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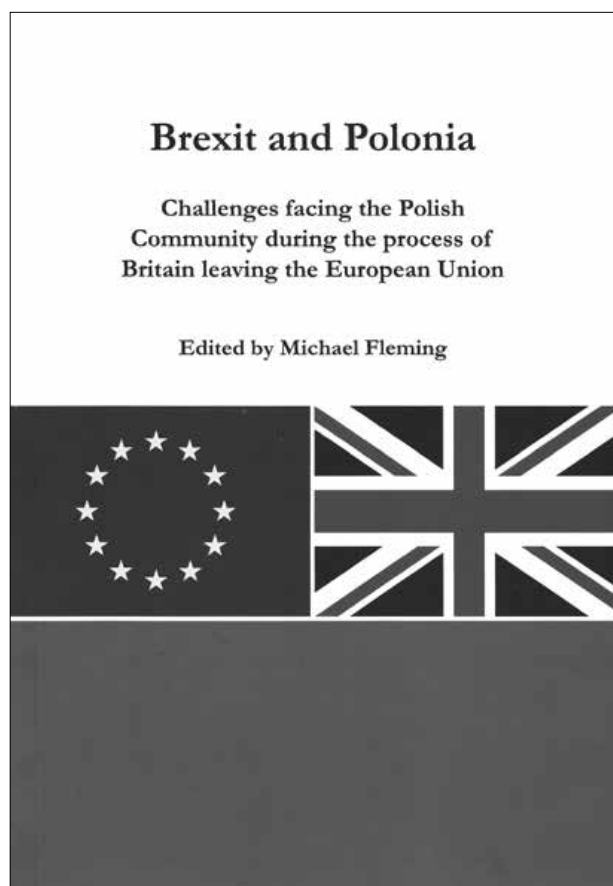
*BREXIT AND POLONIA. CHALLENGES FACING
THE POLISH COMMUNITY DURING THE PROCESS
OF BRITAIN LEAVING THE EUROPEAN UNION,*
ED. BY MICHAEL FLEMING, THE POLISH UNIVERSITY
ABROAD, PUNO PRESS, LONDON, 2018, 154 P.,
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Unsurprisingly, we have been swamped by post-Brexit referendum literature, critical analysis, sociological assessments, policy briefs and political commentaries. After all, this is the most important and far-reaching political decision the British have made in many generations. We are still in the middle of it and will remain in the process for years to come. Hence, in that intellectual maze, it is crucial to hear and assess voices from a range of stakeholders with diverse backgrounds. Brexit, seen as a process, isn't about abstract-sounding issues of fish quotas, passporting rights, customs unions or bilateral agreements. It is ultimately about people's – British and European – daily lives. In its key message for political decision makers the volume edited by Professor Michael Fleming from The Polish University Abroad is timely, crucial, but most of all straightforward. The message is simple: Brexit is not about macro-political shifts. Brexit is about real people, leading real, ordinary lives that are about to be

severely disrupted. Millions of people in the United Kingdom – migrants, non-migrants, British and EU citizens – are going to have to adapt to new social and economic conditions. Among them, a large group of Polish citizens who have their own concerns about what the new, post-Brexit Britain will look like. The majority of them call this country their home. It will be up to the British and European politicians to make sure this home remains a pleasant one. Judging from the content of the book, this will be not an easy task.

The strength of the volume lies certainly in its multi-voiced and pluralistic academic approach to the subject. The Introduction by Prof. Fleming makes compelling arguments and is an obligatory reading for anyone still trying to square – like myself – the contradiction between the respect and admiration for British political traditions, its famous pragmatism and what happened in June 2016. Guided by this overview, the volume brings together a selection of scholars and people very well known in Polish diasporic circles, people who have been active at the heart of the Polish diaspora (some call it Polonia) for decades. One such person is the distinguished Mr Wiktor Moszczyński, who has for years fought the hostile British migration regime on behalf of Polish citizens, and therefore knows a thing or two about the bureaucratic culture of xenophobic hostility at the Home Office (we have had a recent example of it in the Windrush scandal). After all, it was him, among other members of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain, who in the early 1990s campaigned for lifting visa requirements for Polish citizens. Not a lot of people know this, but the fact that since 1993 Polish citizens could travel to the UK without a prearranged visa was due to a handful of well-connected and quite stubborn Polish activists like Mr Moszczyński or Jan Mokrzycki. I wonder if he imagined then that a quarter of century later he would have to make similar arguments to his fellow Brits about the pointlessness of putting up barriers to human mobility. As an active member of a campaign group speaking for over 3 million EU citizens in the UK, he is thus on familiar territory. His assessment makes for sombre reading, but, for those seeing only a glass half empty, there is a distinct tone of hope. His life shows that British civil society isn't toothless and may and should make a change. Similarly, the assessment and synthetic descriptions of the situation of Polish migrants made by Mrs Barbara Drozdowicz and Adriana Górka are crucial for anyone wishing to understand the impact of the Brexit process on individual lives.

These voices from practitioners are mixed with more academic articles in the volume, but luckily they are not immersed in jargon that some readers may



find too heavy. Kathy Burrell, for example, brilliantly anticipates and describes what will probably happen to the entire migration infrastructure underpinning the freedom of movement, highlighting the fact that the new boundaries which are emerging will certainly have a profound impact on people's sense of belonging. It is therefore an additional asset of the volume that the voices of Polish psychologists – Grażyna Czubińska, Agnieszka Golińska, Justyna Kulczyk and Magdalena Łuzniak-Piecha – remind us that all this Brexit mess is highly stressful for millions of people. I don't want to sound monotonous, but again it must be asked – was it really worth it?

The danger of misinterpretation of this volume would be to treat it as a voice of one „ethnic” (whatever it means) community. It is not. It is a fairly straightforward chorus of concerned British residents, some UK citizens, others not, some here since birth, other since a decade or so, who call the United Kingdom their home and suddenly feel that something has been taken away from them. And I am not talking about benefits that come from being an EU Citizen, but of something more soft, yet equally powerful – a sense of security and of feeling at ease in the country we live in.