

Continued from page 1

swung right in the 2019 election. “Those voters do not want to have a conversation about Brexit,” said Joshua Simons, the director of Labour Together, a think tank close to Labour leadership. Sheer exhaustion also contributes to making Brexit talk unwelcome: Between the vote to leave the EU in 2016 and the final agreement in 2020, the issue consumed British politics, and many people just want to move on. Simons argues there’s also a third factor: a sense that the results of a democratic referendum must be honored. He cites a point that a mentor of his,

political philosopher Danielle Allen, made after the 2016 vote. “In the end, in democracy, sometimes you all do crazy things together,” Simons said. “And what becomes more important is not whether the crazy thing was a good or bad thing to do. It’s that you’re doing it together.” One silver lining to Brexit is that it offers a cautionary tale for the rest of Europe. After Britain voted to leave the EU in 2016, there’s been fear, among some who care about the European project, that France or Italy could be next. But as “The Guardian” reported, as of January, support for leaving the EU has declined in every member state for which data is available.



Brexit Victims. | CARTOON: Marian Kamensky, Austria

As governments across the continent move rightward, the EU itself is moving in a more conservative direction, but it’s not coming apart. “I don’t think you’re going to see other countries in the EU leaving the EU, if for no other reason than because they’ve seen the impact on us,” Khan said. But there’s a larger lesson, one most Western countries seemingly have to continually relearn. Right-wing nationalist projects begin with loud, flamboyant swagger. They tend to end unspeakably.

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Exporters think Brexit has done more harm than good

EXPORTS According to a poll, 61 per cent of voters think that Britain’s departure from the EU made the country worse off.

BY OLIVER WRIGHT

BRITISH COMPANIES are losing faith in the potential benefits of new free trade deals, government research shows, as exporters say Brexit has done more harm than good to their overseas sales. A survey of more than 3,000 firms carried out by the Department for Business and Trade found that three out of five now think that free trade deals will have no impact on their business, including half of all firms exporting. A YouGov poll for ‘The Times’ also suggests that the public are increasingly unhappy with the perceived impact of Brexit on the economy. It indicates that 61 per cent of voters think that Britain’s departure from the EU made the country worse off, compared with 10 per cent who think it is better off and 20 per cent who think it made no difference. A majority, 53 per cent, think that the UK should have a closer relationship with the EU than the present free trade deal, compared with 22 per cent who are in favour of the relationship. However, voters have a lack of trust in either party to handle post-Brexit relationships with the EU, with 19 per cent of voters trusting the Conservatives and 17 per cent Labour. The department’s figures show there is a similar pessimism among firms, despite pledges by ministers to use Brexit to promote “global Britain” and increase trade with fast-growing economies.



A container ship loaded with goods waits at a port in Southampton, England. | PHOTO: Andrew Matthews/Empics/Picture Alliance

UK firms exporting overseas has remained stagnant since 2016, despite pledges to unleash the potential of global Britain. In 2016, 33 per cent of firms with a turnover of more than half a million pounds said that they had exported goods or services in the past 12 months. Last year, that figure stood at just 34 per cent. The number of firms that said they had not exported and did not intend to has remained stuck at about 40 per cent. Even among those firms that did export, 40 per cent said that their exports of goods had decreased over the past year. Among service exporters, 29 per cent said sales had decreased.

The survey also suggested pessimism about export opportunities, despite two new trade deals announced last year with Australia and New Zealand. In 2017, 73 per cent of firms said there was a lot of demand for UK products and services, a figure which declined to 55 per cent last year. Forty-nine per cent said that since Brexit, there had been less global demand for products and services, up from 39 per cent in 2021. William Bain, head of trade policy at the British Chambers of Commerce, said: “It doesn’t surprise me that companies feel pretty sore about things, and that is what our survey data shows

well. But it is also true that we’re in a better place than we were last year, and the government has been listening to some of our concerns. A lot of companies do want to export, but they need practical assistance with issues like customs declarations ... we do need to see clear and sustained progress in the months ahead if firms are going to be able to take advantage of new deals.” A Department of Business and Trade spokesman said the public supported trade deals and that exports increased to £852 billion in the year to the end of June. “Selective use of polling stats only paints half a picture,” he

same businesses said there is a lot of opportunity to grow internationally, and the majority of companies who are ready to export, or export already, are using our expert support services to grow their business.”

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zur Vollversion

Sunak's pivot away from 'Global Britain' makes friends on world stage

FOREIGN POLICY Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has dropped Boris Johnson's bombastic approach to foreign policy.



U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (left) shakes hands with French President Emmanuel Macron in March 2023.
| PHOTO: Kin Cheung/Pool/Getty Images

BY MARK LANDLER

PRIME MINISTER Rishi Sunak of Britain has mothballed his predecessors' projects, large and small, from Liz Truss's trickle-down tax cuts to Boris Johnson's revamped royal yacht. But one of Sunak's most symbolic changes since taking over as prime minister five months ago has received less attention: retiring the slogan "Global Britain."

No longer does the phrase, a swashbuckling relic of Britain's debate over its post-Brexit role, feature in speeches by Cabinet ministers or in the government's updated military and foreign policy blueprint released last Monday.

In its place, Sunak has hashed out workmanlike deals on trade and immigration with Britain's nearest neighbors – France and the rest of the European Union. In the process, analysts and diplomats said, he has begun, for the first time since Britain's departure from the European Union, to chart a realistic role on the global stage.

Global Britain, as propounded by Johnson, was meant to evoke a Britain, unshackled from Brussels, that could be agile and opportunistic, a lightly regulated, free-trading powerhouse. In practice, it came to symbolize a country with far-fetched ambitions and, under Johnson, a habit of squabbling with its neighbors.

to some extent, reflects his button-down, technocratic style. (In domestic policy, he has also shunned the ideological experimentation of Truss and the bombastic politics of Johnson in favor of a more methodical approach to Britain's deep-rooted economic problems.)

But a leader's style matters, and on the world stage, Sunak's no-bombast approach is paying eye-catching dividends. In the past few weeks, he has struck a deal with Brussels on trade in Northern Ireland, eased years of Brexit-related tensions with France, inaugurated the next phase of a submarine alliance with Australia and the United States, and announced £11 billion in increased military spending over the next five years, cementing Britain's role as a leading supplier of weapons to Ukraine.

"It's too early to say whether Sunak has found a role for post-Brexit Britain," said Peter Westmacott, who served as Britain's ambassador to France and to the United States. "But he has banished the much-ridiculed 'Global Britain' Johnsonian slogan, preferring to under-promise and over-deliver. He's also moved fast to fix some of the obstacles to better relations with our partners."

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Diplomat who faced Brexit freeze in U.K. now sees a 'new beginning'

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and the Windsor Framework are changing things, the European Union's first ambassador in London says.

BY STEPHEN CASTLE

AS THE European Union's ambassador to London, João Vale de Almeida had a ringside seat for the chaos overwhelming British politics last year, when all eyes were on the missteps, scandals, and resulting downfalls of two prime ministers in quick succession.

Under either of the ousted prime ministers, Vale de Almeida indicated, prospects were dim for resolving one of the most serious conflicts contributing to rocky post-Brexit relations between Britain and the European Union: the trade status of Northern Ireland.

But the relationship has shifted significantly with the rise of a new prime minister, Rishi Sunak, Vale de Almeida said, culminating Monday when Sunak and Ursula von der Leyen, president of the EU's executive arm, the European Commission, struck a deal to resolve their Northern Ireland dispute.

That breakthrough, Vale de Almeida said, opened a path to greater cooperation not only between Brussels and London but also between Europe and the United States in confronting common challenges such as Russian aggression and rising tension with China, where Western cooperation is essential.

"If Sunak gets enough support for the deal, we can see this as a new beginning," Vale de Almeida, who completed his assignment in London late last year, said in an interview. "With the EU, the U.K., and the U.S., there is a triangular dimension."

The agreement followed an era of unrivaled mistrust under Sunak's two most recent predecessors, Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, and Vale de Almeida said the accord illustrated growing European faith in the new British prime minister.

The deal, called the Windsor Framework, outlines mechanisms to smooth trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, without impeding trade across Northern Ireland's land border with Ire-



U.S. Pres. Joe Biden meets with U.K. PM Rishi Sunak in Northern Ireland, shortly after Sunak signed the Windsor Framework in 2023.
| PHOTO: Simon Walker/Photoshot/Picture Alliance



Then the EU's ambassador to the U.K., João Vale de Almeida leaves to present his credentials to Queen Elizabeth II in 2019.
| PHOTO: Rob Pinney/Getty Images

Tension over the status of Northern Ireland has bedeviled negotiators since Britain voted in 2016 to withdraw from the bloc. In 2020, both sides ratified a withdrawal agreement negotiated by Johnson that kept goods flowing freely across the Irish border but infuriated many people in Northern Ireland by hampering the territory's trade with Great Britain.

Johnson and Truss then hooked up Britain's left three years

negotiated a vexed dispute, said Vale de Almeida, one of Europe's most experienced diplomats, who has also served as EU ambassador to Washington and to the United Nations. President Joe Biden, who values his Irish heritage, had made it clear that a negotiated solution was needed if there were to be a presidential visit to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, which ended years of sectarian bloodshed.

"It played a role, the U.S.," said Vale de Almeida, who is about to take up a visiting fellowship at Columbia University. "I think it was important that the U.S. was very clear that this situation should have no impact on the Good Friday Agreement and that we needed to find a solution."

The new agreement draws a line under a period of almost open hostility between London and Brussels, during which Johnson and his Brexit negotiator, David Frost, adopted combative tactics. The effect was felt sharply by Vale de Almeida, a Portuguese citizen who opened the European Union's first embassy in London