BREXIT AND THE POSSIBILITY OF "DOMINO EFFECT"[1]

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ABSTRACT

The European Union (EU) was established by six member states in 1957. It had a policy of ever-forward enlargement and became a union with 28 member states in 2013. The United Kingdom (UK) was one of the first states to apply for membership and is also first to leave the EU. Brexit Referendum, which was held in 2016, was a milestone in the EU. Although it was the first time a member state left the EU the UK's Euroscepticism was nothing new. However, the UK is not the only Eurosceptic member of the EU. For that reason, after the Referendum other "-exits" began to be discussed by the member states with doubts about the EU policies. Frexit, Nexit and Grexit were the examples of other "-exit" discussions. Domino effect possibility was on the papers just after the Referendum but after five years it just seems to be a rhetoric. This research scrutinises Brexit and its possible effects on EU integration through the concepts of Euroscepticism and domino effect. It also argues that Brexit is closely related with the UK's own circumstances, background, interests, capabilities, and expectations. Therefore, it claims that it is difficult to talk about domino effect.

Keywords: Euroscepticism, Brexit, Domino Effect, EU integration

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Brexit ve "Domino Etkisi" Olasılığı

ÖZET

Avrupa Birliği (AB) altı üye ülke tarafından 1957'de kurulmuştur. Sürekli ileriye giden bir genişleme politikası izlemiş ve 2013 yılında 28 üyeli bir birlik haline gelmiştir. Birleşik Krallık üyelik için ilk başvuran ülkelerden bir tanesi ve ayrılmak için de ilk başvuran üye ülkedir. 2016'da düzenlenen Brexit Referandumu, AB için bir dönüm noktası olmuştur. Bir üye ülkenin AB'den ayrılması ilk kez oluyor olsa da Birleşik Krallık'ın Avrupa şüpheciliği yeni bir şey değildi. Bununla birlikte, Birleşik Krallık, AB'nin tek Avrupa şüpheci üyesi değildir. Bu nedenle Referandum sonrası diğer "çıkışlar" AB politikalarından şüphe duyan üye ülkeler tarafından tartışılmaya başlanmıştır. Frexit, Nexit ve Grexit diğer "çıkış" tartışmalarının örnekleriydi. Domino etkisi olasılığı referandumdan hemen sonra gazetelerdeydi ama beş yılın sonunda bu sadece bir retorik olarak görünmektedir. Bu araştırma, Brexit'i ve bunun AB entegrasyonu üzerindeki olası etkilerini Avrupa şüpheciliği ve domino etkisi kavramları üzerinden incelemektedir. Ayrıca Brexit'in İngiltere'nin kendi koşulları, geçmişi, çıkarları, yetenekleri ve beklentileri ile yakından ilişkili olduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu nedenle de domino etkisinden bahsetmenin zor olduğunu iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa şüpheciliği, Brexit, Domino Etkisi, AB entegrasyonu

INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) was established in 1957 by six member states but first it was named the European Economic Community (EEC). The EU has developed with its enlargements and deepening policies since its foundation. It became a 28-member union in 2013, but in 2016, the United Kingdom (UK), one of the first member states (1973), decided to leave the EU. It is difficult to say that the UK had been satisfied with the Union policies since its accession to the EU. The UK was a member state with its own characteristics that could be described as a Eurosceptic, and these characteristics caused Brexit to happen.

After the UK's decision to leave the EU as the first member state, it was expected to create a domino effect and trigger disintegration of the EU. After the referendum in England, many more exit scenarios emerged, especially in the member states before the elections, but it was seen that all of them were the pre-election discourses of the far-right parties in the member states. At that time, these discourses were in the headlines and in the news.

This research scrutinises Brexit and its effects on EU integration. The main question of this research is whether Brexit will create a domino effect in the Union. To answer this question first Euroscepticism, which is thought to be at the centre of Britain's separation is defined, and then the domino effect is briefly explained to show what can be expected with this effect. Then, to form the background of the research and to see the reasons of Brexit, the UK's own characteristics relate to Brexit are scrutinised as it is argued that they influence the separation. As a next step withdrawal process is explained briefly and finally it is focused on possible exit scenarios.

1. EUROSCEPTICISM AND DOMINO EFFECT

In this part, the concepts of Euroscepticism and domino effect are explained to be able to clarify what is meant by these concepts. First, it is focused on Euroscepticism and then it is focused on domino effect.

Euroscepticism is a term which is closely related to the opposition to the European integration. Taggart first explained the concept as "the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and

unqualified opposition to the process of integration" (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002: 4; Taggart, 1998: 366). Later, Taggart and Szczerbiak divided Euroscepticism into hard Euroscepticism and soft Euroscepticism. According to them, hard Euroscepticism is related to "a principled opposition to the EU and European integration", while in soft Euroscepticism the opposition is related to "one (or a number) of policy areas leads to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that 'national interest' is currently at odds with the EU trajectory" (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002: 4). Even though these concepts have been criticized, they fit the scope of this research and therefore they are preferred.

In this research, Euroscepticism is used in the sense of soft Euroscepticism, but the concept of Euroscepticism is preferred because here, the opposition is used in a more general way in relation to member states rather than political elites in a member state. Departing from this point of view, it can be said that in the case of Brexit, the UK opposed to some of the EU policies. However, the gradual increase in these policies led to action for separation. The overflow point was reached, and a referendum was held. The referendum campaign was led by a party, which can be defined as hard Eurosceptic, and because of the referendum it was publicly approved to leave the EU.

Domino effect as another concept which should be mentioned was stated in a speech by Eisenhower "as a domino principle". In the speech, Eisenhower (1954) defined domino principle as "You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over quickly. So, you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.". Before Eisenhower, this effect was mentioned in relation to communism with the thought that its contagious force would spread from country to country and this point of view formed the base of "domino theory" (Smith, 2007; Bell, 2001: 117). These are precisely the effect that is questioned whether it will occur within the EU or not. Disintegration possibility after Brexit has been one of the most curious issues for the future of the EU.

2. THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU is one of the actors in the international relations. As a regional organisation it has different characteristics from other regional organisations. It is more integrated and has supranational elements closely related to the level of integration. However, this integration did not happen suddenly. This is a long process started as an economic community in 1957 with the Treaty of Rome. Although economic cooperation is still at the hearth of the EU, now the members cooperate in many different fields. In other words, the Union has become interwoven day by day with enlargements and deepening policies since its establishment. Although enlargements and deepening of the EU is not the subject of this research, it is important to focus on the enlargement and deepening policies regarding the UK to clarify the way to Brexit.

2.1. The EU's First Enlargement and Opt-Outs

The EU enlargement process can be traced back to the first membership applications in the 1960s and it reached to most enlarged point with the membership of Croatia in 2013. Then, the EU became a union with 28 member states, and it continued until the first separation from the EU.

Wars take an important place in the history of the Europe. Peace could not be secured for centuries in the Europe but after the World War II, states decided to maintain peace. The talks of unified Europe started with Churchill's speech in which he noted that for peace, safety and freedom United States of Europe must be built (European Commission, (n.d.)a). However, both in constructing European Coal and Steel Community and European Economic Community (EEC) as a peace project, the UK preferred to be out. After a while the UK changed its mind and decided to become a member of the EEC and applied for membership. Its applications were vetoed twice in 1963 and 1967 by France. The UK's membership became possible just after the governmental change in France. In 1973, the UK, Denmark and Ireland became the first members of the European Community (EC).

The UK's reasons for opposition to be part of these communities were similar to those for Brexit: "the question of the UK's world role and its relationship with Commonwealth countries; a preference for loose

integration; a greater interest in free trade over economic organization and social policies" (Mourlon-Druol, 2015: 2; Milward, 2002; Young, 2000). These were also the core reasons of Eurosceptic character of the UK, and their traces can be seen throughout the membership process. However, there were also other reasons that could be considered related to them. For example, two years after the UK became a member it held a referendum and asked its citizens if they wanted to stay in the EU. The reasons for this referendum were the UK's role in the world, the economic problems of the 1970s, the UK's contribution to the EU, criticisms of the membership negotiations (Mourlon-Druol, 2015: 3-5). The results of the first referendum were different from the last one. The "yes" votes were more than the "no"s (Mourlon-Druol, 2015: 6). This was the answer of the citizens to the questions of leaving the EC. This first referendum showed indecision of the UK's politician in terms of cost-benefit calculations.

The reasons mentioned above came to the fore again and again in different events during the 47-year membership period. Each of these reasons can be evaluated as a sign of Eurosceptic point of view. The UK's opposition to the budgetary issues in 1970s and 1980s can be given as an example. In 1984, budgetary imbalances were argued, and the UK got a correction (Consillium, 1984: 2). This is an important sign of opposition to the EU policies, and it was a success for England even if there were some news about the rebate demand was defeat (Watt, 2009). In the following years, Thatcher's Eurosceptic point of view and her speeches shaped the relation between the EU and the UK. The Treaty of the EU (Maastricht Treaty) was seen as a treaty which "constituted the very things that Thatcher had warned and spoken out against – Brussel's determination to create a European "super-state" and to impose a Socialist agenda" by the Eurosceptics (Higazy, 2020) and caused opposition to the treaty. According to Menon (2017), John Major secured both "an opt-out of economic and monetary union" and "the removal of the social chapter from the body of treaty itself". The Social Chapter was a legislative tool and with this chapter the decision made with qualified majority voting was extended while unanimous voting related issues retained and the UK preferred to continue with "its own, distinctive labour market policy" (European Commission, 1997). This kind of relation can be evaluated as cooperating in its own way with its own rules. There were also other opt-outs (exemptions) such as the

Schengen Agreement, euro, Charter of Fundamental Rights, area of freedom, security, and justice. Within the scope of this research, some of these opt-outs are evaluated as paving stones on the road to Brexit. However, there are also opinions to the contrary. For example, Addler-Nissen (2011) argues that "the management of the British and Danish opt-outs quite paradoxically expresses the strength of the doxa of European integration".

The Schengen Agreement was signed in 1985 but its implementation started in 1995. The UK's opposition to border-free Europe also came from Thatcher's point of view and the UK got opt-out from the Schengen Agreement with the Treaty of Amsterdam (Addler-Nissen, 2011). The Schengen Agreement is important as it abolishes internal border checks within the EU and sets common rules for the external borders but it should be noted that the states want to be part of this Area must fulfil a list of pre-conditions (European Commission, (n.d)b). So, the UK is not the only member state which is out of the Area. There are also other member states which are not within the Schengen Area. Here, it is crucial to note that the UK's exemption was the result of its preference for being out of such integration.

Another opt-out is related to the Economic and Monetary Union, as mentioned above the UK chose not to join the euro and continued to use its own national currency. As with the Schengen Area, not all members became part of the euro area. Today, there are 19 members states in the euro area. Being in the euro area was an option for member states at the time the euro was introduced but after its introduction, member states had to abolish their national currencies and meet the requirements to start using the euro (European Commission (n.d.)c). The common currency was an important step in the EU integration process as currencies are closely related to national sovereignty and most member states agreed to abolish them for further integration. As in the Schengen Area, the UK preferred to be outside. According to Lilico (Lee, 2016a), the decision to be out of "the euro started the clock ticking".

The Charter of Fundamental Rights can be evaluated as another sign of Euroscepticism in the UK. The Charter, which regulates rights and freedoms of the EU citizens, became part of the EU treaties and binding for the member states with the Lisbon Treaty. However, there is a protocol

which regulates the application of the Charter to the UK and Poland. According to Douglas-Scott (2014: 19), in this case, Eurosceptic point of the UK was because of "its opposition to an EU-wide fundamental rights doctrine", namely a "right-based euroscepticism" and the UK was not alone even if the reasons of Poland were different. The UK once again showed its opposition to further integration and transfer of sovereignty with the Charter.

The opt outs of the UK are not just related to the preferences of a nation state because the policies, the UK preferred to be outside, are closely related to the integration of the EU and most of them are the corner stones of the EU such as the Schengen Area, which is a gain for the citizens, and the euro etc. They make the EU more integrated and a closer Union. However, some of the EU member states perceive these developments as a departure from nation state and oppose to them. The UK was one of these member states and this opposition paved to the Brexit.

3. BREXIT REFERENDUM

The Brexit Referendum was held in June 2016 and according to the results of the Referendum, the UK left the EU after a long negotiation process. However, the referendum itself was the result of long-standing opposition to the EU policies and the reasons for leaving were well defended in the campaign just before the referendum. As a result, 51.9% of the UK decided to leave the EU.

The arguments of leaving the UK were well articulated in Vox, in 2016. According to Lee's report, there were seven arguments. These arguments were the EU threat for British sovereignty, the EU's burdensome regulations, the EU's blocking of radical reforms, the impact of euro, immigrants, the opportunity for a more rational immigration system outside the EU, and sending money to the EU (Lee, 2016b). Most of these arguments are closely related with the Eurosceptic steps which are mentioned in the previous part. For example, sovereignty was the case in nearly all oppositions of the UK for further integration of the EU. The UK's contribution to the EU was also a significant instrument which was used during the leaving campaign. Here, the main argument was that the EU was paying more than benefiting. Migration related issues were at the heart of the campaign, as well.

Crises of the 2000s, strengthened the leave side of the campaign. The series of crises started with the constitutional crisis, which was seen as the loss of sovereignty and a progress towards federalism, and it was abandoned. After a short while, financial crisis started and some of the member states had to be supported to overcome and ease the effects of crisis. Later, the migration crisis reached its peak point, a year before the Brexit Referendum, in 2015. Therefore, migration became hot topic of the leaving campaign.

In terms of sovereignty, the leave group placed sovereignty will of the British people at the center of their campaign and used "Let's take back control" as a slogan (Virdee and McGeever, 2017). This means lots about sovereignty and its share with the EU. Sovereignty was the subject of the Maastricht Treaty, Schengen in relation to the border controls, the euro talks and the Charter. In the Virdee and McGeever's (2017) research, sovereignty related arguments were claimed to be supported by leave group with the re-establishment of "long-standing ties with kith and kin from the Old Commonwealth of Canada, Australia and New Zealand (as well as the US)". This shows a connection with sovereignty and the nostalgia to the past and the past recalls the glorious empire times of the UK. Inglehart and Norris (2016: 16) defined the nostalgic times as "the Westminster parliament was sovereign, society was predominately white Anglo-Saxon, manufacturing factories and extracting industries– producing steel, coals, cars- still providing well-paying and secure jobs for unionized workers in the Midlands and North". This vision was depicted and used in the campaign to achieve the desired result.

The crises caused the longing for the past days to be felt even more strongly, especially the migration crisis. The EU's policies in dealing with the migration crisis did not satisfy many member states. The Visegrad states did not accept relocation plan, the border member states were crushed under the burden of migration and the others were not happy with the EU's policies just like the UK. A good example of this was a poster shown by Farage to draw attention to EU's 'failed' migration policy, showing a queue of migrants crossing the Croatian – Slovenian border, but Johnson noted that it was not a poster of the official leave campaign (Stewart and Mason, 2016). According to Prentis (Stewart and Mason, 2016), "This is a scaremongering

in its most extreme and vile form". This poster and other rhetoric about immigrants affected the voters, whether they were part of an official leave campaign or not. The reasons related to migration was both connected to borders of nation state and also about the employment and benefits because migration had the potential for cheap labour and this caused unemployment fear for the British people. Arnorsson and Zoega's (2018: 314) point of view supports this idea as they noted that "the leave vote and the values and attitudes towards immigrants and the EU may reflect the economic interests or at least the perceived economic interests of individual voters".

Another argument for leaving was the UK's contribution to the EU and data on the contribution was used in a misleading way. The leave group claimed to send £350 million a week to the EU, and this claim was used as a tool by capitalizing on buses. It was an image that impressed people. It was stated to be misleading (Henley: 2016), but buses were used during the campaign. Three years later, Johnson admitted it was wrong (Read: 2019), but admitting years later failed to restore leave votes. The leave group used the statistics to their advantage and the result was what they wanted.

3.1. Leaving the EU - Withdrawal

The leave side used the data and statistics to portray the vision that they wanted voters to see to achieve their goals. Their plans worked, and with the results of the referendum, it was decided to leave the EU. However, the withdrawal process was not easy and lasted for nearly five years.

After the Referendum, Cameron resigned and noted that the path the British people chose, needed a new leader and he would stay until the autumn (Stewart, Mason and Syal, 2016). Theresa May became the leader of withdrawal and triggered article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty but the process was difficult as the Union and cooperation was interwoven. There were many things to be discussed and come to decision. The withdrawal agreement which was drafted with the EU was rejected three times by the British Parliament and May had to resign after three years of effort to deliver Brexit. Boris Johnson came after her and he was very determined to leave and eventually the UK left the EU. However, it was not easy for Boris to conclude the agreement, as well, and no-deal Brexit was also on the agenda. One of the most discussed topics of the agreement was the border related

issues between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Even after the agreement, border controls related issues are still on the agenda. There are problems related to the Northern Ireland Protocol as the EU stated that "the UK cannot be trusted to keep its word" (Stephens, 2021). This shows that Brexit related issues and the agreement will continue to be on the agenda and its effects will be felt.

The cost of leaving the EU should also be taken into consideration. The process was long and exhausting, and it came at a cost. Even if the UK decided to leave the EU because of its policies and contributions, leaving the EU also comes at a cost. Although the total bill is not clear according to the UK, it was stated that it was between £35 billion and £39 billion, of which a large part was paid. According to the Office for Budget Responsibility, about £25 billion remains to be paid by 2057 and "almost £18bn of which will be paid in the first five years" (BBC, 2021). This shows that separation also has a price, and it will last for a while. The UK will also continue to be part of some programmes such as Horizon Europe research scheme, Euratom nuclear research programme and Copernicus, the earth monitoring project so the UK will continue to contribute to these programmes (BBC, 2021).

In this separation process turning back to the beginning is not possible and even it is not beneficial. The UK still prefers to be in, in terms of some programmes and EU policies. Therefore, it will not be wrong to note that in the post-EU period the UK will have some opt-ins. This means that the process is complex and total disintegration is not possible. The UK still continuous to cooperate with the EU according to its benefits. It can be said that the UK has transitioned from a tight integration to a loosely structured and gain-oriented integration. However, it will not be part of the decision-making process and it will not have power to shape the future of the integration. It will take time to see whether it is more beneficial for the UK to be out rather than in.

4. DOMINO EFFECT OF THE BREXIT

The UK's Referendum and its results opened discussions about possible exits from the EU. It was thought that there would be other separations after the UK, and that some Eurosceptic member states would also want to leave the EU. Particularly populist (radical) right parties or in

other words far-right parties and their leaders used the discourse of leaving the EU in the pre-election periods in some member states such as France and the Netherlands as seen in the headlines and news. There were also other member states used Brexit from time to time and to call for leaving the EU.

News of separation began to appear in the headlines of the newspapers the very next day of the referendum in the UK. The discussions moved from Brexit to other possible separations such as Frexit and Swexit (Adler, 2016). Due to the French election, Frexit became one of the most discussed about separation possibilities. Marine Le Pen's words appeared frequently in the newspapers. Some of them were "It's now a reality for everyone. It is possible to leave the EU." (Adler, 2016), "Under those conditions we need an amicable separation" (M'tiri, 2017), and "Victory for Freedom! As I have been asking for years, we must now have the same referendum in France and EU countries" (Chrisafis, 2016). These statements were a call for Frexit and disintegration of the EU as she emphasized that it was possible to leave the EU. So, France and other member states could follow the same way. However, it has not happened. Le Pen lost the elections in 2017 and Frexit rhetoric disappeared for a while. With Covid-19 crisis there were some opinions about the EU's 'failure' to manage the crisis may lead to Frexit but according to Paul Smith, "criticism of the EU does not mean readiness and desire of Paris to leave the EU" (PenzaNews, 2021). This statement is very important for this research as it claims that each member state may feel dissatisfied with the EU and its policies on its own terms, but it is difficult to create the effect to leaving the EU. Brexit happened because of all the aforementioned reasons and the specifics of the UK.

The Netherlands exit (Nexit) was another possibility and it was most voiced by Wilders. According to him, the Netherlands should have had a referendum for leaving the EU as soon as possible and he added that "The Dutch would like to be in charge again of their own budget, their national borders and their immigration policy" (Dunai, 2016). This statement was nearly the same as the leave group in the UK used for their leave campaign. However, Nexit call of Wilders did not last for long as there was an election in 2017 and his party (Party for Freedom- PVV) became the second party and in 2021 elections his party lost votes and became the third party.

However, the possibility of separation is still being discussed because of the same reasons for Brexit such as budget contributions and inequalities although it is not very likely as the Netherlands trade depends mostly to the EU (approximately 75% of its export to the EU) and it is part of Eurozone (Rijnen, 2021). Although these two countries have similarities, they also have different characteristics, backgrounds, and expectations. Moreover, Nexit talks are not as lively as they were after the UK referendum.

There were also other exit scenarios after the UK's referendum such as Grexit (even before Brexit), Mexit, Huxit and Itexit. Each of these member states had their own reasons some of which were related to the crises such as economic, migration and Covid-19 crisis or other specific issues. However, the reasons were generally related to just one policy area rather than being a principal opposition to the EU and its integration. They were mainly instant reactions that changed according to the situation or the crisis. It is hard to evaluate them as stable responses to EU integration.

Although domino effect was expected after the UK referendum, it is difficult to state that after the first disintegration, separation has gone over quickly from one member state to another as defined by the concept of 'domino effect'. There were no referendums but there were calls for referendum by the far-right parties in some member states as stated above, but these calls did not yield any results. These calls did not go beyond rhetoric. However, this does not mean that an exit call of any member state will not end with separation in the future. After Brexit, any member states, which want to leave the EU, knows how the process goes on. However, here it should be noted that member states should do their cost-benefit calculations very well. It should not be forgotten that member states benefit from the EU in terms of trade, security, and their involvement as an actor in the international system. Most member states would not have the same power without being a member state. As a well-integrated union, the EU is a demonstration of the power of cooperation. Moreover, Brexit process has shown that leaving the EU is not easy and has costs. As Walter (2021: 1) states "Observing other countries' disintegration experiences allows voters to better assess the feasibility and desirability of such withdrawals".

CONCLUSION

The EU enlarged and deepened from its establishment to 2013. Integration and cooperation in different fields have always been on the agenda but disintegration was not. The UK, as the first country to be the member of the Union, was also the first to leave. During its membership the UK was a Eurosceptic member state as it opposed some of the EU's policies. Euroscepticism in the UK started just after its membership in 1970s and its opposition to EU's policies continued until it left the EU.

Sovereignty, nostalgia, immigration, and contributions to the EU were at the centre of the leave campaign. The leave group used the statistics by cherry picking and sometimes in a misleading way and got the results they wanted. However, Brexit cannot be evaluated just according to campaign, as it had a background. It was a long process which was blended day by day with Britain's own characteristics, history, interests, expectations, and capabilities. The post-referendum exit process was also a long and difficult process and there are still issues that the parties are not satisfied with, such as the Northern Ireland border. Thus, even if Brexit did show the way to leave, it was not an easy and convenient experience that could lead the member states to follow. So, it is difficult to say that Brexit will lead to disintegration of the EU.

Domino effect was one of the hot topics just after the UK referendum. However, each member state has its own circumstances, background, interests, capabilities, and expectations, so each member state needs to be evaluated in its own terms. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about a domino effect. Each separation can affect the other member states, but it is difficult to say that this will cause a separation that triggers each other as in the domino effect. Moreover, the Brexit process was not a good example to be followed. So, even if exit rhetoric was used by far-right parties for a while especially before the elections, it did not lead to any referendum and domino effect in the EU. The possible EU disintegration scenarios have not materialized. However, this does not mean that it will not be possible at all, it is about the full maturation of conditions for each member state.

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