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Federico Fabbrini (Ed.), *The Law & Politics of Brexit: Volume II. The Withdrawal Agreement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. xxx + 306 pages. ISBN: 9780198848356. GBP 75.

‘Does the entry into force of the Withdrawal Agreement mean that our task is completed? Certainly not!’ So writes none other than Michel Barnier, who in a major coup for the editor of this collection, provides a foreword to introduce the second volume in the *Law and Politics of Brexit* series. The first volume, published in 2017 and favourably reviewed in this journal by Colin Murray, gave an initial but detailed look at the Brexit process and its potential ramifications at the time. Three years on, and the manuscript for the second volume is completed after the final Brexit date of 31 January 2020, but just as the UK, the EU and the rest of the world enters the uncertain world of the global pandemic.

Unlike the first volume, the second *Law and Politics of Brexit* volume benefits from the conclusion of a legal text which provides a central focal point: the Withdrawal Agreement. Characterised by the editor as a ‘detailed and comprehensive legal document, which secures the orderly exit of the UK from the EU’ (p.1), the book examines over 300 pages the two-year process leading up to the conclusion of the Agreement, its different procedural and substantive dimensions, and what it might tell us about the future for EU-UK relations.

Much like the first volume, the book has a four-part structure which separates the Brexit process – in this case the negotiations and conclusion of the Withdrawal Agreement – from the substantive aspects (citizens’ rights, the financial settlement and the Irish border). The remaining two parts shift the focus to what the Withdrawal Agreement signals for the future of EU-UK governance and the respective challenges for the UK, British-Irish relations and the EU. As to be expected for a book which has a legal text as its focal point, the weight of the analysis is drawn from legal scholars, but with an impressive range of subdisciplines beyond those whose primary focus is on EU law, including human rights and constitutional law. This is particularly important given the relevance of the Withdrawal Agreement for Northern Ireland, and Ireland-UK relations. More than 50% of the contributors are women. In addition to the book’s editor (who contributes two substantive chapters and is the joint author of a third) there are four authors – all leading authorities on the EU and Brexit – who have contributed to both the first and second volumes. This gives a strong sense of continuity and coherence to the series, without tipping over into repetition or repackaging of ideas.

It is difficult to quite comprehend in the frenetic pace of negotiations, uncertainty and rapid conclusion of texts, just how much has gone on in the world of Brexit. When narrowing down the scope to the two and half year period leading up to the Withdrawal Agreement, even those who have paid close attention to the process will find aspects in the accounts of the negotiations that have been almost forgotten under the sheer amount of material that Brexit has produced (Theresa May’s intervention at the Munich Security Conference in February 2018 about the importance of trade offs to ensure EU-UK security cooperation being just one example). Reading the introduction, in which the book editor meticulously weaves together the political debates, the major events (European Parliament elections, pro-EU marches, Chequers, the extension requests and so on) and the role of key figures, there is very much a sense of how much scope for analysis this unprecedented period of law and politics provides.

The introduction and first three chapters on the process (by Emily Jones, Federico Fabbrini and Rebecca Schmidt, and Paul Craig) serve as a definitive guide to the complex and tortuous process of getting the Withdrawal Agreement in place, against the background of what can only be described as the UK’s political instability and lack of clear direction in its goals. These chapters have the common strength of combining analysis of the legal

process with the political context, and merit extensive use by those beyond legal scholarship who are looking at this period.

On the substantive aspects, the absence of extensive discussion on citizens' rights in the first volume is rectified by the presence of the first chapter of part II by Catherine Barnard and Emilija Leinarte. Much of this chapter is devoted to a useful and close examination of the enforcement of the rights of EU citizens in the UK, with an eye on the post-transition period and future arrangements as part of the 'multi-dimensional puzzle' (p. 129) of the UK's immigration regime(s). The uncertainty about the future is the key theme of the subsequent two chapters, collectively representing the issues of the first phase of the Brexit negotiations. Michele Chang revisits the financial aspects of Brexit by explaining the financial settlement, although there is only scope to briefly discuss what the impact might be on the EU's future budgetary constraints post-Brexit. Although the financial settlement had more than one moment in the spotlight during the negotiations, the comparative lack of post-Brexit public attention to financial arrangements can be contrasted sharply with the topic of the following chapter, on the Irish Border. Here, Colin Hervey devotes much of his insightful chapter to the content and context of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, the conclusion of which was in his view an 'impressive achievement' (p. 167). Although, once again, events have overtaken the way in which the post-Brexit reception of the Protocol – especially those who pushed most fervently for it in the subsequent frenetic period of leading up to the end of the transition period – this chapter is an excellent summary of how it came together in the form that it did, and why. It is recommended reading for anyone (re)visiting the rationale and meaning of the Protocol at the point of its conclusion, in particular with regard to the protection of human rights.

Northern Ireland features strongly in further contributions by Paola Mariani and Giorgio Sacerdoti on future trade relations between the EU and the UK, and Etain Tannam on the future of British-Irish relations after Brexit. The chapters in the final parts, which also include Kenneth Armstrong's contribution on the transition period, Joris Larik on decision-making and dispute settlement, Sionaidh Douglas-Scott on the future of the UK after Brexit and Federico Fabbrini on the future of the EU after Brexit and Covid-19 are well-executed individual contributions, written with authority by knowledgeable contributors in their respective fields. As is the nature of a collection which all the contributions are aware relates to an agreement that would very soon be overtaken by either another post-Brexit agreement (or the absence of one), many of the insights serve as reminders of our thinking at a specific point in time, or in the 'challenges' part, to wider issues which have only limited relationships with the Withdrawal Agreement text itself. The rapid pace of publication, which is in itself impressive, prevents cross-chapter conversations and does not fully avoid the repetition of some points. However, the aims and purpose of the book – to cover developments during a limited time period and a Withdrawal Agreement of which the effects could not be measured fully – are admirably met.

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