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Brexit - In Margaret Thatcher's spirit?

Bachelor's thesis in European Studies

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Abstract

In 2016 the British Prime Minister David Cameron asked for a referendum regarding British membership of the EU. The following campaign resulted in both Leave and Remain campaigns claiming former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as being on their side, had she been alive. This sparked an interest into the topic, and this thesis researches the question on whether Margaret Thatcher would have been in favor of Brexit, had she been alive.

Upon further research, the Bruges Speech she delivered in 1988, perhaps the most clearly stated opinion on the European Community she has ever given, has been claimed to be both pro-Europe and anti-Europe. This has therefore been a particular point of interest. Not much research has been done on the topic on her possible position on Brexit. Lord Charles Powell, her foreign affairs private secretary of 8 years, held a lecture at the University of Oxford on this topic in 2017, five years after her death, and provided a valuable starting point as to where to begin the research process. The research performed is mostly gathered by the accounts of her colleagues, her track record as Prime Minister, the state of the world from the Second World War to 2016 for historical context, and her upbringing.

Sammendrag

I 2016 ba den britiske statsministeren David Cameron om en folkeavstemning på spørsmålet om britisk EU-medlemskap. Valgkampanjene som kom i kjølvannet av dette resulterte i at både siden for og i mot Brexit, mente at den tidligere statsministeren Margaret Thatcher ville vært på deres side, dersom hun fortsatt var i live. Dette vekket en interesse, og denne oppgaven utforsker derfor spørsmålet om hvorvidt Margaret Thatcher ville vært for eller i mot Brexit.

Ved nærmere undersøkelser viste det seg at Bruges-talen hun ga i 1988 kanskje ga størst innsikt i hennes syn på det Europeiske Felleskap. Det er dessuten påstått at denne talen representerer et syn både for, og i mot, Europeisk Felleskap. Denne talen har derfor vært av størst interesse for arbeidet med oppgaven. Det er ikke gjort mye forskning på spørsmålet om hennes mulige stilling til Brexit. Lord Charles Powell, Thatchers forsvarsminister i 8 år holdt i 2017 en forelesning ved universitetet i Oxford om temaet, fem år etter hun døde. Denne forelesningen ble et godt utgangspunkt for hvor undersøkelsene av temaet burde starte. Undersøkelsene gjort i denne oppgaven passerer seg i størst grad på innsamling av uttalelser fra hennes kollegaer, hennes politisk handlinger, et historisk tilbakeblikk på perioden fra andre verdenskrig til 2016, og hennes oppvekst.

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List of Abbreviations

EAEC	European Atomic Energy Community
ECB	European Central Bank
EEC	European Economic Community
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
IGC	Intergovernmental Conference
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRA	Irish Republic Army
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PM	Prime Minister
SEA	Single European Act
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
US	United States
VAT	Value Added Tax

1 Introduction

Margaret Thatcher was elected the first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1979 (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a). A position she held for more than a decade, until her ultimate downfall in 1990 (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a). She was the subject of great controversy during her years in office. One of the greatest controversies was perhaps the one surrounding her position on Europe. So much so that when the 2016 referendum on British membership in the EU was a fact, both sides claimed she would side with them (Mudge, 2018).

The fact that Brexit happened after her death makes this a question, we will never know the answer to, and sparked the first interest into this topic. Would Margaret Thatcher be in favor of Brexit? This is a question that hopefully will become clearer as the thesis progresses. Another question is the possible misinterpretation that a speech she made in Bruges in 1988 was of an anti-Europe nature. In answering these two questions, the paper will on the one hand focus on the historical context of her life and that of the world in 2016, as to better understand the choices she has made. It will also take into account her track record as Prime Minister, as well as a closer look at the Bruges speech at what she actually meant by it. Additionally, it will be beneficial to look at some of her colleagues' opinions on the matter. The first section will however be an account of her personal life and political career. By this time, the answer to the question on her position on Britain leaving the EU might be clearer.

2 Formative years

Margaret Hilda Roberts was born on October 13th, 1925, above her father's shop in Grantham (Moore, 2013, p. 23). Her place of birth set the stage for her upbringing, and arguably also had a strong influence on her political career as well. The family consisted of her mother Beatrice and father Alfred, and an older sister Muriel. The shop was located on a corner between the richer and poorer sides of the town and served the both of them (Moore, 2013, p. 25). On the one hand was the quality goods and on the other the shop was also a post office and "therefore served the clients of the early welfare state" (Moore, 2013, p. 25). The Roberts' believed it was their duty to help when they could, discretely so as to not offend the recipient, and would live up to this regularly. On top of being a prominent shop keeper, her father was also serving the town as a town councilor, a Rotarian and a Methodist (Moore, 2013, p. 26).

Her home life was strict and busy, dominated by work and religion. Working in the shop during her childhood left little time for relaxation and family holidays. Sundays, when the shop was closed, was spent attending church and Sunday school. Her father being a preacher also meant he sometimes brought other visiting Methodist speakers and Missionaries home after service, which Margaret appreciated and found interesting (Moore, 2013, p. 27). When Methodists gathered at the shop after evening Sunday service discussions on public questions tended to arise, which Margaret enjoyed. Although she brought with her the love for discussion, hard work and wanting to help others with her into politics, Methodism was left behind in her childhood. She did attend the Church of England as an adult however (Moore, 2013, p. 27).

"She was proud of the business and intensely proud of her father" (Moore, 2013, p. 26), she even studied her father's speaking technique (Moore, 2013, p. 28). "Have something to say. Say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style" he wrote, a view Margaret never diverged from (Moore, 2013, p. 28). Her father was also a great advocate for his daughters getting a good education, something he never had the possibility for himself (Moore, 2013, p. 30). Although he did not have formal education, her father was a well-read man who eventually found himself as a chairman of the borough's finance committee for more than twenty years (Moore, 2013, p. 38) and ultimately, he became the mayor of Grantham (Moore, 2013, p. 76).

The Grantham was a market town "which shared the economic hardships of the 1920's and early 1930's and the definite recovery of the mid 1930's" (Moore, 2013, p. 35). The approach of the war brought with it a strong economic growth to Grantham, with its favorable location on the main road to London as well as railways, with great links to other parts of the United Kingdom (Moore, 2013, p. 36). Industry rose quite rapidly in the years prior to the war as well. During the war Grantham saw a large number of members of the armed forces, including four RAF bases and a large number from the USAAF (Moore, 2013, p. 37).

Her father seemed to have formed his view on the international scene based on Rotary principles rather than a political party. Rotary as a worldwide movement was originally founded in the US, with Robert being a founding member of the Grantham branch. They operated under the motto "Service above Self", and Rotary members were instructed to

put political differences aside for the wider public interest in general, which in turn also applied to international issues (Moore, 2013, p. 40). Margaret Thatcher did much like her father also see the world through the eyes of a Rotarian (Moore, 2013, p.30). His efforts to help during the war extensive, including being in the council for Air Raid Precautions, a leading part in Civil Defence and eventually chief raid welfare officer which among other things entailed rehousing and care of people who had been bombed (Moore, 2013, p. 42). Margaret, still living at home during the war, witnessed firsthand the work of her father and the despair of the population of Grantham. "Duty, work, patriotism – and the sense of an enemy – dominated" the world she grew up in (Moore, 2013, p. 42).

Her mother on the other hand, did not have such a great impact on Margaret. She has said that she did not have much to say to her mother after the age of fifteen. Although they did not have a close relationship, she said that she has always loved her mother (Moore, 2013, p. 31). In her later years, Margaret regretted not being appreciative enough towards her mother, which troubled Margaret with guilt (Moore, 2013, p. 32).

Margaret was a woman of many firsts, including being the first woman in her family to go to university, and the first person in her family to attend Oxford (Moore, 2013, p. 67). Here she was one of only three girls studying chemistry (Moore, 2013, p. 70). Some years after completing her science degree she completed her Bar Exam in 1954 becoming a barrister, which according to a letter she had written to her sister during her Oxford-days had been a wish for a long time (Moore, 2013, p. 166). By 1955 she had specialized in tax law, a branch within the law that was easier to combine with a family life (Moore, 2013, p. 169).

In between Oxford and sitting for her Bar Exam she met Denis Thatcher. He was a former soldier but had left the army to take on his father's quite successful business (Moore, 2013, p. 114). The couple married on 13th of December 1951 (Moore, 2013, p. 155). In August of 1953 they welcomed their twins Mark and Carol (Moore, 2013, p. 158). Although Margaret Thatcher loved her children, her daughter Carol has said that she does not believe their childhood to be a particularly important part of Thatcher's life (Moore, 2013, p. 163). Thatcher herself has stated that she needed a career, as that was the kind of person she was (Moore, 2013, p. 159).

Denis Thatcher, her husband of more than 50 years passed away in June 2003. She suffered from dementia that deteriorated rapidly in the years that followed, and on April the 8th, 2013 Margaret Thatcher passed away (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a).

3 Political career

Margaret Thatcher's political career was quite a distinguished one. She became the youngest and the first female Parliamentary candidate for the Conservative party for Dartford in 1949 (Moore, 2013, p. 107). She got the seat for the Conservative party in Finchley in 1958 (Thatcher, 1995, p.97), and in the 1959 election the Conservative party was victorious, and Margaret Thatcher became a Member of Parliament (MP). She was then given a junior office in the Macmillan administration in 1961, and during the new Labour government in 1964-1970 she was a shadow minister (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a). When the Conservative party, with Edward Heath as Prime Minister, came back into office in 1970 she became the Education Secretary (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a). The Conservatives lost the election in 1974, and in 1975 Margaret Thatcher won against Heath in the race for leadership of the party, thus becoming the first female ever to lead a Western political party and a leader of the Opposition (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a). The then Labour Government was riddled with crisis, effectively leaving the country in economic ruin with the collapse of the pound sterling and loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a). The trade unions' demands in the winter of 1978/1979 resulted in an epidemic of strikes, and in the 1979 election they lost to the Conservative party (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a). Margaret Thatcher became the first female Prime Minister of the UK, a position she held until 1990 (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a).

Her time as Prime Minister was one of great controversy. Upon her death many took to the street to celebrate her death with cheers and posters such as "Ding Dong! The witch is dead" (Rawlinson & Quine, 2013). While others mourned her passing and saying how she saved Britain and shattered the glass ceiling (Robinson & Tomlinson, 2013). Some of the events that happened domestically in her time as Prime Minister was the bombings of the IRA and the Falkland Wars. The IRA was an Irish terrorist group which launched a series of bombed attacks, killing more than 1600 people (Thatcher, 1993, p. 63). Among them, a colleague of Margaret Thatcher called Airey Neave (Thatcher, 1993, p. 61). Within two weeks of her taking office as Prime Minister she had to deliver an address in his Memorial Service (Thatcher, 1993, p. 61). When the Argentinians captured the small British colony miles off the coast of South America, she showed how far she was willing to go in preserving Britain's interests on the international scene out of principle (Solly, 2020).

The premiership of Margaret Thatcher was strongly influenced by her view on economy and the idea that it was the strength of the individuals that made a country prosper (Moore, 2013, p. 113). Much of her focus was on "rebuilding the British economy on the free market principles, reducing taxation, privatizing nationalized industries, reforming industrial relations to break trade union power" according to Lord Charles Powell (2017). The miner's strike of 1984-85 has been credited to being "the most violent and long lasting in British history" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a.) and caused a divide amongst the British people that would do lasting damage to her reputation. A speech in Kensington in 1976 regarding defense external aggression earned her the nickname "The Iron Lady" (Moore, 2013, p. 401-402). It was first used as an insult by the Red Army in Russia, as a comparison with Bismarck, the "iron Chancellor of Germany", however she

took it in stride and even said that "A Cold War warrior.. Yes, I am an iron lady" (Moore, 2013, p. 402).

Some has argued that the reason for her downfall was her strict handling of the EC (Powell, 2017). While this is likely to be a contributing factor, but the fact that she handled the issues of the EC the same way in Britain is also likely another factor. She was not called The Iron Lady for nothing, after all. She was forced out of office and thrown as leader of the Conservative Party by her own (Orchard, 2015). The Poll tax – which was a highly despised tax – entailed that everyone, despite the level of income, had to pay the same amount of taxes to fund local council services (Orchard, 2015). She was advised by Lord Garel-Jones to calm down on the poll tax as it was damaging her MP's chances of being re-elected, but refused to listen (Orchard, 2015). She was also advised to soften up on the rhetoric regarding the EC, and yet again she would not listen (Orchard, 2015). This came to a head when she delivered the speech in House of Commons in 1990, and after being publicly bullied by Thatcher in the cabinet, Sir Geoffrey Howe resigned (Orchard, 2015). His leaving paved the way for Michael Heseltine to challenge Thatcher for her leadership. Thatcher did not put much effort into the campaign, and after the first ballot she won the vote, but with so little margin that she knew she would lose her seat (Orchard, 2015). As a consequence, she resigned as leader of the party, and as Prime Minister of Britain (Orchard, 2015).

4 Brexit

The question to be answered as stated in the introduction is if Margaret Thatcher would be for or against Brexit. In order to answer this, an overview of what Brexit actually was and how it affected Britain is needed. Brexit was the exit of Britain from EU membership and was decided on the basis of a referendum in 2016 (Cini & Borragan, 2017, p. 3). There had been a divide between the British population regarding EU membership ever since before they joined the EC in 1973 (Powell, 2017). So much so that the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) was established in the mid 1980's with the sole purpose of getting the UK out of the EU (Cini & Borragan, 2017, p. 2). It came to a head in David Cameron's time as Prime Minister, and he called for a referendum, after trying to negotiate better terms for Britain in the EU ((Cini & Borragan, 2017, p. 3). The issue on membership was a special one as it divided members of the political parties in two. Those who wanted to remain and those that wanted to leave (Cini & Borragan, 2017, p.4).

The key message for the Leave campaign was "take back control". They wanted to take back control of British borders and immigration. They also argued that the UK was a great nation that would benefit economically by looking outside the union (Cini & Borragan, 2017, p. 4). They appealed to the "national pride and sentiment" (Cini & Borragan, 2017, p. 4). The Remain campaign was of an economic nature. They argued the UK would benefit from staying within the union, and that leaving would have a devastating effect (Cini & Borragan, 2017, p. 4). Based on the experts from different institutions such as the Bank of England and the IMF they warned that to leave the EU would "plunge the country into recession" (Cini & Borragan, 2017, p. 4). After two months of campaigning, the results were clear on the 24th of June 2016, the British population had voted to leave the EU by 51.9% to 48.1% (Cini & Borragan, 2017, p. 6).

Margaret Thatcher was used on both sides of the campaign, and each claimed she would have voted with their side. This predicament will be discussed in a later section.

5 Method

The greatest obstacle in answering the question on whether or not Margaret Thatcher would be in favor of Brexit, is that by 2016 she was dead. Prior to this she had suffered from dementia for several years. There is therefore not that much research done on this topic, and Thatcher did not clearly state her opinion about the possibility of a British exit from the EU while she was still alive. Many interviews with old friends and colleagues of hers regarding this subject has been published, however they vary in their conclusions. Some believe she would be in favor of Brexit, whereas others believe she would not be. As she is no longer alive and able to voice her opinion, all there is to go on is her words and actions before the dementia. As such, the method used in this research will lean towards a document analysis primarily on some of her writings and speeches, as well as a lecture done by Lord Charles Powell for the University of Oxford.

Margaret Thatcher's speech in Bruges on September 20th, 1988 (The Bruges Group, 2013, p. 1) is another source of great interest for this research. It is a speech on the subject of Britain and Europe, and is one frequently used in discussions about Thatcher's possible view on Brexit. An analysis of this speech will hopefully provide some insight into her standing on the matter. So will her speech in reaction to Jaques Delors' in the House of Commons in 1990. Other sources of great value will be Thatcher's books *The Downing Street Years* of 1993, *The Path to Power* from 1995. The reason why the lecture on Margaret Thatcher and Europe, given by Lord Charles Powell, will be used as well, as a source of interest, is that he served as Margaret Thatcher's foreign affairs private secretary for eight years (Powell, 2017), and thus I believe he can contribute considerable insight into this topic.

6 Margaret Thatcher – Attitudes toward the European union

Margaret Thatcher was a woman of great controversy. As mentioned previously, she has been celebrated and hated by the British people. It seems like her attitude towards the European Community (EC), now the European Union (EU), has had a great impact on her reputation. Thatcher never officially stated her opinion on whether the UK should stay or leave the union, which has brought with it a cascade of people claiming to know her position. However, no one can know for sure. In trying to find an answer to Margaret Thatcher's possible position on Brexit it is important to understand the historical context of her childhood and political life in both Europe and the world compared to that in 2016, at the time of Brexit.

It is of importance to ascertain the differences between the EC during her years as a politician and that of EU in the latter years. It will also be necessary to shed some light on some of the key events in her relationship with the EC, including her infamous speech in Bruges. Lastly, it is of interest to look into some of the thoughts on this from some of her friends and colleagues, including Lord Charles Powell. The insights gathered from these four topics will form the basis of the conclusion.

6.1 The world then and now

Margaret Thatcher was born in 1925 (Moore, 2013, p. 23). By the time she was twenty years old, the world had seen two world wars in less than half a century. Her youth was spent watching her politically active father help in aiding wounded soldiers and preparing defense from enemy attacks. There were British military bases in and surrounding her town of Grantham, and in 1943 many American soldiers and personnel was also stationed there (Moore, 2013, p. 37). In the waves of the Second World War the world saw the need for a political and military alliance and in 1949 NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was established (NATO, n.d.). The UK was one of the founding members as well as the US. The organization's goal is to "promote democratic values" and "peaceful resolution of disputes" (NATO, n.d.).

Prior to this, in 1917, the Russian Revolution broke out (Swain, 2017, p. 1). This led to the "triumph of communism in the Soviet Union in the 1920's and 1930's", which ultimately led to the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe, which in turn resulted in the Second World War (Swain, 2017, p. 1). The continuous threat of communism, and its expansion, plagued the international scene for decades during which we know as the Cold War, until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Swain, 2017, p. 1). To help with this threat of Communism the US launched two different aids. The first was the Truman Doctrine of 1947, which was a financial aid to Turkey and Greece one of which resulted in an American policy that the US would "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures (Osgood et al. 2019, p. 243). An outcome of this was the Marshall Plan, which was to counter the threat of communism

to Western Europe “by aiding in its recovery and rehabilitation and by promoting European economic cooperation” (Osgood et al. 2019, p. 243).

On a European level, the Soviet Union was a close threat, and the financial aids and NATO were measures taken on a transatlantic level to rehabilitate the European countries, prevent the expansion of communism as well as the threats of a new World War. One of the measures taken on a European level was the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) of 1952 (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 15). The ECSC included France and Germany, and its aim was not only to promote a united Europe and “common foundations for economic development” by pooling their coal and steel production, but it was also argued it would make another war between Germany and France virtually impossible (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 14). This was the first steppingstone towards what is today known as the European Union. Further development entailed signing of the Treaties of Rome in 1957, which established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC) (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 13). This established “the basis of the European Union’s institutional architecture” (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 15). The six countries that was part of these organizations were Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 14). The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) was established in 1960 by “the outer seven”, which consisted of Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 15). It was an intergovernmental association and served as a challenge to the EEC (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 15).

During the next decades the European Community saw a substantial increase in member states, including the UK in 1973, with a total of 27 after the UK’s exit from the EU in 2016 (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 3). The wish for a single market, a market free of trade barriers between the member states, resulted in the Single Market Project in 1984-85, which in turn resulted in the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986 (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 19). The SEA was not only about the Single Market, however. It established the European Central Bank (ECB), “committed the member states to cooperate on the convergence of economic and monetary policy” and social policy expanded to “include health and safety in the workplace and dialogue between management and labour” (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 19). It also extended the Qualified majority vote in the Council, formally recognized the Council and allowed the Council to “confer implementation powers on the Commission” (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 19). This was one step closer to the EU we know today, which derived from the Treaty of Maastricht in 1991 and in November 1993 the EU was formally established (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 20).

On a national level Britain was facing having to rebuild the nation after two World Wars. They were participating in numerous negotiations regarding joining the different European organizations to promote economic rehabilitation and integration in the aftermath of the wars, including the EFTA in 1960. The UK applied for membership to the EC and was vetoed by French President Charles de Gaulle in 1963, as he claimed the UK was a trojan horse for US influence (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 17). The UK’s application was again vetoed by De Gaulle in 1967, but they were ultimately granted membership in 1973 (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 16). The UK held a referendum on continuing Britain’s membership in 1975 (Moore, 2013, p. 372). It was not until 2016 that Brexit was a fact. As mentioned, they also joined NATO in 1949. During her years as PM, Margaret Thatcher also developed a close friendship with US President Reagan, a friendship based in the belief in the same things (Moore, 2013, p. 652).

Domestically, Britain was virtually bankrupt in 1976 following the collapse in the value of the British pound (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.a). The British Empire was decolonized during her lifetime as well, particularly the decade of 1957-1967 saw drastic changes in Britain's colonies in Africa and Asia (Davis, 2013 p. 79). The Irish Republican Army (IRA) gave Thatcher a hard start to her time as PM as they launched several terrorist attacks, mainly using car bombs (Thatcher, 1993, p. 61). In 1984 the IRA almost killed Margaret Thatcher when they bombed the Brighton hotel, which she and the Conservative cabinet was staying at (Carroll, 2021). In 1982, in which is now known as the Falklands War, the Argentinian forces claimed the British colony (Solly, 2020). Even though the islands were located in the South Atlantic, the UK fought for its citizens (Solly, 2020). Britain was victorious, and the victory had ultimately strengthened Margaret Thatcher's poor standing in Britain, raising her popularity by ten per cent, to 41.5 per cent (Thatcher, 1993, p. 293). Margaret Thatcher's battle with the trade unions and the vast privatization of national institutions had a negative impact on her popularity.

The world in 2016 on the other hand, looked quite different to that of the time from Thatcher's birth up until 1990 and her resignation as PM. Some of the challenges of the 21st century has been the rise of the terrorist network ISIS. ISIS announced its formation coincidentally on the day that Margaret Thatcher passed away, April 13th, 2013 (Chulov, 2019). ISIS is a terrorist organization from the Middle East, which has plagued countries such as Iraq, Libya and Syria (Chulov, 2019). They have even launched terrorist attacks in Paris, London, Manchester and Brussels to name a few (Chulov, 2019). In 2015 Europe was faced with what is called the Syrian refugee crisis, which reached a record of 1.3 million asylum seekers to Europe (Pew Research Center, 2016). This undoubtedly had serious consequences for the European countries, with Germany being the primary destination country for asylum seekers in Europe (Pew Research Center, 2016). Another challenge of the century has been the global financial crisis lasting from mid-2007 to mid-2009 (Reserve Bank of Australia, n.d.). Millions of people lost their jobs, and it is considered to be "the deepest recession since the Great Depression in the 1930's" (Reserve Bank of Australia, n.d.).

In the 21st century in Europe, the European Union has established the euro as a legal currency in 2002, as well as welcomed many new member states (EU, n.d.a). In 20 they elected their first female President of the Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen (Boffey, 2019). The EU has also been greatly affected by the global financial crisis, which developed into the euro crisis in 2009 (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 365) and the Syrian refugee crisis. The current structure of the main part of the EU is made up of 4 main decision-making institutions (EU, n.d.b). The European Parliament consists of representatives directly elected by member states' citizens and makes decisions about European laws together with the Council of the European Union, as well as approving the EU budget (EU, n.d.b). The Council of the European Union consists of the ministers of the national governments, and they meet when their area as ministers is discussed, such as education or agriculture (EU, n.d.b). The European Council are the heads of state or government, and they are tasked with defining "the general political direction and priorities of the European Union" (EU, n.d.b). The European Commission is the last of the four, and it is the EU's main executive body of the union. They propose laws, make sure the common interests of the EU is represented, and make sure that the member states follow EU law (EU, n.d.b). Other institutions are the court of justice, European Central Bank and the European Court of Auditors, the latter improves the EU financial management (EU, n.d.b).

The most well-known issues in British politics of the 21st century is the referendum which ultimately resulted in their leave from the EU. The world in Thatcher's early years has indeed changed immensely.

6.2 Margaret Thatcher and the EU

Now that the historical background and development has been established, this next section will shed some light on Margaret Thatcher's key events and track record with the European Union. There is little information about her standing on the European issue prior to the campaign and following referendum in 1975, a finding confirmed by Lord Charles Powell in the lecture held at the University of Oxford in 2017 (Powell, 2017). He believed the reason for this was that Thatcher grew up in a world dominated by the world wars and the aftermath of it, and the looming threat of the Cold War and communism hanging over the Western world (Powell, 2017). However, Thatcher was an active member of the European Union of Women, an organization that promoted European integration (Thatcher, 1995, p. 127). She did however not fall into the idealistic rhetoric on "Europe", and saw the EEC as a framework for trading, a Common Market (Thatcher, 1995, p. 127). Her first battle with the EC was the budget on British contribution to the Community. She stated that the EEC "is about free people living together", implying that the cost of the membership was too high (Moore, 2013, p. 582). She believed Britain had never been treated fairly in the EEC and it became one of her bigger battles with the Community (Thatcher, 1993, p. 601). She also spoke about "the appalling prospect of paying out £1 billion net per annum to Brussels" (Moore, 2013, p. 582). After many years of negotiations, she managed to not only be reimbursed £400 million, but also an agreement of a rebate system giving Britain back 66 per cent of their net contribution based on the VAT (Value Added Tax), also including the cost of enlargement (Thatcher, 1995, p. 601).

Her second battle was the Single Market. This vision was originally found in the Treaty of Rome, and the purpose of the Single Market was to give the treaty real substance and revive some of its vision (Thatcher, 1995, p. 605). The Single Market Project in 1984-85 was to establish "the free movement of goods, services, capital and people" (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 19). It was thought that the spill-over from this would be further integration (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 19), however Thatcher's view on that matter was to ensure that it was not another step towards European federalism, that it was a matter of free trade and not protectionism (Thatcher, 1995, p. 696). She was prepared to fight for "issues of real significance to Britain" (Thatcher, 1995, p. 606). Thatcher wanted to base the cooperation on an intergovernmental agreement, and not a federalist one as the Treaty of Rome had drawn out (Thatcher, 1995, p. 607). Intergovernmental cooperation is a cooperation between sovereign states on a government-to-government basis (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 408), rather than a supranational actor, which in turn means an institution above national level (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 420), which the EEC clearly showed signs of being. An intergovernmental conference (IGC) was held, and the result was the SEA of 1986 (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 19). The majority leaned more towards an intergovernmentalistic approach, and this included giving more power to the EP and the cooperation on social policy regarding workers among other things (Cini & Borrigan, 2016, p. 19). Not what Thatcher had worked for, but at least the Single Market was a fact.

A third key event in her relation to the EC was the Bruges speech of 1988. This has been used as an example from both sides of the Brexit-issue, claiming based on this speech that Thatcher would agree with their point of view. Therefore, it is of interest to take a closer look at what she is actually saying in this speech. She begins with underlining Britain's and mainland Europe's common historical and cultural heritage, and shared experiences (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c). She then says this is proof of their commitment to Europe's future (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c). On the matter on Europe's future she states that "The European Community is a practical means by which Europe can ensure the future prosperity and security" of its population and that this should be made up by "many other powerful nations and groups of nations", later emphasizing the EC should encourage individual initiative and enterprise", rather than diminish them (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c). From here she lists some guiding principles for the future of Europe. Firstly, she believes the best way to build a successful European Community is by "willing and active cooperation between independent sovereign states" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c). She continues by claiming that concentrating power at the center of Europe and suppressing nation states while doing so is a grave mistake. She also adds that of course there are matters in which the European countries will benefit from having a united voice, and that Europe is stronger working together on matters they work better with united than alone (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c). She stresses again that working together "does not require power to be centralized in Brussels, or decisions to be taken by an appointed bureaucracy" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c).

Second, she believes in encouraging change, and that the Community policies must be dealt with efficiently and practically. She uses the example of redistributing the Community budget from storing vast amounts of surplus food to freeing up the resources and spending them on other areas in need, such as helping regions out of poverty and help training people for jobs instead (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c). Her third principle is "the need for the Community policies which encourage enterprise" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c). She advocates for a less state-controlled economy with freer markets, rather than detailed regulation from a concentrated power center (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.). The fourth principle is that the Community should not be protectionistic, that while deregulating within Europe's border will be healthy for the economy, Europe should also do so externally (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c). The last principle is regarding defence. She believes that while maintaining a "sure defence through NATO", they should also look at other ways to contribute to the safety of the West, especially since there are uncertainties surrounding the Soviet Union (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c). During her speech she also makes it clear that she believes the future of Britain is within the European Community, not out on the fringes (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.c).

Lastly, perhaps one of the better-known scenes from Margaret Thatcher on the subject of the EC, is her response to the President of the Commission Jacques Delors' press conference where he said he wanted the EP to be "the democratic body of the Community", the Commission the Executive and the Council the Senate (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.b). The speech was delivered in the House of Commons in October of 1990 (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.b). She proceeded to firmly state "No, no, no" as a response to this. She taunts the opposition by asking if they would prefer to "agree to a single currency and abolition of the pound sterling" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.b). And continues asking if they would be delighted to hand over the monetary responsibilities to a central bank, comparing it to the IMF (Margaret

Thatcher Foundation, n.d.b). She also refers to the pound sterling as “the greatest expression of sovereignty”, and that it is “better to increase democracy than to reduce it” (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, n.d.b).

Having pointed out some of the key events in Thatcher’s relationship with the EC, it is time to take a look at what some of her trusted colleagues and friends believe she would have said about Brexit. Lord Charles Powell stated in his lecture that one should be careful not to claim to know her views on the matter, but that based on his time as her foreign affairs private secretary, and friend, he still had some thoughts on the matter. He talked about her political track record and personal conversations, as well as meetings he attended with Thatcher and European leaders. He said her interest in Europe mirrored what was happening in the rest of the world. When she was young, prior to the 1975 referendum, he could not find much evidence that she was occupied with thoughts on a European Community (Powell, 2017). That would be the post-World War II period, which saw a threat from communist Soviet Union and the hardship of bringing Britain back to its feet again. Her time as Prime Minister had much focus on Europe, but he claims it was not necessarily because she was passionate about it, but rather the circumstances demanded it (Powell, 2017). He used the Bruges speech to illustrate how she was saying she was pro-Europe and against supernational organizations (Powell, 2017). He also points out that there had been a tension between “intergovernmentalism and integrationism at the heart of Britain’s membership of the EU from the beginning” (Powell, 2017).

He did not believe it was Thatcher’s attitude towards the EC nor her actions that inevitably brought about Brexit, but rather political mishandling on both British and European sides. On the one hand, the Tony Blair government should not have pushed for integration when they knew the people were divided, and David Cameron believing in, and relying on, the referendum (Powell, 2017). On the other hand, Powell said he did not believe they would have “refused Margaret Thatcher an emergency brake on immigration” (Powell, 2017). Powell believed she would have wanted to stay within the EC, and continue to fight Britain’s battles from within, as she had done in her years as Prime Minister. She had stated numerous times that “our destiny is within Europe”, and she had never disclosed any other opinion to him. She was sceptic to the EC by all means, but he points out that it was regarding the constant chase for further integration at the expense of national sovereignty that was her issue, not the Community itself (Powell, 2017).

Another colleague of Margaret Thatcher, Lord Tebbit, former Conservative chairman, completely dismissed Powell’s claim and stated that her shouts of “no” in response to Delors illustrates her standing on the question, particularly because it still “remains the policy of the Commission and the European Parliament” (Sparrow, 2016).

So, what would Margaret Thatcher vote in the 2016 referendum, had she still been alive? If one is to look on the side of the leave campaign, we find some evidence to back it up. As Lord Tebbit said, her position towards Delors in 1990 was quite clear, and the perspective on the EU has not changed. The EU has moved further towards integration, and economic integration as well. This, as illustrated, is quite contrary to Thatcher’s opinions. The constant negotiations with the EC tells us something about how she was not in agreement with the majority of the EC. Her close relationship with the US and her philosophy that one needed to look outside Europe to flourish as well, is yet more arguments. It could be argued that she was too skeptical to the direction the EC, and

later EU, took, and would rather have pushed for more transatlantic cooperation and agreements with the EC and other European governments as a sovereign state. Another point of consideration is her lack of interest in the EC prior to 1975. Some might argue this is because the EC was not close to her heart, and the economic freedom would be favorable.

On the other hand, she did state in Bruges that Britain's destiny has always been and will continue to be in Europe. She did serve as Prime Minister from 1979-1990 with a government heavily divided between intergovernmentalists and integrationists. One could argue that if she was the direction the EC was headed, she could have pushed for another referendum, if she truly believed Britain would be better off leaving the Community and negotiate single agreements between the EC and UK.

Lord Charles Powell pointed out another argument in his lecture, that he believed Margaret Thatcher would be fundamentally against Brexit as a principle, because she was against referendums (Powell, 2017). Doing some research into the topic have not provided many answers to this claim other than two points to consider further. First, in an interview regarding the national referendum in 1975 Margaret Thatcher stated that she thought of it as a "device of dictators and demagogues" and that it was a danger "to minorities and destructive of parliamentary sovereignty" (Saunders, 2019). In other words, she did not have a favorable view of referendums, at least not in that case.

The second, from 1973 until now there has been 13 referendums on a national level, and none of them was during the years Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister (Owen, 2016). Powell also pointed out that Thatcher was a parliamentarian, which with her qualms about the loss of British sovereignty to the EC, objection to the national power being transferred to a centralized EC in Brussels, and her belief that the power should stay with the national governments because they are accountable to their voters (Thatcher, 1995, p. 617). These traits are echoing that of a parliamentarian, so perhaps Powell is correct in his statement. She has on numerous occasions guarded British sovereignty, so it is clear that it was of great importance to her, but that does not necessarily mean she would be against giving some of it away, if it benefited Britain more than it would lose by doing it.

Although there are fair arguments to be made on both sides, I am inclined to lean towards her wanting to stay in the EU and fight for Britain from within for some key reasons. One, the economic consequences for leaving the EU were grave, which the Remain campaign warned, and being of an economic mind, economy would likely have been one of her most important factors in making her decision. Two, I think Lord Charles Powell made a plausible argument that she was a parliamentarian, who believed that the government were to be the decision makers as representatives of the British citizens, and would therefore possibly oppose the idea of a referendum in the first place. Three, she clearly stated on numerous occasions that she believed European countries were stronger working together on certain issues, and that she believed Britain should be a part of Europe. And four, Lord Tebbit argued that she her "no" at Delors was still relevant, but as she was still a sitting Prime Minister, she did not at any point say she believed it had gone too far and it was time to move on. Lastly, the fact that the two sides of the Brexit campaigns had vastly different angles of attack, the leave campaign leaned on the issue of immigration whereas the remain campaign fronted the economic consequences. There was not much evidence that Thatcher was against immigration per se, she was against

integration at a national level at the cost of sovereignty, and furthering Britain's economy was at the forefront throughout her political career.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, one has to be careful when discussing opinions of people who are no longer alive, as they are no longer here to defend themselves. As Thatcher suffered from dementia in her later years, it makes this particularly difficult because whatever she might have said on the issue after her last biography might be influenced by her illness. That being said, one other obstacle was that the world she grew up in and served as a PM is vastly different to the current situation. This could have had an impact on the matter. Nonetheless, her upbringing during the Second World War, her politically active father, and a life as the daughter of a shop keeper very much reflected her record as PM, with a determination for hard work, protection against external aggression, and a head start into the world of politics.

The issues of rehabilitating the country after a war, and the looming threat of communism was likely more of interest than the European Community in the year prior to being elected PM. The political climate and her ability to influence the international stage threw her into the issues on the EC and as a believer in the individual and with a nationalistic pride, this reflected her actions in the Community.

As evident by the analysis of the Bruges speech, Thatcher was not so anti-Europe as some has claimed her to be. She has stated on numerous occasions that she believes Britain has a future in Europe, not on the fringes. She advocates for better cooperation, and a less intergovernmental approach. Being against the loss of one's nation's sovereignty is not equal to being against the EC, and I believe that is an important distinction to make.

Based on the evidence from the Bruges speech, the fact that she could have asked for a referendum herself had she wanted it, the understanding of her upbringing and the historical aspect of it leads me to believe that were she alive, she would have been against leaving the union. The main argument to be made is that furthering Britain's economy and making decisions based on the future prosperity of Britain, has been at the very heart of her political career. The fact that the Remain-campaign was founded in the belief that it would lead to economic ruin, backed up by large economic organizations, again affirm my belief that she would remain were she alive today.

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