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THE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF BREXIT

Abstract

Over the past decade, the European Union has faced numerous turmoil and crises that directly affected its stability and prosperity. Starting with conflicts in Africa, economic crises, uncertainty about partnerships and enlargement, the stability of the Western Balkan countries, terrorist attacks in European cities, to migration and refugee crises. These complex events led to tensions and divisions within the Union, the rise of populist anti-EU parties, and culminated with the decision of the UK to leave the EU. In recent years, Europe has been one of the most developed forms of regional integration on a political, economic and security plan, but the events around Brexit have undermined the unity and the existence of the Union. This historic precedent can have a domino effect on the other EU member states and change the direction of the states towards European security and defence. The paper will analyse the losses and benefits of the United Kingdom from the membership in the Union, as well as the current and future relations of Britain with Europe and the world and the possible implications for the EU's foreign and security policy.

Key words: EU, BREXIT, INTEGRATION AND DISINTEGRATION, SECURITY IMPLICATIONS.

Introduction

The decision of the UK citizens to leave the European Union has triggered strong reactions in the country and the world. In a referendum in June 2016 52% of the total electorate of Britain (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) said they want to leave the Union, 48% voted for remaining in the EU (Hunt and Wheeler, 2018). The results of the referendum at the national level were divided, whereby the English and Welsh people voted for Brexit (exit from the EU), while the Scottish and Northern Irish voters decided that the United Kingdom should stay within the Union. According to these results, it is noted that different nations had different priorities, which leaves space for doubt and tensions around the future of the country.

For some, the departure from the EU was a turning point for the relations between Britain and Europe, the reduction of political, economic and military power in the country and abroad, as well as a possibility for tension and division among nations within the United Kingdom (Reeve and Street, 2016). But for others, Brexit is associated with increased international engagement, leadership and the possibility for return to

the historical roots associated with the term *Pax Britannica*, which refers to the power of Britain during the 19th century as a global hegemon with pronounced naval supremacy (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2018).

Britain's relations with the European Union have a long history of persistence with potentially expressive turbulences and precedents. More than half a century ago, Britain's desire to join the European Economic Community (EEC) was disabled by the French vetoes in 1963 and 1967. According to former French President De Gaulle, Britain represented a fundamentally different type of state than the ones included in the European Community. These events have caused a feeling of powerlessness and isolation of Britain from Europe until 1973 when, together with the Republic of Ireland, they became full members of the EEC.

Later, with the advent of a conservative ruling party headed by Margaret Thatcher, doubts about the European super-state increased. For her, the European community was an unnecessary and irrational project, and most of the problems that the world was facing originated from continental Europe, and the solutions to these problems were outside of it. Her views were Eurosceptic, and she thought that if Britain was part of the European super-state, it would be considered a political mistake of historical sizes. She concluded that Britain still had time to choose a different and better direction for action, and referred to the following: (1) Britain should fundamentally reconsider its relations with the EU and renegotiate in order to ensure national interests and sovereignty; (2) Britain should not reject any system that covers the objectives of the country; (3) NAFTA is the best option the country has been able to join, but other free trade agreements have not been excluded and (4) the interests of the state should be directed globally and should be thought in the global context, and not be limited within the narrower Europe (Thatcher, 2002).

It is noticeable that in the period of Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) the unilateral withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU membership was considered. This suggests that Thatcherism had a deep ideological basis and copied the current political scene, where the new Conservative leader and Prime minister of Britain, Theresa May showed "steel will" to exit the political chaos and negotiations that are of historical significance for the country. The nature of conservatism as a political philosophy concerns the preservation of tradition and what it considers to be the best in a political society and opposes the radical changes (McLean, 1996).

However, 43 years of membership in the Union, which is based on mutual agreements and treaties covering thousands of different areas, makes it difficult for Britain to leave the EU. The procedure and the right of a member state to withdraw from the EU were introduced for the first time with the Lisbon Treaty. Under Article 50 of the Treaty, the Union and the withdrawing state are allowed within a period of 2 years to reach a common agreement and define future mutual relations (Article 50, 2016). According to current negotiations, Britain should officially leave the Union on March 29, 2019.

So far, both parties have reached an agreement on the following three "divorce" areas, which are: (a) protecting the rights of Union citizens in the UK and of UK citizens in the Union; (b) the framework for addressing the unique circumstances in Northern Ireland and (c) the financial settlement (Joint report from the negotiators of the European Union and the United Kingdom Government, 2017).

It is obvious that this is a very long lasting and complex process. It is still necessary to determine the relations after Brexit, which requires the approval of more than 30 national and regional parliaments across Europe, whereby is possible to overcome the time period for withdrawal from the Union.

The security challenges of the United Kingdom after Brexit

Public opinion and debates on Brexit were focused on political and economic aspects, and security and defence issues were marginalized. The paradox is that the campaign for Brexit was based on security issues related to immigration (legal and illegal) as a possible threat to national security and the return of sovereignty from the international institutions. The negotiations so far have been aimed at reducing the number of immigrants, although the United Kingdom does not belong to the Schengen zone, which means that it independently decides on the control of its borders and people.

From among the so-called "four freedoms" (the free movement of people, goods, services and capital), they are concerned the most about trade and migration issues, because over 200 million people and 800 billion euros of international trade are crossing the British borders each year (National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review, 2015).

According to analyses and views, the results of the Brexit referendum negatively affected on social cohesion in the country and beyond. Euroscepticism and anti-immigrant rhetoric have contributed to the emergence of xenophobia, nationalism, racism and other forms of violence by extreme groups. The most vulnerable groups were migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities (Veness, et al., 2016), and this is confirmed by police reports, according to which in a year (after the referendum) the number of hate crimes increased by about 30% (Dearden, 2017). Also, the terrorist attacks in Manchester and London in 2017 suggest that Brexit had serious consequences on the stability and security of the country.

One of the main priorities of each country is to preserve the security and territorial integrity and sovereignty. But the UK's decision to leave the EU has led to a series of internal security risks that could have serious consequences on the United Kingdom's foreign and defence policy.

This is due to the fact that every country that is part of the United Kingdom has full sovereignty over the regulation of its policies. For example, Scottish and Northern Ireland voters on the referendum have declared that they wanted to stay within the European Union, although in the historic vote for independence in 2014, the Scots deci-

ded to stay in the United Kingdom, but after Brexit things could go in the opposite direction. In this sense they would insist on a referendum for an independent state and thus continue as a member of the Union.

The same applies to Northern Ireland, which, besides the question of secession from the United Kingdom, will also insist on a referendum on reunification or unification with the Republic of Ireland, which has been a member state of the EU since 1973. If they do not unite, the two parts of Ireland (the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) would be on the opposite sides of the Union border (Reeve and Street, 2016).

These sensitive issues of disintegration and integration will pose a threat to the unity and future of the island country. These processes precisely will depend on the status of the British nuclear armed forces located in the naval bases in Scotland (BBC News, 2017).

Both in the past and today, the Scottish National Party has aspired to the independence of the country, and has sought to dislocate British nuclear submarines from Scotland, and it is also against independent Scotland being a member of the NATO Alliance. Among other things, the public is also concerned about the status of the Irish serving in the armed forces of the United Kingdom which could have serious implications for the equipment, structuring and the ability to deploy British armed forces in the country and abroad. In addition, there is still a threat of terrorism by violent dissidents originating from Northern Ireland that could further affect the stability and prosperity of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

These security risks and changes were not taken into consideration by the EU and UK security and defence policy planners. The problem is that the UK's National Security Strategy was adopted in November 2015, and the European Security Strategy in June 2016, when the Brexit referendum was held. This means that the events around Brexit have not been planned by either side, therefore, these relatively new strategic documents will have to be updated and cover the issues of post-Brexit events related to the unity of the country, partnerships, border change, international engagement, limited resources, security and defence.

According to the National security strategy, the security objectives of Britain are the following: (a) protect people – at home and abroad, protect the territory, economic security, infrastructure and way of life; (b) project global influence – reducing the likelihood of threats materialising and affecting the UK, protect the interests, and the ones of our allies and partners; (c) promote prosperity – seizing opportunities, working innovatively and supporting UK industry.

The strategic document highlights the challenges that are likely to drive UK security priorities for the next decade and those are: (1) the increasing threat posed by terrorism, extremism and instability; (2) the resurgence of state-based threats and intensification of wider state competition; (3) the impact of technology, especially cyber threats and wider technological developments and (4) the erosion of the rules-based in-

ternational order, making it harder to build consensus and tackle global threats (National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review, 2015).

United Kingdom as a global player - competitor or partner

Great Britain has a unique position that gives it the opportunity to be an important actor in the international relations. No country in the world has such a geostrategic position that allows freedom of action. It lies between three connected circles - one with the state union, the Anglo-American relationship and Europe. Therefore, its interests are directed globally, not only towards the European continent. The United Kingdom is a member of several international organizations such as the UN Security Council, NATO, the G7, the G20, the Commonwealth, the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and the OSCE. So far, the state has participated in the creation of alliances and partnerships with many countries of the world in many areas (Irwin, 2015).

The question is whether the United Kingdom will have less influence in Europe and the world, or it will build new alliances through which it would have a greater role and power?

There are strategic calculations, of course, but in general, Brexit has weakened positions simultaneously in the sense of Britain and the European Union. It is logical that the consequences for Britain will be greater because it is leaving the membership of one of the largest trade organizations in the world. According to the European Commission, Brexit will cost the United Kingdom about 60 billion euros (Barker, 2017).

Therefore, the state is forced to look for alternative pathways for joining new alliances and partnerships. Seen through the prism of soft and hard power in international relations, Britain has the following advantages.

It is the world's leading soft power, which promotes British values and interests, referring to the global influence of English language and culture (through the British Council), the widespread diplomatic service in 85% of the countries in the world and the missions in several multilateral organizations, mass media (such as BBC), and science and technology development. It is also the second largest source of development funding in the world, which spends 0.7% of its GDP on Official Development Assistance. While, according to the World Bank, the country is the fifth economic power in the world (National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review, 2015). Furthermore, it is on the 5th position in the world, according to its annual defence budget of 52.5 billion dollars and is among the top five NATO member states that spend 2% of their GDP on defence (UK Defence in Numbers, 2017).

Observed from political, economic, social and security-military aspects, Britain is one of the three most important and most powerful member states of the Union. For example, it participated in the European defence budget with 21.4% (SIPRI, 2011), and still represents the most powerful military force of the Union. We believe that Brexit will reduce the credibility of the EU globally, especially in the area of common

foreign and security policy. It will also disable the European security compactness and strategic autonomy of the Union in international relations. When it comes to hard power and mutual relations, there are dilemmas about whether they will be mutual competitors or partners on the global stage. In the past, the Big Three - France, Germany and the United Kingdom - decided among themselves on the next directions on the development of the EU, keeping aside the other member states. The Big Three is the one that influenced the common foreign and security policy, and participated in building the European Defence and the EU Battlegroup Concept (Lehne, 2012).

The Saint-Malo Declaration was the first official document between France and the United Kingdom on European Defence and the creation of credible armed forces for autonomous action (Gocevski, Bakreski i Slaveski, 2007) and in London (2010) the UK and France signed an agreement on bilateral cooperation in the field of defence and security. The advantage is that both countries are permanent members of the UN Security Council and the only European nuclear powers, and the defence budgets of these countries together account for about 50% of the total defence expenditures of the Member States of the Union (Ministry of Defence, 2015).

Hence, it is assumed that Brexit will not affect the bilateral agreements between France and Britain, because it is formally not related to the policies of the European Union. But, on the other hand, France and Germany felt betrayed by the UK's decision, so they focused on strengthening the common security and defence capabilities. In 2016, they decided to strengthen a European Security Compact by adopting a joint document titled as "A strong Europe in a world of uncertainties" (Ayrault and Steinmeier, 2016). This is an opportunity for France as the only competitive European force for Britain to take a leading role in the security and military sphere of the EU.

There is a possibility that the tensions among these countries will increase within the NATO. As the second most powerful force of the Alliance, Britain will be forced to face the French-German pillar of the Alliance, as well as the individual countries that participate in NATO and the EU. However, Britain has always been a closer strategic partner of the United States, in the field of security, defence and foreign policy than the Union. Hence, the US-UK partnership could be a strong competition for European countries. In the past, Britain has participated in all missions in order to maintain peace and international security in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and others. As a result of tradition and mutual interests with the United States, it is logical for the British Armed Forces to be under a national command or under the command of NATO, but not under a European command.

In order to overcome the tensions about Brexit, NATO and the EU have decided to strengthen the Euro-Atlantic strategic partnership. As a result, they signed in Warsaw (2016) a joint declaration on the efficient use of resources by both organizations for dealing with future challenges and threats (EU-NATO joint declaration, 2016).

In addition to the membership in NATO, Britain has other unique opportunities to act on the global scene. The country has about five million British nationals living abroad and 14 overseas territories that are in constitutional link with the UK. The ad-

vantage compared to the European countries is that it is a leader of the Commonwealth (formerly British Commonwealth), which includes 53 countries around the world, and together account for 1/3 of the world population. This global partnership allows Britain to build strong relations in security, defence and trade with states such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and with some former British colonies such as India (The Commonwealth, 2018).

The United Kingdom, among other things, is the first major country from the West which decided to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which allows it to build strong ties with Asian countries from China to Indonesia. Currently, Britain is one of the most popular destinations for Chinese investments in Europe (National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review, 2015).

We can conclude from the above mentioned that the UK will not be alone, nor will be an isolated country in the international relations. On the contrary, it has huge national capacities and a range of opportunities for bilateral and multilateral cooperation with new strategic partners from Asia and the world. Hence, the opinion is that Brexit should not be reflected on the partnership with the leading international actors. One of the optimistic scenarios is that the state will be "liberated from the constraints" of the EU and will be able to gain a greater advantage over the member states of the Union, and to "revive" the British Empire.

Conclusion

Just when the world needed a strong and prosperous EU, the United Kingdom decided to leave the Union. The British referendum was one of the most difficult moments for the future and existence of the Union. The processes of disintegration are a serious danger that can eliminate Europe and Britain as actors from the international scene. That is why many were concerned about the economic stability, security and international engagement of the Union and Britain.

On one hand, the Union would be weakened in the field of foreign policy and security-military dimension because Britain is one of the two major powerful European states and one of the most influential diplomatic powers in the world. Also, it is the world's leading soft power. On the other hand, EU membership has more benefits than disadvantages, especially when it comes to economic issues, trade connectivity and integration. So far the European Union has helped certain countries including the UK, to achieve economic growth and progress in several areas. We think that the EU and Britain will continue to be partners, not competitors. The strategic partnership between the Big Three in the field of security and defence will continue in the period after Brexit. Due to economic, security and military power, Britain could get a similar agreement as Norway or Switzerland. Compared to European countries (except France), UK is a global power that has had permanent international engagement in numerous UN, NATO and EU missions. Because of that UK will be forced to renew its credibility outside the EU, and thus take responsibility for preserving the regional and global security.

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