

Original article

Security of polish economic migrants in Great Britain in the light of Brexit

Katarzyna Gierczak

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wrocław, Poland,

kasia.gie20@gmail.com

INFORMATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The results of the referendum on leaving the European Union by Great Britain have surprised experts from the world of politics, business analysts and immigrant community which functions in the British Isles. British people have decided, by a majority of votes, to shape the future of the UK outside the structures of the European Union. What does this choice mean for the community of Polish immigrants, which numbers almost one million people, working in the United Kingdom? Does Brexit and its consequences constitute a threat to Poles? The aim of this article is to analyse the economic, social and cultural effects of leaving the European Union by Great Britain, from the perspective of the Polish community in the British Isles.

KEYWORDS

Poles, emigrants, Brexit, discrimination, cultural safety



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Introduction

For over a decade, Polish economic emigrants have formed a part of the multicultural mosaic of the British society, thus for several years, they have constituted the largest group of immigrants in the British Isles. Since Polish accession to the European Union, Poles, as part of the European Community, have been able to cross the British border legally and take legal employment in the United Kingdom. Despite changes in the composition of political forces, starting from the government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, representing the Labour Party, and ending at Prime Minister David Cameron at the head of the Conservative Party, the situation of Polish economic emigrants have been stable, despite tightening immigration and social law. However, with the announcement of intentions to carry out the referendum on Britain's membership in the European Union, not only Poles, but the whole immigrant community, in the United Kingdom, observed the possible separation of the UK from the European Union with concern. The Brexit referendum triggered negative consequences, and the increase in xenophobic behaviours and discrimination against Polish emigrants was their practical manifestation. Are the Poles safe in the UK? What were the first implications of the

democratic decision of the British people to leave the European Union? The aim of this article is to analyse the current situation of Polish economic emigrants in the context of events related to the Brexit referendum, held on 23 June 2016, and above all, it is the attempt to answer the questions mentioned above. The objective, formulated in this way, requires the specification of the main research issue, the essence of which is included in the following question: what factors are going to significantly affect the security of Polish economic emigrants in the UK after the Brexit referendum. An assumption that economic factors (increase in commodity prices and depreciation of the British pound) and socio-cultural factors (increase in discrimination and xenophobia) will be among the main factors affecting the security of Polish immigrants after the Brexit referendum, is hypothetical. For the analysis of potential social, economic and cultural consequences of Brexit, there were used non-reactive research methods based on the analysis of sources, including reports and respective literature.

1. The scale of Polish emigration to the UK – since Polish accession to the European Union until today

1.1. The post-accession scale of Polish emigration

Since 1 May 2004, Polish economic emigrants have been able to benefit from the possibility of the free movement of workers within the framework of the European Community. It therefore comes as no surprise that the first years after the Polish accession to the European Union structures were characterised by a huge increase in the scale of economic migration. According to data from the research on the population's economic activity in the years 2002-2004, the number of Poles living outside the country increased by 50% [Okolski and Kaczmarczyk 2005, p. 45]. Without a doubt, United Kingdom and Ireland were among the most popular directions of emigration, which was due to opening their labour markets on 1 May 2004 [Malachowski 2010, p. 68]. To show the scale of the growth of Poles' economic migration before and after Polish accession to the European Union, it is worth analysing the report by the Central Statistical Office from the year 2012. Table 1 compares the pre-accession and post-accession emigration of Poles to selected European countries.

Table 1. The scale of emigration from Poland in the years 2002-2011, given in thousands

Country	2002	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
France	21	30	44	49	55	56	60	60	62
Ireland	2	15	76	120	200	180	140	133	120
Germany	294	385	430	450	490	490	465	440	470
United Kingdom	24	150	340	580	690	650	595	580	625

Source: [Own study based on: *Informacja o rozmiarach...* 2012, p. 3].

The report published by the CSO clearly confirms that the Polish accession to the European Union contributed to a significant increase in the number of migrations from Poland to all European countries shown in Table 1. United Kingdom has been the most

successful among them, as in the years 2002-2011 over 600 thousand Poles have emigrated there. It should be noted, however, that the CSO's report does not take account of seasonal economic emigration, and emigration in order to carry out foreign contracts. Therefore, the data published by the CSO may be underestimated. The underestimation of the scale of Polish emigration to the UK is also proved by statistics on the number of applications for compulsory social insurance, that is, the *National Insurance Number* (NIN). Figure 1 shows the number of applications for NIN submitted by Poles in the years 2004-2012.

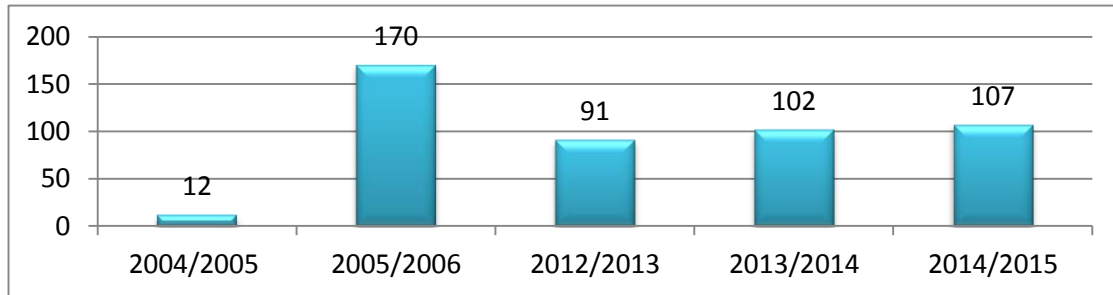


Fig. 1. The number of applications for NIN submitted by Poles in the years 2004-2015, given in thousands

Source: [Own study based on: Trevena 2009; National Insurance... 2015].

At the turn of the year 2004/2005, that is, during the first year from the accession, Poles applied for social insurance only 12 000 times. However, the following year is worthy of notice, as during that year the number of submitted applications increased more than fourteen times. Therefore the following question is very important: how many Polish immigrants are in the British Isles now? The answer to this question is not easy, as each statistical data are based on different methodologies for estimating the size of the community of Polish emigrants. According to the CSO's report from the year 2016, at the end of 2015 there were 720 thousand Polish immigrants in the UK [*Informacja o rozmiarach...* 2016]. However, the report published by the Office for National Statistics indicates that the population of Polish people is larger. According to data published in the *Population by Country of Birth and Nationality* report, in 2014 there were 853 thousands of Polish emigrants on the territory of the United Kingdom. What's more, Poles found themselves in the first place among the largest immigrant communities in the United Kingdom.

1.2. Brexit and Polish economic migration – future migration trends towards the British isles

In the analysis of the scale of Polish emigration to the UK after the Brexit referendum, the question about future migration trends towards the United Kingdom constitutes the most important issue. Will Brexit and its consequences lead to a reduction of the scale of emigration to the UK? Without a doubt, one of the purposes of the referendum and the separation of the UK from the European Union was to limit emigration towards the British Isles. This objective can be achieved by limiting the influx of migrants from European countries, as it is in the case of emigrants coming to Britain from

outside the European continent. This would mean the need to introduce visas and maximum limits of the influx of emigrants to the British Isles. This, in turn, would necessitate leaving the European Economic Area by the United Kingdom. In this way, the European Union's law concerning the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital would not oblige the UK to accept any number of immigrants coming to the United Kingdom.

The most probable scenario is that the United Kingdom, after starting the procedure to leave the European Union, based on article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, and after finishing strenuous bilateral negotiations, will return to its internal immigration law. According to the British law, only those emigrants who inhabit the British Isles for at least 5 years will be entitled to apply for permanent residence on the territory of the United Kingdom [Boronska-Hryniewiecka 2016, p. 2]. It is therefore important to ask the following question. What about those immigrants who came to the United Kingdom later and do not meet the criterion of the minimum duration of stay? Those people who decided to immigrate to the British Isles after the announcement of the Brexit referendum results will be most at risk. Probably they will have to apply for a British visa allowing for their stay, and in case they are refused to obtain it, they will be sent back to their country of origin. This black scenario seems likely, as it is confirmed by the statements of British politicians. Brexit Secretary David Davis, said: "New EU migrants who come to Britain could be sent home to stop a pre-Brexit immigration surge" [Walters 2016]. This means that in the event of a rapid growth in the emigrants' influx to the British Isles, before the formal launch of the procedure based on article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, immigrants may be sent back to their countries of origin. Such declaration of the British Government can slow down the process of migration towards the British Isles, so Polish people who decide to emigrate, may choose other countries, for example Germany or the Scandinavian countries.

2. Security of Polish economic migrants in Great Britain in the light of Brexit – social, economic and cultural aspects

2.1. Economic security of Polish emigrants

Economic security can be seen from different perspectives. Sociologists and anthropologists see it from the micro level, while political scientists rely more often on the traditional approach to security research [Ksiezopolski 2011, p. 31]. According to Patric de Souza, economic security seen from the macro perspective can be defined as the need to ensure physical abilities of the state to operate (infrastructure), while from the micro perspective it is the ability to generate profits by multinational companies or through the opportunities given by migration [De Souza 2000, p. 37]. It is the approach to economic security from the point of view of the functioning of individuals that should become the essence of reflections on the influence of Brexit on Polish people in the British Isles. In order to assess this impact, the first consequences of leaving the European Union by Great Britain and its future, potential effects should be analysed beforehand. The first implications resulting from the Britain's decision concerned sud-

den depreciation of the British pound. Figure 2 shows the value of GBP in relation to PLN in the first weeks after the announcement of the Brexit referendum results.

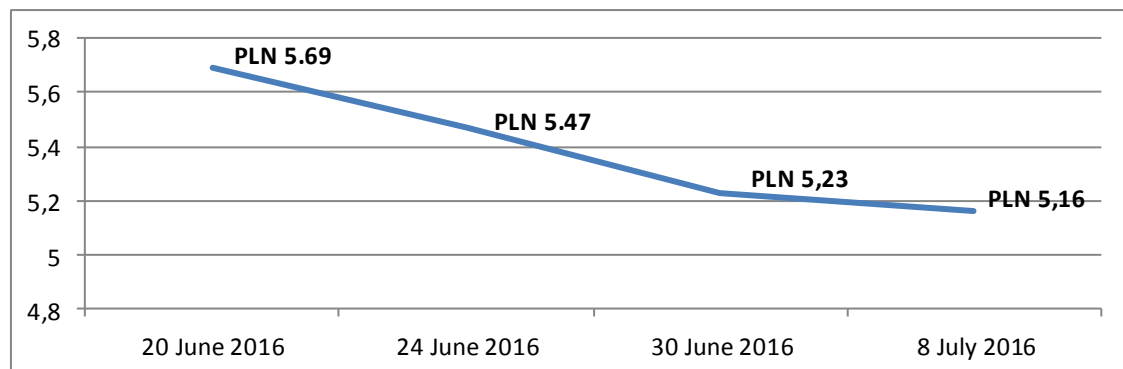


Fig. 2. Rate of GBP in relation to PLN in the first weeks after the announcement of the Brexit referendum results

Source: [Stooq 2017].

Between 20 June and 8 July, the value of GBP in relation to PLN fell by about 9%. Such rapid decrease was due to the fact that even eurosceptic experts and financiers did not fully believe in the possible separation of the UK from the European Union. A lower value of GBP not only affects the lowering of the standard of living of Polish emigrants who live in the British Isles, but it also significantly influences financial capital transferred to families living in Poland. However, lowering of the GBP value in relation to PLN is not the only threat resulting from leaving the European Union by Great Britain. The future of Polish entrepreneurs, running their business activity in the UK, is now becoming one of the most important issues. How will the Brexit affect further functioning of Polish entrepreneurs in the British Isles?

The influence of Brexit on the economic security of Polish entrepreneurs depends largely on the extent to which United Kingdom will leave specific areas of the common market. Therefore, the question concerning its further operation within the European Economic Area is the key issue. According to the latest announcement of the Prime Minister Theresa May, published in 12 points, on the priorities in the process of leaving the European Union by Great Britain, the British Government is planning “hard Brexit” [Watts 2017]. Such solution would mean leaving the common European market and exemption from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. This black scenario of the Brexit course will undoubtedly affect Polish entrepreneurs on the territory of the United Kingdom. According to estimates made by Euler Hermes' economists, separation of Great Britain from the European Union may lead to the following consequences:

1. If the United Kingdom leaves the European Union structures without prior conclusion of a free trade agreement (FTA), the number of insolvencies may increase by 1700 British companies by 2019.
2. If it does not come to the signing of the free trade agreement outside the UK, Belgium, Netherlands and Ireland will suffer the most – and the number of insolvencies will increase respectively by +1.5% + 2.0% and + 2.5%.

3. As a consequence of the Great Britain separation from the European Union, the value of its exports may drop by up to £30 billion within three years.
4. Reduction of the Polish companies' level of export will also be noticeable [Euler Hermes 2016].

In the further part of the economic analysis, the authors point to the Brexit consequences from the point of view of Polish entrepreneurs operating in the UK market. According to estimates, the losses of Polish producers after the separation of Great Britain from the European Union may reach up to 700 million EUR, and industries among the most vulnerable to the loss are listed in the following order: food and groceries, electronics manufacturers, automotive industry, chemical industry and manufacturers of furniture and machine parts.

While analysing the economic impact of Brexit, a closer look should also be taken at the report of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on the impact of Brexit on the future of the British economy. According to OECD analysts, separation of Great Britain from the European Union will weaken GDP, which will be reflected by the costs of living of British society. Figure 3 shows the influence of Brexit on GDP of Great Britain in the long term.

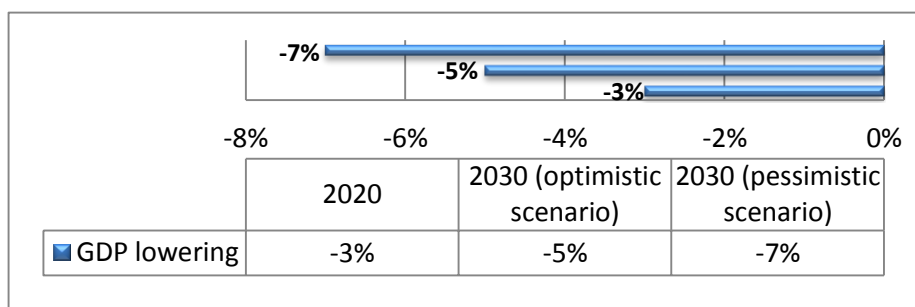


Fig. 3. The influence of Brexit on GDP of Great Britain in the long term

Source: [The economic consequences... 2016, p. 7].

Forecasts prepared by the OECD clearly show a reduction in the UK GDP in each of the adopted variants, compared to the level of British GDP in case of the decision to stay in the structures of the European Union. Factors which will contribute to the lowering of GDP include: lack of access to the common European market, restriction of access to markets of non-EU countries, limitation of immigration, reduction of the income from direct foreign investments caused by the limitation of investments on the territory of the United Kingdom, and less openness and innovation weakening technical progress and productivity [The economic consequences... 2016, p. 6-7]. Forecasts on the lowering of the UK GDP will affect primarily the British society and Polish immigrant community. Figure 4 shows the impact of the forecast reduction of GDP on the costs of maintaining British households.

The reduction of the UK GDP will lead to significant rise of costs of maintaining British households, in 2020 up to 2200 pounds per year, while in the year 2030, depending on a chosen scenario, between 3200 and 5000 pounds per year, in accordance with cur-

rent prices in the UK. Less money in British households will lead to the reduction of consumption and to frugality of citizens, which in turn will affect businesses operating on the territory of the British Isles, which can experience difficulties in selling manufactured goods. To conclude, separation of Great Britain from the European Union will undoubtedly affect the functioning of Polish economic emigrants in the context of economic security. In fact, negative economic forecasts concerning the British economy, apply to all residents of the United Kingdom, so hard Brexit will influence both the British and immigrant community.

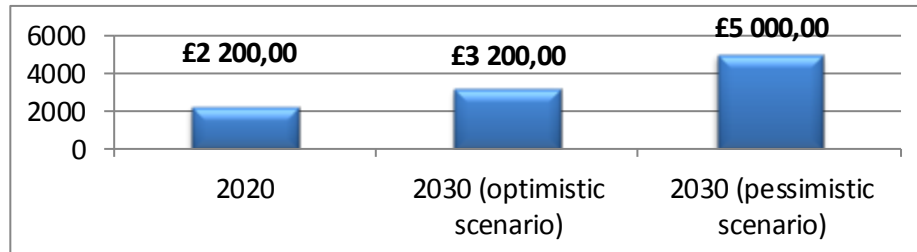


Fig. 4. The impact of Brexit and UK GDP reduction on the costs of maintaining a household
 Source: [The economic consequences... 2016, p. 7].

2.2. Brexit and socio-cultural security

Social security, also known as socio-cultural security, is one of the five most frequently mentioned sectors of security [Czaputowicz 2003, p. 22]. When considering the social security sector from the perspective of the functioning of Polish emigrants in the British Isles, two areas of security are particularly noteworthy, namely the cultural area and social area. Cultural area refers to local communities or specific nations in relation to representatives of other nations characterised by different system of values, language used, or faith. Cultural differences which create religious, race and language divisions are the determinant which generates threats in the cultural area [Brzezinski 2013, p. 9]. The existence of discrimination, xenophobia or racism are primarily indicated among the examples of threats in this area. The social area is associated with insufficient amount of resources necessary for existence, and consequently, the need to exercise a social assistance from the state. When analysing the British system of social assistance, it shall be noted that since David Cameron has become the Prime Minister of the UK, the possibility to benefit from social assistance has been limited. The limitation of access to British social assistance is supposed to keep the financial resources, allocated for immigrants, in the British budget and, secondly, to reduce emigration towards the British Isles of those emigrants, for whom the purpose of arrival is only to benefit from the British social system. The plausibility of the introduction of restrictions for newly arrived emigrants who work and legally pay taxes to the British budget is the only controversy. Is depriving them of their material support from the state, in the form of benefits (Child benefit, Child Tax Credit, Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit), consistent with the law? Certainly the British Government should treat working Britons, Poles and representatives of other nationalities equally, as long as they meet formal requirements.

United Kingdom is a multicultural state inhabited by representatives of various denominations, nations and religions, and therefore it is called the European melting pot of cultures. Such a great cultural variety of the UK creates conditions for the formation of negative attitudes, such as discrimination or xenophobia. Are Polish emigrants in the UK exposed to such risks? Figure 5 shows the number of crimes motivated by a different race or ethnic origin in England and Wales in recent years.

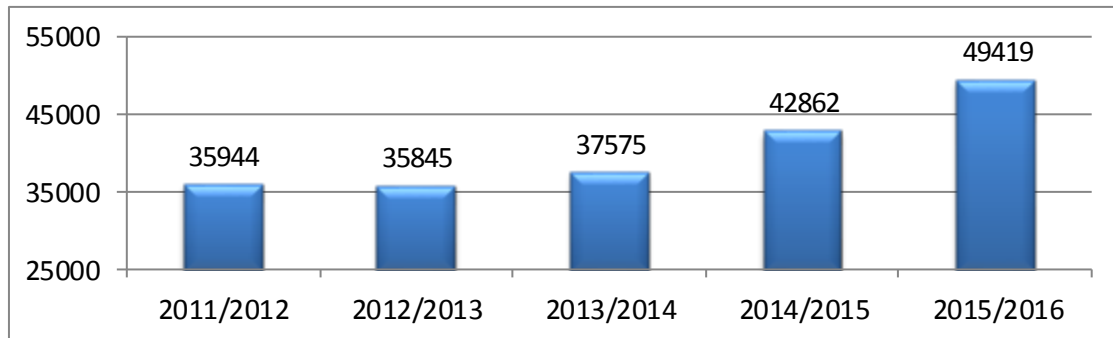


Fig. 5. Crimes motivated by a different race or ethnic origin in England and Wales in the years 2011-2016

Source: [Own study based on: Corcoran and Smith 2016, p. 2].

According to data presented in Figure 5, the number of crimes motivated by a different race or ethnic origin in England and Wales has been growing year by year. Comparing 2011/2012 and 2015/2016, we realise that the number of such crimes recorded by the British police rose by over 25%. The Brexit referendum has undoubtedly made an impact on the increase in xenophobic behaviours registered in the British Isles in recent years. Opponents of Britain's membership in the European Union structures ran a campaign against immigrant community. To show the impact of the referendum on the increase in xenophobic behaviours it is worth analysing data from the report prepared by the British police, which show the percentage increase in such crimes a week before and a few weeks after the announcement of the Brexit referendum results. Figure 6 shows the percentage increase in crimes motivated by hatred from June to August 2016 in Great Britain in relation to data from the previous year.

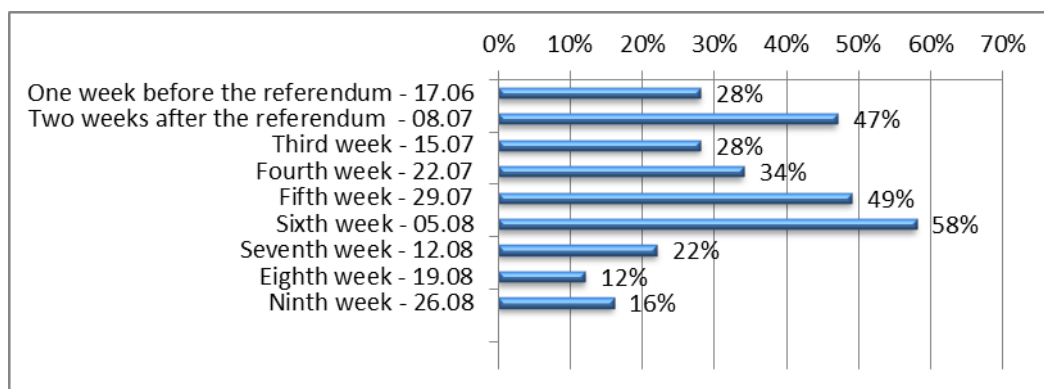


Fig. 6. Percentage increase in crimes motivated by hatred from June to August 2016 in Great Britain in relation to data from the previous year.

Source: [Own study based on: Travis 2016].

The data presented in Figure 6 clearly show an increase in the number of hate motivated crimes, both during a week before the referendum, and a few weeks after the announcement of the results, in comparison to the same period last year. This data is confirmed by numerous incidents against Poles, motivated by nationality, widely publicized by the Polish and British media. Examples of such behaviours include, inter alia: xenophobic graffiti on the Polish Social and Cultural Association's building in London, laminated cards with offensive slogans urging Poles to go back to their country, battery of two Poles in Harlow because they communicated in their native language, resulting in the death of one of them, or battery of a Polish woman in the London underground because of her Polish nationality. Brexit have caused specific socio-cultural risks, and Polish people are more and more often their target.

Conclusions

United Kingdom has been one of the main directions of Polish emigration for over a dozen years. Poland as a Member State of the European Union could, like the United Kingdom, benefit from the freedom of *movement of persons, goods, services and capital*. On 23 June, when the vision of Brexit was slowly becoming fact, experts, analysts and single citizens were analysing the potential impact of the Britain's decision. The greatest immigrant community living in the British Isles, that is the community of Polish economic emigrants, has found itself in the centre of these events. While analysing Brexit economic, social and cultural consequences, it should be noted that the referendum results affect various aspects of the security of Poles living in the United Kingdom. The hypothesis, included in the introduction, that economic factors (increase in commodity prices and depreciation of the British pound) and socio-cultural factors (increase in discrimination and xenophobia) will be among the main factors affecting the security of Polish immigrants after the Brexit referendum, has been confirmed.

Polish entrepreneurs running their business activity on the territory of the United Kingdom are one of the groups which may experience negative consequences of Brexit. Long-term forecasts concerning the British economy and the reduction of the British GDP, are equally alarming. While speaking of the negative socio-cultural consequences, the increase in xenophobic behaviours against the whole immigrant community should be noted. Reduction of the number of hate motivated crimes, should be one of main priorities of the British Government, which would be reflected by the sense of security of Polish economic emigrants. It should be noted that in order to be able to fully assess the scope of the Brexit impact on the functioning of Polish people in the British Isles, specific policy decisions on the part of the British Government are needed as well as a series of bilateral negotiations, which will eventually result in a form of new partnership between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

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Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

Author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. Author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

ORCID

Katarzyna Gierczak – The author declared that she has no ORCID ID's

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Biographical notes

Katarzyna Gierczak – M.A. – graduated from the general Tadeusz Kosciuszko Military Academy of Land Forces in Wrocław, at present a first-year doctoral student at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Wrocław. The main area of scientific interests focuses on international relations, including in particular the issues related to security of Polish emigrants who are living in multicultural British society.

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