



Evaluation of Brexit and Migration Relation

Brexit ve Göç İlişkisinin Değerlendirilmesi

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Öz

Birleşik Krallık, Avrupa Birliği (AB) ile ilişkilerinde her zaman entegrasyon sürecine mesafeli durmuş ve daha izole politikalar izlemeyi tercih etmiştir. Üyelik sürecinde dahi Avrupa şüpheciliği hep arka planda var olmuştur. Avrupa şüpheciliği kavramı özellikle 2004 genişlemesi sonrasında Orta Avrupa ülkelerinden gelen göçle birlikte güçlenmeye başlamış, 2015 göç krizi sonrasında AB'nin yürüttüğü göç politikaları ile en üst seviyeye ulaşmış ve Brexit sürecine yol açmıştır. Bu çalışma, Birleşik Krallık'ın Brexit kararında göç politikalarının etkisini ve Brexit sonrasında Birleşik Krallık'ın nasıl bir göç politikası yürüttüğünü ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda; çalışma kapsamında öncelikle Birleşik Krallık'ın AB üyelik süreci, göç hareketleri ile Avrupa şüpheciliği kavramı arasındaki ilişki ve Brexit sürecinde göç argümanlarının nasıl kullanıldığı incelenecektir. Brexit öncesi ve sonrasında Birleşik Krallık'ın düzenli ve düzensiz göç hareketleri incelenerek, Brexit kampanyalarında vaat edilen göç politikalarının Brexit sonrası döneme nasıl yansıdığı değerlendirilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Göç, Brexit, Avrupa Birliği

Abstract

The United Kingdom has always been distant from the integration process in its relations with the European Union (EU) and has preferred to follow more isolated policies. Even in the membership process, Euroscepticism has always existed in the background. The concept of Euroscepticism started to get stronger with the immigration from Central European countries, especially after the 2004 enlargement, and it reached its highest level with the immigration policies carried out by the EU after the 2015 migration crisis, which led to the Brexit process. This study aims to reveal the effect of immigration policies on the decision to Brexit in the United Kingdom and what kind of immigration policy was carried out by the United Kingdom after Brexit. In this direction, within the scope of this study, first, the EU membership process of the United Kingdom, the relationship between migration movements and the concept of Euro-skepticism, and how immigration arguments are used in the Brexit process will be examined. By examining the UK's regular and irregular migration movements before and after Brexit, we will evaluate how the immigration policies promised in the Brexit campaigns are reflected in the post-Brexit period.

Keywords

Migration, Brexit, European Union

Introduction

Since the seeds of the European Union were sown, the United Kingdom has never considered itself geographically part of Continental Europe. It has positioned itself as an island nation neighboring Europe. The United Kingdom has also shown a different development from Continental Europe regarding historical processes and culture. In economic terms, the United Kingdom owned the most significant colonial empire, and its commercial relations with Continental Europe were not as developed as its trade with its colonies, mainly due to the Napoleonic blockade. In addition, the commercial privileges it applied to its former colonies after the Second World War shaped both the economic and political relations of the United Kingdom. However, the fact that the European Economic Community began to prove itself as a successful model in the 1960s pushed the United Kingdom, which did not want to be weak in the face of this organization economically and politically, to approach the Community.

The United Kingdom applied for membership in 1961 with the EFTA members Norway, Ireland, and Denmark, of which it was the founder. During the Cold War in 1962, the standoff between the three countries during the US offer to give Polaris nuclear weapons to the UK and France led to a further strain in de Gaulle's relations with the UK. The tensest period of the Cold War with the Cuban missile crisis that continued in the same years also supported Gaulle's statement that it would be a mistake to take a radical decision such as the accession of the United Kingdom at such a critical time. Consequently, in 1963, de Gaulle announced at a press conference that the United Kingdom was not qualified and ready for EEC membership, after which the other three EFTA countries withdrew their applications.

The United Kingdom, Denmark, Ireland, and Norway applied for EEC membership a second time in 1968. However, the devaluation of the British Pound in 1967 and the problems in the economy also formed the reason for Gaulle's new veto, and he

stated that the British economy still had a fragile structure and was not ready for the Community level. A new page was opened in France-United Kingdom relations with the replacement of de Gaulle by Georges Pompidou after the events of May 1968, supported by strikes in France about a year later. The negotiations, which officially started in June 1970, ended in January 1972, and the membership of the four candidate countries, acting together with the United Kingdom, to the EC was approved.

The United Kingdom, whose membership process officially started in 1973, has always been privileged. Within the scope of this special status, the United Kingdom maintained its privileged status until it left the membership by staying out of the Euro area, the Schengen Agreement that allows free movement within the EU and its related regulations, and many regulations and policies that are binding for EU members such as the EU area of freedom, security, and justice (Balkir, 2021: 212). The United Kingdom has also continued this approach in terms of immigration policies. When the EU's participation in migration policies within the scope of the integration process is evaluated in general, it is seen that the UK participates in the Union's policies regarding measures restricting migrants' access to Europe or securitization of migration. However, when it comes to border management, asylum, reception of refugees, family reunification, and rights of immigrants and third-country nationals, the UK tends to stay out of EU policies and regulate these areas with its national policies (Yildiz, 2021: 77). With this way they tried to protect from this environment.

1. Euroscepticism and Brexit

The UK was skeptical of European integration even before the accession process. Euroscepticism means opposition and criticism of the EU. Eurosceptics are opposed or are critical of the EU's methodologies. These people have some opinions on the EU policies (Mahr, 2023):

- Citizens of a nation feel that their government no longer has the power to control policy decisions,
- Citizens think that common government policies will cause economic hardship,
- Citizens think that there will be a rapid increase in immigration to the EU countries.

Reinforcing factors of Euroscepticism in the UK: the steps taken to strengthen the supranational powers of the European Union after the 1990s, the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the Union, and the 2008 crisis affected the Union deeply. These factors also laid the groundwork for the United Kingdom to make the Brexit decision. In this context, one of the UK's most potent arguments in the Brexit process has been the EU's immigration policy. The UK's discomfort with the EU's immigration policies started with the migration movements from Central and Eastern European countries to the UK because of the 2004 and 2007 enlargement. The highest level of this discomfort is the migration crisis in 2015. The member states have raised different voices regarding this migration crisis. While radical right parties began to rise in Western European countries, such as Czechia and Hungary, Euroscepticism increased. It spread with immigration issues (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018: 1206). Moreover, this increased the tension.

In 2016, voices began to rise from the United Kingdom to leave the European Union membership, and it was decided to hold a referendum to measure the public's decision in this direction on 23 June 2016. In the interviews conducted by IPSOS with 1,592 adults aged 18 and over across Great Britain on 21-22 June 2016, 51% expressed the opinion of staying /49% left. The most important issues affecting decision-making during the referendum process were immigration and the economy (IPSOS, 2023). For this reason, the main argument of the campaigns carried out during the referendum process was based on the European Union's immigration policy and its adverse effects on the UK. Under this heading, the migration movements in the UK in the pre-Brexit period and how they were used in the campaigns carried out during the referendum process will be examined.

2. Migration Movements and Migrant Profile in the UK before the Brexit Referendum

The UK receives immigration from both European and non-European countries. While the turning point of migration movements from European countries was the 2004-2007 expansion, the turning point of migration movements from non-EU countries was the 2015 migration crisis.

According to the National Statistical Institute September 2016 data, there are approximately 596,000 immigrants in the UK, of whom 268,000 are citizens of EU member states, while 257,000 are from non-EU countries. Although approximately 13 percent of the British population is made up of immigrants, according to the Transatlantic Trends Survey (TEA) (2014), 55 percent of the British public thinks that immigrants in the country are "too many," while only 13 percent think that "few" immigrants. According to the Euro barometer conducted in 2016, the most important problems facing the UK in the British public are defined as immigration (38%), social security (26%), and terrorism (23%). According to the 2013 data of TEA, according to British public

opinion, immigrants mean more wealth in the economy-culture axis. While the majority thinks that immigrants contribute positively to the economy, the rate of those who think that immigrants have positive contributions and lump sums in terms of culture is close to each other. According to the findings of TEA (2014), 57 percent of Britons state that immigrants are a "burden on social services," and 47 percent say that they "take away their jobs," while the rate of those who think that immigrants are a source of employment in some business lines is 73 percent. Considering immigrants and their positive economic returns, 58 percent of the people state that immigrants create employment by opening new businesses. Migration has another perceived economic dimension. Three percent of Britons think they came to the UK to reunite with other family members, 6 percent to seek asylum, and another 6 percent to study, while 40 percent to come to England to benefit from social services and 46 percent to work. Considering these data, it is observed that the British have higher economic concerns about immigrants when compared to other EU countries (Sokullu, 2017: 2). This concern affected their decision precisely.

These economic concerns are thought to be caused by the excessive labor migration to Western European countries, especially after the 2004-2007 enlargements of the former Soviet bloc countries to the EU, because the newly arrived migrant workers were working for low wages, reducing the employment rate of the local people. It is seen that Poles are in the top rank among EU citizens living in the UK between January and December 2015. To evaluate the top 10 countries, Poland is followed by Ireland, Romania, Portugal, Italy, France, Lithuania, Spain, Germany, and Latvia. Although the Poles have a large majority by far, it should not be overlooked that those who come to England from Poland are generally blue-collar workers who come to work (Cenberci and Govdere, 2017: 1437). This affected the results.

Another turning point that changed the UK's perspective on migration and immigrants was the migration crisis, the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. At this period, 1.8 million people came from mainly Syria (as well as Afghans, Nigerians, Pakistanis, Iraqis, and Eritreans) to request asylum. According to FRONTEX statistics, 1,822,177 people entered the EU illegally in 2015. It has been determined that these people are primarily Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi nationals and have crossed to the EU via the Eastern Mediterranean, Central Mediterranean, and Western Balkan routes. In the 2015 refugee crisis, Turkey was seen as an important source and transit country for the EU (FRONTEX, 2017: 8). The EU has signed the 18 March Statement with Turkey, which undertakes to provide visa exemption to prevent migration towards it. A possible visa exemption for Turkey is one of the main arguments of the Brexit campaign. Furthermore, Merkel's choice to open borders for 1 million immigrants from Africa and Middle Eastern countries in 2015 was likewise affected by the consequences of the referendum. Developing Euroscepticism in the UK and the British sway is said to be the explanation for the UK's new way of dealing with regional integration (Akinyoola and Adewumi, 2020: 59). Instead of being part of regional integration, UK citizens thought that they could handle all the economic issues easily.

If we examine the Brexit effect of the 2015 migration crisis, at the time of the referendum, the United Kingdom did not open its doors to Syrian immigrants. The direct effects of Syrian immigrants (increased unemployment, security, and integration problems) were not seen in the country. However, the United Kingdom, which hosted 9 million immigrants as of 2015, experienced these effects with the immigrants it had previously accepted into its country. In addition, with the readmission agreement signed with the Republic of Turkey, Turkish passport holders are included in the scope of visa-free travel and the possibility of working and settling in the UK territory in case of full membership in the coming years frightened the people of the United Kingdom, and pro-secession politicians used this fear before the referendum has reached their goals (Cenberci and Govdere, 2017: 1439).

3. Migration Arguments Used in Brexit Referendum Campaigns

UK media excessively supported the "leave campaign," such as the Sun, Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail, Daily Mail, Star, Sunday Times, and Express. Some important people supported the leave campaign: Michael Gove, MP Boris Johnson, and MP Gisele Stuart (MacMahon, 2023). During the referendum campaigns in the pro-Brexit media organs, immigrants were frequently featured in the news, associating them with crime and expressing them with stereotypes. Immigrants' susceptibility to crime and the harms caused by migration were frequently used in the news. Immigrants are often referred to in the context of natural disasters or calamities: swamp, storm, invasion, raid, siege, terror, crisis, chaos, etc., referred to by words such as The Daily Mail, Sun, and Daily Express often resorted to stereotypes in their reporting. For example, they described Poles as plumbers or builders, Bulgarians as low-skilled, Albanians, Turks, and other Eastern European citizens as swindlers, criminals, gangsters, murderers, drug dealers, rapists, or terrorists. Focusing on Syrians, "leave" campaigners also argued that more "Muslims" would come to the country, which would result in more British women being raped and Turkey's entry into the EU in 2020. Another important aspect is that British national media strengthen Islam phobia and reinforce prejudices against Muslims by reinforcing the "Islam equals terrorism" equation that emerged in the aftermath of 9/11, the terrorist attacks carried out by ISIS.

Immigrants were declared as scapegoats in the media. In news and columns, immigrants have been portrayed as responsible for Britain's economic, social, and political problems; Immigrants, for example, have been criticized for overexploiting maternity services, creating a housing crisis, taking away British jobs, taking advantage of financial aid, lowering wages, undermining Britain's security and increasing crime across the country (Bianet, 2023). According to the Vote Leave and Take Control campaign, nearly 2 million people outside the EU came to the UK in ten years. An uncontrollable migration flow to the UK caused a security threat, affecting the efficiency of the UK's welfare program. He also claims that the courts of the European Union and legal regulations in the field of immigration and asylum prevent them from deporting immigrants who pose a security risk. Turkey's EU membership or visa exemption for Turkish citizens is also seen as an important economic and security threat in increasing migration to the UK (Why Vote Leave, 2023).

As a result, the UK held a referendum for its membership in the EU on 23 June 2016. 52% of UK citizens wanted to leave the EU. The UK informed the European Council, and on 30 January 2020, the EU ratified the Withdrawal Agreement, and the next day, the Agreement came into force. Thus, the transition period lasted until 31 December 2020. After 1 January 2021, the EU and the UK trade and cooperation agreement entered into force (EUR-LEX, 2023).

4. What Has Changed in The UK's Migration Data and Policies After Brexit?

In the statement made by the British Ministry of Interior, it was stated that with the end of the free movement application on 31 December 2020, citizens of EU and non-EU countries will be subject to the same immigration regulations from now on. The UK arranged to encourage a more qualified workforce in the next period. Accordingly, the Ministry of Interior asked companies to invest in their employees and automation technologies, reducing the share of "cheap labor" from Europe. Having a job offer by an approved sponsorship right is added to the criteria to be sought in immigration applications for EU citizens. Thus, by making sponsorship a criterion, coming to the UK to start your own business is blocked. Another effect of this situation is that it is difficult for unqualified personnel to come to the country. This leads to criticism that there will be a need for personnel in unqualified jobs.

However, the immigration policy, which the Ministry tried to solidify, failed in practice. The UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE), a think tank that researches UK-EU relations, "Immigration after Brexit: Where are we going?" published a report. According to this report, low immigration from EU countries in 2022 revealed a skilled worker shortage in many sectors. This year, the UK received the highest number of immigrants from outside the EU. On the other hand, the UK accepted the most significant number of asylum requests after the Second World War in the post-Brexit period. Having decided that only the asylum requests of those who came to the country legally would be evaluated, the UK accepted 437,000 people as asylum seekers after Brexit. The UK experienced a year 2022 in which irregular migration also increased. In 2022, when the number of irregular migrants reaching European countries approached 1 million, the number of people who reached England by crossing the English Channel by boat exceeded 46 thousand. It declares that it will send irregular immigrants entering the country to Rwanda, but those whose asylum request is accepted will not be able to obtain the rights of those who enter legally. The government aims to prevent illegal entry by boat crossing the English Channel. According to the report, while the number of asylum requests that have not yet been processed exceeded 132 thousand on 31 December 2022, this number is the highest in the last 20 years. In another 2022 survey, 46 percent of the respondents stated they were positive towards immigration, while 29 percent said they thought otherwise. Half of those surveyed said that immigrants had positive effects on the economy and culture, while 11 percent said that immigration was the biggest problem facing the country (Perspektif, 2023).

According to the data collected by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and Eurostat, the number of people migrating from the UK to EU countries was 56,832 between 2008 and 2015, while it rose to 73,642 between 2016 and 2018; in other words, it increased by 30 percent. According to the research, there was a 500 percent increase in the number of citizens who immigrated from the UK to EU countries after Brexit. Thus, in 2019, surpassing the United Kingdom, Poland, Romania, Iraq, and Syria, it became the second country with the most German citizenship after Turkey. In this process, Spain was the EU country that received the most immigration from the United Kingdom. In the two years after Brexit, that number rose to 21,250. The second most British emigration country was France. Between 2008 and 2015, approximately 500 people registered for immigration annually, while this number increased to 5,000 in the two years following the referendum. While the number of Britons who obtained dual citizenship in Germany was 622 in 2015, this number increased to 14,600 in 2019. Three years after the referendum, 31,600 UK citizens acquired German citizenship. An additional 15,000 Britons are expected to become German citizens in 2020. Thus, half of the 120,000 Britons residing in Germany will become dual citizens by the end of the year. It is stated that the reason for this is the country's economic and political crisis (Arves, 2020).

In 2020, 2021, and 2022 (until June), the estimates suggest that EU net migration was negative (the EU nationals left > the EU nationals arrived). For instance, until June 2022, 13% of the total migrations to the UK were from British nationals, 21% were from other EU countries, and 66% were from non-EU countries. In 2022, around 277,000 non-EU nationals moved to the nation for formal study; 151,000 moved for work; 276,000 came for humanitarian reasons and family. It shows that formal study is the most common reason for immigration to the UK in 2022 (House of Common Library, 2023: 19). In 2023, 51% of visas were given to visitors, 21% were for formal students, 16% were for work (including dependents), 3% were for family, and 9% were for other reasons (including Ukrainians' condition). Their nationalities in that year were 345,494 Indians, 86,899 Chinese, 61,590 Turkish, and 58,894 South African (Gov.UK, 2023). There was a high increase in skilled-labor visas (up to 61% from the previous year), especially for Indians. Compared with the previous year, there is a 63% increase in Indian nationals. There are some people (22,648 people in 2023) whom the UK protects as refugees and alternative forms of resettlement. There were 75,492 asylum applications in 2023, which is 33% higher than the previous year. This number is also higher than the European Migration crisis (36,546 in 2016). The people came mainly from Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea, and Sudan in 2022-2023 (Gov.UK, 2023).

Conclusion

For the UK, immigration has been one of the most influential arguments for both Euroscepticism and Brexit. The EU's immigration policies affected the decision of the UK citizens' decision because it increased discomfort. Citizens thought that there would be a rapid immigration increase. The UK's economic concerns on immigration issues were higher than those of the other EU countries. And especially after 2015, the Syrian refugee crisis increased this concern. Immigration, both from the EU countries and from outside the EU, has been shown as a burden on the social and economic system and a security problem in the campaigns of pro-Brexit supporters. One of the arguments that found the most support regarding immigrants during the Brexit process was that immigrants increased unemployment in the country by taking away British jobs. In parallel, the UK tightened its immigration policies immediately after Brexit and prioritized recruiting a qualified labor force by setting strict rules for labor migration. However, post-Brexit statistics and research results contradict the UK's pre-Brexit situation. After Brexit, the UK received more immigration and asylum requests, a more significant labor shortage, and the public's view of immigrants turned more positive.

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