Editorial

Brexit: a term, a phenomenon, a process...

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For almost three years, the news about Brexit and its consequences have become a more frequent and increasingly natural media presence. First, both the foreign and local media talked about the causes of the Referendum on June 23, 2016, when more than 30 million British citizens expressed their wish for Britain to break away from the European Union. Then came the news, reports, analyses and debates through which the journalists have tried to explain the situation after the "Leave" vote.

Was that manipulation, hybrid influences, or simple lack of communication... surely, it had it all. Or did we witness the "triumph" of populism, fuelled by the increasing disparities between the political and social environment? These phenomena too cannot be totally ignored... Today, however, the most pressing issues that bother the British around the world, but also the foreign residents of this country, are related to the future and ... the purpose of this process. What will the exit of Great Britain from the European Union eventually mean: disintegration or evolution? And how is Brexit going to affect (if it is not already doing it) the everyday life of people.

The uncertainties and concerns are generated, to a large extent, by the realities about which none of those who has promoted the Referendum has spoken. Almost three years since the Referendum, the British authorities who have negotiated an EU exit deal, cannot win Parliament's confidence vote, while the population is less convinced that the vote was a conscious one. Against the backdrop of the new trends in the developments of political classes, hybrid threats, and massive migration flows to colonialist countries, in the case of Great Britain, the no-confidence vote against the authorities has led to a deep existential crisis. The territorial integrity of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is questioned once it leaves the EU.

How is London going to deal with these concerns and what will Britain look like after Brexit remains an open question. For now, it is clear that the European Union will continue its journey in a new composition, yet in the same format. For institutionally, except for the loss of one Member State, the European club is not going to suffer major changes. Moreover, although immediately after the pro-Brexit vote similar tendencies appeared in other Member States - see the example of Italy- the inability of the British to complete the processes that somehow started in a "loosey-goosey" way have discouraged these attempts and increased the EU unity.

It is not excluded that, in time, we may even talk about positive effects of the Brexit phenomenon. Because Brexit has just reminded the Member States and their citizens of the reason why the European Union was created - the need for Europe to become a stronger global actor, pooling resources and ensuring the interoperability of political, social and economic forces. Today, the single European market is the largest in the world, while the European values allow European citizens to enjoy all forms of mobility, removing the technical barriers and facilitating free movement in all spheres of human life. How is London with all this community experience behind going to organize London's relationship with Brussels, remains to be seen in a few months. However, considering the major negative consequences facing Britain, no one has yet given up the idea that a return is possible ...

Awaiting the outcome of this tragicomedy with an uncertain end, we are continuously wandering: How was that possible? How was it possible in a developed society with century-long democratic traditions to develop and expand such a desire when, de facto, the overall tendency and message regarding the EU was integration and not disintegration? And, in other words, to what extent does it concern us, the ones on the edge of Europe, what the subjects of the British Crown think, do, and feel?

There is certainly a close link between the pro-Brexit vote and the English's lack of satisfaction with the political class on Albion, which no longer represents them and is far too far from the real interests and needs of the people. The vacuum between politicians and society, the lack of communication and understanding of everyday life lead to the development of populism and ... to the politicians' penalisation by citizens. ▶

It's a logical chain that is characteristic not only of European states, but that cannot exist outside the democratic framework. That framework, which in a similar manner allowed for the so-called "Ukrainian scenario," when the comedian Volodimir Zelensky, thanks to a massive protest vote, won on April 21, the race for the presidential seat.

To what extent does it deserve to be subjected to a referendum such complex issues as leaving the community space? Is it okay for the public to decide such a thing without being sufficiently informed? The answer to these questions may be diverse, but the Brexit phenomenon has clearly demonstrated that the existence of European institutions and European bureaucracy does not necessarily reflect the knowledge of the European system by ordinary citizens, the lack of communication at national level giving green light to propagandistic messages and false news.

Ultimately, another element that has defined the Brexit phenomenon is the migration process and the inability of the EU and London to provide social inclusion policies. The ethnic British, who after many immigration waves no longer identified with their own country, voted "exit" precisely because they associated the EU and the freedom of movement with the migratory (historical, based on the colonialist past) processes. From this perspective, they have punished their politicians, but also the European institutions, which often provide complex development assistance outside, including for the EU's popularization, but less so within the Union. And when you remember that Moldova is the largest beneficiary of European aid in the region, you understand that Brexit is about "them", but it is also about "us" ... What is the lesson to be learned? The benefits need to be protected and understood, otherwise their loss is inevitable.

Brexit was also a method of protest - not just ideologically

Iulian Fruntașu, former Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

In 1992, after graduating from the Faculties of Philology and Law of the Moldovan State University, Mr Fruntasu was employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, after which he worked for various diplomatic structures: the OSCE Mission to Georgia; The Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Moldova to the OSCE and the Joint Consultative Group, dealing with the negotiation of the adapted FACE Treaty and the decisions of the OSCE Summit in Istanbul; the OSCE missions in Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia. Meanwhile, he got his PhD in political science and wrote several books, including "An Ethnopolitical History of Bessarabia". From February 2012 to October 2016,

he was the Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – exactly during the time Brexit was born, got ripe and ... happened. I asked Iulian Fruntașu, currently moderator of the foreign policy talk-show "Connections" broadcast every Sunday on TVR Moldova, how this phenomenon was seen there from inside...

■ *Mr. Fruntașu, why did Brexit look so easy and became so hard? Maybe it looked easy for people like me who followed it from outside, and less so for those who have been living with that mess?*

■ It is true that in the beginning Brexit was predominantly a Britain's foreign policy issue, and the outside world knew little about its essence. What was known is that there has always been a certain anti-European tendency in the UK - both for earlier historical considerations and for more "fresh" judgments in terms of time. In addition, in the Conservative Party, there has always been a group that has fought for Britain's exit from the European Union. So it all happened gradually, until David Cameron proposed the organization of the referendum. It was not absolutely unexpected, though.

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