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**The EU in the eyes of the Australian elite 2016-2019:
perceptions in the context of Brexit**

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Prague, 30 July 2021

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Abstract

Brexit represents arguably the most dramatic development in the history of the European Union (EU). For a third country such as Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) with whom it shares a Commonwealth connection, has generally been perceived as serving as a bridge between Australia and the EU. Thus, Brexit represents a conundrum for Australia in its grappling of how to approach its relations with the EU into the future. Perceptions of the EU from the Asia-Pacific region have been regularly studied since the early 2000s. However, there has been a shortcoming in specific focus of Australian perceptions of the EU since 2008, and specifically Australian elite perceptions. Brexit presents an opportunity to update the existing body of literature, thus this research analyses how the Australian elite perceive the EU following the UK's departure. This research utilises a two-tiered methodological approach in order to ascertain what the Australian elite perception of the EU is since the Brexit referendum in June 2016. The methods include a critical content analysis of Australian think tank outputs, and semi-structured interviews with Australian elite figures identified as having extensive knowledge of the EU. The research tests the notion of the UK's centrality to Australia-EU relations and finds that there are mixed perceptions on this, with some believing the claim to be true while others perceive that Australia has in fact dealt more directly with the EU. The research also finds that there are substantial shifts in perceptions of the EU's strategic power, internal condition and negotiating power following Brexit. However, perceptions of the EU's economic prowess and normative power remain largely unchanged. The research also indicates that Australia should improve its understanding of the EU and establish more dynamic relations with Brussels and powerful member states.

Keywords

Perceptions, Image, Brexit, European Union, Australia, United Kingdom

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This thesis was written in loving memory of my Pop, Dr Graeme John Baker.

List of Abbreviations

AIIA – Australian Institute for International Affairs

ANUCES – Australian National University Centre for European Studies

ASPI – Australian Strategic Policy Institute

CAP – Common Agricultural Policy

CPD – Centre for Policy Development

CIS – Centre for Independent Studies

DFAT – Australian Department of Foreign and Affairs and Trade

EEC – European Economic Community

EII – European Intervention Initiative

EU – European Union

FTA – Free Trade Agreement

GATT – General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

JCPOA – Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

PESCO – Permanent Structured Cooperation

UK – United Kingdom

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

US – The United States of America

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Introduction

External perceptions of the European Union (EU) are a prominent field of study. Australia, despite its geographical distance from Europe, has dynamic relations with the EU that have developed over the course of many decades. Relations have not always been smooth, with several issues marring the nature of the relationship. Developments within the EU and abroad have meant that Australian perceptions of the EU as an actor have been regularly studied since the early 2000s. New studies generally arise following major changes within the EU. This thesis follows that structure and seeks to understand the perceptions of the Australian elite toward the EU following significant developments in within the bloc, most notably Brexit.

The timeframe between June 2016 and December 2019 encompasses many significant developments of UK's withdrawal process from the EU, more commonly known as Brexit. Specifically, June 2016 is chosen as a starting point for the scope of this thesis given that it saw the most dramatic development in the history of the EU, the UK's referendum that would trigger its withdrawal from the Union. So pertinent and complex is this development that the conditions of withdrawal continued to be deliberated well into the year 2020. It was only in December 2020 that the two sides came to deal over how they would engage with each other over the next years (Walker, 2021). Brexit sent a shockwave through the EU, highlighting not only the prominence of nationalist sentiment but also the drastic lengths in which some movements are willing to go.

23 June 2016 saw the UK hold a referendum on its membership of the EU. As has been well documented, the result was extremely close with 51.9% of voters choosing to leave. For the next nine months, extensive deliberation took place in the British government eventuating in the Prime Minister's triggering of Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union on 29 March 2017. A transition period was afforded to the UK and extended on several occasions given the extremely complex nature of the withdrawal process and the need for extended time to negotiate the myriad of areas in which Brexit affects. From the time of the referendum until the UK's official withdrawal on 31 January 2020, the process was handled by three different British prime ministers. The Brexit withdrawal agreement was the cause of most of the extensive deliberation, particularly on the British side, which is evidenced by several failed attempts to pass the bill through the British parliament. Many pertinent issues were topics of debate on both the EU and British sides, particularly the state of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, citizen and resident rights, the division of assets and the question around payment of money owed (ibid).

Brexit received enormous media coverage and commentary in Australia, particularly during times when complex and controversial issues were being handled. This is reflected in the data gathered for this thesis. This thesis which analyses the Australian elite perceptions of the EU deliberately avoided analysing perceptions from beyond the end of 2019 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. The European continent has been one of the areas hardest hit by the pandemic and the EU's response has received widespread attention. Simply put, this thesis avoids analysing data from 2020 as the pandemic has consumed much of the Australian discourse about the EU. Indeed, it will certainly be the case that pandemic itself has influenced Australian perceptions of the EU and this will be an area for future research.

The existing literature on Australia-EU relations indicate that the UK has served as Australia's bridge to the EU. The reasons for this 'special relationship' are due mostly to Australia having a British colonial history which has established, among other things, a common language, culture, and legal system. Thus, Brexit represents a stark predicament for Australia as following the UK's official departure in January 2020 as it must consider and deal with the EU in the absence of the UK. The key question this thesis seeks to answer is: **“Have Australian elite perceptions of the EU shifted following the UK's withdrawal from the Union?”**. It is important to understand this given the existing literature on Australian elite perceptions of the EU indicates that the UK has played a significant role as a link between the two. Furthermore, it is also the case that Australia, despite historical contentions over agricultural trade, views the EU as an economic powerhouse with whom deeper ties are both possible and ought to be encouraged. In terms of the EU as a security actor, it is argued that the EU plays a limited role in the Asia-Pacific addressing non-traditional security threats and promoting dialogue. Indeed, this ties in with the growing perception of the EU as normative power. Moreover, the EU's security and broader strategic efforts are viewed as being driven by the UK and France. This thesis will seek to understand the perceptions of what sort of an actor the EU, what the UK brought to the EU in different areas, and in what areas the EU's role as an actor is perceived as increasing or waning following Brexit.

To answer these questions, the thesis utilises a critical content analysis of Australian think tank outputs and semi-structured interviews with Australian elites who have a sound understanding of European affairs. The study examines the idea of the UK's primacy in Australia-EU ties and discovers that opinions are divided, with some thinking the assertion to be true while others feeling Australia has interacted more directly with the EU. There are also notable shifts in perceptions of the EU's strategic power, internal condition, and negotiating power following Brexit. Perceptions

of the EU's economic might and normative power, on the other hand, have generally remained constant. The findings also show that Australian elites believe Australian decision makers should improve their overall meagre understanding of the EU and develop more dynamic relationships with Brussels and powerful member states.

The thesis will adhere to the following structure: Chapter One provides a comprehensive overview and critical analysis of the existing literature on perceptions of the EU from Australia and the Asia-Pacific more broadly. It will make the case for the importance of ascertaining perceptions as a single variable in multi-variant equation in understanding what drives foreign policy. Furthermore, Chapter One will introduce the theoretical framework in which this thesis is situated and then outline the research question and hypotheses which are grounded in academic literature. Chapter Two will outline and justify the methodological approach employed in this research. Chapter Three represents the core of the thesis wherein the data is presented and analysed to ascertain shifts or lack thereof in perceptions of the EU from the Australian elite. Chapter Three is broken down into sub-sections dealing with the different themes that arise both the existing literature and data gathered. First, it analyses how central the UK is perceived to have been to Australia's relationship to the EU, using the Brexit development as an opportunity to test the premises established in the existing literature on Australia-EU relations. Second, it analyses the manner in which Australian elites perceive the EU's internal condition and whether or not Brexit is viewed as exacerbating the existing problems or creating new ones. Next, it discusses the EU's economic prowess. This is followed by perceptions on the EU's strategic power. Next are sub-sections on perceptions of the EU's negotiating and normative power. The chapter concludes by analysing how Australian elites view future Australia-EU relations to take shape. Finally, the thesis concludes by reiterating the findings of the thesis and suggesting areas for future research

Chapter One: Literature review: making the case for the study of perceptions

This thesis will be focussing on the shifts in perceptions of the EU from Australia following the Brexit referendum and its playing out from the time of the referendum in June 2016. Recent developments of a significant magnitude within the Europe call for new analysis of perceptions of the EU. The most pertinent development is the official departure of the UK from the EU in January 2020. Indeed, it is somewhat clear that the EU has taken a new shape and is seeking to promote itself as a more significant global player and given these changes, new external perceptions and expectations of the EU will undoubtedly arise.

1.1. Relevance of perceptions

Policies pursued by the EU are an important field for analysis, but it is the reception of these endeavours that make for better understanding of the EU's influence (Chaban & Holland, 2019). Assumptions have been touted by several scholars as some of the most important variables in understanding what drives the formation of foreign policy (Jervis, 1976; Cottam, 1977; Hermann, 1986; Spiegel, 1985). Studies on the impact of perceptions of the EU suggest that understanding images that might affect the Union's behaviour outside of Europe, "consequently affect its internal rhetoric and self-visions of foreign policy" (Chaban et al., 2009). Lucarelli (2014; p. 2) posits that the study of external images of the EU contributes to the "understanding of the EU's role in world", without which it would be difficult to have a comprehensive grasp of the EU's functioning as a global player. As such, understanding how the EU is perceived among its international partners in the context of recent global developments is pivotal for not only the EU, but third countries and scholars when analysing the EU's global influence.

While the literature suggests that perceptions play a key role in formation of foreign policy, it is important to not to overstate the impact they might have on outcomes. This thesis acknowledges that perceptions are 'soft' data, thus they ought not necessarily be attributed the same weight as other more tangible empirics. Of course, the value of perceptions as empirics depends on the nature of the study. Herrmann (1986) correctly points out that cognitive variables such as perceptions can provide limited explanations. Furthermore, he notes there is often a

preference for the study of other factors including “organisational structures, decision-making routines, bureaucratic interests and roles, or external constraints” (ibid, p. 842).

There is an extensive body of literature that studies perceptions in international relations, which will be elaborated in the following section. It is within this field that this research makes its contribution. This thesis does not aim to make the case that external perceptions are the sole force driving the changes in EU foreign policy, rather that they serve as one of the many variables in which one studies the formation of such policy. On this note, this thesis will endeavour to display the empirics presented in a manner that is suitable to their role as a single variable in a much larger equation of foreign policy analysis.

1.2. Image theory

Image theory shall serve as the theoretical framework for this thesis. A psychological theory in nature, image theory links a grouping of assumptions in international relations theory that consider perceptions of strategic relationships envisaged as a product of an actor’s perceptions of power, culture, or threats and opportunities of another actor (Herrmann et al., 1997). Birthed out of the Cold War as a tool for understanding societal behaviour, image theory was first developed by Boulding (1956). Boulding’s initial study spanned across the fields of political psychology and philosophy and contended that the image is pivotal to understanding behaviour at the individual and societal level. Boulding (1959) furthered his work on image theory and applied it to the institutional level and noted that even in complex organisations where many factors related to decision making are at play, decision-makers essentially choose their preferred position based on their image of a given phenomenon.

The study of images really gained traction from the 1960s, with scholars becoming dissatisfied with and identifying the limitations of traditional theoretical explanations for foreign policy (Herrmann & Fischerkeller 1995). Groundwork on the importance of perceptions in relation to global policy implementation and effectiveness has been established by Morgenthau (1965), who argues that “what others think about us is as important as what we actually are”. This premise has been reiterated and nuanced over the years according to different trends in international relations. Jervis (1976) correlates understanding perceptions with gains in relation to foreign policy. Cottam (1977) and George (1980) have both argued how understanding assumptions are

integral to foreign policy decisions. Spiegel (1985) developed this premise and argues that perceptions of leaders are the most crucial element when it comes to foreign-policy decision making.

Herrmann (1985) harnesses image theory as a means for understanding the influence of perceptions on behaviour in relation to Soviet foreign policy. Herrmann (1986) reiterates similar notions in his later work and establishes that perceptions not only play a key role in foreign policy decisions, but are also useful independent variables when studying such foreign policy decisions. Understanding the perpetuating negative image of adversaries in the context of the Cold War is Silverstein (1989), who also points out that psychologists play a role in this seemingly endless negative perpetuation. Silverstein and Flamenbaum (1989) further their study of image theory to show that media and decision-maker bias play a substantial role not only in reinforcing, but exaggerating how the Soviet Union was perceived as an enemy to the United States (US).

In more recent decades, image theory has remained a relevant framework for understanding international relations, particularly in the study of globalisation. Herrmann and Fischerkeller (1995) build on Morgenthau and Silverstein's work and argue that studying images ought to be done in a broader and more strategic manner so as to not pigeon hole perceptions in a single way – such as the case of bias toward perceiving only threats from perceived adversaries typical in the application of the realist stream and sub-streams of international relations theory. Herrmann et al. (1997) have produced a substantial body of work on image theory to show it to be a useful framework for understanding foreign policy decision making. Their work observes some patterns in decision making based on cognitive assumptions. Castano et al (2003, p. 449) indicate that images are closely associated with expectations and thus actions, however they note that their effect is contingent on the extent to which they are “perceived as a real entity”. Herrmann and Keller's (2004) study evidences that perceptions of military assertiveness, free trade opportunities and culture are all important factors in US foreign policy making. Herrmann (2013) notes how action can be taken based on one's perceived understanding of a relationship and shows how stereotypical images have ‘schemata-like properties’ that fill gaps where information forgoes.

1.3. Australia's relations with the EU: A Commonwealth conduit

Between 1957 and 1993, Australia's relations with the EU (and its forerunners) were limited. This is in part because of the EU's desire to consolidate internally and prioritising third country partnerships with states of relatively larger international standing. Australia's dealings and interest with the EU were almost entirely confined to the UK. This is unsurprising given Australia's existing economic, political and defence ties with the UK that predated UK accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) (Benvenuti & Murray, 2013). Australian attitudes toward the EU during this era were hesitant. This is because Australia was keen to maintain the UK as an export destination and EEC membership cast doubt over the level of access to British markets Australia would have. Australian concerns were realised in the Treaty of Rome which saw the creation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The EU's protectionist agricultural policies quickly became a source of frustration for Australia as they imposed huge tariffs on third country agricultural products. As such, Australia was hesitant to outwardly support UK membership of the EU (ibid).

It was not until the revision of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), known as the Uruguay Round (1986-1993), did Australia get limited respite from the frustrating trading landscape of the EU. During the Uruguay Round of negotiations, Australia sought to bring international attention to the EU's trade distorting policies affecting third country agriculture exports. The international pressure was a success and the EU agreed to lower its subsidies for European farmers and improve market access for non-European agriculture (ibid). Following the Uruguay Round, Australia and the EU enjoyed a new era of improved relations, manifesting in the 2003 Agenda for Cooperation. While the Agenda was not of a treaty-level status, it did acknowledge the potential for greater relations between two likeminded partners. Indeed, Australia and the EU's potential for even deeper relations remained somewhat constrained over the decades old agriculture dispute, which while improved, remained an obstacle for a more comprehensive partnership. By the 2000s, Australia began to perceive the EU in a more favourable light as it realised the continent's economic stability and reliability as a partner. Successive Australian governments under Prime Ministers Rudd and Gillard sought more engagement with Europe on non-agricultural issues and encouraged the EU to become more involved in a role of democracy promotion and norm diffusion in the Asia-Pacific (ibid). By 2016, Australia and the EU agreed to

begin negotiations on a free trade agreement, signally an unprecedented level of economic cooperation between the two.

The focus of this research will centre around how the EU is perceived among elites in Australia. The reasons for the selection of Australia is quite straightforward – it has a British colonial history, a common language and common culture, thus Brexit presents a puzzling situation in the context of Australia-EU relations. Australia along with New Zealand, the UK, Canada and the US make up what is coined the ‘Anglosphere’, a term often reiterated in solidarity by conservatives in the UK (Wallace, 2017; Kenny, 2014). The EU is a very important economic partner for Australia, ranking third in terms of total trade in goods. Australia ranks 21st on the EU’s list of its top trading partners (European Commission, 2020).

The UK, particularly through its colonial ties, provided the EU with international avenues, legitimacy and muscle. The literature points out that Asia-Pacific states with close ties to the UK indicative of colonial history have enjoyed a relationship with the EU that has been largely developed by a special relationship with the UK. (Murray et al., 2002; Elijah, 2006; Murray, 2007; Macdonald & di Mattia, 2014; Scicluna, 2019). Furthermore, Australia is part of the British Commonwealth with Britain’s monarch as its official head of state, albeit largely a ceremonial position.

In the period post-Second World War, the UK served as Australia’s closest economic and strategic partner (Abbott, 2019). This period also earmarked the development of a ‘special’ relationship between the UK and Australia based on social and cultural convergences. Indeed, these are rather opaque terms which are not always clearly defined. Broadly speaking, the parallels centre around a similar language, political system, economic outlook, institutional structure and values. Moreover, the links between the two can be observed at the individual and community levels in sport, arts and other people-to-people links (Elijah, 2006). These links between the Australia and the UK have been well documented in the existing literature (Miller, 1987; Kelly, 1998). Into the 2000s, Australia maintained its preference for bilaterals with states such as the US and UK (Murray, 2003).

In the years following the UK’s accession to the EEC in 1973, Australia’s relationship with the EU remained centred almost entirely on the UK. The Australia-EU relationship has not always been easy – it is asymmetrical and typically marred over disagreements over the EU’s CAP (Murray et al., 2002; Benvenuti & Murray, 2013). In fact, the UK itself expressed reservations

about joining the post-war European Coal and Steel Community given its special ties to the Commonwealth and the US (Bogdanor, 2005). Despite the difficulties, the two states have been bound together on the cultural front, but also in more concrete ways for example via various defence and intelligence cooperative efforts.

Australian perceptions of Europe are often distilled through a British lens. Europe correspondents of Australian media sources are always based in London as opposed to Brussels (Polonska-Kimunguyi & Kimunguyi, 2015). At the time of the Brexit referendum, the ‘leave campaign’ garnered some sympathy from the conservative side of Australian politics and among the conservative Murdoch press. For example, just as the EEC was initially perceived by the UK remain as an economic project, so too did Australia (Scicluna, 2019).

It is worth noting that not all scholars deem Australia’s ‘British centric’ approach to the EU to be as true in the 2000s and beyond as it once was. Benvenuti and Murray (2013), argue that it was certainly the case that Australia’s perceptions and attitudes toward the EU were distilled through a British lens up until the 1980s. However, they indicate that the relationship developed to such a point that this one-dimensional lens from Australia is less prevalent.

In light of this review, it is fair to the vast majority of the literature indicates that Australia has traditionally enjoyed a British-centric view of the EU. Brexit, in many ways, has not hindered the driving ahead of the EU’s global strategy in this region. Some examples of such are the pursuing of a free trade agreement with Australia, the EU’s role in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and its announcement of an Indo-Pacific strategy. However, Brexit and the announcement of a ‘geopolitical European Commission’ are two critical EU developments which may see a shift in the perceptions of Australian elites toward the EU. Thus, it is worth analysing to understand the perceptions of how pertinent the EU’s influence remains.

1.4. Perceptions of the EU from Australia

Given that this thesis will analyse what shifts (or lack thereof) there have been in perceptions toward the EU since the Brexit referendum, it is important to first understand how exactly the EU has been perceived prior to this point. Fortunately, since 2000 a vast body academic literature on perceptions of the EU has been developed. These works have been regularly produced to

understand shifts in perceptions following major developments, for example, perceptions following new treaties on the functioning of the EU.

In terms of the Asia-Pacific, there is a body of literature on the development of the EU's strategies toward the region since 1993 (Gilson, 2019). The key argument is that the EU has sought to improve its approach to the region as the region has become increasingly central to global supply chains and geopolitical interests. There has been regular in-depth analysis into what constitutes European presence and how the EU is perceived in the region (Chaban et al. 2008; 2010; 2014; 2019; Song & Wang 2019). Based on these studies, the EU as an institution is perceived by states in the Indo-Pacific states as an economic actor with waning influence due to its internal difficulties.

Murray (2003) produced one of the first bodies of literature in recent times focussing specifically on Australian elite perceptions of the EU. Prior to this point there was little literature focussing on perceptions of the EU from Australia, with the preference instead focussing on research of relations and perceptions of individual member states. She points out how at this time Australia's relationship with major security actors in the US and UK were intensified following terror attacks on 11 September 2001. Utilising a survey of elites in Australia including analysts, decisionmakers and stakeholders, Murray divulged that there is significant understanding of the EU among Australian elites. Furthermore, the study indicates that the EU's global influence is predominately expressed via its agreements and treaties with third countries and that the UK understands and deals best with Australia out of all member states. Moreover, Murray identifies that many respondents viewed individual member states as the primary focus for Australia rather than the EU as a whole.

The first of a rich series literature on the perception of the EU from the Asia-Pacific by Chaban and Holland (2008) delved into what the images are of the Union. At this time, the EU had been the largest trading partner and the largest investor for Australia. From this book, Jones (2008) points out that the public in Australia have a sound grasp on the function of the EU and also perceive it in similar ways. Murray's (2008) study reinforces notions from her earlier work such as the importance of the UK in Australia's relationship with the UK, and the marred nature of the relationship due to disputes over agricultural trade. There are also, however, shifts in perceptions from the Australia elite toward the EU, at this point understanding it better as a significant economic actor on the global stage. What remains is the perception that the US is a more important partner, however the EU has developed to be perceived as having the status of a

“distant and recalcitrant cousin” (p. 179). From the same book, Bain et al (2008) looked specifically at the elite perceptions in four Asia-Pacific countries: Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and South Korea. They concluded that the EU was seldom regarded as a global leader by elites in any of the four countries, yet it remained influential with expectations that its importance would increase.

Benvenuti and Murray (2013) identify the maturation of perceptions by this time period. They argue that the traditional areas of Australian discontentment toward the EU, notably agricultural trade access, have less of an impact on perceptions. Instead, they note that the EU is perceived as an important trading partner with potential for deeper economic links. A study from Chaban et al. (2013) reveals elite perceptions of the EU from the Pacific in the areas of the Union’s role as an international leader and a global power. The study draws its findings from interviews with elites across the Pacific, and while certain countries from where interviewees are chosen are named, many are not. It is important to note that this study makes no specific reference Australia as being included in its definition of the ‘wider Pacific’, although it is possible that it is implied. The authors findings indicate that the EU is viewed by elites to be an international leader in the realms of development, trade and economics, and also as a leader in terms of agenda-setting. By 2014, the general perception of the EU from external elites is that it is an economic powerhouse. This represents a minor shift given that the EU had not always been consensus around perceptions of the EU’s economic potency. Of note is the mixed perceptions of the EU as a normative power by this time (Lucarelli, 2014).

Other literature (Casarini 2013; Stumbaum 2014; Reiterer 2014, 2016; Klose 2017; Attina 2019), has focussed on what the security role of the EU is in the Asia-Pacific region. The studies indicate that the EU seeks to address non-traditional security threat and engages in military dialogues. The literature shows that the EU is not considered an effective security actor in the region but instead perceived as having some economic muscle and norm diffusion capabilities. There is a body of literature to indicate that European security in the region has been led by France and the UK (Rogers 2009; 2013; Moroney et al. 2011; Macdonald & di Mattia 2011; Fisher 2013). These states have had clear Asia-Pacific strategies and consistently sought to improve their presence and securitise the region in response to the shifting dynamics.

The strongest aspect of existing literature is that it provides a comprehensive overview of EU and EU member state engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. This provides a good framework and baseline understanding for further and more specific research. Another strength,

particularly of the work on perceptions (Chaban et al.) aforementioned, is that it allows for policy analysts and decision-makers to criticise or shape policy with a clear idea of how the EU and its member states are perceived. The work has provided a clear outlining of the strategies of the EU, although these are somewhat outdated. The existing views on the perceptions of the EU have covered a vast geographical area which will prove a useful foundation for more the more focussed study this thesis will undertake.

1.5. Research Question

The key question this thesis seeks to answer is: **“Have Australian elite perceptions of the EU shifted following the UK’s withdrawal from the Union?”**. The existing literature on Australian elite perceptions of the EU indicates that the UK has played a significant role as a link between the two. Furthermore, it is also the case that Australia, despite historical contentions over agricultural trade, views the EU as an economic powerhouse with whom deeper ties are both possible and ought to be encouraged. In terms of the EU as a security actor, it is argued that the EU plays a limited role in the Asia-Pacific addressing non-traditional security threats and promoting dialogue. Indeed, this ties in with the growing perception of the EU as normative power. Moreover, the EU’s security and broader strategic efforts are viewed as being driven by the UK and France. This thesis will seek to understand what sort of an actor the EU is perceived to be following Brexit and in what areas the EU’s role as an actor is perceived as increasing or waning.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The existing approaches to understanding not only elite perceptions, but also public perception of the EU from Australia have been utilised to sound effect and have assisted in producing rigorous studies. In terms of perceptions, interviews with elites have been utilised and to good effect. Chaban et al. (2019) have taken multi-layered qualitative approach utilising public opinion questionnaires and media content analysis. These approaches have been quite thorough, ensuring reliability and validity and serve as inspiration to methodology of this thesis.

However, not all studies have undertaken a mixed methods approach. Rather, some have chosen to focus on a single method. Caution should be erred before deeming this to be a weakness. This single layered approach in some cases is a consequence of a narrow research focus wherein a multi-layered methodology might not be necessary. With this in mind, it could be argued that such approaches could limit the potential of the research in certain cases. It could certainly be said that there has been a limited analysis of economic trends, spending, or specific examples of EU presence. Again, this may not have been a necessary approach in all studies, but certainly could have been implemented in the study undertaken by Scicluna (2019) as it would have provided more clarity to the research. It would seem prudent that more analysis, empiricism and precise examples of EU and Australian activity toward one another is utilised in future studies of perceptions, thus this thesis will seek to do that where suitable.

2.1. The study of elite perceptions – who they are and why it matters?

It is important to explain both what is meant by elites and the value of studying their perceptions toward the EU. McClosky (1956, p.60) argues that when it comes to foreign policy, elites in this field are “more participant, more informed, [and] more mobile”. Kelly (2014) notes that elites are significant because of their ability to direct debate and influence the direction of a state’s international relations. The notion of ‘elites’ has several layers. It can be, and is most often, inclusive of those who are “in positions to make decisions having major consequences” (Mills, 1956, p. 4). However, ‘elites’ is certainly a nuanced concept and can include those who are “advisers and consultants, spokesmen and opinion-makers” (ibid, p.4). This latter classification is most appropriate for defining the elites targeted in this research.

Hermann (1986) argues that perceptions are important independent variables that play a significant role in the explanation of policy-making. It is important to specify the value of studying such perceptions in specific relation to the EU. Chaban and Holland (2008, p. 13) argue that given the EU is an “elite-driven project”, thus perceptions of elite contemporaries are deemed to be of value. The study of external perceptions of the EU specifically is important for a multitude of reasons. Perceptions act as an indicator of the EU’s performance in the context of the goals it sets for itself (Rhodes, 1998). Additionally, it is argued that how the EU is viewed externally contributes to the process of shaping EU identity and the bloc’s roles at home and abroad (Chaban et al., 2006). Furthermore, perceptions play a role in influencing the overall impact of the EU’s foreign policy (ibid).

Elites in this thesis are a specific group including think tankers, researchers and commentators, many of whom have previously worked in government departments dealing with foreign affairs. The elites are identified as having either a focus or substantial publication output on European affairs. The institutions from which these Australian elites are drawn include a university research centre in the Australian National University Centre for European Studies (ANUCES). Other university institutions of a similar nature in Australia are the EU Centre for Excellence Royal Melbourne Technical College (EUCE), the Monash European and EU Centre (MEEUC), however these were not utilised for sources of data. In the case of EUCE, the vast majority of publications are related to policy and provide little in the way of opinion pieces and perceptions, thus none of their outputs are used as data for this thesis. For MEEUC, the institution was disbanded in 2018 and its work is no longer publicly available. The former director of the MEEUC was contacted about this and they were unaware of any repository wherein the work could be found. This accounts for why its outputs are not included in the data for this thesis.

Other elites from whom data is gathered include those from leading international relations and strategic policy think tanks. These think tanks are identified as those ranked highest in Australia for the international relations and public policy according to the 2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report (McGann, 2021). Widely recognised as one of the most rigorous think tank ranking reports, these reports follow a peer nomination and selection process and a selection criterion pertaining to 18 features. As such, it seemed prudent to identify think tanks for this research from the most recent Index Report. The institutions and think tanks identified in this report, whose publications and research community will serve as the data for this thesis, include the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), the Australian Institute for International Affairs

(AIIA), the Lowy Institute, the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), and the Centre for Policy Development (CPD). Given the predominately economic nature of the relationship between the EU and Australia, written output data was sought from the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), however nothing useful to the study of perceptions was found. Other Australian think tanks ranked highly in the index were investigated but no data useful to this thesis was found. This is, in some sense, an interesting observation in and of itself, as it perhaps highlights the modest level of interest in the EU from Australian think tanks.

As is illustrated in the biographies of the authors available on think tank websites, it is clear that many of these individuals whose publications serve as the core data for this thesis have held positions in the Australian government that have dealt with the EU specifically or covered foreign policy more broadly. In some cases, it is not an Australian national authoring the publication, instead it is sometimes a European or third national writing on behalf of the Australian institution. Despite this seemingly contradicting the essence of this study being about Australian elite perceptions, it is argued that their contributions essentially represent the Australian elite views given their outputs help drive the Australian elite debate. Again, this observation is interesting given that it speaks to the fact that Australia has few of its own European experts in or writing for its think tanks. It likely simultaneously reflects the fact that much of the written output of Australian think tanks is focussed issues of close geographical proximity and pertaining to the US and China.

These think tanks engaged with as sources of data, particularly those in the university setting, participate in a wide range of outreach activities. These activities include regularly training of government representatives, briefing outgoing diplomats, the wide dissemination of material among government and stakeholders. Furthermore, these institutions are at times employed by the government for research on certain issues. Given this thesis draws much of its data from think tanks, there is need to give an overview of the platform from which they conduct their research. As such, this thesis will attempt to briefly outline the position of think tanks engaged with and identify their funders and political agenda wherever possible. This section will only provide a brief overview of this. More in depth information on the think tanks' funding sources and political persuasion is available Appendix no. 1. An overview of the think tanks will help in the framing of the empirics and also in understanding how representative the data are for the Australian elite perceptions of the EU.

Written output data is drawn from six Australian think tanks. ANUCES is the only institution in a university setting and it is jointly funded by the Australian National University and the European Commission. Its research is policy-orientated and generally in alignment with EU funding grants (ANU, 2019). The remaining think tanks do not have such strong university affiliation; however, they too focus their attention on policy issues. Common policy areas covered are domestic, foreign and strategic, with the specific area of study depending on the think tank. All proclaim themselves to be independent and non-partisan. CIS and CPD are funded by private sources, with former regarded as a being a conservative and the latter as left-of-centre (Hart & Vromen, 2008; ABC, 2018). In the case of ASPI, most of its funding is drawn from the Australian government while also receiving a substantial amount from the US government. ASPI has been described as pro-American in its political agenda (Robin, 2020). The AIIA and the Lowy Institute also receive substantial funding and grants from the Australian government in addition to revenue sourced from private entities (AIIA, 2021; Lowy Institute, 2021).

Politicians and policy makers could, at face value, seem a more suitable group of elites for this study, thus it is important to clarify why they have not been selected for this research. The reasons for their omission are both pragmatic and out of an apprehension of gathering sanitised data. In a pragmatic sense, the limited scope and time frame of the thesis meant gaining access with politicians for interviews was deemed to be too hefty of a task given their demanding schedules coupled with stark time zone differences. Moreover, in relation to policy maker elites or those at the senior administrative level of government, their omission is based on a potential inability to gain access to them, or also, in anticipation of receiving responses either the same or similar to the governmental department's publicly available stance. It was deemed that think tankers would provide a less sanitised response, or that they would be less constrained when voicing their opinions.

Understanding the efficacy of think tanks in influencing public policy is important in justifying the selection of elites from such institutions. As was aforementioned, these institutions engage in a range of outreach activities, yet it is worth comparing this with the academic literature's finding on the influence of such efforts. Studies on think tank influence has been generally focussed in the context of the US (Medvetz, 2008; 2012). One such study is from Weidenbaum (2010), who argues that it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the influence of think tanks, but acknowledges that they are critical sources of information for government, media and stakeholders who partake in the formation of public policy. With the study undertaken in the

American context, Weidenbaum deems think tanks' most significant contribution to be intellectual competition and robust debate (ibid). Mendes (2003) argues that those think tanks with a neoliberal agenda have been most influential in the Anglo-Saxon world. However, he notes that their influence is typically confined to broader ideological debate or reinforcement, rather than linked directly with policy outcomes. Rich (2004) suggests that think tanks have the greatest impact on policy at the early stages of policy development as they can then effectively influence the agenda.

In the Australian context, there is limited output of literature in recent times measuring the influence of think tanks. Hart and Vromen (2008) indicate that the efficacy of think tanks in relation to the formation of policy varies depending on a variety of factors. They categorise the different types of think tanks present in Australia; academic, government, contract research, and policy advocacy. The think tanks that will be engaged with in this thesis fall under the academic (ANUCES, Lowy Institute), government (ASPI, AIIA), and policy advocacy (CIS, CPD). The authors argue that there is a trend in the Anglo-Saxon world, including Australia, for think tanks to enjoy a “revolving door relationship” with the government and have “close personal ties to certain rulers” (p. 145). This, they argue, is how their influence remains pertinent. Furthermore, in a similar vein to Rich (2004), Hart and Vromen (2008) argue that Australian think tanks influence seems to be at its greatest within the early stages of policy development as they can play an agenda setting role. Lingard (2013) suggests that contributing research and ideas for policy has a greater impact than academic research of policy. Lingard (2016) argues that what enables Australian think tanks to have the greatest influence is a combination of factors including a shift to network governance and the reduced capacity of the state to undertake research and the policy making process itself.

2.2. Methodological approach

In order to ascertain the perceptions of Australian elites toward the EU since Brexit, this thesis employs a two-tiered methodological approach. The first method is a critical content analysis of 36 written outputs from the Australian think tanks mentioned in the previous section. The theory of critical content analysis implies that people mean something when they communicate either orally or in writing (Bryman, 2012). In certain cases, it can be that there is an indirect message or purpose to what is being communicated, thus a “sceptical reading” is necessary to understand the true meaning (Gill, 2000). While the analysis should be a relatively straight forward procedure

given that it is expected that the authors are generally straightforward in their views, a sceptical approach to the reading is always adopted as it can only strengthen and provide a more critical analysis for the research. As was aforementioned, there are, in the case of some think tanks, studies on their ideological stance or agenda. Wherever necessary, this will be reiterated in the thesis as it may help to better understand the author's perception and ensure proper representation of the empirics. The data for the content analysis was gathered on a key word and theme basis. Wherever possible, search filters on think tank websites were utilised to ensure the display of publications only from the time frame question. This was not always possible, nor was always a simple process to gather written data. In some cases, much more navigation of think tank websites was necessary to identify relevant material. It is acknowledged that this could lead to the unintentional omission of certain data that otherwise might be included in the thesis.

In terms of key words, publications mentioning 'Brexit' and 'the European Union' were chosen first. From there, the publications were scanned for further key words and themes relating to the EU's power, presence and activity, including but not limited to; 'economic', 'strategic', 'military', 'relevant', 'importance', 'normative', 'negotiation' etc. Other areas analysed in documents were recommendations on what direction both the EU and Australia should take toward each other and their respective regions. If any of these words, themes or recommendations were present, the surrounding text was then analysed to see if it bears significance to the aims of the thesis. Here, in particular, the idea of a "sceptical reading" was utilised to divulge any indirect inferences to the key words, themes or recommendations. From here the outputs gathered were closely analysed then broken up into thematic groups for representation in the thesis.

The second method used were semi-structured interviews with figures identified as having significant knowledge of the EU or international relations more broadly. Most interviewees are former Ambassadors of Australia and have extensive experience and knowledge of the dynamics of the European continent. A total of six interviews were conducted. Five of the six interviewees are former Australian diplomats, two of whom were based in Europe at some point in their careers. The remaining interviewee is from ACCI, whose perceptions are deemed of critical importance given the largely economic nature of the Australia-EU relationship. All interviewees gave consent to be named, quoted and have their association disclosed in the thesis. Interviewees were approached via email and the semi-structured interviews themselves were conducted via the Zoom Video Communications platform. The length of interviews ranged from 15 to 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format meaning that they had a thematic structure

but the interviewee had the freedom to elaborate or address different areas they deemed to be of importance. Interviewees were reminded of the timeframe in which this thesis was covering, with particular emphasis on trying to restrict their perceptions of the EU to the pre-Covid era. While this measure was taken prior to all interviews, it is possible that some participants unintentionally had their perceptions influenced by events beyond 2019. For pragmatic purposes, the interviews are coded from Interview #1-#6. Hereafter, interviewees are referenced in the thesis as their assigned number. See Appendix no. 2 for more in depth information on the participants.

Interviewees, despite being retired from diplomatic work, remain heavily involved in the Australian debate about Europe and the EU or international relations more broadly, usually via their participation in conferences and events held by the think tanks analysed in this thesis. These interviewees have an evidenced focus on European studies, or have published on it among their other interests. These interviews are intended to refine and sharpen the findings and gather data not otherwise available within the written outputs. In this sense, the interviews were conducted after the critical content analysis so as to avoid double ups and regurgitation of information, as well as, at times, clarifying ideas brought up in the think tank outputs.

On occasion throughout the thesis, graphs are used as visual representations of the qualitative data. These are not meant to serve as the primary representations of the data from which the thesis makes its case. At times, certainly the graphs are intended to provide more clarity for the qualitative data, but in most cases, they serve as a visual break from what might at times become an overwhelming amount of qualitative data, particularly given the number of quotes included.

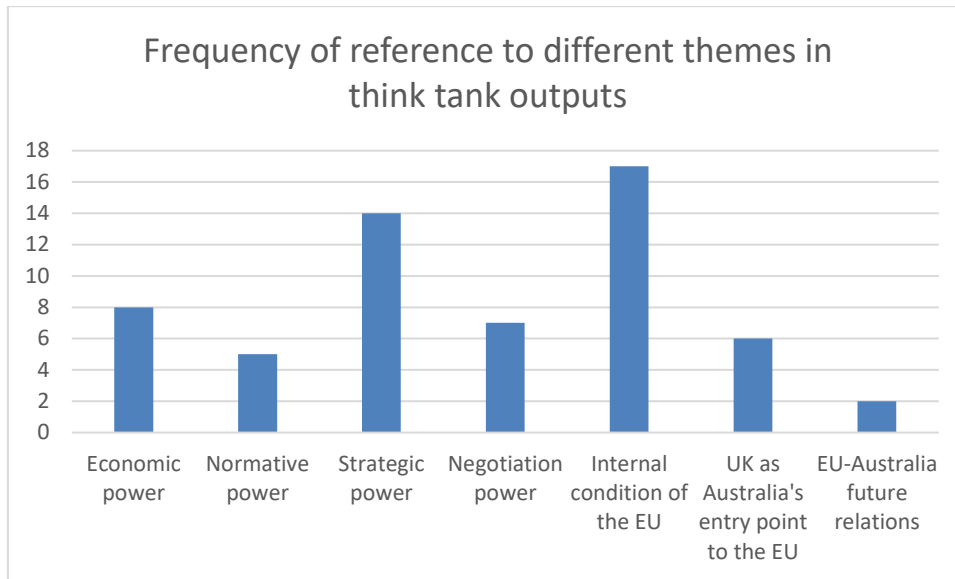


Figure 1: Frequency of reference to different themes pertaining to the EU

Worth prefacing is the nature of Figure 1 that will be frequently referenced throughout the thesis. Even though the frequency of reference to certain themes in relation to the EU is based on the 36 outputs collected, some outputs touch on multiple themes in the same body of text. This overlap is taken into account and represented in Figure 1. Thus, at face value it may seem that there are more than 36 outputs, however it is not the case. A sounder way of looking at the Figure is understanding it as the amount of references to specific themes that are evident in the think tank outputs collected.

Having conducted a comprehensive literature review and outlined the thesis methodology, the next chapter deals with the Australian elite perceptions of the EU. The chapter is broken into seven sub-sections, all of which deal with a different thematic area frequently referenced in both existing literature and the data gathered for this thesis. The seven categories are identified inductively as the most recurring topics across the empirical material analysed. The sub-sections analyse perceptions the following areas:

- The UK as Australia's entry point to the EU
- The internal condition of the EU
- The EU's economic power
- The EU's strategic power
- The EU's negotiating power
- The EU's normative power
- Future relations between Australia and the EU

The first and last sub-sections are not, in a strict sense grounded in existing literature on perceptions of the EU, thus it is important to explain their inclusion in the thesis. The first sub-section on the UK as Australia's entry point to the EU is included as Brexit will be removing this bridge, so it is important to understand to what level the UK is perceived to have been relied upon. This then ties in with the last sub-section on future relations between Australia and the EU. Understanding the perceptions in this context is relevant as a probe into how the elites see the outlook of Australia-EU relations in the context of Brexit.

Chapter Three: Analysis of Australian elite perceptions of the EU

3.1. The UK: A Commonwealth conduit for Australia-EU relations?

As has been pointed out quite clearly in the existing literature on Australia-EU relations and Australian perceptions of the EU, the UK has served as Australia's entry point into the Union. However, in the data harvested for this thesis, there are some mixed views on this notion. Think tank outputs typically framed the UK as Australia's entry point to the EU and see the need for Australia to shift its approach to the bloc following Brexit. In the semi-structured interviews conducted, some interviewees express their ambivalence toward to the idea that Australia had relied solely on the UK when approaching the EU.

From outputs gathered from Australian think tanks, the notion of the UK as Australia's entry point to the EU features much less frequently than many of the other thematic areas explored in this thesis, as is shown in Figure 1. Out of the 36 written publications gathered, only six outputs make an explicit mention of the UK serving as Australia's bridge to the EU. However, Europe as a whole receives low coverage in Australia's top think tanks relative to other parts of the world and other major international actors, notably China, the US, Japan and India. Given the geographical proximity of these states to Australia and the increasingly complex nature of the relationships, it is understandable that their actions encompass the majority of the political and international relations discourse in Australian think tanks. Moreover, another explanation for Australia's special relationship enjoyed with the EU via the UK receiving such little coverage due to the notion being an established premise in the academic literature. Thus, authors when writing about the EU may understand this concept and not feel the need to add it to their outputs. Supplement to this argument could be that the authors thus choose to focus on issues more of a more pertinent and uncertain nature such as the economic and strategic implications of Brexit or the state of the EU's internal functioning as a consequence.

Support for the notion of the UK as Australia's bridge to the EU

Irrespective of the level of coverage in Australian think tanks, four of the six publications on this theme strongly endorse the idea that the UK served as Australia's primary avenue to the EU. The

strong endorsement is evident in the choice of words by the authors. One article claims there “is little doubt as to the cultural and political affinity Australia has with the UK” (Di Lieto & Treisman, 2017). Another notes that “Australia’s engagement with Europe has traditionally been dominated by its relationship with the United Kingdom” (Bloch & Harcourt, 2019). In a similar vein, an ASPI output reiterates this sentiment, by stating that “due to its historical and cultural ties, Australia has usually approached Europe through the UK as a gateway” (Westermann, 2018). The AIIA’s outputs also firmly state that Australia’s approach to Europe was done via the UK. Conley Tyler et al. (2017) reaffirm the “historical centrality of the UK in EU-Australia relations”. In the same output, which analyses Australian understandings of the EU, mention how the fact that Brexit, despite being a relatively new development at the time of publication, “features so prominently in the discussion reflects the long-standing role of the UK as primary entry point to Europe for Australia” (ibid).

Given there were only handful of references to the idea of Commonwealth conduit when it comes to the nature of Australia-EU relations, it was key to explore further this notion in the semi-structured interviews so greater clarity could be gained. Despite the existing literature indicating that Australia enjoyed a special relationship with the EU that was essentially facilitated via the UK, interviewees when questioned about this facet provided mixed takes on whether Australia really did rely so heavily on the UK as a bridge to the EU. Some respondents endorsed the idea while others argued that Australia had a long established and effective diplomatic mission in Brussels that was in fact Australia’s key entry point to the EU.

Two interviewees strongly endorse the idea of the UK’s centrality to Australia’s relations with the EU. It was expressed how Australia is likeminded with the UK and how the Australian government has a longstanding and close relationship with the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office and UK leaders. Moreover, it is argued that these relationships enabled Australia to rely on UK leaders to represent Australia’s case at the EU level where Australia “do not have a seat at the table” (Interview #1). Furthermore, it was expected that the UK, whose views were largely in align with Australia’s, would fight for Australia at EU meetings against some policies that might adversely affect its Commonwealth partner (ibid). A slightly different perception argued that up until around 2010 Australia was operating in the EU via the UK but that this approach had shifted somewhat in the following years (Interview #2).

Those endorsing the notion of Australia's UK centric relationship with the EU and pointed out a myriad of reasons for why this was the case. It was argued that because Australian officials did not understand the dynamics of the EU, nor did they have adequate language skills to operate as effectively in Brussels (ibid). Thus "it was easy for Australia to approach the Brits" (Interview #1). Moreover, it was repeatedly emphasised that Australia is "lazy" vis-à-vis the EU, and the commonalities with the UK saw it remain as the preferable bridge for Australia-EU relations. Australia were able to make warm representations to UK leaders which would not damage the bilateral relationship. In addition to this, London provides a convenient headquarters for Australian businesses given the relative ease with which companies could navigate a legal system similar to Australia's and there not being a language barrier (Interview #1 & #4).

Australia's British-centric view of the EU is perceived as stemming from the overwhelming concentration of UK media coverage about Europe. Thus, Australia sees Europe second hand via a British lens rather than an EU lens (Interview #2). This is particularly the case on the conservative sides of politics in both countries whose views on the EU generally align. In the eyes of one interviewee, the Australian government paid particular attention to "our British friends" (Interview #5). Moreover, it was identified that very few of Australia citizens have heritage from modern core EU member states, such as Germany and France who are now the undisputed powerhouses of the EU. This was contrasted with an acknowledgement of a better level of understanding of South European politics, notably Italy and Greece, from where Australia has received substantial migration (Interview #2).

Another handful of perceptions support the idea of the UK's centrality for Australia-EU relations, although their take on it is a little softer, utilising a more indirect or hedged style of interpretation. For example, one article cites that Australia's traditional "Eurocentric view of the world" essentially stems from "the views and national/imperial interests of the United Kingdom" (Besemeres, 2018). The other output makes mention of the "historical, political and economic ties that link Australia and Britain" (Jiménez Lobeira, 2016). In the surrounding texts from which these quotes are taken, the EU is referenced in some capacity indicating an agreeance with the existing literature albeit less direct in its manner.

Sceptical of the notion of the UK as Australia's bridge to the EU

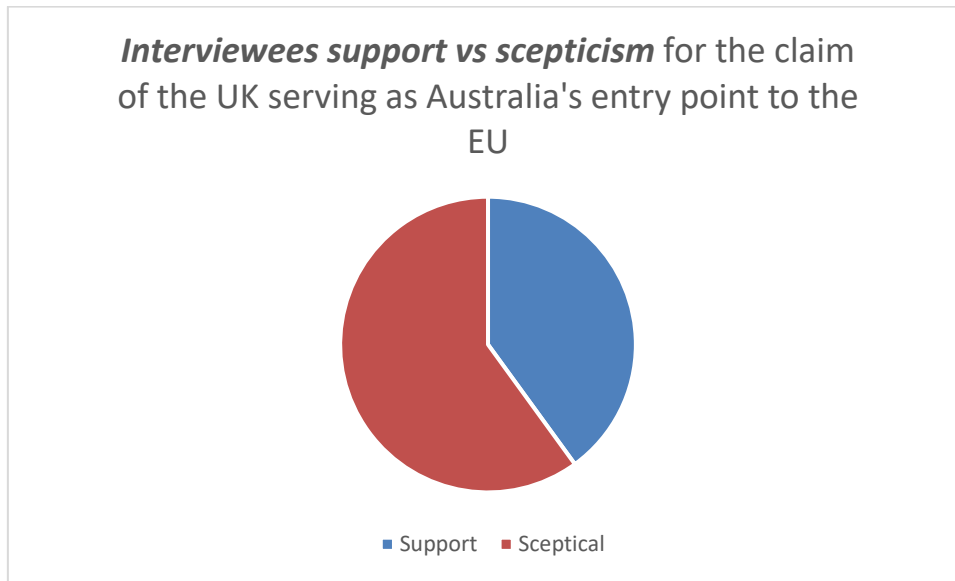


Figure 2: Support vs scepticism for the notion of UK's centrality to Australia-EU relations

As is illustrated in Figure 2, three of the five interviewees who were questioned on this matter were ambivalent toward the claim that the UK was the primary point of contact for Australia in relation to the EU. Not an overwhelming rate, however it certainly represents a contradiction to the existing literature on the topic as well as the majority of other written outputs and interview data sourced for this thesis.

It was outlined that Australia had not managed its relationship with the EU at all via the UK. Instead, it was argued that “we [Australia] have had a pretty solid operation in Brussels for many years” (Interview #5). Rather it is perceived that dealing with EU institutions and Brussels happened with them directly and not via the UK (ibid). Seconding this perception is another interviewee who holds the belief that Australia deals with the EU and Europe via its whole host of bilateral relations with EU member states and that these are more prominent on a day to day basis. It was argued that the reason for this approach is because “the EU is the sum of its parts” (Interview #3). To affirm how Australia deals more directly with EU and its member states, what was referenced was the well-resourced and sophisticated nature of Australia’s embassies in Europe, particularly Australia’s mission in Brussels dealing with the EU and NATO that includes some of Australia’s best diplomats (ibid).

In a softer take, another interviewee expressed some ambivalence toward the idea that the UK has been central to Australia’s dealings with the EU. In their eyes, they are “dubious” about this claim, and from their time as a diplomat, it seemed that Australia engaged directly with the EU (Interview #6). These points were prefaced by context of Australia’s rather longstanding and negative attitude toward the EU stemming from UK accession to the EEC in 1973 which significantly weakened Australia’s access to UK markets, particularly in agriculture. It was illustrated how the EU’s CAP accounted in large part for Australia’s difficult relationship with the bloc and that this was not something with which the UK could help Australia (ibid).

Conclusion: was the UK really that important for Australia-EU relations?

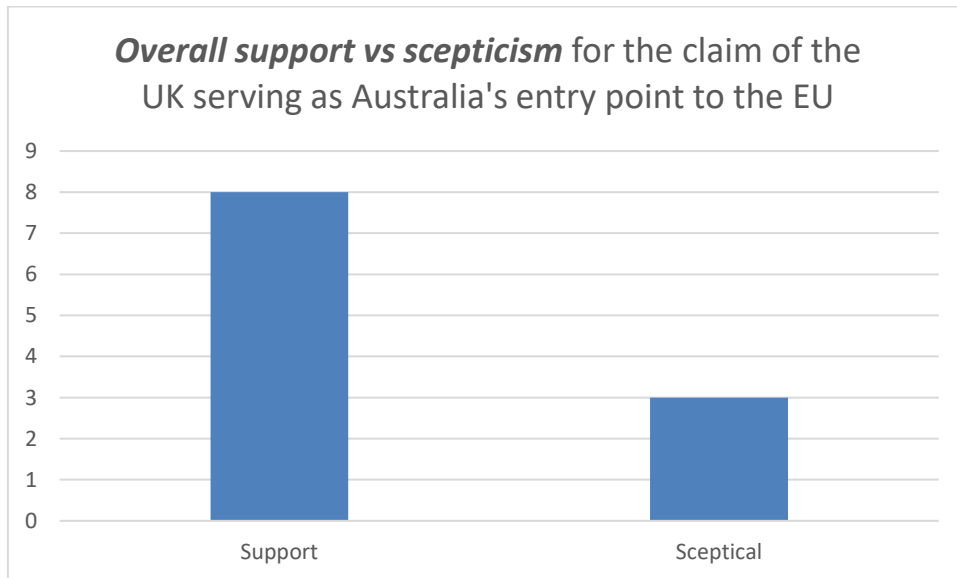


Figure 3: Overall support vs scepticism for the claim of the UK's centrality to the Australia-EU relationship

As Figure 3 portrays, when combining the data gathered in both written outputs from think tanks and semi-structured interviews, 73% of sources endorse the claim that the UK was central to Australia’s dealings with the EU. Only three sources, all of whom are interviewees dispute the notion. Important to point out is that those who are sceptical of the claim have had distinguished diplomatic careers with the Australian government. Thus, it could be argued that their takes on the issues possess more weight given their insight into the workings of Australia’s diplomatic relations. This interpretation could certainly hold up against the authors of think tank outputs who have not had such experienced such insight into the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), with only one of the think tankers commentating on this notion having previously worked in the Australian government. However, this is a somewhat simplistic analysis and likely

does not do the other think tankers justice as their knowledge of the area in question is undoubtedly more than sound.

Overall, the data collected represents a perception that to moderate extent contradicts the body of literature claiming the UK serving as Australia's bridge to the EU. In literature prior to 2016, it was overwhelmingly the argument of that the UK served Australian in such a way. Based on the findings which provide mixed opinions, Australia is always perceived to be in such trouble following the departure of the UK from the EU as it would otherwise be implied in the literature on Australia-EU relations.

3.2. Perceptions of the EU's internal (dys)function: Brexit as an exacerbator of pre-existing problems?

As was mentioned in Chapter One, the EU was perceived to have waning influence in the Asia-Pacific region largely due to the increasing levels of internal dysfunction with which the bloc was facing (Chaban et al. 2008; 2010; 2014; 2019; Song & Wang 2019). In the data gathered, the internal state of the EU is regularly mentioned in both the written outputs and semi-structured interviews. Most of the data indicates that the EU is perceived to be even weaker since the Brexit referendum, with some indicating that Brexit has indeed exacerbated the EU's pre-existing issues. As is shown in Figure 1 on Page 20, reference to the EU's internal condition in the think tank outputs gathered was the most frequent theme to appear. Of course, these are not all in relation to Brexit with many other issues being discussed, thus it is difficult to pinpoint in all cases whether the authors perceive Brexit to have exacerbated the EU's internal difficulties.

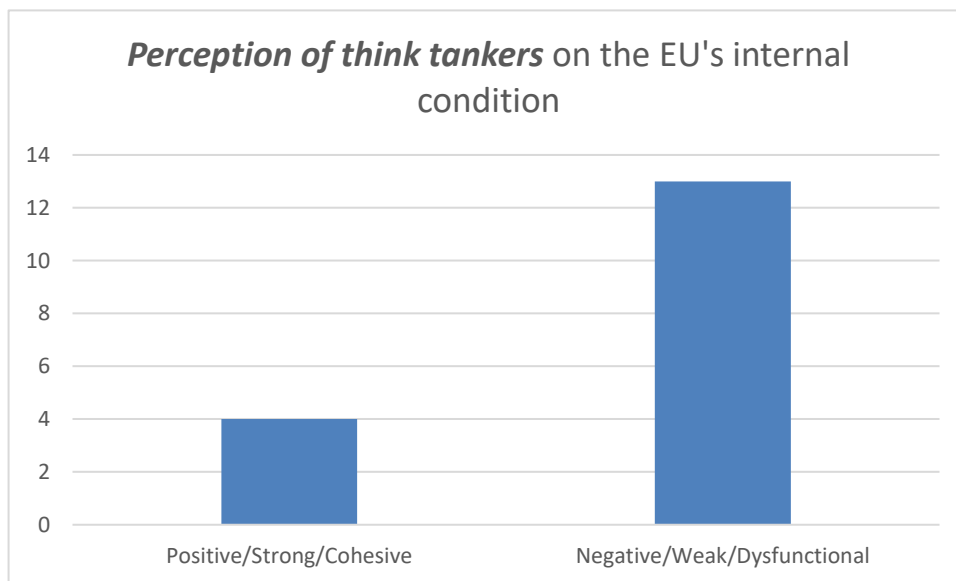


Figure 4: Perceptions of the EU's internal condition based on think tank outputs

Figure 4 represents the manner in which think tankers perceive the state of the EU. The think tank outputs were analysed closely and grouped into two broad categories: (i) those outputs that perceive the EU as positive, or as a strong or cohesive bloc; and (ii) those outputs that perceive the EU in the opposite ways. Most think tankers are clear about the state they perceive the EU to be in, thus the criteria for the groupings is not based on single key words, rather on the general sentiment espoused from the output. It is prudent to preface the fact that reporting on the EU in

Australian think tanks is generally done when the Union faces a significant problem. This could account for the skewed nature of the above graph as the overwhelming majority perceive the EU negatively in this area. Moreover, from close analysis of the outputs, it is clear that they usually follow a similar structure of outlining the issue, and then offering either policy solutions or a prediction of the future. In the guidelines for submissions to think tanks such as ASPI, following such a structure is a requirement as it wants authors to be contributing to the policy debate (ASPI, 2021). In light of this, it is understandable that the positive stories of the EU attract less attention in the think tank community. Thus, as Figure 4 shows, 77% of the think tank outputs have a perception of the EU as weak, dysfunctional or in a generally negative.

Negative perceptions of the EU's internal state: exacerbated by Brexit?

More than three quarters of the think tank outputs addressing the EU's state of affairs perceive the EU as being in poor condition or some variant that. In this section, the outputs will be analysed chronologically. This will allow for more accurate representation of the data as on some occasions, outputs are published in very close succession to a major EU development on which commentary is offered. As will be shown, when discussing the internal state of the EU, it is almost always the case that think tank outputs align with a pertinent development.

Immediately following the Brexit referendum, there is a perception of how deteriorating internal condition “offers Russia a welcome opportunity to undermine European stability further” (Leask, 2016). This perception is seconded by one who argues that in relation to the EU's engagement with Russia, “Britain was a check on voluntarist tendencies in Berlin and Paris”, who are perceived to be less hawkish in their approach to Russia (Interview #6). It is argued that the Baltic states and Poland will have been disheartened by Brexit especially given their geographical proximity and difficult relations with Russia (ibid).

There is a strong belief that the EU is set to face increasing instability. It is implied that Brexit would lead to a more “divided Europe” and would see European “politicians scramble” to deal with the fallout (Leask, 2016). Moreover, it is believed that Brexit will intensify pre-existing problems the EU faces such as immigration and economic woes (ibid). Another output following the referendum is from the conservative think tank CIS, whose publications about the EU are always heavily Eurosceptic and critical of EU integration. The author in this case contrasts what

they see being Brexit as a democratic process, opposed to the "the EU [which is] is the ultimate technocracy, imposing expert led regulations over the wishes of democratic governments" (Cowan, 2016). Another perception offered following the referendum foresees Brexit as inducing "collateral damage to the European economics" (Chapman, 2016).

Following 2016, fewer of the articles published relating to the EU's functionality include or make reference to Brexit. Instead, articles tend to address other difficulties the EU was grappling with at the time. In the wake of Catalonia's separatist movement, what is highlighted are the ever-present challenges facing the EU in "populism, nationalism, [and] separatism" (Woker, 2017). A more critical analysis is offered by Besemeres (2018), who labels the EU as "morally vain" in the face of issues such as migration. This notion is developed further in the context of Brexit, wherein it is argued that the EU could have been "less pushy" toward the UK on matters of immigration and free movement – an issue believed to loom large in Britain (Interview #5). However, this is somewhat of a misplaced claim as it misunderstands the governance of migration and free movement in the EU. It is perceived that "feckless handling of border security issues has undermined domestic governance in much of Europe" (ibid). Following the electoral success of far-right populist parties in Germany and Italy, others perceive the EU as being in "serious disarray" (Ritchie, 2018). This development in addition to the pre-existing challenges are perceived to be contributing to the "continuing chaos in Europe" (ibid). These issues are believed to reflect a weak EU whose state of affairs as "largely self-inflicted", citing the handling of migration and poor economic performance as examples (ibid).

In 2019, CIS published scathing outputs vis-à-vis the EU which contribute further to the trend of negative perceptions of the EU's internal affairs during this time period. Following the appointment of former German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen as President of the EU Commission, Maley (2019) perceives the EU to be increasingly German led and having "chilling and submissive intentions". The use of emotive phrases is starkly noticeable in the CIS outputs, with one arguing that the EU's "goal is a centralised system that will advance the authoritarian overlordship it has in mind" (ibid). Following the British House of Commons' approval of the Brexit deal in October 2019, another CIS output portrays the EU's behaviour in the negotiation process as extremely distasteful. Opacic (2019) notes that "the longer Brexit negotiations drag on, the more the EU reveals itself as the stifling Byzantine monstrosity it is". While varying in intensity and language, the above data indicate a general trend of negative perceptions of the EU's internal dysfunction since the Brexit referendum.

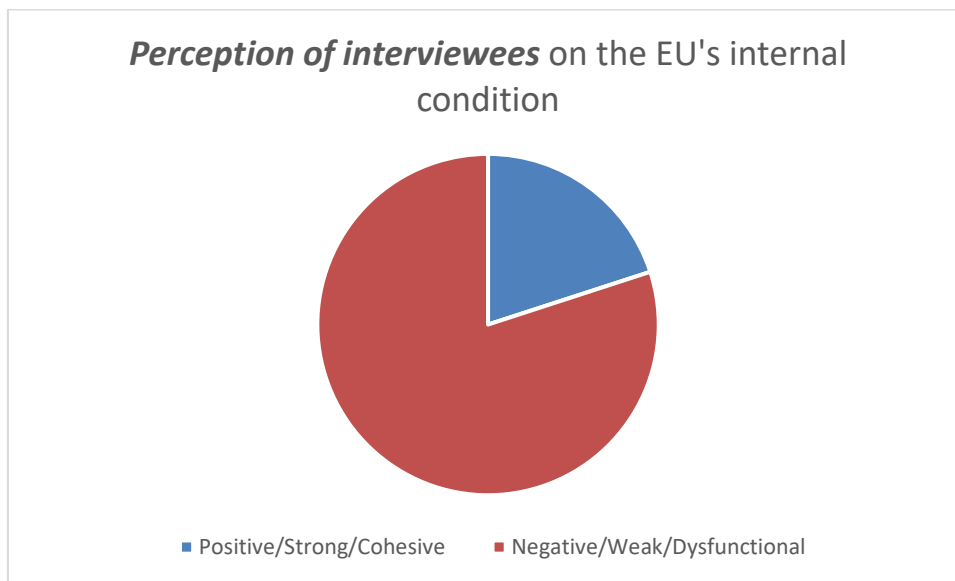


Figure 5: Interviewees' perception of the EU's internal condition

The semi-structured interviews conducted provide extensive insight into Australian elite perceptions of the EU's internal condition. All participants made extensive remarks on this topic, most of which were not framing the EU as in a positive state following the Brexit referendum. Figure 5 represents the data from five of the six semi-structured interviews conducted wherein interviewees were questioned about the impact of Brexit on the EU's internal state. This question was not posed to Interviewee #4 due to their interview dealing exclusively with the economics of the EU. Figure 5 shows that 80% of interviewees viewed the EU as either continuing to exist in a dysfunctional state or having had its internal woes exacerbated by Brexit.

Three interviewees agree that Brexit exacerbates the EU's internal problems (Interview #2, #3 & #5). Of note is that Brexit as a development is believed to be the greatest disaster in the European project's history (Interview #5). One interviewee mentioned what they saw as the "tragedy of Brexit" in that is simultaneously managed to weaken the EU, the UK and the Transatlantic relationship (Interview #2). It was argued that Brexit weakens the EU as the bloc is now without the extensive human, financial, institutional and professional resources of the UK, as well as losing the economic and diplomatic weight Britain possesses on the global stage (Interview #2 & #5). Furthermore, the state of affairs in the EU is perceived by one to be a "disaster" and something "that is not going to change" (Interview #3). Longstanding issues with which the EU has failed to address such as the North-South economic divide and the East-West cultural divides were mentioned in an interview. It is acknowledged that these issues predate Brexit but they are

believed to have “become a little sharper” since the UK’s decision to depart the EU (Interview #5). Cyprus’ accession to the EU is highlighted as an example of the EU’s ongoing mistakes and miscalculations, stating that it brought to the fore longstanding problems between Greece and Turkey – something that the EU should have foreseen. Furthermore, it is argued that EU expansion results in less cohesiveness for the Union. Looking ahead, it is perceived by one that the EU will face more dysfunction than the UK (Interview #3).

All interviewees agree that the state of the EU prior to Brexit was very poor yet not all share in the view it intensifies the bloc’s issues further. One believes it is not fair to posit that Brexit galvanises the EU’s internal fragility. Instead, it is argued that prior to Brexit, the UK were already on the outer of the EU in several ways. An example is in the realm of EU finance whereby Britain had never adopted the Euro thus it was excluded from serious financial decision-making bodies within the EU. It is acknowledged that the EU is in a very weak state which bodes negatively for the rest of the world, especially in the face of Russian aggression and the dysfunctional state of the Middle East where the EU is present and working to improve the area.

Perceptions are also offered on the future of the EU’s internal condition. One interviewee implores that “the EU needs to get its act together”, however they see no sign of such instigation, rather the EU has shown itself to be “muddling along” through its problems (Interview #1). France and Germany efforts to “re-dynamise the EU” are acknowledged by two interviewees (Interview #1 & #3). However, what is perceived to be a shortfall of these efforts is that both member states agree further integration is the way forward, yet they do not agree on how best or at what pace to approach it. Moreover, what makes this even more complicated is the imminent departure of German Chancellor Merkel, the unpopularity of French President Macron and his failures to implement meaningful reform, as well as the ongoing issues around migration (Interview #1).

Perceiving the EU in a positive light on niche issues

As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, only four of the 17 think tank outputs referring to the internal condition of the EU perceive it to be in some form of positive, strong or cohesive state of affairs. The manner in which the EU is perceived in this section will be analysed very critically as the perceptions are rather complex and generally pertain to a specific issue not related to the longstanding and well documented problems of, for example, immigration and economic

woes. Instead, positive perceptions of the EU's internal condition generally relate to successes in niche areas such as advancements in coordinated defence, in which case they also overlap with the thematic areas discussed in sub-sections.

Following the Brexit referendum, one article sets out “the Good, the Bad and the Ugly” for the EU's future (Jiménez Lobeira, 2016). It is important to point out here that perception gathered is largely speculative and does not always deal with tangible examples or evidence. Notwithstanding this, the output mentions that “even with Brexit, the European Union will remain a market of more than 450 million people and a prominent promoter of Western values shared by Australia” (ibid). Woker's (2017) output, titled *Finally, good news for the European Union* suggests the EU has enjoyed some internal victories, however the success is acknowledged in the context of a great deal more challenges still existing and affecting the EU. What are perceived to be positive developments of the EU are the Eurozone's 1.8% economic growth in 2016, populism appearing to wane, and migration becoming a more manageable task that is less threatening to the Schengen area (ibid).

The final two outputs perceiving the EU in a more cohesive state relate the EU's advancements in the realm of common defence and strategic autonomy. Receiving a modest level of praise is European Intervention Initiative (EII). This perception is also made in the context of Brexit, citing how it might keep the UK as part of European defence following its departure. While the EII is not an EU initiative, it is perceived as perhaps foreshadowing further common defence structures. The article does however mention the fact that discussions of EU strategic autonomy rile both the US and UK, who are arguably the two most powerful members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The output perceives that “with the UK out of the EU and thus unable to interfere in its political decision making on the highest level, EII would help both sides” (Woker, 2018). In a similar vein, another perceives the integration EU defence as part of the EU's Common Defence and Security Policy as increasing “interoperability and capabilities, and allows for better resource-application” (Westermann, 2018). The output adds that these efforts “benefit the EU's security and defence capabilities and improve NATO's general abilities and preparedness” (ibid).

Rounding out the more positive perceptions of the EU's internal condition is data drawn from a semi-structured interview. The interviewee believes the EU to be managing fine without the Britain. This is because “the UK from the perspective of the EU became increasingly high

maintenance and low delivery” (Interview #6). While it is believed that the EU wanted the UK to remain in the bloc, it became very hard for the EU to function effectively with the UK. It is argued that what increased the difficulty of EU-UK relations were three consecutively poor British Prime Ministers in Cameron, May and Johnson, all of whom are perceived to have handled the EU poorly. It is believed that there is a “certain amount of relief in the EU that Britain is gone” and that the Union will be more effective and streamlined without it the UK (ibid).

Conclusion: more of the same for the EU?

In the timeframe of 2016-2019, perceptions from the Australian elite more frequently reference the EU’s internal strife than in previous studies on perceptions. Granted, the previous studies were academic papers which require far more time to write and are thus likely to be less sensationalist or have a ‘knee jerk’ reaction style, as can be the case with think tank outputs which do not have to undergo the same levels of peer review.

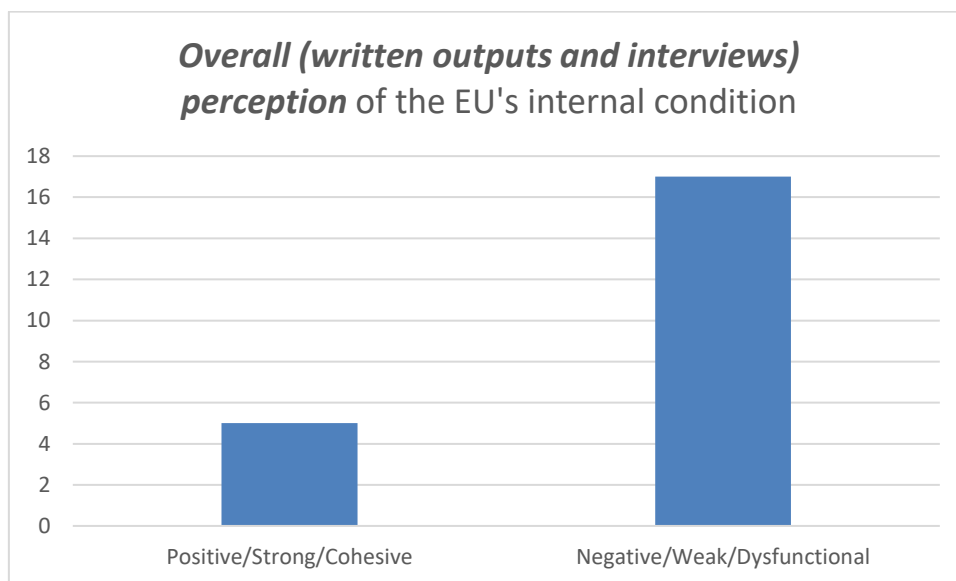


Figure 6: Overall perception of the EU's internal condition

As Figure 6 shows, when both data sets are combined, the view of the EU’s internal state since the Brexit referendum remains overwhelmingly negative, making up 77% of the perceptions. On the negative front, most outputs and interviewees perceive Brexit to have weakened the EU’s internal condition by exacerbating pre-existing problems and well as creating new ones. The small number of those outputs perceiving the EU in a positive way, or some variant of that, usually relate

to niche issues or relatively new debates within the EU, such as strategic autonomy. The perceptions of positive developments are usually expressed in a hedged manner or with a caveat that the other significant issues facing the EU persist.

3.3. Perceptions of the EU's economic prowess

In existing studies on perceptions of the EU from Australia, the EU is considered to be an economic powerhouse. Dating back to 2008, the Australian elite understood the EU as a major economic actor in the world and as particularly important for Australia itself as it was Australia's largest trading partner at the time (Murray, 2008). This perception of the EU continues in later studies (Benvenuti and Murray, 2013 & Chaban et al., 2013) to the point where in 2014, any lack of consensus on the EU's economic prowess from the Australia elite had virtually disappeared (Lucarelli, 2014). Even following Brexit, the EU as a bloc remains Australia's second largest trading partner and largest investor. As a single trading partner, the UK has also been significant for Australia over the years, ranking as its fifth largest partner in 2019 (DFAT, 2021). Given these dynamics, perceptions of the EU's economic power are at the forefront of the data gathered in this thesis. As Figure 1 on Page 20 shows, the EU's economics is referenced in 22% of the think tank outputs gathered. Indeed, this seems a small amount especially given the importance of the EU to Australia's economy. One explanation for this might be that despite the UK's withdrawal, elites may find it difficult to dispute the level of economic power the EU still wields, not to mention important the bloc remains as a trading partner remains to Australia. Moreover, as will be evidenced later in the chapter, some Australian elites believe Brexit to be an economic opportunity for Australia, thus there might be little impetus to write negatively about the economic implications of Brexit for the EU.

From the outputs and semi-structured interview data gathered, perceptions on the EU's economic power were closely analysed and categorised into two perception groups: (i) those perceiving the EU's economy as positive/strong irrespective of Brexit, and (ii) those perceiving the EU's economic power as waning due to Brexit. It is important to point out that not all data on this theme that was collected deals specifically with impact of Brexit on the EU's economic prowess. In those cases, the data is critically analysed to ascertain which group the perception would fall under were Brexit not part of the criteria for the grouping.

Perceptions of the EU's economic power as unaffected following the Brexit referendum

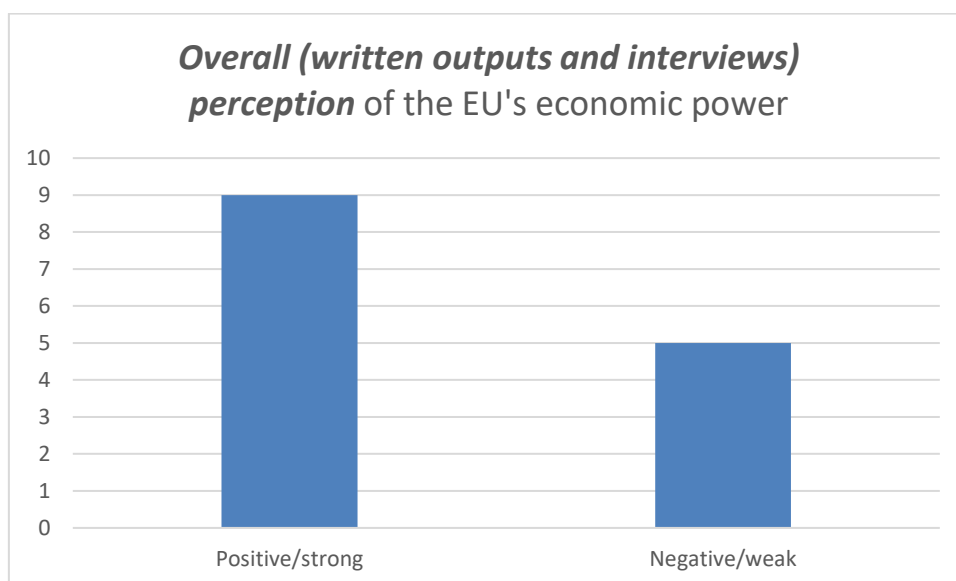


Figure 7: Overall perception of the EU's economic power

Figure 7 shows the frequency with which the EU is perceived both positively and negatively in relation to its economic power. When analysing solely the results from the think tank outputs, the EU is marginally less frequently perceived to be economically stronger state following the Brexit referendum. However, when both data sets are combined as is the case in Figure 7, it indicates that the majority feel that the EU's economic prowess remains largely unaffected and still very potent. Noteworthy is the fact that all six interviewees viewed the EU as almost entirely unhindered in this area. While the UK is viewed as being important to the EU in an economic sense and Brexit means that the bloc is now, on aggregate, a smaller economy, the EU remains a massive economic entity (Interview #1, #2 & #5). Moreover, it is perceived that it will move along strongly without the UK (Interview #1 & #2). This notion is reinforced by the interpretation of how even with Brexit “the EU will remain a market of more than 450 million people” implying that its economic weight remains more than substantial (Jiménez Lobeira, 2016). One interviewee describes the EU as remaining a “formidable” trading bloc even in the absence of the UK, believing it to be one of the three big economic powers in the world along with the US and China (Interview #6). It is the perception of one that “for all the talk about EU disunity which is undoubtedly true, the EU is remarkably cohesive on many trade matters” (Interview #6).

There are an abundance of perceptions pertaining to the significance of the EU as a trading partner for Australia in the context of Brexit. It was demonstrated how Australia's economic

engagement with the EU has typically been confined to Western Europe, and that focus on relations with the EU have been of secondary importance as Australia has focussed its attention on Asia. It is agreed that Australian businesses have typically first approached the EU first via the UK, a decision driven in part by commonalities in language and legal systems. As a result of Brexit, it is perceived that this avenue is naturally less attractive now, noting it as “broken but not irreparable” (Interview #4). However, the same interviewee believed that Brexit will have little impact on the EU’s significance as an economic partner (ibid). Furthermore, several sources were keen to point out there will be economic opportunities for Australia in the UK arising as a result of Brexit (Di Lieto & Treisman, 2017; Interview #3 & #4).

Much of the data seeks to outline the historically marred nature of the Australia-EU trading landscape. The EU’s protectionist policies impacting particularly on agricultural imports are identified as the primary issue in this space (Interview #3 & #5). It is argued that the UK did little to assist Australia’s interests in achieving better market access, thus Brexit matters little in relation to Australia’s pursuits for this (Interview #3). Furthermore, despite the longstanding disputes over market access there has been a consistently increasing appetite for trade with the EU manifesting in the 2015 announcement that an Australia-EU free trade agreement (FTA) would be negotiated (Interview #6). What is regularly pointed out is the fact that the EU is the number one investor in Australia (Interview #1, #2 & #3). This idea of the EU remaining critical to Australia’s economy is reinforced by some who make the case that “the rest of the EU without the UK is a far more significant trading partner for Australia than the UK itself” (Di Lieto & Treisman, 2017). The optimistic outlook for the future of Australia-EU economic relations is also referenced in the context of Australia’s troubled relations with China. It is perceived the EU will become a more important economic partner for Australia the midst of troubled economic relations with China, identifying Australia’s need for secure and trusted supply chains (Interview #2). It is pointed out that Brexit lessens to some extent the attractiveness of the forthcoming FTA, especially given how remarkably large the UK loomed for merchandise trade and investment vis-à-vis Australia. However, the size of the EU’s economy makes a trade agreement worth completing (Interview #5). Hedging the excitement somewhat is a perception that FTAs have a “head turning effect” and that trade and investment will go ahead irrespective of such an agreement (Interview #4).

Australian elites also plaudit the EU on its geoeconomic prowess in the case of Cambodia wherein the EU imposed trade sanctions to weaken Cambodia’s authoritarian government. It is stated that “European Union pressure is working, and revoking trade preferences might allow

Cambodians to escape dynastic rule” (Dunst, 2019). Following the release of political opposition in Cambodia, it is believed that these “relaxations are a direct response to European Union pressure” (ibid). Indeed, this perception makes no reference to Brexit, and its central argument is made in relation to a different third country. Nonetheless, it perceives the EU to be effectively wielding its geoeconomic weight during the Brexit process, particularly toward countries of lesser global standing.

Perceptions of the EU’s economic weight having waned

Five think tank outputs have the perception of the EU’s economic position to be, in varying levels and ways, as weaker since the Brexit referendum. Important to note that some of the outputs do not address the economic implications of Brexit specifically, rather they deal with the state of the Eurozone or the EU’s protectionist policies. In this vein, there is a pronounced argument for the unsuitability of a monetary union, claiming the euro was “sold as a celebration of European unity in diversity” whereas “the euro is today experienced as an instrument of brutal homogenisation” (Dal Santo, 2016). The author makes clear his own “Euroscepticism”, citing motivation for it partly due to Italy’s shrinking economy since joining the euro (ibid). Another makes the case that following the UK’s departure from the EU, Britain “must rediscover its internationalism” (Johnson, 2017). This case is made in the context of what is perceived to be the EU’s hypocrisy when it comes to internationalism, arguing that despite its rhetoric on the matter, the EU “is a protectionist club that has devastated the economies of some of the poorest countries”, believing the EU to have infected the UK with the same approach (ibid). Only one output perceives Brexit to have a damaging impact on European economies. Chapman (2016) believes Brexit to cause “collateral damage to the European economies”, however he does not go into detail as to how this will happen. There is also the perception that the EU is losing some of its geoeconomic weight as the UK departs, but only slightly (Interview #6).

Conclusion: Brexit with little impact on the economic perception of the EU

The data clearly show that Australian elites perceive Brexit as having little impact on the economic strength of the EU, nor greatly impeding on Australia-EU economic relations. The interview results in particular reinforce this notion. While interviewees often acknowledge that the UK meant

something to the EU economically, and Australia-EU relations more specifically, all are firm in their opinion that it matters little to the EU's well-established and demonstrated economic prowess. Certainly, a handful of think tank outputs perceive the EU in a negative light vis-à-vis its economics, however some of the case studies explored in these outputs bore no relation at all to Brexit. Instead, these articles address other issues such as the Eurozone or EU protectionism which have been perceived in a similar manner in the existing literature. On this note, there appears to be little, if any, shift in Australian elite perceptions on the EU as an economic actor. It was previously perceived to be an economic powerhouse and it remains perceived as such.

3.4. Perceptions of the EU’s strategic power: waning as a result of Brexit?

A body of literature suggests that France and the UK have been the drivers of European strategic and security efforts in the Asia-Pacific (Rogers 2009; 2013; Moroney et al. 2011; Macdonald & di Mattia 2011; Fisher 2013). In previous studies, the EU has not been perceived to be an effective security actor, rather it has drawn its strategic prowess from its economic muscle and norm diffusion capabilities (ibid). On the strategic front, the EU has been perceived in Asia as underperforming (Wacker, 2014). However, specific studies on Australian elite perceptions of the EU’s strategic power have not been published, thus this chapter represents the first study of such nature. The data in this chapter are important to understand what the UK meant for the EU in a strategic sense as well as how Australians perceive the EU as a strategic actor following Brexit as well as the announcement of a “geopolitical European Commission” (European Commission, 2019).

Figure 1 on Page 20 shows the frequency with which think tankers reference the EU’s strategic power following the Brexit referendum. The EU’s strategic prowess is referenced in 38% of all outputs gathered, making it the second most referenced theme. This is a stark statistic when compared to the lack of existing literature on how Australia perceived the EU’s strategic power.

Perceiving the EU as losing strategic power post-Brexit

Of the 14 think tank outputs discussing the EU’s strategic capacity following the Brexit referendum, 10 of them perceive the EU to have been weakened in this area by the UK’s departure. There is, however, some overlap among a few outputs that both lament and modestly praise the EU’s strategic condition. One article references how the EU has lost one of its “main members” in the UK which will encourage Russia to exploit what it perceives as weakened Union (Leask, 2016). Woker (2018) hedges his perception in a way that he indirectly implies that the EU is worse off in defence terms because of Brexit. He argues that the EU should “keep the UK integrated into European defence after Brexit”, which implies that the UK played a key role in the EU’s strategic efforts. The same perception, although with a security tweak, is resonated when discussing strategic issues with geographical proximity to Europe. Following British Prime Minister Johnson’s proposal to not include defence and security matters in his Brexit deal, unlike his

predecessor May, it is implied the EU would be less effective in the face of Iran's nuclear threat (Woker, 2019).

Other perceptions far more emphasis on what the UK meant in strategic terms to the EU. In this case, it is argued that the UK, based on its hegemonic status prior to 1945, "has a unique relationship with a number of the world's most influential (what in the EU are known as "third" countries") (Verdun, 2019). The most direct perception of the loss of strategic power is drawn from a Lowy Institute piece, stating the following:

"In the nearer term, Europe without Britain will lose, hopefully only temporarily, on the global front where it matters most. Strategically, this will occur in terms of military means and traditional outreach into the Anglosphere" (Woker, 2019).

The same perception is garnered by Dobell (2019), who denotes that "British diplomatic and strategic history is as Europe's off-shore balancer". There is also the belief among two of the interviewees that the EU with the UK in it would carry more weight internationally, especially in terms of the bloc's geopolitical ambitions and security. This is due to the EU losing one of its two members who are nuclear powers and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Thus, it is argued that Brexit has diminished a substantial part of the EU's strategic weight (Interview #5 & #6).

However, even with the UK as a member state the EU was perceived to be a geopolitical pigmy. It was pointed out that very few states take the EU seriously as a geopolitical actor (Interview #6). There is a perception that the EU is a little softer in its approach to China that it otherwise would be were Britain remaining in the Union (Interview #5). One elite concedes though that it is difficult to conceptualise how much losing the UK matters in strategic terms to the EU given there has not been a major international incident since the Brexit referendum wherein the EU would have utilised the UK's added strategic prowess (ibid).

The question of EU strategic autonomy is not always viewed in a positive light. Some view the EU as presenting itself as a serious figure on the world stage but note that it garners most of its credibility as an international actor not from strategic power but from economic weight and its status as a major aid donor (ibid). There is a sense that developments in strategic autonomy and separation from the US would manifest in the EU struggling to be taken seriously as a geopolitical

power. This is viewed as a dilemma for the EU given that it is perceived that NATO is essentially America acting in Europe and for as long as Europe's strategic matters are dealt with via NATO, no one will take the EU seriously on the geopolitical front. Moreover, it is perceived that there would not be much development of EU strategic autonomy in the near future, despite the EU's need to have a unified voice, separate from NATO, on issues such as China and Russia (Interview #5 & #6).

Perceiving the EU's strategic power as relatively unaffected post-Brexit

Some perceptions indicate that the EU will not be overly weakened in a strategic sense by Brexit. The main argument for this is that Europe's strategic matters have typically been coordinated via NATO, an organisation with which the UK remains an influential and active member (Interview #1 & #2). It is argued that Australia rarely approaches the EU on strategic matters and it instead maintains strong working bilateral relations with strong EU member states possessing significant power (Interview #2). This is reiterated with reference to an EU review conducted in 2011 that shows strategic interests in overseas territories to be led by France, a member state with which Australia has significantly deepened its bilateral relations under Macron's presidency (Interview #3). Moreover, the importance of EU aid and support in South East Asia and the Pacific is recognised as important by Australia even following Brexit (Interview #2).

Coordinated defence efforts in a handful of cases are perceived to be a success of the EU on the strategic front. Some of these were mentioned in the earlier chapter on the EU's internal condition as their themes overlap. To reiterate, the EII is cited as benefiting existing coordinated defence structures such as NATO. Moreover, PESCO is praised for the foundations it sets for further defence integration in the EU (Westermann, 2018; Woker, 2019). The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSFP), is also applauded for its "rare" success in assisting the brokerage of the Iranian nuclear deal known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) (Woker, 2019). However, the author makes clear this is one of the "rare successes", thus perceiving it to be something of an anomaly (*ibid*). Notwithstanding this, on aggregate there are some positive perceptions of the EU's existing structures relating to coordinated foreign policy and defence.

Conclusion: a mixed bag in perceptions on strategic power

It is firmly established in the existing literature on the EU's foreign policy that the UK along with France drove the strategic efforts of the bloc. However, there are some mixed feelings among Australian elites whether the EU has lost much of its strategic prowess as a result of Brexit. Certainly, many of the think tanks outputs prefer to discuss both the negatives and perceived opportunities for the EU's strategic power arising as a result of Brexit. Overall, their perception is that the EU has lost a member state whom gave the bloc considerable strategic and diplomatic presence in the world. This is reiterated by interviewees who note the loss of a key state who is both a permanent member of the UNSC and a nuclear power. However, there is a strong vein of feeling that while the UK certainly added to the EU's clout as a strategic actor, the EU has not really ever been perceived as a leader in this field, rather that NATO has driven policies and efforts for European strategic matters.

3.5. Perceptions of the EU as a negotiator: a more mercantilist approach

The motivation for this chapter stems not from the theme's prevalence in existing literature, rather from the frequency with which it is referred to in the data harvested for this thesis. Thus, analysing a shift in perceptions will be difficult. As Figure 1 on Page 20 shows, reference to the EU as a negotiator receives substantial attention in the think tank outputs collected. Furthermore, four of the six interviewees touched on the topic to varying extents. When assessing the perception of the EU as a negotiator, a different framing of what constitutes certain views is taken. There are possibly conflicting takes on what constitutes positive and negative negotiating behaviour. Based on a neorealist theory, states will seek to gain power and maintain security and a course of action vis-à-vis another state is pursued when it has a power advantage (Waltz, 1979). The suitability of a theoretical framework for analysing behaviour is arguably subjective matter, so this sub-section will adopt Waltz's approach. Based on this interpretation, what will be constituted as a positive perception will pertain to the EU's mercantilist approach and success in achieving what it seeks at the negotiating table. However, it is certainly the case that the Eurosceptic think tanks in Australia lambast the EU on this matter, specifically in the context of the Brexit negotiations.

It is worth reiterating the complicated trading landscape between Australia and the EU. The former has typically been frustrated at the latter due to a lack of market access, particularly on the agricultural front. This discontentment dates back to UK accession to the EEC in 1973, thus making for a longstanding marred relationship on the trading front. Despite multiple reforms of the CAP, Australia has not enjoyed substantial improvements to market access. This legacy was pointed out in multiple semi-structured interviews (Interview #2, #4 & #5). It is important to keep this in mind when assessing the perceptions of the EU's negotiating power as it could contribute to some of the more negative perceptions whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Perceiving the EU as strong or mercantilist

Much of what is available in think tank outputs relating to the EU as a negotiator gathered from the period of 2016-2019 reflects the EU as either strong, mercantilist or a bully at the negotiating table. Outputs published following a round of Brexit negotiations in 2018 note the EU's "predatory" behaviour (Radford, 2018). In this case, the EU seems to be both respected and

resented by the author for the way in which it dealt with the UK at the negotiating table. For example, Radford follows up this point by arguing that during negotiations “the EU revealed some unanticipated qualities: unity, discipline, and exceptional statecraft” (ibid). However, the title of the outputs suggests the author’s distaste of the EU’s approach, labelling it to reveal “the dark side to EU diplomacy” and as having “brutal logic or exploitative intent” (ibid). From CIS, a more Eurosceptic think tank, the EU is criticised for its approach to negotiations, particularly with the UK. It is perceived that the European Commission seeks to “punish Britain for questioning the validity of the EU model” (Martin Jones, 2016-2017). As Brexit negotiations dragged on, CIS authors perceived the EU to be revealing as the “stifling Byzantine monstrosity it is” (Opacic, 2019). Indeed, there is strong vein of highly critical and Eurosceptic sentiment from Australian elites

This notion of the EU’s strength, and even ruthlessness at the negotiating table is reaffirmed to a large extent in other data where it was noted that the EU has shown itself to be an extremely strong negotiator during the Brexit process (Interview #1). Where the perception differs somewhat relates to Radford’s claim that the EU’s skills in the negotiating field are “unanticipated”. Following former British Prime Minister May’s ambitions for a “full English Brexit”, that being a withdrawal agreement with favourable outcomes for the UK, it was perceived by think tankers that it would be extremely unlikely that May would have success in achieving this (Woker, 2017). It was repeatedly emphasised that the EU are “very tough negotiators” and have been for a long time, especially when third countries are trying to achieve greater market access during the negotiation of trade deals (Interview #1). Moreover, it was demonstrated how during the EU’s trade negotiations, the bloc seeks to have access to third country markets on all fronts while maintaining its own protectionist status quo. It was argued that this mercantilist approach should come as no surprise (Interview #1 & #2).

Also perceived positively in a specific case is the EU’s economic statecraft. This case was mentioned in an earlier chapter on the EU’s economic prowess yet its theme overlaps with perceptions of the EU’s negotiating power. The perception is made in the context of the EU’s revoking of trade preferences for Cambodia in an effort to make the authoritarian government soften its crackdown of opposition (Dunst, 2019). This is, of course, a specific case wherein the EU wields much more power than the smaller state at the negotiating table, thus the perception must be analysed in a niche context and not necessarily taken as representative for the EU’s negotiating power globally.

Some insights also are offered as to what Brexit means for the EU's status as a negotiator. Those outputs and interviewees that deal with this notion perceive the EU's status as a negotiator to be largely unchanged or shifting slightly. It was highlighted that when negotiating with the EU, one is dealing with a particular part of the EU's bureaucracy. It is perceived that the UK did not substantially influence this area, if at all, especially in the context of FTA negotiations. For example, at the time of the Brexit referendum, trade negotiations were headed by the EU's Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom, a Swedish national (Interview #5). The EU is also perceived to be a more effective negotiator without the UK as it was argued Britain was often a disruptive influence in the EU's discussions (Interview #6).

Perceptions of what hinders the EU's negotiating power

The EU's emphasis on its own values when at the negotiating table is viewed by one interviewee to have resulted in "eye rolling on the part of Australian officials" (Interview #2). This was mentioned in reference to the EU's repeated insistence to insert human rights clauses into bilateral documents. This is perceived to have become less of a problem however following Australia's difficult relationship with China in large part due to a clash of values and stances over human rights, an area in which Australia now stands more alongside the EU (ibid). This perception reflects more of a frustration on the Australian part rather than an outward view that the EU is weaker in the negotiating realm because of its choice of negotiating craft.

There is also some cautious sentiment among Australian elites vis-à-vis the EU's approach to Turkish accession and its subsequent negotiations. Following the left wing of Germany's political spectrum expressing frustration at the undemocratic state of Turkey under President Erdogan, there was some discussion among the EU as to whether it should abandon talks with the candidate country. One output labels the state of Turkey's EU accession as a "useful fiction" (Colla, 2017). Moreover, it is perceived that despite Turkey's authoritarian shift, "terminating the talks completely would be an enormous betrayal of the many pro-European Turks who have placed great hope in the EU to curb abuses in Turkey" (ibid). Indeed, it is noteworthy that this is a more speculative perception and thus not grounded in a concrete EU action. With this in mind, the perception is that the EU ought not abandon support for Turkey's democratic reform.

In the data gathered Brexit is not perceived to have hindered the EU's negotiating power, rather the opposite. Alternatively, what is perceived to weaken the EU on this front are longstanding issues around the bloc's approvals process. It is pointed out that what weakens the EU is that it cannot agree internally, a problem amplified by its slow and difficult approval process which are often held up on single issues. Moreover, the EU's track record of negotiating trade agreements shows it to be extremely lengthy. These issues, it is perceived, predate Brexit and are not magnified by the UK's withdrawal from the EU (Interview #1 & #5).

Conclusion: the EU as a tough but slow negotiator

Based on the data gathered, Brexit has certainly sharpened the focus on the EU's approach to negotiations. By and large, the EU is perceived to be very mercantilist. The manner in which this is perceived depends largely on the think tank or author's political predisposition. Those who are more Eurosceptic tend to view the EU's behaviour in the Brexit negotiations as overly exploitative. Others perceive the EU's behaviour in this case and more broadly as a typical negotiating approach and one that has come to be expected of the EU. Finally, it is not perceived that Brexit has weakened the EU's ability to negotiate favourable outcomes for itself, rather the contrary. It is argued that the loss of the UK will in fact streamline the EU's approvals process which has hindered the bloc for a long time.

3.6. Perceptions of the EU's normative power

The EU is widely regarded as a global leader not just in norm promotion, but also diffusion. Studies on elite perceptions normative power since 2014 indicate some shifts in this area. Earlier studies imply that there have been mixed perceptions regarding the EU's normative power, with little consensus on the efficacy of the EU as a norm leader (Lucarelli, 2014). Since this time, perceptions have shifted somewhat to garner more consensus, especially among South East Asian states wherein the EU has been perceived as having substantial norm diffusion capabilities (Casarini 2013; Stumbaum 2014; Reiterer 2014, 2016; Klose 2017; Attina 2019). Certainly, the EU presents itself as a global normative power (Khalil, 2019), thus it is important to analyse the extent to which Australian elites perceive this to be the case.

As Figure 1 on Page 20 shows, reference to the EU's normative power in the think tank outputs collected is minimal, however reference to this theme is prevalent in the existing literature. It is important to note from the outset the context in which the EU's normative power is analysed or simply mentioned. From five outputs collected, two of them are specific to Australia's climate policy (or lack thereof) and how the EU's actions in this area could serve as inspiration, so they are far from EU-centric in their analysis. The other three are more EU-centric, often dealing with the role of normative power in the EU's relations with third-countries.

Perceptions of the EU's normative power as weakening

The EU's fractured relations with Turkey are central to the Australian elite perceptions of the EU's normative power. One output seeks to frame Turkey more so in a negative light than it does the EU. In fact, it actually praises the EU in many respects for the manner in which it deals with Turkey. With this said, the perception is that the Turkish government's behaviour has eroded "the EU's prestige, normative standard and soft power" (Yilmaz, 2016). Relations between the EU and Turkey are also perceived to move away from norm promotion to more of a zero-sum transactionalist approach. It is argued that this began following the March 2016 refugee deal signed by both Turkey and the EU in the face of migration crisis. In this context, it is perceived that the EU is losing its "normative power status" (Yilmaz, 2019).

There is a firm perception that the EU's internal condition and the behaviour of some member states is weakening its reputation as a normative power. Following the Catalonia's independence vote in October 2017, one output was critical of the EU's reaction to what was perceived as the Spanish government's harsh response. The author mentions "the right to self-determination", and the fact that the EU failed to promote and uphold this right following Catalonia's referendum (Mabley, 2017). It is perceived that "Europeans have damaged their reputation by their mutism when it comes to promoting human rights within the EU itself" (ibid). Furthermore, the democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland are mentioned as seriously challenging the EU's internal normative situation. It is believed that the EU should embark on more self-reflection of its values as such issues continue (Interview #2).

Perceptions of the EU's normative power persisting post-Brexit

On whether the UK brought much to the status of the EU as a normative power, the perception reflects a sense that this was rather not the case. One interviewee argues that the EU remains a normative leader in global politics. Furthermore, it is argued that the UK was never a driver of the EU's normative agenda, nor could it wish to be given the state of its political leadership and public standards. The integrity of Prime Minister Johnson was mentioned in reference to this point, as was former Prime Minister David Cameron's, both of whom are perceived to be of questionable moral character. In this context, it was stated "the idea that the UK adds to the normative power of the EU is frankly laughable" (Interview #6).

As was aforementioned, the EU was perceived positively as a promoter of climate policy norms among Australian elites. Both outputs touching on this theme are from CPD, a think tank that deals with long-term policy development and being considered left-of-centre on the political spectrum. One output suggests that Australia should follow the EU's lead in appointing a "Sustainable Finance Task Force" to assist in producing more forward think financial systems (McLeod, 2018). Furthermore, the EU is perceived as a role model when it comes to financial transparency (Boll, 2019).

Conclusion: The EU as a normative leader

There appears to be a small shift in the perceptions of the EU's normative power. The common case made for what weakens the EU on this front is exploitative behaviour from Turkey as well as internal issues of the democratic process among member states. The EU is perceived to be a role model for a niche group of Australian elites dealing with long-term policy development when it comes to climate change mitigation. Brexit is viewed as not adversely affecting the EU's status as a normative power given Britain's poor state of political leadership which contributed very little in a positive sense to the EU's normative reputation.

3.7. Perceptions on the future of Australia-EU relations

This chapter deals with how Australian elites view relations between Australia and the EU to develop in the post-Brexit era. In contrast to the existing academic literature, some of the findings in this thesis challenge the notion of the UK's centrality to the Australia-EU relationship. Indeed, not all of the data gathered suggests this is the case as some indicates that the UK was indeed Australia's bridge to the EU. Nonetheless, a substantial amount of the data gathered offers Australian elite perceptions on how Australian-EU relations will or should develop in the absence of the UK.

Australia as less important to the EU because of Brexit?

This thesis has demonstrated the lack of consensus over how important the UK actually was to Australia-EU relations. Irrespective of this, there is consensus around the perception that Australia will not be of less importance to the EU in the post-Brexit era, nor the EU to Australia. The key arguments for this case relate to the deepening economic and strategic relationship between Australia and the EU. Even without the UK, the EU remains the single largest investor in Australia and it remains committed to finalising FTAs around the world. In relation to the EU's FTA with Australia specifically, it is argued that the EU would be eager to negotiate an agreement that sees automotive tariffs reduced, so its attention on Australia is unlikely to wane at least in this context (Interview #1, #4 & #5). Australia too has significant interest in maintaining positive economic relations with the EU especially given its considerable investment in European gas lines (Interview #1).

Strategic reasons for deeper engagement are also made clear in the data gathered. Australia finds itself in a contested and uncertain geographical region, notably due to China's increasingly assertive approach. The EU has pivotal economic interests in the region, thus maintaining allies and stability is of crucial importance. It is argued that the EU "should treat Australia as an important and stable partner in an uncertain and dangerous world" (Bloch & Harcourt, 2019).

How should Australia deal with the EU?

Despite the disputes over the UK's role in Australia-EU relations, there is a general consensus that Brexit has brought about a new reality and a need to shift Australia's approach to the EU. It is argued by some who hold the view of the UK as Australia's champion in the EU that Australia should improve its relations with Brussels after Brexit (ibid). There are cases made arguing against replacing the UK with a single member state as an EU bridge as that then puts Australia in the same predicament as it was previously when relying too heavily on Britain for the same purpose. The perception is that Australia needs a traditional and conventional diplomatic approach to the EU and having knowledgeable people engaging across the European capitals. It is argued that Australia has performed poorly in this area, which too serves as a reflection of the manner in which the Australian political class thinks about the world and the difficulties it has with non-English speaking interlocutors (Interview #2). Among those sceptical of the UK's centrality in Australia-EU relations, it is perceived that there will not be a major shift in Australia's approach to the EU (Interview #3 & #6). One interviewee believes the Australian decision-makers to be necessarily hard-headed vis-à-vis the EU and that this approach will continue post-Brexit (Interview #6).

There is also a widely held view that Brexit presents economic opportunities for Australia. A forthcoming UK-Australia FTA is believed that it will produce favourable outcomes for Australia. This is because of the belief that the British government will be desperate to attain tangible results rapidly to show the British people that the UK's departure from the EU was the right choice (Interview #1, #3, & #4). One interviewee holds the view that the possibility of Australia negotiating favourable outcomes in the forthcoming FTA with the UK might inspire it to pursue or argue for more in the Australia-EU FTA (Interview #3).

The data gathered also shed light on which remaining member states are perceived to become Australia's new champion in the EU. It was the strong view of one interviewee that following the Brexit referendum, Germany became Australia's new favoured entry point into the EU due to its near unrivalled status as the leader of Europe. Developments to suggest that Australia has shifted its focus to Germany include Chancellor Merkel's visit to Australia in November 2014 for the G20 meeting in Brisbane which was followed by bilateral discussions with Australian leaders in Sydney. Other manifestations include Germany's Indo-Pacific strategy and the Merkel administration's clear intent to have a likeminded partner as well as its own presence in the region. It is argued that Australia's relationship with Germany had slid and needed modernising with

Brexit providing the perfect opportunity for this. It is argued that Australia's aim is to make Germany realise that it is a serious player in the world's fastest growing economic area, and that is the Western democracy Germany needs as an ally in this region (Interview #1).

France too is perceived as a member state with whom Australia could develop its already reasonably well-established ties. Australia's contract with France to develop its new submarines, high level ministerial dialogues and good defence relations are highlighted as examples of strong Australia-France relations (Interview #1 & #2). Moreover, it was pointed out that France espouses more strategic legitimacy which stems from its offshore colonies and exclusive economic zones. It is argued that these realities make France a natural partner for Australia (Interview #2).

Ireland was included in the discussions of future Australia-EU relations. The reasons for Ireland's presence in the debate is due to it too being an English-speaking country with whom Australia could more easily communicate. While it was perceived to be likely that Australian businesses will seek deeper engagement with Ireland, especially due to its status as a leader in information technology and having a similar legal system to the UK. However, while these points are acknowledged, it is argued that Ireland does not have the size nor political and economic weight to be a powerful voice in the EU, thus Australia would not look at it as a key EU member state (Interview #1).

Issues central to the relationship going forward

The data collected indicates several areas deemed to be central issues moving ahead in the Australia-EU. The most notable of these is climate policy. It is believed that Australia had best prepare itself to deal with some of the EU's ambitious climate policies in which the Australian government shares little enthusiasm. It is pointed out that Canada too ran into similar problems on this front when negotiating its FTA with the EU (Interview #5). It was reiterated among interviewees that recent Australian governments have lacked ambition in relation to climate change mitigation. Moreover, it is perceived to that it would be delusional to think the EU is not serious about a decarbonisation agenda. It is argued that this will be a real sticking point in its future relations between Australia and the EU (Interview #6). Finally, it is acknowledged that these issues could prove to sour the relationship between Australia and the EU, even create further anti-EU sentiment (Interview #5).

Conclusion

The data in this thesis indicate that since the Brexit referendum in June 2016 there are shifts the perceptions of Australian elites in some areas pertaining to the EU, whereas some other aspects of the EU's power are perceived to be relatively unchanged. This thesis outlined how in the existing literature, the UK is demonstrated to have been fundamental to Australia's relations with the EU. This thesis conducting research in the context of Brexit provided a perfect opportunity to test the claims made in the existing literature by exploring the perceptions of just how central the UK was to Australia-EU relations. Certainly, based solely on the think tank outputs, there is no challenge to the existing notion. However, scepticism of the idea is relevant among interviewees, three of which were ambivalent about the claim and instead argue that Australia has in fact been more Brussels-centric in its dealings with the EU. Overall, the data illustrates some scepticism for the notion, which moderately goes against the idea UK serving as Australia's bridge to the EU.

The frequency with which the EU's internal condition is referenced in the data gathered is appears to be greater than in previous studies. Since the Brexit referendum, Australian elites perceive the EU to be in very poor state of internal affairs. However, there is some ambivalence toward the idea of Brexit as having intensified these problems. Overall, there is little change in the perception toward the EU's functionality or lack thereof from Australian elites given that it was already viewed to be suffering much internal strife. On the EU's economic power, there is also very little shift in the perceptions. With the acknowledgement that the EU is on aggregate a smaller economy without the UK, the EU's status as an economic powerhouse is generally perceived as unchanged. Most of the negative views of the EU's economic state are in the context of issues related to the Eurozone. There are mixed perceptions on what Brexit means for the EU's strategic prowess. The academic literature indicates that the UK has been central to the EU's strategic efforts, and this notion is certainly reflected in the perceptions garnered from think tank outputs. However, some interviewees believe that the EU has never really been considered a leading strategic actor and that European strategic matters are dealt with primarily via NATO.

The theme of the EU's negotiating power is rarely addressed in existing studies of Australian elite perceptions of the EU. The frequency with which it is referenced in the data gathered for this thesis commanded that perceptions of it be analysed and included. Brexit negotiations, the manner in which the EU approached them, and the outcomes it secured, make

some Australian elites perceive the EU to be more mercantilist than it previously was. However, some perceive this approach to be typical of the EU who has possessed advanced negotiating teams and methods for a long time. It is argued that the loss of the UK will in fact streamline the EU's approvals process making it a more effective actor in this realm. On the normative front, it is not perceived that Brexit affects the EU's ability to be a normative leader in the world. Thus, there has been no shift in perception in this sense. However, some data indicate that the EU's normative power has been eroded by the Turkish government's exploitative behaviour over the years.

There are multiple avenues and issues perceived to be central to the future of Australia-EU relations. There is a consensus that the EU will still treat Australia as an important partner and that relations may even deepen in the face of mutual geopolitical difficulties. Australian elites perceive that Brexit earmarks the point where Australia should shift its approach to the EU and focus more directly on Brussels, as well as developing comprehensive bilateral relations with Germany and France. Climate change policy is perceived to become a point of tension into the future with Australia and the EU having starkly different levels of ambition in this area.

Areas for future research

Given the ever-changing landscape of the EU, there is always need for further research on external perceptions of the bloc. The Covid-19 pandemic which has consumed the European continent in 2020 and beyond has seen the EU taken unprecedented levels of action in order to deal with and recover from the fallout caused by the virus. The actions taken have on most occasions been starkly different from the Australian government's responses. How the EU is perceived to handle a crisis of this magnitude and nature would certainly make for interesting research. The EU's approach to climate change mitigation is also different to the Australian government's approach. Measures such as the EU Green Deal represent a development of significance which would also make a strong case for updating the literature on Australian perceptions of the EU.

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Appendix

Appendix no. 1: Information on think tanks

Lowy Institute

The Lowy Institute is a self-proclaimed “independent, nonpartisan international policy think tank” (Lowy Institute, 2021). Lowy’s sources of funding are primarily drawn from donations (approximately 45%), grants (approximately 20%), and membership income (approximately 10%). The principal donor is the Lowy Foundation, whom were the maiden funding source. Other major donors include Manikay Partners, Earnst and Young, and Michael and Deborah Thawley. Grants secured by Lowy are from the Australian government. Some of Lowy’s sponsors for events and awards are drawn from multinational corporations such as Rio Tinto, BHP, Capital Group, and Rothschild and Co (Lowy Institute, 2021). No academic literature on Lowy’s political stance was found.

The Australian Institute for International Affairs (AIIA)

The AIIA is a self-proclaimed “independent, non-profit organisation promoting interest in and understanding of international affairs in Australia” (AIIA, 2021). According to the AIIA, it “does not seek to formulate its own institutional views”, rather it provides a platform for debate (ibid). In 2015, the AIIA was awarded a four-star rating in relation to its financial transparency – the only think tank in Australia to be rated as highly. With regards to its funding, the most recent data available is from the years 2018-2019. Based on this, the AIIA’s largest institutional donor was the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, closely followed by the EU, and then the ANU. Individual donors also account for a significant portion of the AIIA’s funding (ibid). Although recent research on the AIIA’s political positioning was not found, a study from 1996 affirmed the think tank as “independent” and espousing “neutrality” in an era where, the author argues, was increasingly not the case (Stone, 1996; 117).

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)

ASPI describes itself as “an independent, non-partisan think tank” with the aim of generating “new ideas for policy makers, allowing them to make better-informed decisions” (ASPI, 2021). ASPI was established by the Australian government in 2001, whom remain the core funders in 2020 at 68% of the think tank’s income (ASPI, 2021). 17% of ASPI’s funding comes from foreign

governments, the largest of which are the US and the UK. Donations from the private sector and defence industries account for around 14% of ASPI's income. ASPI has been labelled as taking a "anti-China" and "pro-American" stance in some Australian media (Robin, 2020). This view stems largely from the funding received by the US Department of State.

The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS)

CIS describes itself as a "politically non-partisan" and independent think tank (Windybank, 2020). CIS describes its mission as promoting "free choice and individual liberty, and defends cultural free and the open exchange of ideas" (CIS, 2021). CIS receives no government funding, instead relying solely on the support of its members, private enterprises and other foundations (CIS, 2021). CIS' research typically deals with Australian public policy issues and it is regarded as being a conservative think tank (Hart and Vromen, 2008).

The ANU Centre for European Studies (ANUCES)

ANUCES is an interdisciplinary centre "focussed on the study of Europe and the European Union" (ANU, 2018). Funding for ANUCES is jointly undertaken by ANU and the European Commission (ANU, 2019).

Centre for Policy Development (CPD)

CPD is "an institute for long-term policy development" and describes itself as "independent and non-partisan" (CPD, 2017). CPD have a wide variety of entities and individuals who make funding contributions. While exact funding contributions are not publicly available, the major organisations contributing to CPD are Planet Wheeler, the Myer Foundation and the Paul Ramsay Foundation. It is described by some media as being "left-of-centre" (ABC, 2018).

Appendix no. 2: Information on interviewees

David Ritchie AO (Interview #1)

David Ritchie AO is a former Australian diplomat. From 2013-2016 he served as Australian Ambassador to Germany. He also had previous postings as Ambassador to Italy and Indonesia. Between 1999-2001, he was Senior Advisor (International Relations) to then Prime Minister John Howard. Following his prominent diplomatic career with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr Ritchie has been a Distinguished Research Fellow with the ANU Centre for European Studies and has contributed widely to the debate of European affairs in Australia via notable think tanks such as the Lowy Institute (SPIR, 2018).

Allan Gyngell AO (Interview #2)

Allan Gyngell AO is National President of the Australian Institute of International Affairs. He is also an honorary professor at the ANU's College of the Asia Pacific. Mr Gyngell has had a decorated career in the Australian government, particularly in the realm of Australia's international affairs. He served as the Director-General of the Australian Office of National Assessments, worked in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade where he had various diplomatic postings, and was Senior Advisor (International) to then Prime Minister Paul Keating from 1993-1996 (AIIA, 2021).

Denise Fisher (Interview #3)

Dr Denise Fisher is Visiting Fellow at the ANU Centre for European Studies. Her research focusses on France in the South Pacific. Prior to entering research, Dr Fisher had a thirty year career as an Australian diplomat having had various postings in Africa, Asia and America. She also frequently contributes to think tanks such as the Lowy Institute among others (ANUCES, 2021).

Bryan Clark (Interview #4)

Bryan Clark is Director of Trade and International Affairs at the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI). Within ACCI, Mr Clark is also head of the Commerce Policy Unit and serves as the main contact with international organisations. Mr Clark's career of industry representation and international policy development spans over 25 years (ACCI, 2021).

Mark Higgle (Interview #5)

Dr Mark Higgle is a Senior Fellow at the Danube Institute in Budapest and the Europe Correspondent for The Spectator Australia. Dr Higgle has had a distinguished in diplomatic career as well as in international relations more broadly. He was Australian Ambassador Hungary from 1998-2001, to the EU and NATO from 2014-2017, and previously the international advisor to former Prime Minister Tony Abbott between 2010 and 2014 (Danube Institute, 2021).

Bobo Lo (Interview #6)

Dr Bobo Lo is an international relations analyst. He is a non-resident fellow at the Lowy Institute. In addition to this, Dr Lo is associated with the Russia/NIS Centre at the French Institute of International Relations, where he is an Associate Research Fellow. He was previously Deputy Head of Mission at the Australian Embassy in Moscow (Lowy Institute, 2021).