

Internationalisation of a Mayor: Sadiq Khan's Involvement in the Brexit Process*

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Bir Belediye Başkanının Uluslararasılaşması: Sadiq Khan'ın Brexit Sürecine Katılımı

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Öz

Londra belediye başkanı olarak yeniden seçilmesinin ardından Khan, "Brexit'in henüz iyileşmemiş yaralarının" altını çizmiştir. AB'den ayrılmaya karşı siyasi duruşu, Khan'ın merkezi hükümetin dış politika kararlarına eleştirel bir müdahale oluşturmuştur. Bu çalışma, yerel yönetimin uluslararasılaşmasına ilişkin literatür ışığında, Hocking'in (1999) teorik çerçevesinden yararlanarak Khan'ın Brexit referandumu sonrasındaki "aktörlüğünü" açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Sadiq Khan'ın Brexit sürecine dahil olmasının boyutları, *öncüler*, *yönlendiriciler* ve *hedefler* kategorileri altında açıklanmış, bu çalışma tarafından önerilen *sözcüler* başlıklı yeni bir gruplama ile daha bütünlüklü bir inceleme yapılmaya çalışılmıştır. Londra hükümetinin resmi internet sayfasından alınan basın bültenleri, araştırma materyalinin temelini oluşturmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sadiq Khan, Londra, Brexit, Yerel Hükümet, Uluslararasılaşma

Abstract

After his re-election as the mayor of London, Khan underlined "the scars of Brexit" that are not healed yet. His political stance against leaving the EU has formed a critical interference of Khan in a foreign policy decision of national government. In the light of the literature on internationalisation of non-central government, this study aims to explain Khan's "actorness" in the aftermath of Brexit referendum by utilizing Hocking's (1999) theoretical framework. Dimensions of the mayor's involvement in the Brexit process are explained under the categories of initiators, channels and targets; yet a new grouping titled voices proposed by this study would complete the whole picture of analysis. The press releases derived from the official website of London government constitute the basis of research material.

Keywords: Sadiq Khan, London, Brexit, Non-Central Government, Internationalisation

Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

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1. Introduction

On 6th of May, 2021, London went to polls to elect its mayor for the sixth time in history and the result was not a surprise for many as Sadiq Khan was re-elected given that none of the previous mayors left the Office after his first term. Following 8 years of Conservative mayoral term, Khan's first term coincided with the post-Brexit era in British politics. The mayor who actively participated in the Remain campaign did not change much of his critical stance towards Brexit and central government's policies and achieved to receive the approval of Londoners for the second time.

On the issue of Brexit, there seems a clear conflictual nature and interest between the Westminster/Whitehall and Sadiq Khan in which the latter acts beyond his jurisdiction. Just after his re-election, in the victory speech, Sadiq Khan underlined "the scars of Brexit" that are not healed yet (The Independent, 2021). Not only this statement but also all his political stance against leaving the EU has formed the vocal critical interference of Khan in a foreign policy decision of national government since his first term in the Office.

Despite his political importance and the large political mandate he had in two mayoral elections, there is not much academic work on Sadiq Khan's role in British politics. This study will try to fill this gap in the literature both by choosing the mayor as the subject of analysis and focussing on his engagement in an issue of foreign policy. It will try to answer to what extent Khan's actorness had an impact on Britain's exit from the EU. In the light of the literature on internationalisation of non-central government, this study aims to figure out Khan's "actorness" in the aftermath of Brexit referendum by utilizing Brian Hocking's (1999) theoretical framework. Dimensions of the mayor's involvement in the Brexit process are explained under the categories of *initiators*, *channels* and *targets* as Hocking offers; yet a new grouping titled *voices* proposed by this study would complete the whole picture of analysis. I will argue that the author's categories to explain the aims and motivations of "actorness" can help the students of the field to grasp Khan's actions to some extent however a new category of "voice" is necessary as one of the fundamental basis of his preoccupation in the international realm is Khan's discontentment with central government's Brexit policies and his capability and willingness to raise a voice against them.

First, relatively short history of Mayor of London, as a directly elected executive post, will be examined and this will be followed by the status of Sadiq Khan in this position. In the second part of the study, related literature on the topic will be viewed and in particular, theoretical perspective derived from Brian Hocking's conceptualization will be analysed to answer why an actor of non-central government involves in a foreign policy issue. In the following part, the above mentioned categories offered by Hocking will be used as a framework to explain Khan's involvement on the issue of Brexit. The press releases used in the categorization are derived from the official website of London government, specifically from Mayor of London's section, and constitute the basis of research material. As a conclusion, I will be arguing that the findings demonstrate that having one of the largest political mandate to hold a public office in UK, the mayor has become a main actor behind a wide range of international engagement on Brexit from "London is open" campaign to diplomatic meetings with the EU officials. While he claims to improve London's position in the world politics and global economy embracing the idea that national policy does not reply London's interests, he also denounces the incapability of central government in the management of Brexit.

2. The London Mayoralty and Sadiq Khan

Centrality of London and its domination of British economy, culture and politics is something indisputable. Hall (2006: 336) argues that London is and will be capable of shaping the views of "prime ministers and chancellor of the exchequer" having a significant place in British politics. It is not just the largest city but also the centre of elite life in many terms. Therefore, London's dynamism is unique when compared to other cities of England. A city hosting a one eighth of population and one sixth of the

GDP would never be easy to govern. This has been a bit more complicated when it comes to London. Following the abolishment of the Greater London Council (GLC) in 1986, there was no city wide government left in London until 2000 (Travers, 2003). As a part of Great London Authority (GLA), New Labour promised to instate the post of Mayor of London¹ together with an Assembly of 25 members to provide more responsibility and accountability at the municipality level (Labour Party, 1997). This promise was backed by a referendum in 1998 and the following year Parliament enacted the Greater London Authority Act. New Labour's modernisation project at the local level had some promises such as "public participation, effective leadership, 'performance' and a modernist notion of rational progressive change" (Fenwick and Elcock, 2014: 584). The executive bodies of London would be directly elected by Londoners. Among the two, the Mayor would be the visible figure and the one to enable vision and a direction for Londoners, someone to realize the development of the city, to extend the number the partnerships which are necessary (Carvel; 1999: 255).² This act was highly crucial for studies in urban politics because, for the first time, a local self-government was introduced in one of the largest cities of Europe at the very end of 20th century and a directly elected mayor would come to Office which is highly inherent in the modern democratic politics. As Copus (2004: 583) states that a directly chosen mayor can act on behalf of the entire region, advancing and defending its interests much beyond the limits of the council. In fact, the mayor would represent the region by speaking with the authority of ministers, serving as the different projects' focal point, and, when necessary, connecting local politics into a larger national, European, or even global network.

The Office has seen only two different mayors, Livingstone and Johnson³, until 2016, each holding the post for two terms. The former, as the last leader of GLC before its abolishment, sustained his popularity by being elected as an independent candidate in the election of 2000 although he was expelled from Labour Party due to his conflict with Blair administration⁴. The latter, on the other hand, achieved to be the Prime Minister of the country in the meantime.

When Sadiq Khan declared his candidacy for being a London mayor in 2016, he introduced himself as "I am Labour first and foremost. I am also a Fabian, a father, a husband, a Londoner" (Dasgupta, 2016: 21). As parallel to this, his campaign slogan emerges as "A Mayor for All Londoners." Following his victory in 2016 mayoral election, he became the first ethnic minority mayor of London. His political career was not limited to this post since he had become MP from Labour Party in 2005 and achieved a position in the cabinet in 2009 by being the first Muslim (Dasgupta 2016:21). His coming to office coincided with a milestone for British politics as the voters decided to leave the EU just a month after his mayoral election. Following an active participation in the Remain camp, Khan needed to govern a City who voted in the opposite direction of the result. Moreover the difficulty of being elected at the local level from the opposition party was also in evidence. Yet the "individual leadership" factor as described by Fenwick and Elcock (2014: 596) became crucial element to analyse his stance towards Brexit issue. First of all, he demonstrated some leadership skills distinct from his party and acted independently thanks to the direct public mandate. Secondly, Khan attracted not just the local but also the international interest groups and partners within the framework of wider governance. Both will be discussed in the following parts.

¹ Before New Labour's promise, elected mayor idea had been raised by Michael Haseltine in 1991, the Conservative Secretary of State for the Environment of the time. However, the proposal was not embraced by his colleagues in cabinet and other MPs in the party (Whitton, 2018).

² Strategic planning, transport, economic development and regeneration, environmental protection and culture, media and leisure, the metropolitan police and fire, and civil defence are the areas that the mayor is responsible for (Rao, 2006: 218).

³ There is some more academic literature on the mayoralty of previous two names compared to Khan. On Livingstone, studies began even before his mayoral terms; Carvel (1984, 1999), Turner (2001), McNeill (2002), Hosken (2008), Beech and Smith (2010). On Johnson; Holman and Thornley (2011), Purnell (2012), Crines (2013), Dommet (2015), Gimson (2016). From a comparative perspective, Edwards and Isaby (2008), Worthy et al. (2019)

⁴ In the mayoral election of 2004, he became the candidate of Labour Party.

3. Internationalisation of Non-central government

Internationalisation of local/regional/non-central governments is not a new phenomenon. Various conceptualizations have been used to explain it as non-central governments and its external activities are heterogeneous (Blatter et al, 2009). Among these concepts multi-level Governance and para-diplomacy are the most common terms while the former refers to processes and structures, the latter generally deals with the actors. Unlike multi-level governance, para-diplomacy⁵ examines sub-state level actors and their discourses in the international realm in addition to their legitimising strategies (McConnell et al. 2012).

One another concept that emerges in the literature is city diplomacy which can be defined as engagement of cities with actors of international realm via institutions and processes to represent themselves (van der Plujim and Melissen, 2007:6). Burksiene et al. (2020: 305) categorizes city-diplomacy studies into five topics namely; city-twinning, city networks and the possibilities they provide, the smart city concept, the impact of mayors on city diplomacy and the internationalization of cities, and the broader topic of para-diplomacy. Regarding the impact of mayors on city diplomacy, an important contribution to the field comes from the study of Hocking as he prefers to focus on the “actorness” behind the international involvement. According to him there are two key reasons behind the external activities on non-central governments; changing policy environment and growing preference to use local political arena to achieve goals in the international realm (Hocking, 1993:12). Hocking (1999) analyses the actorness of non-central governments and their involvement in the international realm from the perspective of aims and motivations, extent and direction of involvement, structures and resources, levels of participation and strategies. Regarding their aims and motivations, Hocking categorizes these actors as initiators trying to follow their policy targets “outside the national setting; channels in which local/regional field is used for a basis of global strategies by other actors such as NGOs; and finally targets in the international activity since their policies and exercises can influence the benefit of other international actors”. The initiators are the ones having two parallel aims of trade promotion and investment. The prominence of these objects has increased the presence of non-central governments in the international realm especially since 1980s. Second group of motivation according to Hocking can be named as channels because non central governments can be capable of responding the demands of international actors despite their possible exclusion from the foreign policy realm. Their jurisdiction could be considered as a suitable base to achieve global strategies. Whereas thirdly, as targets, non-central governments’ policies can work for the benefit of international actors (Hocking, 1999: 20-22).

About the nature of involvement of these actors, Criekemans underlines that it might have either cooperative or conflictual dynamics (2010). It should be underlined that numerous studies have addressed cooperative city-diplomacy activities⁶. Regarding the latter dynamic, on the other hand, declining confidence in central government leads sub-state level actors to be more involved in foreign policy issues. Brown (1995) also discusses the emergence of phenomenon as follows;

“In some countries where the national government is ineffective in dealing with the concerns of subnational communities and especially where such communities are concentrated in particular provinces or localities, provincial or local governments have been asserting themselves, not only as agencies of advocacy for the cultural and human rights of the aggrieved communities, but increasingly as their economic agents in the

⁵ Duchacek (1990:32) defines para-diplomacy as an initiative of sub-central authorities in the form of international work which is “parallel to, often co-ordinated with, complementary to, and sometimes in conflict with centre-to-centre macro-diplomacy”

⁶ Please see for London (Acuto, 2013); St Etienne (Beal and Pinson, 2014); Medellin (Auschner et al, 2020); Turku (Clerc, 2020); Chişinău (Cantir, 2023).

global market place, negotiating trade and investment arrangements with similar subunits of government in other countries.”

Here a keyword comes to forefront to explain the relations between central and non-central government, to name “ineffective”. This can be counted as one of the distinction line in the analysis of internationalisation of sub-state actors according to Dickson. The author basically argues that these actors involve in the international realm either through the central government or bypassing them (Dickson, 2014).

Considering the above contributions to the literature and the mentioned gap in local government studies, this study will try to focus on Hockings’s actorness emphasis and the role of mayors in international issues given the environment of “ineffective” foreign policy decision making for the city in question followed by central government. As a case study, I will try to analyse Sadiq Khan’s involvement in Brexit process as a non-central government actor having both domestic and international policy implications. His goals and motivations will be examined from the perspective of categories defined by Hocking and this study will try to answer to what extent Khan’s actorness had an impact on the process of Brexit. At this point, it needs to be clarified that both of Khan’s predecessors had tensions with the central government on a matter of foreign policy. While Livingstone criticized Blair’s stance on Iraq War, Boris Johnson was embracing a different path than Cameron government on the issue of EU (Worthy et al, 2019).⁷ However, Khan’s case is exceptional because of two reasons. First, both Livingstone and Johnson enjoyed a compliance to a great extent as they are not a member of party in opposition, but in power⁸. Second, in above mentioned issues, they did not follow a London wide campaign to raise their arguments. Therefore, systematic involvement as an actor by Livingstone and Johnson could not be observed during their terms in the Office.

In the following part of the study, I will use the research material derived from the official website of London government. The analysed material was collected from the section of Mayor of London’s press releases page by being filtered with the word of “Brexit”. Press release results which could summarize Khan’s activities in a nutshell mostly belong to the first term of the Mayor as the research was conducted in October 2021, 5 months after his re-election. At this point, it needs to be underlined that categories offered by Hocking are analytic ones to explain the empirical world. The division lines between them seem to be not clear at some points however they function as a bridge to connect the theory and practice.

4. Analysis of Khan’s actorness on the issue of Brexit

4.1 Initiators

One of the important initiatives of Sadiq Khan is “London is open campaign” launched in 2016 just after the result of Brexit referendum. He argued the main motivation was to give the message that, despite the decision of leaving, London would remain as the most entrepreneurial and outward-looking centre of business in the world. It is a city of creativity and opportunity. (The Mayor of London, 16 August 2016). Moreover this campaign was also carried to social media and used its language with the campaign’s promotion as #Londonisopen. Another aim of the hashtag sign was to receive the contributions from the public in an interactive way. Within the framework of this campaign, the Mayor paid international visits and hosted summits and events in the capital which will be examined in the following parts. Thanks to a four-day bus tour in London, the mayor has tried to reach the European

⁷ Outside of the UK, Chişinău mayor Dorin Chirtoacă (2007–2017) can be named as an example as his policies to have closer relationship with the EU constituted an alternative to central foreign policy favouring Russia (Cantir, 2023). On the issue of climate change, the mayors in the USA became a part of “We Are Still In” initiative criticizing the central government’s decision of not signing Kyoto Protocol (Kihlgren Grandi, 2020).

⁸ First term of Livingstone as an independent candidate and first two years of Johnson under Labour government need to be excluded.

nationals living there with an aim of offering advises and guidance for the uncertain post-Brexit era (The Mayor of London, 29 March 2019).

“London is open” framework is to some extent Khan’s objection to two main outcomes of Brexit; leaving the Single Market and ending the freedom of movement. Various initiatives were raised by the Mayor to create an awareness for the possible results of these two decisions. On the issue of leaving the Single Market, Londoners came to know various initiatives of Khan such as Brexit Expert Advisory Panel (The Mayor of London, 19 December 2016) and Brexit Business Resource Hub (The Mayor of London, 17 October 2018) to supervise the unknowns of being outside of the Single Market especially for the sake of business world. Within these structures, Khan took the assistance of experts and sector leaders. Along with Single Market, freedom of movement is another red line for Khan as he claims it needs to be continued even in the post-Brexit period and the benefits of this EU policy including migration cannot be compensated with any other alternatives. In line with this backing, Khan proposed “Associate Citizenship” which could be negotiated between EU officials and central government of UK (The Mayor of London, 18 February 2020). This scheme raised by the Mayor was actually a recapitulation of MEP Guy Verhofstadt’s idea introduced in 2016. The aim was for British citizens to keep enjoying the right to move and work in the EU zone. This exclusive right would be “next best thing to membership” given that being a member of the EU again was not a realistic expectation according to Khan⁹.

In line with his support to stay in the Single Market and maintain the freedom of movement, Khan called for a public vote on the Brexit deal or a no deal which would be realized by the Government needs to be explained. To a certain extent it could be argued that the idea of second referendum was not the Mayor’s initiative, but a local government support to the People’s Vote campaign. Presenting the legitimate background of this call for another referendum he defended his position by underlining government’s failure as follows;

“As the Mayor of London, I wouldn’t be doing my job representing the interests of Londoners if I didn’t stand up now and say that it’s time to think again about how we take this crucial decision for the future of our country – and the futures of our children and grandchildren...The need for another public vote on Brexit was never inevitable, or something I ever thought I’d have to call for.” (The Mayor of London, 15 September 2018)

Although this call in 2018 meant to be at odds with his own party’s official stance upholding the decision of referendum on 23rd of June, 2016, Khan, as an actor of local arena, did not hesitate to be engaged in a national debate resulting from a foreign policy verdict.

4.2 Channels

In numerous instances Khan’s actorness was shaped by the fact that his position was in line with the some other actors’ interests in London. In those cases, the mayor has become a conveyor and channel to direct the enthusiasm of civil society, academic world and also EU representatives. The summits and meetings hosted by Khan offer an opportunity for others to articulate their concerns.

⁹ Khan has come with some other initiatives to deal with post-Brexit obstacles until the end of his second term. Youth Group Travel Scheme has been a one recent example. He argues that “since October 2021 every child entering the UK must have a passport, and children with non-EU passports, including refugees, also need a £95 visa [...] I call on the Government to introduce a Youth Group Travel Scheme, which could be specially designed to make the UK more open to visits from school children from around the world. The Government should also extend the Youth Mobility Scheme in a reciprocal agreement with EU countries to allow further cultural exchange whilst also supporting sectors, such as the hospitality and catering industries, which have been on the frontline of post-Brexit labour shortages. Our post-Brexit future does not have to mean isolation from our European friends and partners and restrictive policies that only damage our economy and opportunities for growth” (The Mayor of London, 27 April 2023).

First and foremost, Khan had meetings with agents of civil society. Especially the dialogue with the business sector was remarkable. This was no surprise that historically, London local government and the business sector could unite in search for the acceptance that “London is different” than any other city in the UK in the sight of central governments (Hall, 2006: 336). In April 2017, he hosted a summit in which the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI)¹⁰ and Alliance of European Metropolitan Chamber in City Hall participated. In the summit, collaborations and links were strengthened with the business world given that a scenario of “hard Brexit” was undesirable for all (The Mayor of London, 5 April 2017). Before the summit, Khan had written a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond on behalf of The New West End Company, London Councils, LCCI, the Federation of Small Businesses in London, the Heart of London Business Alliance and other major organisations (The Mayor of London, 21 February 2017). The capital’s Remain supporting majority and the Mayor’s seamless loyalty to Single Market enabled a good chance to raise a coherent objection on the side of civil society.

Secondly, the universities¹¹ also preferred to be actively involved in the process as leaving from the EU created many unknowns in terms of the academic staff, student enrolment and fundings. In a meeting with High Education Institutions (HEI), Khan appreciated the diversity that HEIs offers. His “London is open” campaign could be seen as a facilitator in the eyes of the universities in London for the continuation of their reputation and competitiveness at a time Brexit was about to bring a confrontation. Khan, by welcoming the international students and academic staff, further added that London as the capital of higher education has prominent universities and great number of international students.¹² He assured Londoners that his wish would be to keep it in the same way and remain a key partner of academy in the EU (The Mayor of London, 31 August 2016). In 2019, this time, universities paid a visit to Mayor’s Office to raise their concerns, common expectations with these actors paved the ground for other letters written to the Home Secretary and the Secretaries of State for Education and International Trade, to demonstrate and represent the view of HEIs (The Mayor of London, 2 April 2019).

One of the important summits that Khan had hosted was the European Union Capital City Mayors Summit in June 2019. Although the main themes seem to be the common concerns on climate change and violent extremism, Khan used this channel to comfort his counterparts that London would stay as a home for one million EU citizens and a European city (The Mayor of London, 25 June 2019).

4.3 Targets

Since the decision of leaving the EU, Khan has paid various visits to European capitals and EU headquarters. In those visit, the mayor met with foreign ministers, EU officials and his counterparts. As mentioned above, the target activities are the ones policies of non-central government fit well into the interests of international actor meaning that the mayor chooses the latter as the target and mean to realize his policies.

Under the umbrella of “London is open” campaign he first visited Paris and Brussels¹³ in March 2017 to enhance the historic economic, business and cultural ties of London with the other European

¹⁰ Established in 1881, LCCI is one of the representatives of business interest in London concerning “global trading conditions” and the local issues at the same time (Hall, 2006: 314).

¹¹ According to Hall, Higher Education sector in London, as a part of public service, needs to be considered within the framework of business due to its contribution to the economy of London, place in international marketplace and “business-like” operations in terms of scale and diversity. As one of the “distinctive products” universities contribute to brand recognition abroad (Hall, 2006: 327-329).

¹² One of the recent initiatives of Khan is a new Erasmus-style overseas study scheme under which students would apply for grants and other financial support to study in the EU. It aims to focus on the loss of mobility of students as a result of Brexit (The Guardian, 2024).

¹³The initial plan was to visit 5 cities: Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Madrid, Warsaw. However, only Paris and Brussels visits could be realized due to the terror attack at Westminster Bridge on March 22, 2017 (Evening Standard, 2017).

capitals (The Mayor of London, 8 February 2017). The campaign was planned to include meetings with politicians; city and business leaders. In the capital of Belgium and the EU, Khan underlined that “Even if the UK leaves the EU we will remain part of the European family” and reminded the ties between London and continental Europe thanks to the EU nationals living in London. This visit created an opportunity for Khan to spread his views on Brexit to the President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, the European Parliament’s chief Brexit negotiator, Guy Verhofstadt, the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, and the Mayor of Brussels, Yvan Mayeur. In Paris, he raised the issue of privileged access to Single Market as London business (ITV, 29 March 2017).

In November 2018, Berlin and Paris visits were on the agenda The Mayor of London argued that London was enjoying a trade, business and cultural bonds with its counterparts in Europe such as Paris and Berlin. By developing the relationship with different cities of Europe he expressed his will to attract more jobs, trade and investment for the people of London.¹⁴ Despite Brexit, Khan insisted London remaining open (The Mayor of London, 9 November 2018).

The Poland visit of mayor in 2019, August was serving for an issue which is very inherent in world politics. He basically argued in a meeting with other world leaders where the 80th anniversary of the start of Second World War commemorated that Brexit happened because the politicians were seeking to play on fears of people instead of addressing them. In that symbolic time and place, an international event helped him to promote his “London is open” campaign while highlighting the necessity to take an action against the rise of far-right. (Reuters, 1 September 2019).

4.4 Voice

Being a voice of Londoners has been used before by other political actors. Dahrendorf argues that during 1990s it was used to describe the need for local government reform in the capital by the public and private sector experts (Dahrendorf, 1990). Especially in the second half of 1990s, the lack of voice in London both at the national and international level was emphasized more as it was affecting the City’s representation negatively (Hebbert, 1998). Labour Party also utilized this argument while introducing its pledges on London government (Labour party 1996). As Syrett (2006: 301) argues that a high profile mayor, whose legitimacy comes from his election and strategy development that includes stakeholder consultation and the pursuit of a broadly based consensus, has given London a much stronger voice both at the national and international realm.

Khan’s Office preferred to use this call for a voice because of two reasons. First, in general, Khan demands more autonomy for his non-central government. Dependency on central government’s funding compared to other capital cities in the world is one of the concerns as he emphasizes that London cannot develop its own policies in line with the interests of the City. Having a population as much as the total of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; London has far less autonomy over its own economy and public services (The Mayor of London, 7 November 2018). Secondly, more specifically to the case of Brexit, Khan believes a separate decision making mechanism for London is vital. He claims by enabling more control to London, economic uncertainties related to Brexit could be managed. Therefore a “stronger voice” would provide protection of jobs, prosperity and growth. (The Guardian, 2017). By assigning this role of “stronger voice” to himself, he equalizes the interest of the capital to the one of whole country’s asserting that “when London succeeds, Britain succeeds” (The Mayor of London, 16 August 2016). Within this framework, Khan’s actorness is articulated mostly by giving warnings, taking Londoners’ attentions to central government’s policies and challenging them. This is

¹⁴ In April, 2023, the mayor attended the opening ceremony of a French architecture firm planning to invest over €100m in London. This meeting in which business were gathered constituted a proper environment for mayor to raise his concerns about London in the post-Brexit era (The Mayor of London, 27 April 2023)

also important due to the fact that Khan's own party cannot offer an alternative voice of opposition as it prefers to keep quiet despite the Party's Remain inclined position.

As mentioned above Khan has raised objections for leaving the Single Market and ending the freedom of movement in the aftermath of Brexit referendum. These objections were fostered by denouncing the government's policies in general. He warns and urges government to take necessary actions for the upcoming threats¹⁵; informs the Londoners about the "inabilities" and "unwillingness" of decision makers.

Another tool of Khan to challenge government was his response statements. Following Theresa May's White Paper on Brexit, Khan has published below words in his critical response;

"The Prime Minister's assertion that 'no deal for Britain is better than a bad deal for Britain' is not necessarily true. 'No deal' would mean us crashing out of the EU and relying on basic World Trade Organisation rules - the very worst case scenario. This could be terrible for London and for the British economy" (The Mayor of London, March 2017).

As mentioned above, the aim and motivation to be a "voice" is highly related with the adversarial nature of politics in Khan's case. His involvement in the international issues is constructed not on the basis of cooperation but a conflictual environment. Moreover, his embodiment of possibly the most important Remain majority within England and even within the UK increases the number of empirical cases of Brexit engagement as a voice of Londoners.

5. Conclusion

This study tries to fill the gap in the literature on the issue of Sadiq Khan's actorness in the international realm. His critical stance against Brexit and its aftermath made him visible and active in the eyes of people of London, international institutions and other international actors. Brian Hocking's theoretical framework offered us categories such as *initiator*, *channel* and *target* to understand and analyse Khan's involvement in a foreign policy issue. From "London is open" campaign to the summits gathering EU officials, universities and business world the Mayor provides empirical cases for Hocking's categorization. However, an additional category of *voice* is useful as one of the Mayor's significant motivations is to challenge central government's foreign policy decisions and provide an alternative voice.

Khan's tenure as mayor coincided with significant political upheaval due to Brexit, positioning him uniquely as an eloquent critic of the central government's policies. His "London is open" campaign and other related initiatives aimed to mitigate the adverse effects of Brexit on London, underscoring his proactive stance in international engagement. Khan's use of the mayoral platform to support London's continued access to the Single Market and freedom of movement exemplifies his role as an initiator. His efforts to channel the interests of business, academic, and civil society groups further illustrate his actorness in representing London's distinct position. Khan's international visits and interactions with EU officials highlight his role in targeting the necessary occasions and seeking to align London's interests with those of international actors. Moreover, his persistent critique of the central government's handling of Brexit and his calls for a second referendum underline his function as a voice for Londoners, advocating for greater autonomy and better management of the city's economic and social interests.

In 2002, Simon Jenkins was giving a credit to Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London of the time, as Livingstone had put "the mayoralty on the map", yet Jenkins was also adding that the mayor was not able to "convert popularity into influence and influence into making difference" (Travers, 2003). What

¹⁵ One recent example was his warning on potential Eurostar chaos. He raised his worries related to the planning for the new EU biometric Entry/Exit System (EES) checks by adding that "as it stands these new post-Brexit checks will cause chaos at St Pancras, with cuts to services and potentially huge queues facing passengers at peak times. This is directly a result of Brexit, and it's not an issue ministers can now wash their hands of" (The Mayor of London, 10 February 2024).

Khan is trying to do since 2016 is to create a difference for Londoners who had mostly voted in favour of EU in the referendum. It is not possible to claim Khan's involvement had resulted or would result in realistic outcomes and meet the demands of Londoners in a highly centralized and unitary state like Britain but his actorness is worth to be brought on the academic field given the electoral dynamics in the capital and its worldwide prominence. On 2nd of May 2024, another mayoral election will be held. Sadiq Khan, as the candidate of Labour Party, still keeps a similar stance (The Guardian, 2024b) however, it could be the issue of further research to discuss to what extent Khan can be argued to be involved in the issue of Brexit and which limitations are on the table for the Mayor since the end of his first term in the Office.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study.

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There is no conflict of interest in this article.

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