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**BREXIT, ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY**

**Abstract**

Euroscepticism has been a threatening challenge for the European Union for four years. Brexit is one of the most important lessons that should be learnt in terms of accountability. All countries, which are characterized to a certain extent by some Euroscepticism, will remember this prolonged process, which came to an end on January 31st.

This research paper tries to identify the extent to which public officials were accountable to people during the process of Brexit. The referendum campaign, which started in 2015 was supposed to take into consideration the opinion of the public, but political actors misled the public by providing incomplete information.

Furthermore, right after the ballot public officials removed some posts in social media. The purpose of this research is to identify the lessons learnt from Brexit in terms of accountability. The research will analyze data taken from surveys, interviews and official government websites.

At the moment of speaking U.K has to think about minimizing the consequences and making reforms that will make the country more sustainable in coming years.

**Key Words:** Brexit, U.K, accountability, Euroscepticism, responsiveness.

**Introduction**

Euroscepticism has been a threat for the European Union since 1992 with the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. After the ratification of this treaty, which is also known as the Treaty on the European Union some countries started opposing the policies of the EU. The United Kingdom is one of those countries who was known for its rebellion in terms of new policies of the European Union.

This research paper tries to identify the extent to which public officials were accountable to people during the process of Brexit. In the beginning of my paper I will give a definition of the concept of Brexit and then a brief history of the events from the moment that the UK decided to leave the EU until the process was finalized. After that, I will take into consideration the concepts of transparency and accountability during the process of Brexit. The research will analyze data taken from surveys, interviews and official government websites.

To continue with, I will mention two main claims which are considered to be false and were spreaded during the referendum campaign. Moreover, I will take into consideration what the UK lost after Brexit and what the EU lost together with Britain. January 31, 2020 is more the beginning than the end of Brexit. The United Kingdom and the European Union will have to negotiate the basics of a trade agreement that will shape their future relationship. For those who supported Brexit, January 31,2020 marks a major victory. For those who were against it, it is a day of mourning. Two elections, three prime ministers and three years of clashes and political struggles, have divided the United Kingdom into two parts. The future will show which part of the country will benefit from this decision.

**A brief history of the Brexit process**

Brexit is a word used to symbolize Britain's departure from the European Union - merging the words Britain and Exit to form the word Brexit. We have seen a similar scenario when Greece wanted to leave the Eurozone and the process was called Grexit.

The United Kingdom applied to join the European Communities in 1963 and 1967, but they were banned by President De Gaulle. After President Gaulle surrendered, the United Kingdom successfully applied and the treaty of acceptance was signed by Prime Minister Heath in 1972. The European Communities Act was approved by the Parliament in 1972 and the United Kingdom officially joined the European Community on January 1, 1973 along with Ireland and Denmark.

After a prolonged period of referendums and uncertainties regarding the EU membership Prime Minister David Cameron abandoned the call for a referendum regarding the EU membership in 2012, but suggested an option for a future referendum. Being under pressure, Cameron announced that a re - election of him would lead to a referendum on membership in the European Union in 2017. After winning the 2015 elections, the 2015 European Union referendum act was presented to the parliament. Prime Minister Cameron favored staying in the European Union, but asked for negotiations regarding some critical issues such as limiting European Union immigration, protecting a single market for non-eurozone countries and excluding the UK from an ever-closer union.

Opinion polls conducted in December 2015 showed that a considerable number of British people showed support for their Prime Minister, but on condition that Cameron must succeed in his renegotiations. In February 2016, Cameron announced that some restrictions on immigrants employed in the European Union were agreed, but before applying them, the United Kingdom must seek permission from the European Council and the European Commission. The Prime Minister in his speech at the House of Commons finally announced the date of the referendum.

On June 23, 2016 a referendum was held to decide whether the UK should leave or stay in the European Union. 51.9% including England and Wales voted to leave compared to 48.1% including Scotland and Northern Ireland who voted to stay in the EU. The day he lost the referendum, David Cameroon resigned and was replaced by Theresa May. May became the Prime Minister without facing competition in the conservative leadership after her main rivals who voted to leave the EU withdrew. Firstly she opposed Britain's departure from the EU just like Cameroon, but changed her attitude later on. On March 27, 2019 after a lot of vicissitudes with the British Parliament, which rejected her agreement to leave the European Union, Theresa May declared that she will "not lead the UK in the next stage of Brexit negotiations". [[1]](#footnote-0)

Boris Johnson was the one who succeeded the former Prime Minister Theresa May starting from July 29, 2019. He came to power in a dangerous political time for Britain, at a time when the UK was facing the impossibility of a successful exit from the European Union. In his first speech as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson stated that in terms of Britain's exit from the European Union, he and his government would bring back the confidence in democracy.

Brexit happened on January 31, 2020 at 11PM. From that time Britain was no longer part of the European Union. After Brexit, Prime Minister Boris Johnson in his speech stated that “the most important thing to say tonight is that this is not an end but a beginning. This is the moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up on a new act in our great national drama”.[[2]](#footnote-1)

**Accountability during Brexit**

Brexit was a prolonged process with a series of events happening but what I want to focus on is the issue of misleading the public and lack of accountability and transparency. Bovens (2007) defines accountability as *a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgment, and the actor may face consequences.*

The campaign which started in 2015 with the slogan “take back the control” had the intention of taking into consideration mainly the opinion of the public but during the campaign and after the referendum political actors seemed to mislead the public by providing either incomplete or wrong information. The Executive in the UK has the power to deal with negotiations and sign international agreements, while the Legislative is responsible for monitoring all the process and calling the Executive to account for its actions. So, as it can be understood the Executive does not have unlimited power and it is the duty of the Legislative to hold the Executive accountable and transparent. The purpose of holding the Executive accountable is to provide information to the public regarding the agenda. After the referendum took place on June 23, 2016 Parliament did not provide any kind of information to British citizens in terms of further negotiations or other decisions. The only statement that Theresa May made after a while was “brexit means brexit”, which gave the message that she supported leaving the EU but that declaration was not as transparent as British citizens expected.

Moreover, what is interesting about the referendum campaign is that a vast number of tweets that had caused a stir during the campaign disappeared after the referendum. According to a research conducted by the University of London, 13,500 fake [Twitter](https://twitter.com/) accounts which posted about 65,000 messages for a period of four weeks during the campaign were deactivated or changed their names right after the referendum. [[3]](#footnote-2) This is considered to be a communication strategy used by political actors in order to get public support by providing fake information.

**False claims made during referendum campaign**

Furthermore, we can talk about two more misleading claims made and changed after the referendum. So, those who supported the referendum claimed that house prices would fall by 10% after a vote to leave, while in reality such a thing would be valid if the UK voted to stay in the EU. Political actors did not go into greater details regarding this issue and neither house prices nor other property prices declined.

Moreover, David Cameron in the early beginning informed that the interest rates would remain the same. According to the Bank of England the interest rate, which was 0.25% in August 2016 increased to 0.50% in 2017 and 0.75% in 2018.[[4]](#footnote-3) All the false claims show us the strategy of manipulations used by politicians in order to win the support of the public no matter how.

**Conclusions**

Brexit happened on January 31, 2020 at 11PM. The long-awaited day for most British citizens had already arrived. Theoretically, the United Kingdom was no longer a member state of the European Union. So what will happen next? With the end of the UK EU membership after 47 years, the transition period began. Right now the UK has certain rights such as customs union, common market and free movement. Furthermore, the UK has to comply with the EU rules. However, the country does not have a say in the decision-making process in the EU. If Britain makes a request until 30 June, this transition period can be extended for another 2 years. But for now, such a thing is not an issue.

The EU is expected to be the most affected actor since Britain left the European Union. Britain was one of the main actors within the EU in both economic and military terms.. Now that Britain is outside the Union, any agreement between Britain and the EU must be renegotiated from the beginning. Also, the EU is already losing one of the largest contributors in terms of monetary value poured into Union institutions.

Another concern of the EU is the fact that other states can take a similar decision such as the UK in terms of leaving the Union. Let us remind Greece and Grexit. Many analysts have seen the departure of the UK as the beginning of the end of the European Union.

In fact, if the EU ignores all the lessons learnt from Brexit and does not become more transparent to citizens in terms of how member-states and the European institutions are interconnected and reasons why this Union is definitely a good thing for the states, it will witness several referendums on the EU membership take place in other countries.

To conclude, a French diplomat stated that “the UK had the best possible world, now it is gone”. [[5]](#footnote-4) Is that true? Did the UK lose this best possible world or not? At the moment, the only things we all can do is to wait and monitor the progress of the UK as a non-EU member country so that many questions can be answered.

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2. Prime Minister Johnson's Brexit address [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. 13,500-strong Twitter bot army disappeared shortly after EU referendum, research reveals, 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Bank rate | Bank of England database [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Brexit explained: how it happened and what comes next, 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)