

Britain and the European Union from 1945 to Brexit: A Long and Winding Road

The United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union has been a complex and evolving one, marked by both cooperation and conflict. This article will explore the history of Britain's relationship with the EU, from its early involvement in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to its eventual withdrawal in 2020.



Reluctant European: Britain and the European Union from 1945 to Brexit by Stephen Wall

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Early Involvement: The European Coal and Steel Community

The United Kingdom's involvement in European integration began in 1951, when it joined the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The ECSC was a supranational organization established by the Treaty of Paris with the aim of pooling the coal and steel resources of its member states in order to prevent future wars. The UK was one of the six founding members

of the ECSC, along with France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

The ECSC was a success, and it helped to lay the foundation for further European integration. In 1957, the ECSC was expanded into the European Economic Community (EEC), which was established by the Treaty of Rome. The EEC was a more ambitious project than the ECSC, and it aimed to create a single market for goods, services, capital, and labor among its member states.

Reluctant Member: Britain and the EEC

The United Kingdom was a reluctant member of the EEC. The British government was concerned about the loss of sovereignty that would result from joining the EEC, and it was also concerned about the impact that the EEC would have on the UK's economy. As a result, the UK negotiated a number of opt-outs from EEC policies, including the Common Agricultural Policy.

Despite its reservations, the UK benefited from membership in the EEC. The EEC provided the UK with access to a large and growing market, and it helped to boost the UK's economy. However, the UK's relationship with the EEC was often strained, and the UK was frequently at odds with its European partners.

Growing Euroscepticism: The 1970s and 1980s

In the 1970s and 1980s, Euroscepticism grew in the UK. This was due to a number of factors, including the UK's economic problems, the increasing power of the European Union, and the growing sense that the UK was losing its independence. In 1975, the UK held a referendum on whether to

remain in the EEC. The result was a narrow vote in favor of staying in, but the referendum revealed the deep divisions within the UK over Europe.

The Conservative Party, which was elected to power in 1979, was more Eurosceptic than the Labour Party. The Conservative government negotiated a number of concessions from the EU, including a rebate on the UK's budget contribution. However, the Conservative government's relationship with the EU remained strained, and the UK continued to be at odds with its European partners on a number of issues.

Maastricht and Beyond: The 1990s and 2000s

In 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht was signed. The Maastricht Treaty established the European Union (EU) and set out the goals of the EU, including the creation of a single currency, the euro. The UK negotiated an opt-out from the euro, but it was required to join the EU's single market. The Maastricht Treaty was controversial in the UK, and it led to the resignation of a number of Conservative MPs from the government.

The Labour Party, which was elected to power in 1997, was more pro-European than the Conservative Party. The Labour government introduced a number of reforms to the UK's relationship with the EU, including the devolution of power to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. However, the Labour government's relationship with the EU remained strained, and the UK continued to be at odds with its European partners on a number of issues.

Brexit: The End of the Road?

In 2016, the UK held a referendum on whether to remain a member of the EU. The result was a narrow vote in favor of leaving the EU. The UK

government invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union in 2017, which began the process of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. The UK left the EU on January 31, 2020.

The UK's withdrawal from the EU was a major event in British history. It is too early to say what the long-term effects of Brexit will be, but it is clear that the UK's relationship with the EU has been irrevocably changed.

The United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union has been a complex and evolving one. The UK was a reluctant member of the EEC, and it was often at odds with its European partners. However, the UK benefited from membership in the EEC, and it helped to boost the UK's economy. In the 1970s and 1980s, Euroscepticism grew in the UK, and in 2016, the UK voted to leave the EU. The UK's withdrawal from the EU was a major event in British history, and it is too early to say what the long-term effects of Brexit will be.



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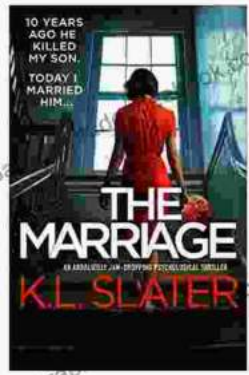
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