

Summary of Annie NIESSEN's master thesis

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Title: *Bidding farewell? On the assessment of the structural or situational nature of the current crisis surrounding David Cameron's prospective referendum on Britain's continued membership of the European Union*

Keywords: referendum on continued membership of the EU; Brexit; David Cameron; 2015 general election; UK-EEC/EU relationship; withdrawal from the EU; British demands to reform the EU.

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Since David Cameron's announcement for a referendum on continued membership of the European Union, Britain's membership has been in jeopardy. This recent crisis in the UK-EEC/EU relationship is far from being the first one. Indeed, the UK has acquired the reputation of a difficult Member State since his accession in 1973. My dissertation explores this relationship throughout the different crises that occurred under the successive premierships in order to answer the following research question: is the current crisis surrounding Cameron's 'in/out' referendum a structural or a situational phenomenon?

In this regard, the terms structural and situational were defined as follows: a fact is structural if it pertains to the structure of the relationship, i.e. if it occurs regularly throughout the relationship and independently of the circumstances or changes in the society; a fact is situational if

it pertains to specific circumstances regardless of the political leanings and during a limited period of time, or to a specific political tendency on a longer time lapse. In order to come to a conclusion regarding the structural or situational nature of the current crisis, the dissertation explores the reforms (or 'red lines') adduced by Cameron in order to overhaul the EU so that the UK remains part of it after the 'in/out' referendum planned for 2017.

The following axioms were set: if Cameron's 'red lines' are of structural nature, the current crisis is structural as well; if his 'red lines' are of situational nature, the current crisis is situational as well. The structural nature of Cameron's 'red lines' can be assessed by looking at the former Prime Ministers' 'red lines' in order to determine whether some 'red lines' recur throughout the relationship. As for the situational aspect, it can be discovered by exploring Cameron's contemporaries' 'red lines' in order to see whether some 'red lines' find their roots in the current social-economic context. Therefore, the body of the dissertation is divided into three parts.

Part 1 deals with the legal and practical possibilities of withdrawal from the EU. It first explores article 50 TEU which provides the legal basis for unilateral withdrawal from the EU. Then, it goes through the very special case of Greenland that withdrew from the EEC in 1985 and the arguments adduced for withdrawal. Finally, it provides for a speculative comparison between Greenland's withdrawal and a potential Brexit, which ends on the conclusion that the case of Greenland, although it presents some interesting leads regarding the issue of withdrawal, cannot serve as a precedent for a Brexit or even for a future withdrawal from the EU.

Part 2 is a journey through the past UK-EEC/EU relationship with a focus on the crises and the 'red lines' adduced by the former Prime Ministers. Relevant literature and a few speeches have been gone through in order to assess the frequency of withdrawal threats and extract the Prime Ministers' 'red lines'. It was discovered that the crises can take on different forms and intensities, i.e. disagreements, deadlock deeds, referenda, and that withdrawal threats using an 'in/out' referendum are relatively rare. In addition, several 'red lines' were found for each Prime Ministers and a summary table of these 'red lines' per premiership was designed at the end of the part.

Part 3 focuses on the current crisis, exploring Cameron's 'red lines' and comparing them with three other party leaders' 'red lines' before the 2015 general election. The three chosen party leaders are Ed Miliband (Labour Party), Nick Clegg (Liberal Democrats) and Nigel Farage (UK Independence Party). It first glances at the idea of a Brexit and the possibility of an 'in/out' referendum in a corpus of speeches delivered by these four party leaders. Then, a thematic analysis was performed on this corpus in order to extract the main 'red lines' adduced by the party leaders and a look was taken at their ways of communicating on the EU. A summary table of these 'red lines' was provided at the end of the part.

After a comparison between the 'red lines' of the second and third parts with the help of a recapitulative table and a discussion on the nature of the 'red lines', it was concluded that the current crisis can be characterised as a bi-dimensional phenomenon since it is based on 'red lines' of structural *and* situational nature. The current crisis surrounding Cameron's referendum that the UK-EEC/EU relationship has been encountering seems to be a usual, though more serious, crisis that encompasses both deeply-rooted and freshly-cooked demands for reform. It was observed that the development of the European integration is a decisive factor in the creation of new bones of contention and consequently of new, situational 'red lines'. Moreover, well-established, structural 'red lines' are also difficult to settle, which creates a permanent context of tensions propitious for crises. This crisis could well be handled with promptly-led negotiations but the quite exceptional withdrawal threat relying on the British people's final say through a referendum could also lead Britain to bid farewell to the EU.