



THE REASONS BEHIND THE BREXIT DECISION

Onur ALP

Uludağ Üniversitesi, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü Mezun (2018)
Siyaset ve Diplomasi Akademisi



İHTİSAS
AKADEMİ

The decision taken by United Kingdom (UK) to leave the European Union (EU) is one of the most important incidents in this decade. First of all, Brexit is a unique event in the EU's integration history. For the first time, a member states invoked to the Lisbon Treaty's article 50 to start the leaving process. Brexit will definitely have impacts on EU in both political, economic, international relations and so on... Since the UK's membership, the relations between the EU and the UK developed in a different way and their views about the future of Europe differ from each other. After the Big Bang enlargement which is viewed as a significant achievement of the EU, the new circumstances in the world emerged as well. Considering the last decade, there have been some prominent issues that EU has had to deal with. Namely, Eurozone Crisis, Ukraine Crisis, Refugee Crisis. Considering all this facts, the final blow that can be deemed as Brexit result.¹

In the EU's integration history, one of the important economic and political power decided to leave. However, the UK encounters some negative consequences. In the wake of the referendum results, it impinged on the UK's economy considering the uncertain situation and consequently, Sterling lost roughly %10 values.² Moreover, given the results from the Scotland and the Northern Ireland, it gave a way to possible constitutional crisis.³ Brexit process also led to the two Prime Minister's resignation. After the leave decision, there are many important questions and strategies how to conduct the process. For instance, the future relations, single market, Irish border issues are the important ones among others. Considering the limitation, in this study, it examines the reasons why the United Kingdom decided to take the leaving path? In order to seek for answers, this study scrutinizes the historical background, political and economic reasons.

A Concise Historical Background

From the beginning, the UK didn't seem to be eager to participate in the EU. Although Churchill mentioned "United States of Europe" during his speech in Zurich, he did not see UK within it. The UK perceived itself as influential as pre-war years. However, in the aftermath of the Second World War, Soviet Union became an outstanding actors and got a hold of the eastern side of Europe.

The UK and other Western European countries relied on the US vis-à-vis Soviet Union. In Western Europe, the common institution emerged. Early integration of the EU, the UK was not in favour of joining in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Rather it chose to enhance its relations with Commonwealth.² Western European countries improved their capacity and deepened their integrations on other fields, especially founding European Economic Community and Euroatom via Rome treaty. While the supranational character of European Communities (hereafter EU), the UK was the one of the country that founded EFTA with other European country which were not EU's members. However, the advantages and successes of EU's project, and also USA's insistence led the UK to application for membership in 60s. Yet, De Gaulle in France vetoed the UK's entrance twice due to its historical place and ties with USA. Later on, with Pompidou's inauguration in France, the UK acquired the membership together with Ireland and Denmark in 1973.

As a matter of fact, the willingness to exit from the EU is not a new phenomenon considering the UK's history. After two years of acquiring membership, new Prime Minister Harold Wilson from labour party, went to referendum for leaving Communities. However, at %67 of participants chose to stay. Despite this result, the UK's "opted-out" posture continue to persist particularly, during Thacher's era and also in 90s. Given the fact that, non-participation of UK in Schengen zone or rejection of using Euro and opting out justice and home affairs demonstrate the UK's reluctance for further, deeper integration in the EU. Aside from the internal issue, in global arena, the UK tends to pursue its foreign policy more in consistence with USA. The most prominent example is the Iraq war while Germany and France was against that.

Notwithstanding the political aspect, the UK's tendency is much more toward economic integration and intergovernmental model of integration. For example, Thacher took a stand for founding of a single market in the EU. This economic cooperation continued until today (Ondorza 2016, 5).

1- Riley, A., Ghilès, F.,(2016), "Brexit: Causes and Consequences" Barcelona center for international affairs, https://www.cidob.org/es/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionals/n1_159/brexit_causes_and_consequences
2- Aktaş, M., (2019), "Avrupa Birliği ve Türkiye", 2. Baskı, Bursa: Dora Ya.
3- Arnorsson, A., Zoega, G. (2018), "On the causes of Brexit", European Journal of Political Economy", doi: 10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2018.02.001.

Political reasons of Brexit

Practically, according to the article 50 of Lisbon treaty: Any states can withdraw from the EU provided that the national parliament would confirm the decision. And the Brexit process has begun with the leave decision in the referendum. In 2016, given the Brexit's referendum, the results seem pretty close. %51,9 of participants voted "leave" against %48,1 of "remain". Despite leaving decision, results shows the division over the future relationship with EU due to fact that the rates are close to each other. The regions are also significant to show this division. Northern Ireland, Scotland and London voted mainly "remain", In Wales, the "leave" outnumbers "stay" just a little. However apart from London, in other regions of England generally (not all of them) voted "leave" as it is put below. Taking into account that, these facts behind Brexit, the leave decision has two important reason with respect to political aspect: Sovereignty and immigration.⁴

One of the reason is that the willingness to preserve national sovereignty. Considering the events in the world, the nationalism is rising.⁵ During the last 3 years, the election in European level and national level, Eurosceptic parties namely, National Front, Alternative for Germany and others piled up their votes. When the new challenges emerges during the last decades, Euroscepticism finds power. If the EU could not find sustainable solutions for the crisis, then it can be held accountable for the failures. Related to Euroscepticism, the voters could be influenced by the current event such as economic situation, refugee crisis and the last but not the least the Medias 'effect on voter's decisions for "leave" as well. Yet, aside from the Euroscepticism, in this respect for the decision-makers, supranational character of EU matters more. The interference from supranational entities perceived as negative for its national sovereignty. In particular, Court of Justice of European Union's (ECJ) supremacy over the national law and its binding effect on all over the member states affected the result. Its main role is to interpret the treaties and ascertain the rule of law applied equally within EU. Contrary to this, the UK seeks after more independent policy without confronting the ECJ and European law. Since the UK's membership of the EU, it encounter some judicial cases which had an impact on the UK's political life with respect to free movement and so on.

The new initiatives or deepening process which led by Brussels is not favourable for the UK. Given the historical facts, the UK's perspective differs from other member states from scratch. Of course, the argument is not about the competency rather, the UK reacts this. Brussel's interference in national policy is also perceived as a sovereignty problem for the advocates of leave. Brussels's growing role over domestic politics of the member states created for an important reason for decision to leave. There are also voices against interference from Brussels. Hungary and Poland recently criticizes Brussels growing role over their internal affairs. However, unlike the UK, those country have not questioned their membership yet. Without being tied with the EU, main argument of Brexit's supporters is that UK can be influential in international organizations or enhance its trade relations with third countries through free trade agreements. Perhaps, it can refresh and consolidate its political and commercial ties with Commonwealth and USA.

Second one is the influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe due to the free movement right.⁶ In the wake of the Big Bang enlargement of the EU in 2004, the UK didn't utilize its restriction right against the new members of the EU despite reserving them which was entitled under treaties (idib). However, Eurozone crisis engendered a new migration wave from the Central and Eastern European States for working the UK. Increasing numbers of the migrants from other European countries is important aspect; however, the outbreak of Syrian civil war and its consequences as creating a new wave refugee crisis strengthened the tendency of the UK to leave the EU. Considering the date of Brexit occurred right after the refugee crisis. The supporters of leave consider the EU's measures and how it deals with the crisis at hand, as failure. Therefore, they demand stricter border controls and control the immigration into the UK.

Apart from the two important political factor, the results construed as a reaction against the political elites. In literature, it is called anti-establishment. Actually, it is related to two political reasons above. The decisions taken by political elites affects the daily life of the ordinary citizens. Some politicians and analyst said that the results shows who are really in power. Actually, the global incidents and the Refugee Crisis facilitated the prospect of the Brexit.

4- Arnorsson, A., Zoega, G. (2018), "On the causes of Brexit", *European Journal of Political Economy*, doi: 10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2018.02.001.

5- Friedman, G., (2016), "3 Reasons Brits Voted For Brexit", *The Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2016/07/05/3-reasons-brits-voted-for-brexit/?sh=9ca6001f9d6a>

6- Riley, A., Ghilès, F.,(2016), "Brexit: Causes and Consequences" *Barcelona center for international affairs*, https://www.cidob.org/es/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionals/n1_159/brexit_causes_and_consequences

The fear of sharing public services and the would-be effects of migrants and refugee waves could create unfavourable situation as it is thought by Supporter of leave. Therefore, the Brexit's results and peoples' leave choice is directly related to the social issues. EU was generally held responsible for the issues.⁷

The supporters of the Brexit claims that if the UK leaves the EU, then it can solve the problems with Northern Ireland and Scotland's independence willingness. However, experts claims vice versa. The possible Brexit cannot strengthen the common identity but make those states pursue independence in order to obtain the EU membership.⁸ If one looks at the results of the Brexit, Northern Ireland and Scotland majorly voted to remain within the EU. Therefore, that Brexit can hinder the independency of both but can lead a new domestic problem within UK.

Economic reasons for Brexit

Economic aspect is also the important reason for the Brexit. According to the supporters of Brexit, the UK won't have to pay the EU annually (idib, 223). The main argument is "We pay more but receive less", comparing with the Eastern Europe. In EU's system, the powerful economies contribute to EU's budget more than the others. Although this argument seems true, in the long run, UK's benefit in single market is much more than what it pays. The mutual interdependence and trade volume makes this kind of request meaningless as pro Europeans argues (idib).

The Brexit is seen also an opportunity for some. One the one hand the British economy should be reformed in order to recover effect of Brexit and Eurozone crisis. That's why outside of EU, it would be simpler task (Elliot 2020). One the other hand, from 1973 to 2016, UK's growing rate was much slower than in 60s (idib). Therefore, these play an encouraging role for Brexit. Of course, it is the argument. However, before the Brexit, UK's economy was doing well and the unemployment rate was lowest after Germany (Romei 2016). Therefore, it seems the economic problem related to other factors (idib).

7- Gollom, M., (2016), "Brexit vote part of an anti-establishment 'wake-up call'" CBC,

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/brexit-vote-anti-establishment-leave-remain-1.3652059>

8- Aktaş, M., (2019), "Avrupa Birliği ve Türkiye", 2. Baskı, Bursa: Dora Yayıncılık,

9- Friedman, G., (2016), "3 Reasons Brits Voted For Brexit", The Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2016/07/05/3-reasons-brits-voted-for-brexit/?sh=9ca6001f9d6a>

The supporters of leave also claim, EU's economic policy doesn't function very well as in the wake of Eurozone Crisis, the effect still lingers on in southern part of Europe.⁹

As a result, this facts show that the reason behind Brexit is the idea that EU fails to accelerate the economic growth. EU's deep-seated problems take much more time to rectify the situation. However, with the Brexit, the UK can have a slate clean beginning from scratch and develop its economy without the EU. Considering its economic muscle, the UK can try new things setting its own regulation and overcoming the red tape in Brussels (Elliot 2020). Therefore, the result can be seen as a victory of the free market and trade supporters. After leaving the EU, the UK can easily sign free trade agreements with others without EU's regulative approach.

On the other side, for single market, its objectives as written in Maastricht agreement grants four freedom in goods, services, capital and person. The UK are willing to maintain goods, services and capital however, aims to control migration not being involved in migrations within market. During the Brexit negotiations, this issue stands out as the UK wants to still maintain its access to the one of the biggest market. However, as for migration issue, the social benefits for the people living for a while in the EU can be counted as that the UK wants to shuffle off this kind of responsibility. With the Brexit agreement in 2021, though the UK leave the Single Market and Custom Union and also the four freedom, the UK and the EU sign a new agreement that both are not subjected to tariff and quota but the regular checks will be on goods. That seems the UK and the EU found a common ground on this issue. Although the economic reasons of Brexit can be explained to some extent, one should also inspect in the wake of the Brexit result, how Sterling affected or the views of the international company located in UK. The uncertainty what would happen and also most of the company's support for staying in the EU shows in the short run, not much profitable for the UK to leave.

Reference list

Amorsson, A., Zoega, G. (2018), "On the causes of Brexit", *European Journal of Political Economy*", doi: 10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2018.02.001.

Aktaş, M., (2019), "Avrupa Birliği ve Türkiye", 2. Baskı, Bursa: Dora Yayıncılık, p

Elliot, L., (2020) “Why Brexit is a chance to fix the UK economy’s long term problems”, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jan/31/why-brexit-is-chance-to-fix-uk-economy-long-term-problems>

Friedman, G., (2016), “3 Reasons Brits Voted For Brexit”, The Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2016/07/05/3-reasons-brits-voted-for-brexit/?sh=9ca6001f9d6a>

Gollom, M., (2016), “Brexit vote part of an anti-establishment 'wake-up call'” CBC, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/brexit-vote-anti-establishment-leave-remain-1.3652059>

Kellner, P., (2021), “Brexit and the Gradual Disintegration of the United Kingdom” Carnegie Europe, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/83632>

Riley, A., Ghilès, F.,(2016), “Brexit: Causes and Consequences” Barcelona center for international affairs, https://www.cidob.org/es/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionales/n1_159/brexit_causes_and_consequences

Romei, V., (2016), “The economic factors behind the vote for Brexit”, Financial Times, <https://www.ft.com/content/4b3c05f7-382d-33d9-b74b-5cb4cae945fc>

Scottish Government (2021), “EU-UK negotiations: outcome analysis” <https://www.gov.scot/publications/eu-uk-negotiations-outcome-analysis/#Economy%20overall>

The Brussels Times (2021) “Scotland hopes to rejoin the EU as an independent nation”, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium/151971/over-40-of-belgiums-red-zone-returnees-have-been-tested-france-spain-morocco-poland-italy/>



İHTİSAS
AKADEMİ
