



Brexit Dilemma and the Future of Euroscepticism



Brexit İkilemi ve AB Şüpheliğinin Geleceği

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Abstract

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The United Kingdom (UK) has always been sceptical towards the European integration initiative and European Union (EU) membership has been a controversial issue in UK politics throughout the decades. Following the historic referendum questioning the UK's EU membership, the withdrawal of the UK from the EU (Brexit) has been on the top of the agenda both in the UK and the EU. Brexit referendum result raised concerns about the impact of UK's exit from the EU on other EU member states' (MS) perceptions on EU full membership and the future of EU integration. Thus, there were concerns whether Eurosceptic tendencies would increase among the political parties. In this framework, the purpose of the article is to discuss the extent to which the UK's decision to leave the EU has affected the Eurosceptic attitudes of political parties towards the EU. Although there were concerns whether Brexit would trigger a domino effect that would pose a threat to European integration, the public and political support towards EU integration and full membership remained mostly moderate. Devoting specific focus to the impact of Brexit on the future of Euroscepticism, this paper also discusses why Brexit appears to have less impact on Eurosceptic tendencies of political parties than it was anticipated. However, Euroscepticism in the MSs is likely to depend on the series of future crises the EU would face and the future success of the UK-EU relations.

Keywords: European Union, Brexit, Euroscepticism.

Öz

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Birleşik Krallık (BK), Avrupa entegrasyon girişimine karşı her zaman şüphe ile yaklaşmış ve Avrupa Birliği (AB) üyeliği BK siyasetinde yıllar boyu tartışılan bir konu olmuştur. BK'nin AB üyeliğini sorgulayan tarihi referandumun ardından, BK'nin AB'den ayrılma süreci (Brexit) hem BK hem de AB'nin gündeminde ilk sıralarda yer almıştır. Brexit referandum sonucu, BK'nin AB'den ayrılmasının diğer AB ülkelerinin AB üyelikleri ve AB entegrasyonunun geleceği hakkındaki algıları üzerindeki etkisine ilişkin endişeleri arttırmıştır. Dolayısıyla, siyasi partiler arasında Avrupa şüpheli eğilimlerin artıp artmayacağı konusunda endişeler ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu kapsamda çalışmanın amacı, BK'nin AB'den ayrılma kararının siyasi partilerin Avrupa şüpheli tutumlarını ne ölçüde etkilediğini tartışmaktır. Brexit'in Avrupa bütünleşmesine tehdit oluşturacak bir domino etkisini tetikleyip tetikleyemeyeceğine dair endişeler olsa da AB entegrasyonuna ve tam üyeliğe yönelik kamuoyu ve siyasi destek çoğunlukla ılımlı kalmıştır. Brexit'in Avrupa şüpheliğinin geleceği üzerindeki etkilerine odaklanan bu çalışma ayrıca Brexit'in siyasi partilerin Avrupa şüpheli eğilimleri üzerinde neden tahmin edildiğinden daha az etkiye sahip olduğunu tartışmaktadır. Buna rağmen, üye ülkelerdeki AB şüpheliği AB'nin ileride karşı karşıya kalacağı krizler ve BK-AB ilişkilerinin gelecekteki başarısına bağlı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, Brexit, AB şüpheliği.

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1. Introduction

The post-war period in Europe has witnessed an increase in economic and political integration efforts to unite the continent. Half a century of European integration process, which is mostly equated with the European Union (EU), has been characterized with crucial steps towards an “ever closer union”. During that period, the EU has achieved some of its signature achievements including the establishment of the customs union, internal market and monetary union. However, the EU has faced various challenges such as the Eurozone debt crisis, refugee influx and Schengen, terrorism threat, influence of Eurosceptic political parties, and the exit of the United Kingdom (UK) from the EU (Brexit) over the last decade (Szucko, 2020: 622). Such challenges are considered as the factors that may undermine the support for the EU and slowdown the integration efforts among the EU member states (MSs).

UK’s Brexit referendum not only plunged the EU into a new crisis but also lead to a growing concern towards the future of the EU (Wassenberg, 2020: 57). The UK’s decision on leaving the EU sparked fears whether other EU members would follow and lead to a disintegration process of the EU. Indeed, as Szucko (2020) states, a prominent aspect of Brexit other than the previous crisis is that Brexit caused a disintegration process of a full EU MS for the first time in EU’s history. In a similar manner, Hooghe and Marks (2019) consider Brexit as “one of the episodes of European disintegration” that have been witnessed since 2008. Thus, there were concerns whether UK’s decision may cause negative implications on EU MSs’ willingness to further integrate with each other which would result in the re-emergence of the debate on Euroscepticism at the EU level.

The return of the Euroscepticism debate makes the state of Euroscepticism in the post-Brexit era a crucial issue. For instance, Szczerbiak and Taggart (2018) asserts that Brexit’s impact needed to be analyzed in terms of its impact on the future shape of Euroscepticism. In this framework, it is crucial to discuss the main aspects and implications of Brexit process through the lens of Euroscepticism across the EU. Literature on Euroscepticism stems from two sets of research field (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2018: 11). The first field is based on comparative politics that takes into consideration Euroscepticism across the EU by focusing mainly on public opinion and political parties. The second one focuses on the Euroscepticism within the institutions of the EU. As stated by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2018), research on Euroscepticism mostly focus on the issues of public opinion and “party-based Euroscepticism” and adds that “party-based Euroscepticism” focuses on conceptualisation, measurement and causes of Euroscepticism. In this context, this paper argues the relationship between Euroscepticism and Brexit by focusing on public opinion and political parties.

Considering the effects of Brexit on the state of Eurosceptic attitudes and the future of the EU, the article aims to discuss the following questions: “What lies behind the UK's Eurosceptic attitudes towards the European integration project?” and “What is the current state of public and party-based Eurosceptics tendencies in the UK and the EU and to what extent remaining EU MSs are likely to follow the UK’s path?”. In order to evaluate these issues, the article aims to discuss the consequences of Brexit on Eurosceptic tendencies among the political parties in the UK and the rest of the EU. The paper is structured as follows. First section presents the relations between the EU and its reluctant and difficult member UK from a historical perspective by taking into account the reasons for the opt-outs negotiated by the UK throughout its full membership. Second section focuses on British Euroscepticism that paved the way to Brexit. In this section, the roots of Euroscepticism and how it became a norm of British politics over the years is presented. This section also takes into account the arguments for and against Brexit by focusing on the impact of Euroscepticism on UK’s decision to leave the EU. The third section deals with the post-Brexit party-based Euroscepticism in the UK and the EU. This section first deals with the current state of Eurosceptic tendencies in the UK following the historic referendum. In this context, this section argues the implications of Brexit on current and future public opinion and political parties towards the EU. The second part discusses how Eurosceptic public opinion and political parties reacted to Brexit process in the EU and why UK’s exit appears to

have less implications on Eurosceptic tendencies of political parties than it was anticipated. And the final section concludes.

2. The UK as a Reluctant EU Member

The UK has always been reluctant about the European integration project. Its EU membership throughout the decades has been a controversial and predominant issue in UK politics. The UK did not engage in negotiations that led to the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1950s. Remaining out of the ECSC and EEC, the UK preferred to join the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) in 1959. With EFTA, the UK was mainly interested in forming a shallow form of economic integration which established free trade among the participating nations, avoided the creation of supranational institutions and allowed countries to retain the implementation of national trade policies towards the rest of the world. Indeed, there were concerns that full EU membership would force the UK to cut traditionally privileged economic and trade arrangements with the Commonwealth and the US. As Coricelli and Campos (2015) states the belief that joining a shallow economic integration in the form of a free trade agreement would be superior to a deeper integration alternative. Moreover, the existing close ties with the US and the Commonwealth were among the reasons for UK's reluctance entering into the EU at that time. In 1960s, UK's initial reluctance to consider EU membership was offset by a number of reasons. A prominent reason was the decline in UK's economic performance in the late 1950s, compared with other European countries, notably France and Germany. Next, the ineffectiveness of developing EFTA as a well-functioning free trade area resulted in UK to seek developing trade relations with the EU (which was then the European Economic Community-EEC). In addition, according to The Economist (2015b), the EU had some features that were against UK's interests such as its protectionist trade rules, budget and common agricultural and fisheries policies. UK applied for EEC membership three times in 1961, 1967 and 1971. However, Charles de Gaulle, the president of France, blocked UK's membership application twice in 1963 and 1969. The situation changed and the negotiations relaunched when de Gaulle resigned and Georges Pompidou became the new prime minister of France. Following the change of French presidency, the UK, alongside Denmark and Ireland, became a full member only in 1973. At the time of the UK's accession negotiations, the MSs, excluding France, claimed that they support an enlarged Europe. Thus, all five MSs supported UK's membership negotiations and reacted favourably to the UK's accession (Lekl, 2016). The main concern of de Gaulle was that UK's membership would weaken the influence of France within the EU and UK's close relations with the US would increase the voice of the US in Europe. As stated by De Gaulle in 1963, the UK differed profoundly from much of continental Europe and has been regarded as an awkward member since it joined the EU in 1973 (The Economist, 2015b; Rennie, 2012: 1). According to Guerra (2020) UK's relations with the EU in 1970s and the French veto on the enlargement to the UK by de Gaulle led to the slowdown of European integration process during that decade. Indeed, between July 31, 1965 and January 30, 1966 France pursued the "empty chair policy" when France withdrew its representatives from the activities of the community for seven months and made the EU incapable of taking any decisions.

The relations between the UK and the EU followed a similar trajectory during the UK's full membership in the EU. The UK's membership was first questioned only two years after its entrance into the EU. The UK held its first referendum – the referendum on the European Community (Common Market) - in 1975. In 1975, when the full membership was put to a referendum, the entire establishment including the media, businesses and main political parties urged the citizens to remain in (de Witte et al., 2015: 4). Although a substantial majority (% 67.2) voted in favour of a continued EU membership, the positive result of the 1975 referendum did not end the membership debate in the nation. In the following years, the UK consistently objected the idea of handing powers to the EU and resisted deeper integration efforts at the EU level.

Criticism and opposition to European integration project (the so-called Euroscepticism) increased first with the completion of the Single European Market in end 1992 and next with the introduction of the single currency Euro in 1999 which are considered as the symbols for social, economic and political integration in Europe. Such developments involved more transfer of power to Brussels. As a result, the UK demanded some exemptions and succeeded securing some opt-outs from the prominent policy areas of the EU such as the introduction of the single currency. Indeed, the divide between the UK and the EU grew following the currency speculation of “Black Wednesday” when the UK withdrew from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in 1992. The exit of the British pound from the ERM was the first time that the UK had exited from an EU integration initiative. Opposition to the Euro and one-size-fits-all monetary policy increased in the following decades and fuelled the Euroscepticism prospects in the nation. The deepening of European integration in 1980s and 1990s forced UK to push for opt-outs in some policy areas. During its full membership, the UK has negotiated opt-outs in key areas of EU legislation such as economic and monetary union, Schengen Agreement, Charter of Fundamental Rights, freedom, security and justice and social charter (between 1992-1997) with the EU. Thus, the UK not only opted out from joining the Eurozone to retain control over its national monetary policy, but also rejected the Schengen Agreement which allowed the removal of border controls and free mobility of people. Opt-outs the UK secured in key policy areas has been a sign of Euroscepticism in the country. Although UK’s priorities and concerns have changed over the 40 years, British Euroscepticism and referendum on UK’s membership remained among the most debated political issue in the country.

3. The Roots of British Euroscepticism and Brexit Dilemma

The EU has faced various criticisms throughout its development. The expansion of the EU’s competences in several policy areas overtime have triggered the debate on Euroscepticism. In this context, a focus into the roots of sceptical debate about the UK-EU relations is also crucial to understand the nature, development, and shortcomings of the European integration initiative. Thus, the factors that explain the rise of Euroscepticism are also related to the state and development of the EU itself. Bickerton (2012) views European integration as “a process of state transformation” which corresponds to the shift of a nation state into a MS. EU MSs are required to incorporate primary and secondary legislation of the EU into their national laws. One of the main concerns about the full membership is that EU directives and regulations that are transposed into national ones cause over regulation in a wide range of areas. Thus, the deepening and widening of the EU overtime triggered an intense process of harmonisation at the EU level and created a high degree of complexity. In addition, the EU has developed a unique institutional structure which requires MSs to delegate some of their decision-making rights to supranational institutions. Within this supranational institutional framework, decisions on specific issues are made at the EU level. Indeed, unlike other regional integration initiatives, the EU has achieved a deep cooperation in various economic and political issues that raised concerns about the loss of national sovereignty and national policy making of MSs.

Scepticism towards a deep integration initiative at the EU level has been a predominant rhetoric in UK politics since the start of the European integration project. The UK, when became a full member as a latecomer in 1973, had to adopt EU’s rules and regulations that had been formulated without it being in the decision-making process (Adam, 2020: 8). Following its full membership into the EU, an increased trend towards a more critical insight about European integration initiative is witnessed in the UK and Euroscepticism has been regarded as a norm of British politics (Oliver, 2013: 7). Indeed, the UK has been the birthplace of the term Euroscepticism and the term has been present in the UK longer and stronger than in other EU MSs (Spiering, 2004: 127, 137; Usherwood, 2020: 31). The term Euroscepticism entered the British political and journalistic lexicon in the mid-1980 notably advocated by Margaret Thatcher (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004: 15; Rodriguez-Aguilera de Prat, 2013: 21; Wassenberg, 2020: 55). Eurosceptic views towards the EU increased as efforts

towards the creation of a deeper integration with supranational ambitions intensified. As a result, the disputes between the Eurosceptics and Europhiles have increased in the nation. According to Carl et al. (2019), starting from the 1990s, there are four factors that contributed to rising Eurosceptic tendencies in the UK: (i) the ERM crisis of 1992; (ii) the increasing extent of political integration at the EU level; (iii) the debt crisis in Eurozone; and (iv) the rise in immigration from Eastern European countries. All these factors triggered the debate on questioning the UK's full membership throughout the decades.

Usherwood (2020) considers Brexit as a product of Euroscepticism and Usherwood (2018) states that Brexit dilemma provides a natural experiment to better understand and analyse the debate on Euroscepticism in the country. Since 2016, Brexit has dominated both UK public and political debate; redefined the British economic, political and social environment; and divided the British communities into 'Leave' and "Remain" camps. Euroscepticism and growing opposition to Europeanization provide an insight into some of the complex factors behind the Leave camp. The Brexit dilemma and the main features of the Leave campaign mostly focused on the impact of full EU membership on the sovereignty of the UK, immigration, nation's economy, the welfare system and budget contributions. Indeed, a prominent reason for Euroscepticism in the UK has been the existence of weak European identity compared to other EU MSs (Carl et al., 2019: 289). Although the UK has always been an indispensable part of the Western world and thus Europe, UK citizens are mostly reluctant to identify themselves as Europeans (Oliver, 2013: 11). Moreover, in UK political debate, the issue of national identity and sovereignty is mostly associated with full EU membership. For instance, Baker and Schnapper (2015) defines the UK's involvement into the EU as half-hearted, self-interested and defensive in nature. For the UK, Brexit also means withdrawing from the EU's supranational political institutions. Thus, with the UK's departure from the EU, certain decision-making powers delegated to the EU's supranational institutions, have returned to the UK. UK has been a part of the EU's free mobility of labour and immigration has always been a predominant issue for Eurosceptics who argue that the UK need to have more control over its borders and the number of migrants entering the country. The mobility of people from Central and Eastern Europe increased following the enlargements of 2004 and 2007 and David Cameron, in his election campaign, promised to reduce immigration into the UK. Increasing number of immigrants and refugees provided a positive environment for the Leave campaign. According to Eurosceptics, the best way to control the mobility of people from Europe, and thus "welfare tourism" which allows the EU citizens to enjoy the free mobility of people to benefit from more generous British welfare system, was to exit the EU. Post-Brexit, leaving the internal market and thus ending the free mobility of people from the EU countries and introduction of the points-based immigration system is likely to reduce immigration. Welfare tourism, which allowed the EU citizens to provide health treatment in the UK was also highly criticized during the debate on budget contributions. Since 1973, the UK have constantly been a net contributor to the EU budget. Thus, one of the claims of the Leave campaign centered on the size of the UK's payments into the EU budget and the main motivation was to redirect spending on domestic priorities and increase the funds available for the health system, education and climate to better serve the needs of the citizens. Considering such facts, the main objective for exiting the EU was to restore the sovereignty of the UK by "taking back control" in several areas. In line with this objective, to determine the UK's own future as a sovereign state, the UK was aiming to restore its national law-making, end the free mobility of people, take control of its borders and set its own trade policy and tariff regime.

4. The UK and the Reluctant Europeans Post-Brexit

4.1. Euroscepticism and the Future of the UK

It is a well-known fact that Euroscepticism is a common phenomenon in the UK and British political parties have a Eurosceptic nature. Eurosceptic tendencies of British political parties can be considered based on Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008)'s definitions of "hard" and "soft" party-based Euroscepticism. "Party-based hard Euroscepticism" refers to the parties that oppose the whole European project and thus the EU and favour their nations to exit the initiative. In case of "party-based soft Euroscepticism", political parties do not object to the European project and its membership but they express their concerns on some of the EU's major policy initiatives such as monetary integration or Schengen (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008: 240-241). Minor and major political parties in the UK's party system appear distinct from each other. For instance, in the UK, the two prominent Europhiles are the Labour and Liberal Democrats. Among the minor political parties, the Liberal Democrats has long been considered as the most Europhile, while the UKIP and Brexit Party (currently renamed as the "Reform Party") remained on the opposite side of the spectrum. Among the Eurosceptics, while foundations of some of the parties are fully tied to the EU issues, some of the parties' foundations are only partly tied to the EU issues. Moreover, "hard Euroscepticism" is mostly witnessed outside mainstream politics. Eurosceptic right-wing views are based on the issues of national sovereignty and immigration. In the UK, "hard Euroscepticism" is mostly associated with English nationalism (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018: 1210). Eurosceptic left-wing is more concerned with the economic issues such as the state of their welfare state and they criticise the neoliberal aspects of the EU. Hard Eurosceptic parties, whether right or left-wing, resist further integration efforts. For instance, UKIP is a case for a minor, issue-specific and hard Eurosceptic right-wing party. The core issues of UKIP are EU membership and immigration. Indeed, the UKIP's *raison d'être*, as a strong anti-EU and anti-immigration party, was to campaign and hold a referendum to end UK's EU membership (Curtice and Ormston, 2015: 5). For instance, while no less than 81% of UKIP supporters claim they prefer UK withdrawal from the EU, 51% of UKIP voters think that workers from the rest of the EU should not have access to welfare benefits (Curtice, 2015: 22). The Conservative Party, as an established, soft Eurosceptic and right-wing, became increasingly more sceptical about the EU over the last decade (Curtice and Evans, 2015: 33). When David Cameron first proposed a referendum in 2013 under the shadow of the Eurosceptic pressures, he was hoping to renegotiate some of the UK's membership terms and expecting electorates to vote to remain in the EU (The Economist, 2015a). The UK politics has witnessed an increased controversy over its EU membership since 2010s. As stated by Curtice and Ormston (2015), more than half of Britons were referred to as Eurosceptic, as 24% support the UK's exit from the EU or 38% want the EU's powers to be reduced. However, unexpectedly, in the referendum 51.9% voted for Leave and 48.1% voted for Remain with a turnover of 71.8%. According to Curtice and Evans (2015) D. Cameron's promise to renegotiate the membership terms reflected long standing Eurosceptic views among the Conservatives.

"Should the UK remain a member of the EU, or leave the EU?" was the question that was put to the voters in the historic referendum. The referendum question which is about staying in or out appears to be a simple question. However, the debate on leaving the EU should have focused more on the future alternatives to full membership and their economic benefits needed to be convinced to the public to reduce and eliminate uncertainty and potential disruptions for both parties. Following the Leave vote, the UK started to consider a number of alternatives to its full membership. The alternative models for the future relationship have been categorized as the "soft" and "hard" forms of Brexit. The former represented the case UK remaining in the European Economic Area (EEA), while the latter represented the case UK leaving the EU's customs union and single market or the so-called "no-deal Brexit" which would leave the UK trading with the EU as a WTO member. Following a long negotiation process the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020 and "the deal is done" between the parties when the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) was signed on 30 December

2020. TCA which resulted the negotiation process in the form of a “hard Brexit” completely changed the pattern of the relationship between the UK and the EU leaving the UK outside the EU’s single market. Two Eurosceptic parties UKIP and Brexit Party that campaigned for a “hard Brexit” consider the signing of the TCA as a success. However, how well the TCA will function is likely to shape the future Eurosceptic patterns in the country. Whether a third referendum on EU membership will be held in the UK is likely to depend not only on the success of the TCA but also changes in public and political opinion in the next years. Considering these facts, according to Solli (2021), although the UK left the EU whether there would be a political space for Eurosceptic parties in the UK in the future remains an open question.

4.2. The State of Euroscepticism in the EU Post-Brexit

Besides the historical British Euroscepticism, Euroscepticism is also widespread across Europe under the shadow of Eurosceptic parties. There are a number of EU states oppose or criticize some aspects of European integration and its functioning. The roots of Euroscepticism in these countries are diverse that public opinion and attitudes towards the European project is distinguished between “soft Euroscepticism” and “hard Euroscepticism”. “Soft Eurosceptics” criticize the EU politics but accept the main principles of European integration, while “hard Eurosceptics” oppose EU membership and support leaving the EU (Chopin and Lequesne, 2021: 424). According to Curtice and Evans (2015) negative or positive attitudes towards European integration mostly focus on two main explanations: (i) the perceptions about the benefits of membership and (ii) the sense of national sovereignty and identity. Until the Brexit referendum of 2016, mostly Eurozone crisis and refugee influx dominated the main concerns in the MSs which increased negative tendencies towards EU integration. Thus, the criticism towards European integration and thus Euroscepticism mostly shaped by the EU related crises including Brexit. Such challenges also exposed EU’s weaknesses and vulnerability (Chopin, 2017: 1) and as a result, Eurosceptic rhetoric remained high on the agenda of the public opinion and political parties across the EU.

As Webber (2014) states, throughout its history, the EU has witnessed an upsurge in Eurosceptic political attitudes and movements in a number of MSs. According to Brack and Startin (2015), Euroscepticism has become a prominent aspect across the EU at various levels, for instance, public opinion became more critical towards the EU; the support for anti-EU parties and the Eurosceptic rhetoric among the mainstream parties that were traditionally pro-EU has increased. Moreover, at the insitutional level, it is witnessed that, for instance, since 2000s political parties that support Euroscepticism started to have greater support in the European elections (Wassenberg, 2020: 55). Within the EU MSs, Eurosceptic political parties are diverse based on their ideologies and agendas. They mostly remain outside the mainstream politics and are divided along the left and right wing. There a number of factors contribute to support for Eurosceptic tendencies at the party level. While the left-wing mostly focus on economic issues, the right-wing focus on issues such as national identity, national sovereignty and immigration. For instance, left-wing Eurosceptics such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain criticised austerity programs while right-wing parties including the National Rally in France, Freedom Party in Austria, Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, and Danish People’s Party gained electoral support on anti-immigration sentiments (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016: 422). Moreover, according to the political parties with Eurosceptic orientations, the EU is elitist, it undermines national sovereignty, lacks democracy and transparency and has complex decision-making processes. In this context, for instance, Alternative for Germany considered Brexit as an opportunity for the EU to reform itself (Henley, 2016). Freedom Party of Austria expressed their intention to renegotiate their relationship with the EU. The leader of National Rally referred the UK’s referendum result as a key moment in the history of European integration and added that every EU MS must have the right to decide about staying in or out. Indeed, since 2016, some scholars considered Brexit as a potential model for other (Eurosceptic) EU MSs and its association with

increasing Eurosceptic views in the continent (Wilson, 2020: 9). Thus, there were concerns whether it might trigger a domino effect (remaining MSs' future potential withdrawals from the EU because of UK's Brexit decision) that would pose a threat to the future integration of the European project (Wachowiak and Zuleeg, 2021: 1). At the MS level, there were concerns whether Brexit may negatively affect other EU states' willingness to further integrate with each other at the EU level and this might lead MSs not willing to participate in all aspects of EU integration. Although the potential impact of Brexit is still ambiguous, it needs further assessment by taking into account the debate occurred in remaining (Eurosceptic) EU MSs. Almost seven years after the referendum, no particular exit policies were campaigned by the existing anti-EU parties across the EU. Thus, exit policies are yet not considered as an alternative to EU membership. As Martini and Walter (2023) states Eurosceptic rhetoric shifted from exit policies towards reforming the EU. In this framework, it can be stated that there has been a shift from "hard Eurosceptic" rhetoric to "soft Eurosceptic" rhetoric.

Until recently, no full EU MS had ever decided to exit the EU except for the hard Eurosceptic UK. Before Brexit, even discussing the withdrawal of a MS from the EU was something of a taboo (Oliver, 2013: 6). There was no article in the previous treaties regarding the withdrawal procedure for a MS willing to exit the EU. Leaving the EU became a possibility when Treaty of Lisbon introduced its Article 50. Over four decades of full EU membership forced the UK to comply with the EU's common regulatory and institutional structures in which the UK's public and private economic entities operate. Moreover, EU's common policies and regulations became an indispensable part of a UK's domestic policy making. Thus, the UK's exit from an advanced integration initiative required lengthy negotiations. As Adam (2020) indicate voting to leave the EU was difficult, but it was the easiest part of Brexit. Considering such facts, it is clear that Brexit process had been difficult and time consuming for both parties. Taking such facts into consideration, remaining states in the EU witnessed that the experience of the negotiation of a withdrawal agreement was lengthy and painful and it had destabilizing implications on the domestic politics of the nation. For instance, although Article 50 set out the withdrawal process of a MS, Oliver (2013) resembles the withdrawal procedure to an "unopened Pandora's Box". The UK's exit process which was expected to take two years lasted for months, dominated British domestic politics and intensified political chaos and confusion. The UK struggled to decide the nature of future relations with the EU, faced an intense pressure as the deadline approached and repeatedly extended the exit date from the EU. Even emergency plans and proposals for a "no-deal Brexit" was introduced. As a result, long negotiation process and the risk of a "no-deal Brexit" raised concerns and uncertainty about UK's future relations with the rest of the EU and the world.

After the Brexit vote, public support towards EU membership remained mostly positive. In EU countries, including the UK, a majority of voters preferred to remain in the EU. According to Hoffmann and de Vries (2016), in almost all other MSs the support for the EU between March and August 2016 increased by 5%. Similarly, as stated by van Kessel et al. (2020), support for continuing full EU membership has risen after the 2016 referendum in four EU states Netherlands, France, Germany, and Italy. Chopin and Lequesne (2021) also add that Brexit did not rise Eurosceptic views and did not trigger disintegration process at the EU level. They also add that Brexit rather had positive implications towards integration efforts among the MSs. Moreover, although European Parliamentary elections in 2014 witnessed a record low turnout and a strong surge in Eurosceptic political parties (de Vries, 2018: 132; The Economist, 2015c), the pro-EU parties gained majority in the European Parliament following the 2019 European Parliamentary elections and the former president of the European Council Donald Tusk stated that Brexit acted as a "vaccine" against anti-EU propaganda and Euroscepticism (Randerson, 2019).

Recently, no further withdrawals are on the EU's agenda. Moreover, there are a number of candidate countries that are aiming to become full members. There are also countries that still want

to join. Nevertheless, the lessons that Brexit provide for the remaining countries in the EU is controversial. UK's 2016 referendum was held under the shadow of Eurozone crisis and the refugee influx and thus at a time when the EU was unpopular among its citizens (Webber, 2020). Indeed, for instance, although the UK did not join the Eurozone, economic uncertainty due to the Euro crisis, the rescue efforts for Greece and the failure of France and Italy to accomplish economic reforms strengthened the Leave campaign (The Economist, 2015a). The success of the EU in adapting and overcoming these different crisis is likely to lessen the Eurosceptic attitudes across the MSs.

Most debate on Brexit focused on its causes rather than on its potential consequences for the future of the EU. However, the withdrawal of the UK -one of EU's largest and most influential members- expected to result in significant changes at the EU and MS level (Oliver, 2013: 5). At the EU level, for instance, according to Oliver (2015), the exit of a reluctant member such as the UK would lead to increased unity at the EU level and allow the EU to move towards the creation of an "ever closer union" more easily. Oliver adds that the EU and Eurozone would more neatly align with UK outside the EU. The exit of the UK from the EU also required complex tasks of negotiating changes in MSs' voting rights, allocation of the members of the European Parliament and staff, voting procedures and budget within the EU (Oliver, 2015: 420). In addition, according to Guerra (2020), the UK as a large and influencer member has implications on the changing institutional landscape and balance of power across the EU states. In this framework, Guerra states that while importance of France and Germany remains as the leading countries, large countries such as Spain and Italy will likely to play greater roles within the EU.

Adam (2020: 263) resembles UK's Brexit dilemma to a divorce, and adds when one partner leaves, the other partner must have a self-examination. In this context, Brexit referendum result was a warning signal that there was a need for structural reforms in the EU (van Kessel, 2020: 65). Brexit also triggered the debate on the design and reform of the EU to avoid future withdrawals (Szucko, 2020: 641). In order to avoid future possible referendums and withdrawals, the EU may consider to reform its treaties and institutional structure to respond the demands and expectations of the (Eurosceptic) EU states and their citizens. Regarding the relations between the EU and its MSs in the post-Brexit era, Wachowiak and Zuleeg (2022: 153) adds that the EU should give greater importance on full membership and imply limited scope for differentiation. Thus, exiting the EU will not be a priority in the EU MSs in the future.

5. Conclusion

Throughout its history, the EU has faced various crisis and challenges which strengthened negative views towards the integration initiative, undermined the support for the EU and created significant opposition to deeper integration. One of the most important challenges to further integration at the EU level has been Euroscepticism. The term Euroscepticism was first used in the UK, it has risen over the decades and became a British phenomenon. Indeed, UK's membership throughout the decades has been controversial and the relationship with the EU has been a predominant issue in UK politics since the start of the European integration project. The UK has always been reluctant towards the European project: First, it hesitated to join the EU; next, it secured a number of opt-outs from EU policies during its membership; and finally, it became the first full MS that exited the EU. In line with such dilemmas faced by the UK throughout its membership, there has been a dramatic increase in the support for Eurosceptic parties and they became significant players in British political landscape. British public opinion and political parties concerns' about EU membership mostly stem from the issues of loosing sovereignty to EU's supranational institutions, controlling immigration, economy and welfare services. In addition, a number of common EU policy areas were criticized such as internal market, monetary union or trade agreements. Moreover, the complex and supranational structure of the EU resulted in the emergence and rise of British Euroscepticism and Eurosceptic parties. As a

result, proliferation and significance of Eurosceptic parties, both left and right-wing, became a key and lasting feature of party politics in the UK.

Brexit, which is considered as an outcome of Euroscepticism, has dominated the political debate not only in the UK but also across the rest of the EU over the last years. Following the Brexit vote, the debate on European integration has shifted towards an assessment of the future of the EU in the context of Euroscepticism. With Brexit, British Eurosceptic parties have achieved their two core objectives (withdrawing the EU and controlling immigration) of their parties. Moreover, with Brexit “done”, the Eurosceptics in the rest of the EU realized that exiting the EU is not an impossible task. Thus, there were concerns whether Brexit might trigger Eurosceptic and populist parties to seek better deals with the EU for their own nations or set up their own exit strategies. Since 2016, public and political debate on EU membership remained mostly positive and no particular campaigns for exiting the EU were introduced by the Eurosceptic parties across the EU. Thus, exiting the EU is not yet considered as an alternative to full EU membership by Eurosceptic political parties. Exit policies did not dominate the political agenda of the Eurosceptic parties, instead the debate shifted towards the reform of the EU. In this framework, it is witnessed that party-based Eurosceptic tendencies shifted from “hard Euroscepticism” towards “soft Euroscepticism”. However, the future success of post-Brexit era for the UK might increase public and political interest in withdrawing the EU and political parties may consider campaigning for in or out referendums. Thus, there may still be concerns whether Brexit would lead to a shift of Euroscepticism from a minor issue to a major one. In this framework, Eurosceptic parties may position themselves in the long run depending on the future success or failure of the future UK-EU relations and/or the vulnerability of the EU to future crisis that might be faced. Finally, given the importance of the issue, there is still a room for future research on the relation between Euroscepticism, potential future withdrawals and the future of the EU integration.

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