

Immigration as a Key Factor in the United Kingdom's Decision to Withdraw from the European Union

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ABSTRACT

The post-communist enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, resulted in the membership of twelve states from Central and Eastern Europe, Baltic, Southeast Europe, and Mediterranean, which together represent more than 100 million citizens. Their rights to move, live and work in the United Kingdom, caused concerns to the British people, which affected their decision to leave the EU in the Brexit referendum. The main purpose of this paper is to highlight the role of immigration in the UK's withdrawal from the EU. For the realization of the research has been applied the qualitative methodological approach, based on data collected from bibliography and the credible Internet sources, related to the EU and the UK, especially to the Brexit process. The results show that not controlling immigration was considered as a big risk for the future of UK citizens and is characterized as one of the key factors that affected in their voting for Brexit. The conclusions of this paper aim to increase knowledge about the Brexit process, with special emphasis for the impact that immigration has had in the UK's decision to withdraw from the EU.

KEY WORDS: Immigration, European Union, United Kingdom, Brexit

POVZETEK

Postkomunistična širitev EU v letih 2004 in 2007 se je izšla v članstvu dvanajstih novih držav iz Srednje, Vzhodne in Jugovzhodne Evrope ter Baltika in Sredozemlja, kar skupaj predstavlja več kot sto milijonov državljanov. Njihova pravica priseliti se, živeti in delati v Združenem kraljestvu je povzročila zaskrbljenost pri Britancih, kar je vplivalo na referendumsko odločitev zapustiti EU. Osnovni namen tega prispevka je osvetliti vlogo imigracije v odločitvi o izhodu iz EU. Ugotavljamo, da je bilo neobvladovanje imigracijskih procesov razumljeno kot veliko tveganje za prihodnost britanskih državljanov in se zato smatra za enega ključnih dejavnikov, ki so vplivali na odločitev za Brexit. Z ugotovitvami skušamo povečati poznavanje Brexit procesa, s posebnim poudarkom na vpliv imigracije pri odločitvi za odhod iz EU.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: imigracija, Evropska unija, Združeno kraljestvo, Brexit

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INTRODUCTION

The paper treats a topic which is very important for the Brexit process, otherwise known as the decision of the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union. Brexit is opening new chapters in the history of Britain, while the EU is facing for the first time with the activation of Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, by which is regulated the withdrawal of states from EU membership. However, although with a very close result, in the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU held on June 23, 2016, the British people decided to leave the EU.

The main research purposes of the paper are: to emphasize British concerns in the Referendums on the UK's membership of the European Economic Community/European Union in 1975 and 2016; to explain the way how the withdrawal of states from the EU is regulated; to classify the main points of the Brexit negotiations; and to clarify the impact that immigration has had in the decision of the British people to leave the EU.

The research question of the paper is: Was immigration one of the most important factors that affected in the decision of the British people to leave the EU? Whereas the hypothesis of the paper is: The possibility of "controlling immigration" as a result of the UK's withdrawal from EU membership affected the increase of Brexit supporters.

Therefore, to give the research question a right answer and to verify the raised hypothesis, besides the introduction, conclusion, references and the Internet sources, the paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter emphasizes British concerns in the referendum on the UK's membership of the EEC in 1975, continuing with the second chapter, which describes British concerns in the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU in 2016. The third chapter explains the withdrawal of states from EU membership, while the fourth one classifies the main points of the Brexit negotiations. Fifth chapter is a very special chapter of this paper on which is clarified the impact of immigration in the decision of the UK to leave the EU.

The paper has explanatory, descriptive, comparative and analytical natures, and for its realization are used qualitative methods, relying in the bibliography and in the credible Internet sources related to the EU and the UK, in particular to the Brexit process.

BRITISH CONCERNS IN THE REFERENDUM ON THE UNITED KINGDOM'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY IN 1975

Referendums are imperfect devices for making basic decisions about the direction in which a country should move. The legitimacy of the verdict may be compromised in many ways by the timing of the contest or the phrasing of the question, by the level of turnout or the margin of victory. Nonetheless, there may be occasions when a referendum may prove to be the least imperfect mechanism available. A great majority of states have in fact turned to a referendum at some time or other to solve a political or constitutional impasse (Butler and Kitinger, 1996, p.7).

Such an example is the United Kingdom because organizing a referendum that enables the British people to decide the future of their country, by remaining or leaving the EU, was not just an idea and a fulfilled promise of David Cameron. In fact, this was the second time that British politicians asked the people to decide the country's relationship with Europe, for in 1975 there was a referendum on whether to stay in the European Economic Community or leave it (Glencross, 2016, p.8).

The Labour general election manifestos in February and October 1974 had promised a renegotiation of the UK's terms of membership of the European Economic Community or Common Market, followed by a referendum on the UK's continued membership. After winning the election on 28 February 1974 without a majority and on 10 October 1974 with a narrow majority, in 1975 British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and his government negotiated concessions for the UK from other European governments.

The main areas of UK concern were:

- The Common Agricultural Policy;
- The UK contribution to the EEC Budget;
- The goal of Economic and Monetary Union;
- The harmonisation of VAT;
- The parliamentary sovereignty in pursuing regional, industrial and fiscal policies (Miller, 2015, pp.12-18).

The referendum on the UK's membership of the EEC was held on 5 *June* 1975. The electorate included *40,456,877 people*, whereas the turnout was *64.03%*. The results were as follows:

Table 1. Results of the referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Economic Community in 1975

Yes	17,378,581 (67.2%)
No	8,470,073 (32.8%)
Valid votes	25,848,654
Invalid votes	54,540
Total votes	25,903,194

Source: Miller, 2015, p.25

The results proved that reasons such as the security aspect, the protection of British values, trade and industrial goals, as well as the benefits of free trade with the EEC, favored the “remain” option.

BRITISH CONCERNS IN THE REFERENDUM ON THE UNITED KINGDOM'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN 2016

Forty-one years later, but not this time by the Labour Party, a referendum was held in Britain on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union, organized by the Conservative Party, which was led by David Cameron.

On 23 January 2013, Cameron gave a speech at Bloomberg regarding the future of the EU, where he mentioned a lot of challenges inside and outside the European continent, and also emphasized the main problems that worried him as prime minister:

- The problems in the Eurozone;
- A crisis of European competitiveness;
- A gap between the EU and its citizens which had grown dramatically.

He declared that he favored the idea of holding a referendum in which the British people could have the opportunity to decide the future of their country, by remaining or leaving the EU. So if Conservative Party would win British general election in 2015, he promised to hold a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU (Government of the United Kingdom, 2013).

The holding of an “in-out” referendum on Britain's renegotiated EU membership by 2017 was one of the most important promises of the

Conservatives in the aforementioned election (BBC, n.d.). On 9 June 2015 Cameron won the election and at the meeting of the European Council on 25/26 June 2015 set out his plans for an in/out referendum, which was the first step in the negotiation process with the EU (European Council, 2015).

In November 2015 he set out the four concerns of the British people over UK membership of the EU:

- Sovereignty and subsidiarity;
- New strategies of the EU for not detracting the UK trade competitiveness;
- Protection of the non-Eurozone countries;
- **Free movement and immigration.**

The EC debated the UK's referendum plans and agreed to find solutions in all four areas at their February meeting in 2016 (European Council, 2015). At the meeting of the EC on 18/19 February 2016, the British government reached a new settlement for the UK in a reformed EU. This settlement also secured all the UK's objectives set out by Cameron, and gave the UK a special status within the EU, as well as setting the EU on a path of long-term reform, covering 4 areas of the settlement:

- Economic governance;
- Competitiveness;
- Sovereignty;
- Welfare (Government of the United Kingdom, 2016).

On 22 February 2016, David Cameron made a statement in the House of Commons on the UK's new special status in the EU and for the in-out referendum. According to him the perfect solution was to be an even greater Britain within a reformed EU than a great leap into the unknown. He believed that Britain will be stronger, safer and better by remaining in a reformed EU because the British people could play a leading role in one of the most important organizations in the world, by helping and making big decisions on trade and security, which determine their future. Remaining in the EU was a better option because the British businesses could have full access to the free trade single market, resulting with new jobs, investments and lower prices. Therefore, remaining in the EU was a safer option by the fact that the British could work with their European partners to fight cross-border crime and terrorism (Government of the United Kingdom, 2016).

The referendum on the UK's membership of the EU was held on 23 June 2016. The turnout was 72.2% and except for the Scottish Independence Referendum in September in 2014², this was the highest turnout since the UK general election in 1992³ (The Electoral Commission, 2019). The results were as follows:

Table 2. Results of the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU in 2016

Votes	UK	England	Wales	Northern Ireland	Scotland
Yes	17,410,742 (51,9%)	15,188,406 (53,4%)	854,572 (52,5%)	440,707 (55,8%)	1,018,322 (32%)
No	16,141,241 (48,1%)	13,266,996 (46,6%)	772,347 (47,5%)	349,442 (44,2%)	1,661,191 (62%)
Valid votes	33,551,983	28,455,402	1,626,919	790,149	2,679,513
Invalid votes	25,359	22,184	1,135	374	1666
Total votes	33,577,342	28,477,586	1,628,054	790,523	2,681,179

Source: The Electoral Commission of the UK, 2019

An interesting fact during the Brexit referendum was the way how people of different ages voted, based on the fact that in 2016 the average age in the UK was 40 years old (The Office for National Statistics of the UK, 2016).

Table 3. Voting of the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU by the British people of different ages

Age	Leave	Remain
18-24	27%	73%
25-34	38%	62%
35-44	48%	52%
45-54	56%	44%
55-64	57%	43%
65+	60%	40%

Source: BBC, 2016

2 The Scottish Independence Referendum was held on 18 September 2014 and was characterized by the electorate that included 4,283,392 people, while 3,899,455 voters or 84.59% took part in the voting.

3 The 1992 United Kingdom general election was held on 9 April 1992 and was characterized by the electorate that included 43,275,316 people, while 33,614,074 voters or 77.67% took part in the voting.

WITHDRAWAL OF STATES FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

While has always been generally assumed that the European Union could be dissolved and individual withdrawals permitted by an agreement of all the member states, most publicists believed before the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 that the European treaties in their Nice version did not permit unilateral withdrawals, in view of express provisions stating that these treaties were concluded for unlimited periods (Dörr and Schmalenbach, 2018, p.1057).

The Lisbon Treaty, signed on 17 December 2007 and entered into force on 1 December 2009, for the first time defined the possibility of voluntary withdrawal of an EU Member State under *Article 50*, which states:

- Any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements.
- A Member State which decides to withdraw shall notify the European Council of its intention. In the light of the guidelines provided by the European Council, the Union shall negotiate and conclude an agreement with that State, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union. That agreement shall be negotiated in accordance with Article 218(3)⁴ of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It shall be concluded on behalf of the Union by the Council, acting by a qualified majority, after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament.
- The Treaties shall cease to apply to the State in question from the date of entry into force of the withdrawal agreement or, failing that, two years after the notification referred to in paragraph 2, unless the European Council, in agreement with the Member State concerned, unanimously decides to extend this period.
- For the purposes of paragraphs 2 and 3, the member of the European Council or of the Council representing the withdrawing Member State shall not participate in the discussions of the European Council or Council or in decisions concerning it. A quali

⁴ Article 218 (3) states: The Commission, or the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy where the agreement envisaged relates exclusively or principally to the common foreign and security policy, shall submit recommendations to the Council, which shall adopt a decision authorising the opening of negotiations and, depending on the subject of the agreement envisaged, nominating the Union negotiator or the head of the Union's negotiating team.

fied majority shall be defined in accordance with Article 238(3)(b)⁵ of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

- If a State which has withdrawn from the Union asks to rejoin, its request shall be subject to the procedure referred to in Article 49⁶ (European Union Law, 2012).

THE MAIN POINTS OF BREXIT NEGOTIATIONS

On 29 March 2017, British Prime Minister Theresa May⁷ notified the European Council in accordance with Article 50(2) of the Treaty on European Union of the UK's intention to withdraw from the EU. In addition, in accordance with the same article as applied by Article 106a⁸ of the Treaty Establishing the European Atomic Energy Community, she notified the EC of the UK's intention to withdraw from the European Atomic Energy Community (BBC, 2017).

On 5 April 2017 the European Parliament approved the resolution of the negotiations with the UK following its notification that it intended to withdraw from the EU (European Parliament, 2017).

Following the adoption of the guidelines by the EC and based on a recommendation from the European Commission, the General Affairs Council on 22 May 2017 authorised the opening of negotiations, nominated the EU negotiators and adopted negotiating directives (European Council, 2017). The two year countdown to Brexit commenced on 29 March 2017. The task of negotiating the UK's withdrawal from the EU was always going to be challenging for all concerned and especially

5 Article 238(3)(b) states: By way of derogation from point (a), where the Council does not act on a proposal from the Commission or from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the qualified majority shall be defined as at least 72 % of the members of the Council representing the participating Member States, comprising at least 65 % of the population of these States.

6 Article 49 states: Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the consent of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its component members. The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account. The conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded, which such admission entails, shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements.

7 Theresa May on 13 July 2016 was invited by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, to form the government after the resignation of David Cameron on 24 June 2016, thus becoming the second female Prime Minister of the UK.

8 Article 106a of the Treaty Establishing the European Atomic Energy Community states: Member States which, before 1 January 1958 or, for acceding States, before the date of their accession, have concluded agreements with third States providing for cooperation in the field of nuclear energy shall be required to undertake jointly with the Commission the necessary negotiations with these third States in order to ensure that the rights and obligations arising out of such agreements shall as far as possible be assumed by the Community.

given the tight time constraints laid out under Article 50 (McGowan, 2018, p.49).

The first phase of Brexit negotiations began on 19 June 2017 and was closed on 15 December 2017. In this phase the UK and the EU were required to tackle three issues:

- EU and UK citizens' rights;
- The financial settlement, including the UK's obligations undertaken while still being a member;
- The specific costs linked to the withdrawal process and the dilemma caused by the Northern Irish border⁹.

The second phase began on 9 February 2018 and this phase focused on the negotiation and ratification of the withdrawal agreement and on a preliminary discussion on the framework for the future EU-UK long-term relationship (Carrapico, Niehuss and Berthélémy, 2019, pp.41-42). However, as a consequence of political clashes within the UK caused by contradictions over a satisfactory withdrawal agreement, the UK's withdrawal from the EU was delayed.

On 20 March 2019, EU leaders took note of the letter from Theresa May, in which she requested delay of Brexit until 30 June 2019, and they offered an extension until 22 May 2019 (European Council, 2019).

For the second time on 5 April 2019, Theresa May sent a letter to the Donald Tusk, which was the President of the European Council, asking for a further extension to the Article 50 period, proposing the date of 30 June 2019. At the special summit on 10 April 2019, 27 EU leaders agreed for an extension of Article 50 until 31 October 2019 (European Council, 2019).

Nevertheless, "Brexit Day" was not even on 31 October 2019. After the resignation of Theresa May, on 24 July 2019 Boris Johnson became Prime Minister of the UK. For the third time, he addressed to Donald Tusk a request to extend the Article 50 until 31 January 2020. The EC adopted a decision to extend the period under Article 50 and the extension was until 31 January 2020 (European Council, 2019).

⁹ The Republic of Ireland-United Kingdom border, sometimes referred to as the Irish border or British-Irish border, runs for 499 km from Lough Foyle in the north of Ireland to Carlingford Lough in the northeast, separating the Republic of Ireland from Northern Ireland.

On 24 January 2020, President of the European Council Charles Michel and the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, signed the withdrawal agreement in Brussels, and also on the same day the agreement was signed by Boris Johnson in London. On 29 January 2020 the UK notified the EU of the completion of its internal procedures which were necessary for the entry into force of the withdrawal agreement and the European Parliament approved the withdrawal agreement (European Council, 2020). The withdrawal agreement entered into force upon the UK's exit from the EU, on 31 January 2020 at midnight. The UK is no longer an EU member state and is considered as a third country.

The entry into force of the withdrawal agreement marks the end of the period under Article 50 and the start of a transition period due to last until 31 December 2020 (European Council, 2020). But, currently the world is facing with the spread of Coronavirus¹⁰, which has become a global problem with extremely serious consequences. According to the World Health Organization, after the United States of America, most EU countries have the highest number of infected people with Covid-19, while the UK takes the first place in Europe for the number of deaths (World Health Organization, 2020). An early victim of the pandemic has been trade talks between Britain and the EU. With coronavirus consuming the British government's attention, it is hardly an ideal time to thrash out compromises, whereas EU minds are also elsewhere, as they confront the serious risks to the bloc's economy and the potential for destabilization. The chances of getting a deal fixed in time are diminishing (The Economist, 2020).

WAS BREXIT CAUSED BY IMMIGRATION?

As it is known, voluntary factors of migration can be divided in social and economic ones. Some examples of social factors are better living conditions, access to health care, and access to good education, while economic factors include better employment prospects and higher wages.

While migration can benefit countries, by providing new trades, skills

10 Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads by washing hands or using an alcohol based rub frequently and not touching face.

and a cheaper workforce, there are potential drawbacks to large scale migration. Healthcare and education services can become strained, a large influx of migrants can lead to housing shortages, cultural differences can lead to racial tensions and the welfare system can become strained if migrants claim benefits.

There are two factors that make the lives of irregular migrants, those without proper immigration status, either to reside or work more difficult than those of citizens or legal entrants, which are:

- They have to remain invisible to the immigration authorities and (presumably) to other officials concerned with law enforcement, and to citizens and legal residents who might perceive them as harmful in some way to their interests;
- They have to survive without the support of those institutions designed to sustain the lives of lawful members of that society, including welfare systems, regulatory bodies and agencies for the protection of persons and property (Düvell, 2006, p.52).

A first glance at actors in EU immigration politics shows that three distinct groups are relevant:

- EU institutions such as the European Commission, the European Court of Justice, and the European Parliament;
- Member states;
- Collective actors such as political parties and interest groups (Carrera, 2009, p.21).

From the perspective of member states, immigration policies are not primarily market-making and equal rights policies. For them, immigration entails costs and benefits that are perceived differently according to the respective immigrant categories seeking entry into member states. Member states' autonomy on immigration policies can be challenged by actual spill-over from the single market, anticipated spill-over stressed by EU institutions, and European conventions calling for compliance (Carrera, 2009, p.29).

In order to become a full-fledged citizen via naturalisation, immigrants are usually required to be sufficiently integrated. Whether this is the case can be assessed using various criteria. For example in order to prove that s/he is sufficiently integrated to become a full member of society, applicants for naturalisation in the UK have to show they have

sufficient language skills and knowledge of society. People that did not fulfil the requirements for ‘qualified persons’ status, they had no right to reside, and subsequently no right to the benefits sought (Guild, Groenendijk and Carrera, 2009, p.113).

In the UK exists a special categorization of EU migrants, which are divided into two groups:

- The best, which includes very specific categories such as EU students, researchers, National Health Service workers are depicted within an economic prosperity frame, underlining the contributions those groups make to the UK economy;
- The rest, which includes migrants that are mentioned within arguments of labour and social security, for instance referring to pressures migrants have on native wages, and on public services such as the National Health Service, schools, and housing.

Migration was a concern issue for David Cameron, when he was leading the process of “reform and renegotiation” on the UK’s membership of the EU. On 22 February 2016 he mentioned the desire of the British people to reduce the very high level of migration from within the EU and preventing the abuse of free movement and the abuse of British welfare system that was acting as a magnet for people to come to the UK.

Cameron said that those coming from the EU, who haven’t found work in Britain within 6 months, can be required to leave. According to him, in the UK will be established a new emergency brake so that EU migrants will have to wait 4 years until they have full access to British benefits, and once activated, the emergency brake will be in place for 7 years (Government of the United Kingdom, 2016).

However, the fear of further immigration from EU countries certainly played a role in Brexit, where high immigration may exert downward pressure on wages for low-skilled workers (Welfens, 2017, p.271). When countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined the EU in 2004, their citizens gained the right to move to the UK to live and work. This resulted in large numbers of immigrants coming to the UK in search of work as the UK economy was booming. Between 2004 and 2006 the UK became the host country for 600,000 Eastern European migrants. Many found jobs, particularly in the construction and retailing trades, earning up to five times as much as they

did in their home countries (BBC, n.d.). In 2004, the UK used the accession of the ten new member states (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) to restrict substantially the access to social benefits for all EU migrants (Guild, Groenendijk and Carrera, 2009, p.235).

The growth rate of immigrants from the 12 EU accession countries which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 (Romania and Bulgaria) was linked to the Vote Leave share. This stands in contrast to migrant growth from the EU countries or elsewhere in the world. It suggests that migration from predominantly Eastern European countries has had an effect on voters. However, it cannot identify the precise mechanism whether the effect on voters is mainly economic through competition in the labour and housing markets, or rather in terms of changing social conditions (Fleming, 2018, p.31). The famous campaign “Vote Leave and Take Control”¹¹ emphasized the possibility of the British people to control immigration if they would vote to leave the EU on 23 June 2016, and have a faire system which welcomes people to the UK based on the skills they have, not by the passport they hold.

Remain campaigners in the UK emphasised how beneficial EU freedom of movement is for British citizens, enabling them to ‘travel, work, study, and retire in the EU, without visas’ and also emphasised the multicultural argument for British students abroad, the positive impact that studying in another EU member state has on gaining valuable international experience.

Alongside of positive categories such as ‘EU students and researchers’ and medical professionals, EU migrants are also mentioned in the context of negative categories such as criminals and ‘low skilled East Europeans’ (Fleming, 2018, pp.40-41). There were mentioned the facts that a quarter of a million EU migrants came in the UK every year, a city the size of Newcastle and this puts a big strain on public services like the NHS and schools. Leave campaigners visually associated through maps, future EU migration from Turkey and other countries with increased refugee movements. For example, a map included countries set to join the EU’, lists five countries like Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Ser-

11 “Vote Leave and Take Control” is the campaign for a Leave vote in the EU Referendum that took place on the 23rd June 2016. It was founded on 8 October, 2015 and on 13 April 2016 it was designated by the Electoral Commission as the official campaign in favour of leaving the EU in the Brexit Referendum. Part of the Vote Leave Campaign Committee was also the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, which at that time was Member of the British Parliament from Conservative Party.

bia and Turkey and their total populations. Even though not present in the list, Syria and Iraq are also highlighted in a different shade of red on the map, underlining the proximity of Turkey, a potential EU state, with countries from where refugees could come to the UK (Vote Leave and Take Control Campaign, n.d.).

More than a million migrants and refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Albania, Pakistan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Iran and Ukraine crossed into Europe in 2015, sparking a crisis as countries struggled to cope with the influx, and creating division in the EU over how best to deal with resettling people. Tensions in the EU had been rising because of the disproportionate burden faced by some countries, particularly the countries where the majority of migrants had been arriving as Greece, Italy and Hungary. The UK had 60 asylum applications for every 100,000 residents and was ranked as twentieth from the EU states, while the EU average was 260.

Then David Cameron said that the UK would accept up to 20,000 refugees from Syria over the next five years, and together with Denmark weren't part of the 24 EU countries that agreed to relocate migrants from Greece and Italy in their territories (BBC, 2016).

The immigrant crisis in 2015 has had a profound effect not only in Britain but also in other EU countries. According to a study realized in 2016 by the Pew Research Center in 10 EU countries (Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Sweden, Hungary and Poland), the highest level of Euroscepticism was as follows: *Greece (71%); France (61%); Spain (49%); the UK (48%); and Germany (48%)*. The research showed that Euroscepticism was on the rise in EU key countries (Stokes, 2016).

CONCLUSION

There is a number of factors that have contributed in the decision of the British people to leave the European Union, such as the incompatibility of the United Kingdom with certain EU policies, the issue of sovereignty which is like the Achilles heel for Britain, the growth of Euroscepticism, economic issues etc., but immigration was a key factor in the decision of UK citizens for Brexit.

In the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Economic Community in 1975, immigration was not a concern for the British and renegotiation between the UK and the EEC was focused mostly on economic and political issues. Whereas, in the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union in 2016, anger and fear caused by EU immigrants had an impact on many UK citizens, which at the same time created favorable spaces for the dominance of Eurosceptic views through various campaigns. While in 1975 the British people chose to remain in the EEC mainly because of the economic benefits, in 2016 they chose to leave the EU because for them national security was more important than the various economic benefits they received from EU membership.

Leave campaigners emphasized the "lack of control over immigration" as the main threat for British national security, which increased the number of Brexit supporters. This support was also affected by the immigrant crisis in 2015, caused by more than a million refugees mostly from the Middle East, who moved to Europe and whose destinations were the main EU countries. The UK was not part of EU countries which accepted and agreed to relocate immigrants in their territories, despite the raised tensions among EU member states and their efforts to solve this issue in the best way.

After voting for Brexit, the British people understood the importance of their decision to leave the EU because the activation of Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty is a very complicated process with major consequences. Seemingly, immigration had a major impact in the decision of the British people for Brexit, but did not threaten their national security as they thought.

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