



Brexit: The impact on the United Kingdom and Turkey

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Abstract

The United Kingdom (UK) voted for leaving the European Union (EU) in the referendum held in June 2016. Several factors have triggered the emergence of Euroscepticism in the UK. Arguments about economy, immigration and national sovereignty shaped the Brexit campaign. Although the UK government was one of the main supporters of Turkey accession to the EU before the Brexit referendum, the question of Turkey's membership in the EU arose as a strong factor. Turkey's membership in the EU is shown as a potential risk for European stability and the UK's security. However, the UK and Turkey face a similar situation in their relations with the EU. The UK-Turkey relations carries a great importance for British in terms of developing relations in the region. This article examines how Turkey emerged as a factor for Brexit and finds out new partnership opportunities for the UK and Turkey after Brexit.

Key Words: Brexit, United Kingdom, Turkey, UK-Turkey partnership, European Union

Introduction

Brexit is one of the most resonated words in today's world which means British's exit from the European Union. Just over the half of British voters shaped the UK's future by voting to leave the EU. This article enables readers to look at this topic from the perspective of Turkey. Although Turkey's membership in the EU does not seem as a strong factor at the first glance for Brexit, Eurosceptics consider Turkey as a big potential risk to European stability and the UK's national security. The purpose of the article is to examine how Turkey's accession to the EU triggered Brexit process and how the UK-Turkey partnership will continue after Brexit.

Method

In order to investigate presented topic, we used data collection, content and textual analysis and comparative methods. Content analysis has been carried out by using written text such as books and papers, oral text such as speech and mostly hypertexts which are texts found on the Internet because of actuality of the topic. Speech sounded by officials regarding the Brexit and the UK-Turkey relations has been analyzed. In addition to these, survey results carried by

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different institutions and authors, reports of the official institutions of countries have been investigated in order to find out public opinion and current situation regarding the discussed topic.

1. Brexit – General Overview

Brexit is a combination of the words “Britain” and “exit”. This term indicates a British exit from the European Union. The referendum held in 2016, June 23 asked voters: “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?” (Taub, 2016).

Voter turnout at the referendum was 72.2 percent. United Kingdom has voted to leave the European Union by 51,9 percent, while 48,1 percent UK citizens voted to stay in the EU. There was a clash of ideas between the regions of the UK. London, Scotland and Northern Ireland opted to remain in the organization having 43 years of unity. However, the rest of regions (East Midlands, Eastern, North East, North West, South East, South West&Gibraltar, Wales, West Midlands, Yorkshire&The Humber) used their votes to leave the EU. (EU: In or out? Results in full, 2016)

The United Kingdom and European Union has long, but rocky relationship together. (Wilson, 2014) Great Britain was always enthusiastic to form a united Europe after World War II. Winston Churchill’s historic speech in Zurich in 1946 was a great example of British passion in building European identity.

It is to re-create the European Family, or as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. We must build a kind of United States of Europe. (Mr Winston Churchill speaking in Zurich 19th September 1946)

He was remembered as “the father of Europe” because of these words. “But he was also the father of misunderstandings about Britain’s part in this Europe. He encouraged Europe to misunderstand Britain, and Britain to misunderstand herself.”- The British journalist and political commentator Hugo Young wrote. (Peel, 2016)

If we pay attention to the end of his speech, it becomes clear that Churchill did not see Great Britain inside of this union. His misunderstood speech only aimed at encouraging European countries, in particular, France and Germany to forget unpleasant past and to form the United States of Europe, but without Britain.

In all this urgent work, France and Germany must take the lead together. Great Britain, the British Commonwealth of Nations, mighty America, and I trust Soviet Russia - for then indeed all would be well - must be the friends and sponsors of the new Europe and must champion its right to live and shine. (Mr Winston Churchill speaking in Zurich 19th September 1946)

In 1957 the United Kingdom refused to join the European Economic Community, because of its irrelevance to British interests. Then, UK started her membership bid owing to economic decline. UK became the member of the European Economic Community in 1973 in the result of its third application after the death of Charles de Gaulle who vetoed twice British membership to the EEC. However, it was not considered as the victory of Europhiles, it was a sample of UK exceptionalism in the history. It shows that Brexit is rooted in the imperial history of Great Britain, its interests and its global diplomacy which is not limited with Europe. (Peel, 2016)

Several arguments were sounded during and after Brexit campaign. On referendum day Lord Ashcroft surveyed 12,369 people in the UK after voting to help find out the real opinions of UK citizens about Brexit and which arguments lay behind their decision.

According to the quote taken the analysis of the poll:

Nearly half (49%) of leave voters said the biggest single reason for wanting to leave the EU was “the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK”. One third (33%) said the main reason was that leaving “offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders.” Just over one in eight (13%) said remaining would mean having no choice “about how the EU expanded its membership or its powers in the years ahead.” Only just over one in twenty (6%) said their main reason was that “when it comes to trade and the economy, the UK would benefit more from being outside the EU than from being part of it.” (Ashcroft, 2016)

As seen from the results of the poll economy, immigration and sovereignty were the most popular “words” during the campaign and the most sounded reasons for Brexit.

Firstly, “Leave” campaign supports that the UK’s economy will benefit from Brexit more than if it continues to remain in the EU. The UK’s contribution to the EU budget became one of the crucial arguments of Brexit supporters. The European Union requires its member states to make an annual contribution to the budget of the union. Like all member states, the UK makes payments to the EU budget through customs tariffs and levies, a percentage of VAT-base and a percentage of Gross National Income (GNI). That means the more national income the UK has, the more payments it has to make to the EU budget. However, the United Kingdom is the only country that receives a permanent rebate from the European Union.

Since 1985 the EU has been deducting the rebate from the contribution of the UK before making its payments to the EU budget. According to the publications of the UK parliament, in 2016/2017 the United Kingdom paid £16,9 billion and the European Union gave back £4,1 billion as a rebate. In addition to this, the UK's public sector got £4,1 billion funding from the EU. The UK's net contribution to the EU budget was £8,9 billion in 2016/2017. The argument of Brexit supporters is that it would be better for the United Kingdom to save this money and spend it for themselves. (Keep, 2018)

Secondly, one of the major arguments of "Leave" campaign is that immigration decreases the quality of life in the UK. EU law allows EU citizens to travel, live and work in other EU countries. Brexit supporters think that immigrants coming from the EU countries reduce wages and job opportunities of the UK citizens. According to the 2015 statistics, 3,3 million immigrants who came from the EU countries live in the UK, and constitute 5.3% of the total population and 6.3% of the working-age population aged between 16 and 64. EU countries make up 35% of all immigrants living in the United Kingdom. Immigrants from Poland (29%), Ireland (12%), Portugal (7%), Romania (7%), Lithuania (6%) and Italy (6%) account for a great part of immigration from the EU countries. (Wadsworth, J., & Dhingra, S., & Ottaviano, G., & Reenen, V. J., 2016)

Finally, the most common argument of Brexit supporters was that British membership in the EU threatens its sovereignty. As mentioned above in the result of poll eurosceptics claim that "decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK". (Ashcroft, 2016) "Take control" is one of the main slogans during the Brexit campaign. Sometimes EU law extinguishes national law. According to the 1972 European Communities Act, the UK had to adjust its national law to European Community law. In addition to this, Leave campaign claim that European Commission which proposes draft legislation governed unelected bureaucrats and does not represent the voice of citizens. Leading Leave campaigner Boris Johnson, the mayor of London, declares that "EU membership is incompatible with parliamentary sovereignty". (Dreaming sovereignty, 2016) Nationalism in the UK always prevents European integration. It is not surprising that British who consider themselves as European identity are in favor of remaining. (Oliver, 2017) It also worth to mention that there is a link between Brexit and the rise of English nationalism. (Hobolt, 2016) All English regions voted for Leave except London. (EU: In or out? Results in full, 2016)

2. Turkey's EU membership as a factor of Brexit

As mentioned in the first paragraph many factors shaped the Brexit idea and one of the determinants was Turkey's accession to the European Union. At the first glance, it does not seem as a strong factor, due to British government's support to EU membership of Turkey. However, from the perspective of Eurosceptics accepting Turkey as the member of the European Union carries a big potential risk to European stability and the UK's national security. (Ker-Lindsay, 2017)

Turkey has a great importance for the EU in terms of geopolitical factors, Turkey's contribution to enhancing the EU's global role and strengthening the EU as economic superpower. For Turkey, the European Union means economic development, political stability and modernisation in all aspects of society. Therefore, Turkey has been waiting for the membership in the list of candidate countries since Turkey officially applied for membership to European Community in 1987. (Arvanitopoulos, 2009) Turkey obtained the status of candidate country for the EU membership at the Helsinki Summit in 1999 and accession negotiations have officially started since 3 October 2005. (EU and Turkey's history) According to the information taken from the official website of the Ministry of EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey up to now, 16 chapters have been opened in Turkey's EU accession negotiations, however, only one chapter has been temporarily closed. (History of Turkey- EU Relations, 2017)

Most of British are not in favour of Turkey's accession to the EU. A survey carried out by YouGov in 2013 found out that 52% of British voters do not support Turkey's membership, whereas only 21% said "Yes" and 27% opted "do not know". One of the most popular Brexit campaigners Nigel Farage had said in his speech: "Turkey wants to join the EU and has the support of Angela Merkel and David Cameron. This illustrates the risk in remaining in the EU". (Bennett, 2016) Brexit referendum was defined an unmissable chance to take back control of the UK against the political union which intends to accept Turkey as a member state. (Bone, 2016)

Why does British see Turkey as a potential risk for European stability and the UK's security?

The first reason could be uncontrolled immigration from Turkey and its neighbouring countries into Britain. EU membership will give 77 million Turkish the right of free movement and EU passports will enable them to enter the UK. As immigration from the EU

countries is one of the key arguments of Brexit campaigners, opening the doors of Britain for millions of Turkish workers makes British uneasy for losing job opportunities and wage drop. In addition to this, Turkey is a country bordered with Syria, and Iraq where human rights are violated and many refugees come from. Those in favor of leaving think that this immigration will increase the risk of terrorism in borderless EU and being in the same union with Turkey makes them vulnerable in front of thousands of Isil sponsored terrorists. (Bone, 2016) In the official leaflet of Leave campaign disseminated to about 40 million Britons, Turkish membership was mention as a key factor with placing a map showing its borders with Syria and Iraq. (Erlanger, 2016) According to a survey carried out by YouGov in 2013, 58,8% of voters do not want Turkey's citizens to get visa-free travel in the EU countries. (Bennett, 2016)

Furthermore, Turkey's accession means its great influence to decision-making inside the European Union. Turkish population has shown a significance grow from 50 million to 77 million between 1985 and 2015. It is estimated that its population will reach 95 million by 2050 catching up Germany which possesses the largest population in the EU. In this case, Turkey would have the largest group of MEPs in the European Parliament and the largest voting power of under the Qualified Majority Voting system. It means more Turkish MEPs are elected in the European Parliament than British. (Bone, 2016)

3. Turkey and UK partnership after Brexit

The UK government was one of the main supporters of Turkish membership to the EU before the Brexit referendum. David Cameron, the former prime minister of the UK characterized Turkey as a "great European power" which helps Europe build links with the Middle East. As a prime minister he made his first visit to Turkey and gave this message from Ankara: "I'm here to make the case for Turkey's membership of the EU. And to fight for it." From his point of view it is not right to keep Turkey outside the union, but to ask for a help to guard its security. He added: "So I will remain your strongest possible advocate for EU membership and greater influence at the top table of European diplomacy." (Cameron 'anger' at slow pace of Turkish EU negotiations, 2010)

After the Brexit referendum the most essential attempt for the UK is to make over its diplomatic and economic relations in the world, in particular with Turkey. Turkey has a great strategic significance for the UK. Because of isolated location of the UK, the importance of Turkey is only going to increase year by year. Therefore, balanced foreign policy should be

implemented towards Turkey, by taking a lesson from the Turkish-German relations and ignoring human rights and democracy for a while. (Kawczynski, 2017)

After establishing the new British government, Mrs Theresa May, the prime minister of the UK visited Turkey on 28th of January 2017. During the visit of Mrs May, a defence agreement was signed between BAE Systems and Turkish Aerospace Industries for the Turkish Fighter Programme. After signing the agreement Mrs May emphasized the power of Britain as “a great, global, trading nation” in her speech. Mrs May also added: "It marks the start of a new and deeper trading relationship with Turkey and will potentially secure British and Turkish jobs and prosperity for decades to come." In the course of the meeting it was mentioned by the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that Turkey aimed to increase trade with the UK to \$20 billion from \$15.6 billion. (Theresa May in Turkey: UK agrees £100m defence deal, 2017)

In addition to this, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson’s interview is needed to be mentioned in terms of partnership between the UK and Turkey. “Turkey will continue to be an indispensable partner for the U.K. in the post-Brexit era” – he said to the Hürriyet Daily News on the occasion of the 6th meeting of the Turkey-U.K. “Tatlıdil” Forum. During the interview he was asked about his vision for the UK and Turkey relations, challenges and opportunities. He mentioned that the UK should widen the horizons of its foreign policy and fortify the relations with the world, including Turkey. That is why, he was in favor of leaving the EU and wants to see “Global Britain” instead of “European Britain”. An agreement between Turkey and the United Kingdom on developing Turkey’s new TFX jet fighter and a new UK-Turkey trade working group are good examples for strength of the partnership. He also emphasized that Turkey will continue to be an essential counter-terrorism partner of the United Kingdom. (Demirtas, 2017)

Currently, Turkey and the United Kingdom face a similar situation. They both need to rebuild a relationship with the European Union after recent happenings. The UK is trying to become a non-EU member, while Turkey newly understands that it will never become a member of the EU. Although they have started their journey from different spot, however, they may finish at a very similar point. (Ulgen, 2017)

The United Kingdom is the third biggest export partner of Turkey. (Urundul, 2016) Trade between the UK and Turkey has increased since 2009, reaching £10.6 billion in 2015 with the UK taking a 5% share in overall Turkish trade. There are a significant number of business

links between the UK and Turkey. Over 2,500 UK companies are currently operating in Turkey including BP, Shell, Vodafone, Unilever (UK), BAE, Aviva and Diageo. Well-known retail chains, including Harvey Nichols, M&S, Kingfisher and Laura Ashley also have significant operations in Turkey. EU accession talks are the main driver for the modernisation of Turkey's economy and business environment. (Overseas Business risk – Turkey, 2017)

The trade between the UK and Turkey may suffer in case of not having an agreement guaranteed by the European Union. Moreover, Turkey's accession to the EU may get more difficult if it loses the UK's support. Turkey-the UK relations may be affected by increasing nationalism and euroscepticism inside both countries, in particular in the United Kingdom. However, Brexit may also have a positive effects for the relationship and very beneficial for both nations. Brexit is the first experience in the history of European integration. It is an unknown adventure for the UK, the EU and the whole world. In the result of Brexit the UK's trade relations with the rest of the EU countries will probably weaken, thus, the amount of goods imported from the EU countries may be reduced. Meanwhile, Turkey may benefit from it by designing and signing new trade agreement with the UK. In addition to this, rebuilding relations with Russia and Israel, Turkey may become a negotiator and the UK's main partner in the Middle East. It may bring economic benefits to both the UK and Turkey. If both sides disregard their relationship in the post-Brexit era, the UK-Turkey partnership may get damaged as the new British government mostly consists of Brexit supporters. (Urundul, 2016)

Results

In June 2016 the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Before and after the Brexit referendum, many claims have been raised by Eurosceptics. In the result of research, it has become clear that the most sounded arguments were an economic burden of membership, particularly, high amount of contribution of the UK to the EU, mass immigration from the EU countries which affects the quality of life in the UK and fear of the complete loss of state sovereignty. EU history of the UK explains to us that Brexit is rooted in the imperial history of Great Britain, its national interests and its global diplomacy that is not limited with Europe. Brexit may seem simply the end of membership relations between the UK and the European Union, however, it has a great impact on the world, including Turkey. The connection of Brexit with Turkey could be explained from 2 sides.

Firstly, Turkey's accession to the EU is considered as a triggering factor for Brexit owing to the possibility of uncontrolled immigration from Turkey and its neighbouring countries into

Britain, the risk of terrorism and Turkey's great influence to decision-making inside the European Union.

Secondly, Brexit brought reconstruction of the UK-Turkey partnership to the agenda of both countries. Before Brexit Turkey-UK relations were standing at the EU-Turkey relations. Now the UK decided to withdraw from the EU and all EU regulations and agreements will be revised after Brexit. During the Brexit campaign, public opinion was not so positive about Turkey and it was referred as one of the main factors for leaving the EU. It may affect the UK-Turkey partnership if both sides disregard their relationship in the post-Brexit era. Turkey may also benefit from Brexit by widening cooperation with the UK and replacing the EU in the UK's trade relations.

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