.

European Union and Britain Exit Policy Implication for ECOWAS

As earlier observed, ECOWAS was established based on an implicit political premise that by pooling the resources of the member-states together and providing services, they would benefit, and such benefits would also promote popular acceptance of the principle of regional rather than national services. The logic of economic integration of the West African Sub-region was built on the idea of functionalism. The idea of functionalism on the goal of integration revolves around the creation of a network of independent transnational functional organizations for the provision of socio-economic demand which according to the functionalists, is for sheer community interests.

The establishment of ECOWAS was to solve common economic problems. ECOWAS important areas of cooperation are: custom union and trade, industrial cooperation, common financial institution, conflict resolution, transport and communication, social and cultural exchange programme and scholarship and student exchange programme etc. But it is obvious that inspite of the initial surge of enthusiasm that catapulted the formation of ECOWAS, it has not been very successful in achieving some of its chartered objectives. The problems confronting ECOWAS are: traditional economic dependence on their formal colonial powers, unequal distribution of gain as Nigeria dominated the community in terms of population and land mass; non-adherence to the provision of ECOWAS protocols especially as occasioned by government of ECOWAS states restricting the movement

of people, and thus embarking on series of repatriation of such resident and borders closure, (Bunting, 1981, West Africa, 1982, Ibok, 2015).

Recently, the most pressing issues confronting ECOWAS just as it EU counterparts are present economic situation and internal security especially the activities of armed or insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, the Taurug rebels etc. Also, lack of firm political will on the part of ECOWAS leaders occasioned by clashes of interest, boarder check and harassment and the spread of deadly disease such as Ebola across national borders etc. The most glaring issues that sent fears into some members spine is the suspicion that ECOMOG was primarily set up to serve Nigeria's political and economic interest as against ECOWAS primary goal of solving members socio-economic problems. Just like UK financial commitment to EU, it is equally observed that Nigeria spent over \$10,000,000,000 during the ECOMOG Peace Support Operation (PSO). This huge amount spent by Nigeria alone in Liberia as argued would have been used in establishing industries or other welfare projects in the country which could have gone a long way to meet the welfare needs of the citizens. Besides, Nigeria is the prime contributor to the ECOWAS (Okojie, 2009).

The policy implication of these problems experienced by ECOWAS revealed that all is not well with this sub-regional body. This therefore calls for a proactive action by the ECOWAS to address these problems by going back to the drawing board to come up with realistic policies to address some of the grey areas that need urgent attention for the continued existence of the sub West African body (ECOWAS). Most importantly, with the current happening in the world scene and the dynamic nature of our society should informed ECOWAS members to be committed to ECOWAS goals and objectives. More so, any serious complaint by a member state should not be relegated to the background to avoid Nigeria or Liberia exit.

Conclusion

The interest in economic integration is reflected in a resolution adopted at the second session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), held in New Delhi, India on February to March 1968. At the conference it was reaffirm that trade expansion, economic cooperation and integration among developing countries is an important element of an international development strategy, and would make an essential contribution toward their economic development (UNCTAD, 1968).

ECOWAS just like EU, primary goal was to foster the socio-economic opportunities for the population of West Africa thereby accelerating the process of economic development collectively and individually and diffusing suspicion and border conflicts among others. Despite the initial surge and enthusiasm among member states, certain factors continued to threatened the corporate existence of ECOWAS such as globalization, environmental factor, economic dependence, economic downturn in ECOWAS states, internal security threat, international market price fluctuation, terrorism and trans-border crime etc. To forestall break-up, a well

clear policies are needed to tackle these problems to save ECOWAS from EU experience otherwise known as BREXIT.

Recommendations

In order to reposition ECOWAS to enhance effective and efficient cooperation among member-states and to avoid BREXIT, the following recommendations are made:

- That ECOWAS should come up with policy that will protect and strengthened members' internal economy as a way out of the current recession.
- That a well-founded policy should be aim at guaranteeing members internal security against terrorism, insurgency and religious extremism.
- That no member states should be allow to be at the disadvantaged position.
- That any compliant received should be promptly and properly handled to avoid European Union experience with Britain.
- That from time to time agreement, protocol, etc should be reviewed in line with the current realities.
- That there should be a policy to eliminate dependency relations that reinforce the conditions of peripheral capitalism within the member's state.

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