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Historical Determinants of the British Separateness in the Context of Brexit

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The article aims at identifying and discussing historical determinants of British/English separateness.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: Brexit is the sign of disintegration tendencies within the EU. The decision taken by the British society in June 2016 regarding withdrawal from the EU disrupted the dynamics of the integration processes. Brexit reflects the British separateness. Determinants of the British separateness were studied with the application of the following research methods: literature studies, critical thinking, inductive and deductive reasoning, nomothetic analysis.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The line of reasoning consists of three essential elements. At first, Brexit literature review was conducted in order to identify the research gap. The next part focuses on the dynamics of the process of Brexit. The final part concentrates on the analysis of sources of separateness of England/Great Britain.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The conducted research and analysis made it possible to confirm hypothesis according to which Brexit is yet another example of separateness of Great Britain, while separateness of Great Britain results from numerous determinants (including historical ones) and history brings reasons for and indications of its separateness.

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CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMEDATIONS: The specific path of England to the position of world leader has left its mark not only on social relations, but also on the mentality of the English. It confirmed their belief in the uniqueness and difference as compared to other nations. This regularity has been confirmed by the referendum on leaving the EU. The British separateness should be considered as essential factor in the process of post-Brexit relations between the EU and the UK in regard to political aspects and practical issues.

Keywords:
Brexit, Great Britain, history, separateness

1. INTRODUCTION

The result of referendum held on June 23rd, 2016 changed both the image of the European Union (EU) and the international position of the United Kingdom (UK). Brexit, i.e. the process of the UK's withdrawal from the EU was supposed to be difficult and complicated; however, in 2016 not many experts anticipated the situation we experienced in June 2019: with Brexit deal having been negotiated and signed, though not ratified by the UK's Parliament and the EU's decision to agree for *brextension* till October 31st, 2019 and – further – till January 31st, 2020. Since 2016 there have been many research projects undertaken in the field of possible economic, political and social effects of Brexit for the EU, the UK and individual European and non-European economies. There is, however, a gap in scientific literature in regard to the identification of historical determinants of Great Britain's separateness in the context of Brexit. Authors made an attempt to identify and discuss separateness of the UK in the context of Brexit and from historical perspective.

Authors formulated the following research questions:

- What factors explain British separateness?
- What are the main elements of UK separateness during the period of EU membership?
- What historical phenomena prove British separateness?

The roots of "English dissimilarity" in relation to continental Europe states can be seen in the Middle Ages already. The island location of

England forced self-sufficiency and that's why the local population followed its own paths, which was related to the implementation of alternative solutions in economic and socio-political life (socio-economic and legally-political specificity). Therefore, the sources of English uniqueness should be considered on three levels: economic, social and political. They decided not only about the alternative way of economic development, but also the emergence of the conviction of exceptionalism and otherness among the English.

The island location and specific features of the English determined the specificity and the uniqueness of England (and since 1707 Great Britain), which contributed to:

- The domination (predomination) in the European economic life, as a result of the 1st wave of industrial revolution; in this way England charted the directions of development of industrialized countries (in the first decades of the 19th century, England gained a leading position in both the economic and political spheres) (Gray, 2017);
- A different perception of the world, including the place and role of England/Great Britain in the dynamically changing economic and political reality.

The achieved results confirmed the hypothesis according to which separateness of the UK has a long, multi-century history; UK's participation in the European integration project was also quite specific and it did not reduce the abovementioned separateness.

2. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Hypotheses: Numerous historical factors and phenomena explain and prove British separateness. Brexit is yet another example of separateness of Great Britain.

Methods: The research was conducted with the application of the following research methods: literature studies, critical thinking, inductive and deductive reasoning, as well as nomothetic analysis.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The decision to use Article 50 of TEU was made by Prime Minister D. Cameron during the parliamentary elections campaign in 2015 in order to get additional votes from Eurosceptical citizens. Cameron's decision to organize the referendum on the continued participation of the UK in the EU was taken without a real belief that the referendum result would be as it actually was. Brexit has been widely discussed in scientific literature. There have been numerous studies regarding the results itself and its implications and possible political, economic and social effects of leaving the EU by the UK for the UK, the EU, individual EU Member States and non-EU economies. Arnorssona and Zoega (2018) focused on the referendum results by age, income and education. Alabrese, Becker, Fetzer, Novy (2019) made an attempt to prove that voting "leave" was strongly associated with older age, white ethnicity, low educational attainment, infrequent use of smartphones and the Internet, receiving benefits, adverse health and low life satisfaction. Bachmann, Sidaway (2016) indicated the impact of right-populism, racism, ultra-nationalism and socioeconomic inequalities on the results of Brexit referendum. Liberinia, Oswald, Proto, Redoano (2019) proved strong influence of feelings about individual financial situation on the way of voting in the 2016 referendum. Shaw, Smith, Scully (2017) indicated the differences between the Leave campaign (which focused more consistently on a smaller set of campaign themes and contributed more details to those themes, and focused on their own core issues) and the Remain campaign (which shared more information but across a broader range of themes and was much less consistent) and stated that better quality of the Leave campaign partly influenced the overall result of the referendum. The Brexit campaign was also studied by Cooper (2016). Breeze (2018) stressed the fact that representation of social actors underpinned ideology in media discourse and something like productive symbiosis emerged between political and tabloid populism. Daoa, McGroarty, Urquhart (2019) evaluated the impact of Brexit referendum on the situation on currency markets. Plakandaras, Gupta, Wohar (2017) studied the depreciation of the pound post-Brexit. Li (2019), Aristeidis, Elias (2018), Oehler, Horn, Wendt (2017), Schiereck, Kiesel, Kolaric (2016), as well as Davies, Studnicka

(2018) analyzed the influence of the shock of Brexit decision and the uncertainty of Brexit on stock markets. Samitas, Polyzos, Siriopoulos (2018) tested short-term and long-term effects of Brexit on financial stability on both the UK and the EU. Lavery, McDaniel, Schmid (2018) focused on the evaluation of possible changes in the geography of European financial competition after Brexit and tried to assess the chances of Frankfurt and Paris as potential new leaders of financial competition in Europe. Pawlas (2017) studied trade relations between the UK and the EU in the context of Brexit. Hallett (2019) focused on the economic effects of the UK dis-engagement from free trade association after Brexit. Steinberg (2019) assessed the impact of Brexit on British foreign trade after actual leaving the EU with focus on the uncertainty of trade policies that will replace the common trade policy of the EU and proved that uncertainty would cause immediate harm to the UK economy. Henökl (2018) concentrated on the assessment of possible impact of Brexit on EU external policy, particularly on development policy. Mold (2018) studied the significance of Brexit on African economies (mostly in regard to trade, investment, remittances and development cooperation). Political aspects of the UK leaving the EU, namely the implications of its withdrawal from EURATOM, were analyzed by Callen, Takamasa, Toma (2019). Le Page (2016) studied the implications of the UK leaving the EU on the condition of natural environment. Babonneau, Haurie (2018) and Parkes (2016) focused on the likely impact of Brexit on European climate policy, while Ziv, Watson, Young, Howard, Tanentzap (2018) indicated potential impact on energy, water and food markets in the UK. The research of Sharf (2016) focused on challenges for cyber-security industry resulting from regulatory changes in the field of information exchanges after Brexit. Fleming (2018) pointed to possible implications of the UK leaving the EU on market of science (including labor market in the area of scientific activity, research and development). Pawlas (2016) indicated short-term and long-term effects of Brexit and discussed challenges for the EU resulting from Brexit.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Brexit – what do we know as of January 2020?

D. Cameron promised the British society in 2013 to organize EU referendum in accordance with Article 50 (*Lisbon Treaty => Treaty on European Union & Comments* => Title 6 *Final Provisions => Article 50*) assuming the 2015 general elections' victory of Conservative Party. The official date of the referendum was June 23rd 2016. The question asked in the 2016 referendum was: "Should the UK remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?" With over 30 million people voting on June 23rd 2016, the turnout was high at 72.2%. 48.1% (16.1 million) voted "remain," while 51.9% (over 17.4 million) voted "leave" (BBC, 2016c). The referendum results differed substantially by regions and nations. "Leave" option won in England (53.4% voted "leave") and Wales (52.5% voted "leave"). "Remain" option won in Scotland (62.0% voted "remain") and Northern Ireland (55.8% voted "remain"). Age was another significant factor determining the way the UK citizens voted. Generally, older voters were more likely to vote for Brexit (60% voted for Brexit in the age group 65+) and younger voters more often decided to vote for the UK in the EU (73% voted "remain" in the age group 18-24). After the Referendum D. Cameron resigned from the Prime Minister position and was replaced by T. May. The official notification of the UK's intention to leave the EU was presented on March 29th, 2017. "Divorce" negotiations began in June 2017 and lasted till November 2018. They included both the transitional period and the outline of the objectives for future relationships between the UK and the EU. Many experts discussed the possible effects of soft Brexit and hard Brexit (CER, 2014; Babonneau, Haurie, Vielle, 2018; Parkes, 2016; Sekeris, 2019; Steinberg, 2019), the likeliness of the adoption of Norway model, Swiss model, Turkey model or Canada model, as well as the possible elements of a completely new type of agreement (HM Government, 2016; Pawlas, 2016), the implications of no-deal Brexit and WTO membership only (Jackson & Shepotylo, 2018). Even though the solution regarding future relations between the UK and EU were created, the Withdrawal Agreement (i.e. the so-called Brexit deal) was not ratified by the UK Parliament, though there were several

attempts of ratification (1st – January 15, 2019: 202 votes for Brexit deal and 432 against it, 2nd – March 13, 2019: 242 votes for T. May's Brexit deal and 391 votes against it, and 3rd – March 29th, 2019: 286 votes for Brexit deal and 344 against it). Time passed and the situation got more and more complicated. On March 20th, 2019, the UK Parliament asked the EU for postponing the date of leaving the EU till June 30th, 2019. On March 21st, 2019, the EU agreed to postpone Brexit till May, 22nd 2019 if the UK ratifies the deal and till April, 12th 2019 if the Withdrawal Agreement is not ratified. On March 27th, 2019, the UK Parliament voted on the following issues/variants: 1– Brexit cancellation if Brexit deal is not ratified, 2 – access to Single European Market, 3 – participation in European Economic Area, 4 – leaving the EU on April 12th without the deal (no-deal Brexit), 5 – customs union with the EU, 6 – permanent customs union with Single European market participation, 7 – Brexit-deal referendum, 8 – further negotiation with the EU (UK Parliament, 2019). No agreement was reached however (neither to ratify the deal, nor for no-deal Brexit, or any abovementioned option). The scenario of negotiating permanent and complex customs union with the EU was closest to obtaining majority (with 264 votes for and 272 votes against). Prime Minister T. May even tried to persuade the members of the UK Parliament to agree to the Withdrawal deal she negotiated with the EU, vowing to resign from the post of Prime Minister if her Brexit deal is passed through Parliament. No ratification of Withdrawal Agreement accompanied with another UK's request for postponement created further complications for the EU and its 27 Member States. Finally, the EU27 decided for the extension of the Article 50 till October 31st, 2019 with an option to terminate UK membership earlier if the Withdrawal Agreement is passed by the UK Parliament before then. Under this extension, the UK had to take part in the 2019 European Parliament election scheduled for May 2019 or leave on 1 June 2019. The UK organized the elections to European Parliament in May 2019 (and elected 73 Members of European Parliament) due to the fact that it was still treated as a Member State of the EU in June 2019. The next *brextension* was set for Ocotber 31st 2019, and the final one for January 31st 2020. However, interim period in EU-UK relations will last till 31st December, 2020. This time will be used for UK-EU negotiations relating to their future relations. If the negotiations do

not bring the agreement, in 2021 Brexit will result in restoration of customs control and the need to have a passport when crossing the border; it will cause difficulties for transport companies and reappearance of restrictions on access to the British labor market. Still not knowing the details regarding the future of UK relations with the EU after the end of 2020, it is important to study British separateness and to identify its determinants.

4.2. Separateness of the United Kingdom in the European Union

There are many issues which confirm separateness of the UK during the period of EU membership. The UK did not form the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, though the mining sector was truly important for the British economy then. The UK did not participate in the creation of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community in 1957. Instead the UK became a leader for the creation of an alternative regional integration grouping based exclusively on industrial free trade, i.e. the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which was formed in 1960 by Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Undoubtedly the UK played the role of a leader in the EFTA. Such a position was of great importance for the UK as it tried to retain as much as possible of its influence and role in global international affairs. The UK applied for membership in the European Communities a couple of years after the creation of the EFTA. The reason for the UK's application, however, was not true willingness to participate in intense integration but attempt to avoid the danger of being marginalized. Finally, the UK joined the European Communities in 1973 (partly due to the French vetoes in 1963 and in 1967) (Troitiño, Chochia, & Kerikmäe, eds., 2018). The position of the UK towards the European integration, however, remained quite specific. The UK tried to push the integration process towards a free trade economy rather than political integration. The UK did try to get as many opt-out clauses as possible and it required the possibility not to participate in those areas of integration which it did not find useful. The following issues should be stressed here:

- The UK stayed out of euro zone and out of ERM II;
- The UK did not participate in Schengen area;
- The UK successfully negotiated the rebate regarding its contribution to the EU budget;
- The UK obtained a "clarifying protocol" according to which Charter of Fundamental Human Rights did not extend the ability of the European Court of Justice to find UK law inconsistent with the Charter;
- The UK had the right to opt-out Lisbon Treaty legislation relating to justice and home affairs;
- The UK did not conclude the Fiscal Pact.

It was particularly difficult for the UK to accept the need for passing part of the authority from national level to the EU institutions. Moreover, even though the UK was a member of the EU it did treat transatlantic relations and cooperation with the United States as more important than the European issues. The UK seemed to treat the relations with the United States as a priority. The issue of securing special political and economic ties with the United States was of vital significance for the UK. Such an attitude was reflected – among others – in strong UK-US trade relations (much stronger than in the case of other EU Member States).

Even at the time of the EU membership, the UK underlined its separateness. The UK made every effort to take part in the European integration processes with as many exceptions as possible. The EU legislation applied selectively to the UK. The UK was a member state with the biggest number of opt-outs on key integration legislation.

4.3. Economic and political sources of separateness of England / Great Britain

There are numerous historical determinants of separateness of England/Great Britain. Due to the limited scope of the paper, only selected elements were described below, including crucial aspects relating to: changes in agriculture and agrarian revolution, industrial production development, political and systemic changes.

As far as changes in agriculture and agrarian revolution are concerned, the English economy came to commodity and money economy

in the first decades of the 11th century, which resulted in stabilization of economic conditions and development of agriculture based on great land property. Landowners, having adequate cash resources, conducted an intensive economy and benefited from technical, managerial and organizational innovations (including modern production organization). Commodification of agricultural production contributed to higher productivity, improvement of living conditions, it also implicated the eradication of serfdom and the development of lease. Considerable surplus in agriculture production resulted in stratification of peasantry in the English countryside, which led to social and economic advancement of rich peasants (yeomen farmers) and tenants (copyholders) at the expense of feudal owners and to pauperization of rural poor. It also contributed to the creation of free labor force, which favored social division of labor, development of urban centers and manufactory production (Cameron & Neal, 2014; Mączak, 1967; Skodlarski, 2014; Szpak, 2003; Wickham, 2018; Zins, 2001). This is how the ground for future industrialization and construction of early-capitalist socioeconomic order was prepared. Technical and organizational progress, increase in productivity and wealth, flourishing of cloth making in reborn cities contributed to the agrarian revolution, associated with the system of enclosures in England. Reconstruction of production relations in the English agriculture was connected with: emergence of individual property system in agriculture, stratification of the old gentry and strengthening of economic and political position of the new gentry, gradual reduction of employment in agriculture, improvement of material position and emancipation of rural population, liquidation of feudal residue and development of more progressive socioeconomic phenomena, de-population of villages and urban development (Bidwell, 1985; Black, 1997; Frysztacki & Radwan-Prąglowski, 1996; Głąbicka, 2001; Kaliński, 2008; Małowist, 2006; Wojnarski, 2004).

Reduction of English agriculture in the 15th century significantly determined urbanization process and manufacture production, which later evolved into industrial production. New urban residents created a market for rural products and forced the development of crafts and trade, which in turn stimulated the development of internal market and international trade relations. (Cameron & Neal, 2014; Galbraith, 1991; Spiegel, 1971; Zagóra-Jonszta, 2000).

Changes in agriculture and positive demographic tendencies created favorable conditions for fast development of cloth and textile industry. Cloth export positively affected foreign trade and implicated rising wealth of merchants and craftsmen. The aforementioned conditions favored and stimulated the transition from small manufacturing to the manufacture. The rapid development of economic potential and the privileged position in international trade and shipping made England an economic power and in the 17th century the British colonial empire was created. (Black, 1997; Cameron & Neal, 2004; Małowist, 2006; Zins, 2001; Lee & Paine, 2019).

Pro-market and pre-industrial changes in the English economy, as well as pro-liberal attitude of the society prepared the ground for innovative revolution in industrial production in 2nd half of the 18th century. The industrial revolution associated with a wave of inventions and innovations included technical, economic and social changes, in that: mechanization of production, establishment of a factory system, introduction of the principles of economic calculation, transition from the rural society to the urban society, acceleration of the urbanization process and lifestyle changes.

Pro-capitalist and pro-liberal economic and social transformations have made England/Great Britain a leader in the creation of capitalist reality. To this day, Great Britain is one of the richest countries. It favors the manifestation of the otherness, dissimilarity, specificity and exceptionalism of the British. Modern production organization methods and modern management methods used by English producers, merchants and bankers determined the efficiency of the British economy. New economic and social realities favored the liberalization (democratization) of political and economic life, i.e. the birth of liberal economic and political thought, which opted for freedom, equality before the law, freedom of economic activity and private property. The new economic and social order built a conviction of the British uniqueness and exceptionalism among the British. Moreover, it created the belief that the British had the right to act in accordance with their own interests and beliefs.

Changes in socioeconomic life contributed to changes in the political (and later civic) sphere, which forced the introduction of new systemic solutions. At the turn of the 12th and the 13th centuries the state monarchy system was implemented, which replaced the feudal

monarchy with the strong position of the ruler. The new regime strengthened the role of state society (Wickham, 2018; Zins, 2001).

Magna Charta Liberatatum proclaimed in 1215 built the foundations of the constitutional order and civil liberties, as it limited the arbitrariness of the ruler in tax and court matters. The provisions of the Charter set out the political, economic and judicial benefits of the lords and the church feudal (to a lesser extent they protected the interests of knights, rich middle-class and free peasants). In the 2nd half of the 14th century the Parliament was divided into House of Lords and House of Commons. Both chambers jointly controlled the ruler's policies, decided on taxes and passed new laws. The solutions developed in the 14th century have survived for centuries and they do affect the current political life of Great Britain (Wickham, 2018; Zins, 2001).

At the turn of the 15th and the 16th centuries, the process of transition from a centralized state monarchy to the constitutional monarchy with the parliamentary-cabinet system of government began (with a short episode of absolute monarchy). The transition process was supported by additional factors, including reformation (Henry VIII schism contributed to the construction of a new society promoting economic activity, work ethos and saving) and competition for colonies (with a positive impact on the primary capital accumulation and the pace of economic development) (Ferguson, 2007; Skrzydło & Orłowski, 2007).

The economic and political aspirations of pro-industrially oriented society led to an open conflict with the Stuarts. Grand Remonstrance was announced in the Parliament in 1641. Parliament's attitude led to civil war and ultimately contributed to the victory of the parliamentary monarchy and the weakening of the position of the king (Zins, 2001).

In the 17th century the English bourgeoisie supported by the new nobility increased the scope of the liberties: *Habeas Corpus Act* (1679) guaranteed personal inviolability to each person, *Bill of Rights* (1869) limited the royal power and extended the powers of Parliament, *Toleration Act* (1689) introduced freedom of religion, *Act of Settlement* (1701) enshrined the principle of ministerial responsibility before Parliament as the supreme authority in the state (Zins, 2001). The scope of power of English Parliament increased gradually from tax powers, through co-decision and law-making towards the actual control of the king and government (as observed at present).

5. DISCUSSION

Experts studying the issue of UK-EU relations do agree on specificity of the UK's membership in the EU. Participation in the project of the European integration was considered a truly problematic issue for the UK mostly due to the matters related to sovereignty and economics. Sovereignty issues were strongly related to the way the UK perceived itself and its position after the World War II. The UK continued to feel it had an important role of a global leader to play. Some authors indicated that citizens of a country often tend to overestimate their nation's role in world history; it was the case also for the UK citizens (Zaromb, Liu, Paez, Hanke, Putnam, & Roediger III, 2018). When it comes to Brexit, most experts focused on its direct causes (Arnorssona & Zoega, 2018; Alabrese, Becker, Fetzer, & Novy, 2019; Bachmann & Sidaway, 2016; Liberinia, Oswald, Proto, & Redoano, 2019) and likely results in various areas, including (among others) currency markets (Daoa, McGroarty, & Urquhart, 2019; Plakandaras, Gupta, & Wohar, 2017), stock market (Aristeidis & Elias, 2018; Oehler, Horn, & Wendt, 2017; Schiereck, Kiesel, & Kolaric, 2016; Davies & Studnicka, 2018), international trade (Pawlas, 2016; Hallett, 2019; Steinberg, 2019). We do share the opinion regarding the specificity of the UK's participation in the EU (proved by numerous opt-out clauses used by the UK in order to reduce the depth and limit the scope of integration). We do agree with other experts who stressed the importance of the UK's perception of itself after World War II. The value added of the conducted research, as well as its impact do relate to the interdisciplinary approach applied in our research. The uniqueness of economic and political development history of England/Great Britain and the UK separateness during the period of EU membership provide a valuable historical perspective on the causes and factors of Brexit.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The island location of England determined directions of changes in agriculture, industry and trade. It also significantly influenced political system and socio-political changes. The changes taking place in England implicated the global leadership position of England in

economic and political spheres. The specific path of England to the position of world leader left its mark not only on social relations, but also on mentality of the English. It confirmed their belief in the uniqueness, difference and exceptionalism as compared to other nations. The conducted research made it possible to confirm the hypothesis assuming that numerous historical phenomena explain and prove British separateness. The British separateness should be considered as essential factor in the process of post-Brexit relations between the EU and the UK in regard to future international cooperation in terms of anti-terrorist actions, international migration problems, climate change, consumer rights protection, personal data protection and practical issues relating to activity of companies and EU citizens. The publication only signaled selected historical determinants of British/English separateness, e.g. Reformation and colonization ought to be studied more carefully. The future research will focus on detailed analysis of the impact of Reformation and geographical discoveries on economic and political changes that decided on the specificity of the English, their perception of the World, including position to the EU.

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