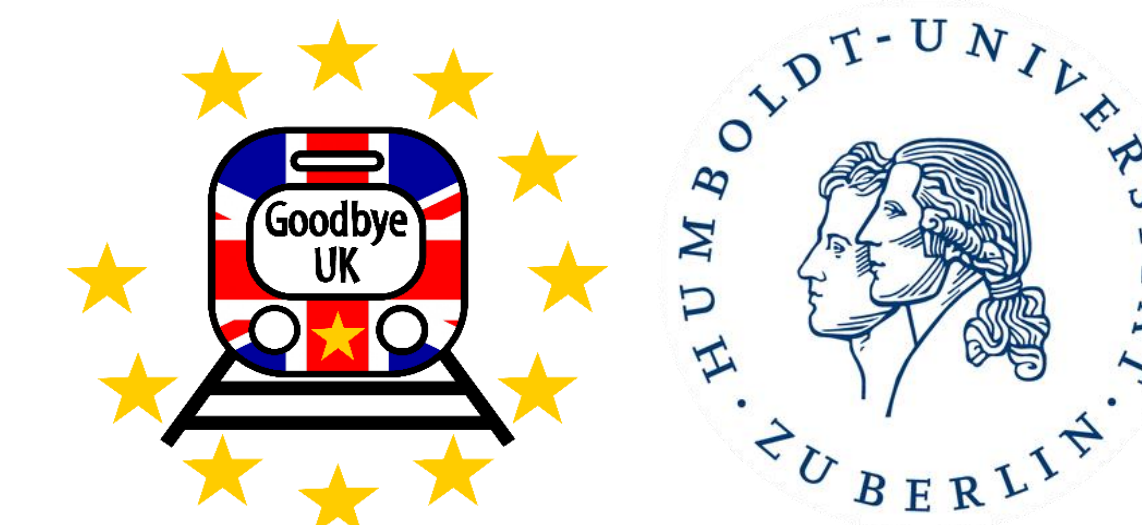


A journey through the UK's political and economic capital



by Leonore Hinz

Whitehall / Downing Street

What is it?

Both located in central London, Whitehall and Downing Street are two streets in a 'cluster of short streets, squares, and governmental buildings adjoining the street[s]' ("Whitehall"). The two often refer to the UK Government, or civil service, due to the density of government buildings in the area.

Who does what?

The UK's parliamentary executive can only lead the country as long as they sustain a majority in parliament, i.e. they derive its legitimacy from parliament. All ministers being members of parliament, the consequence is a fusion of the legislative and executive branches of power. In a situation of executive dominance, the executive controls the legislative branch. The government consists of different bodies with obligations on different levels of administration. The Cabinet is the country's supreme decision-making body which discuss and decide on policy issues then passed on to Parliament for legitimation, amendments or denial. Due to the immense volume of policy issues and the required expertise, most decisions are made in Cabinet committees. The UK's 500,000 civil servants work in different departments and in their intended political neutrality, their role is to advise and subsequently implement government policies. Towards the end of the 20th century, reforms introducing characteristics of the private sector into the management of the public sector (New Public Management) resulted in the creation of agencies to deliver services and several services were transferred to the private sector.

The City

What is it?

The City of London, mostly referred to as The City, is a central London district and a global financial and business centre. Besides, the City of London is the historic centre of London, constituting what used to be the initial settlement of the developing town in medieval times.

Who does what?

As the UK's economic capital, the City houses major international financial actors and headquarters of global firms. In 2016, more than 16,500 business were located in the City, generating around £45bn ($\pm 3\%$ of the UK's GDP ["City Statistics"; Dakers; "Statistics about the City"]). With over 454,700 people, the City's workforce accounts for roughly 9% of London's total employment, employees being comparably young, highly educated and earning approximately twice as much as the national average ("City Statistics"). Around 30% of the City's workforce are not UK citizens, representing its high international relevance. In light of the UK leaving the EU, speculations have risen around the City losing its status as one of the world's main financial hubs, which, considering it being an immense generator of tax receipts for the government, may be detrimental to the national financial balance. The City has benefited greatly from the EU single market and resulting regulations allowing for cost savings especially for non-EU businesses and thus leaving the single market may cause grave economic consequences not only for the UK.

The Crown

What is it?

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy, i.e. while the monarch is the head of state, without democratic legitimacy, she cannot act independently of government, hence her law-making abilities now reside with the UK Parliament and her executive role has been transferred to the head of government. Besides formal functions, the Queen now fulfils the role of representing the state and acts as a symbol for national unity and stability.

Who does what?

In general, the Queen is supposed to be 'above politics', i.e. she remains politically neutral. In relation to the legislative branch, the monarch opens parliament every year at the beginning of each session of Parliament. Furthermore, the royal assent ultimately turns a bill into a valid Act of Parliament. Despite the theoretical option, no monarch has refused Parliament's wishes since 1707. The monarch also retains a special relationship with the Prime Minister, who she appoints and meets with on a regular, usually weekly basis. In the UK's political system, the Crown further designates the Crown Prerogative, or prerogative powers. Previously held by the monarch, prerogative powers now reside with the government, can be used without parliamentary consent and are not subject to judicial oversight. The Bill of Rights limited these powers and should prerogative powers clash with the wishes of Parliament, **the sovereignty of parliament prevails**, the UK's prime constitutional principle. Important prerogative powers include issues of foreign policy, security services, the civil service and, until recently, defence.

Westminster

What is it?

The Palace of Westminster designates the seat of the UK Parliament. Situated on the north bank of the river Thames, the building has an internal area of 112,476m² and contains over 1,100 rooms, the most popular being the Chambers of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Who does what?

The building houses offices, conference rooms and other venues for the members of the bicameral UK Parliament, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Originally the lower house, the House of Commons has been the major decision-making body ultimately since the 1911 Parliament Act. Each of the 650 MPs in the Commons is elected through the first-past-the-post system to represent a constituency for a parliamentary period of 5 years. Nearly all MPs represent political parties and besides obligations to their constituencies, MPs are bound by the whipping system which ensures MPs voting in accordance with the party's intentions. While in theory, Parliament's main function is to scrutinize government actions, in practice, the government party holds a majority in the House of Commons, making it difficult for the opposing party to effectively object government action. The House of Lords, currently composed of 805 members, has come to hold a marginal significance in British politics, only able to delay legislation passed in the House of Commons by one year. The Salisbury Convention prevents the House of Lords from opposing any legislation promised in the governing party's election manifesto. Drawing on experience and expertise, the Lords' main function is to discuss uncontroversial details of a Bill.