

Editorial

The Brexit phenomenon and its impact on education, politics, and economy

Klarissa Lueg (Klarissa.lueg@uni-flensburg.de)

Flensburg University, Germany

Monika Eigmüller (monika.eigmueLLer@uni-flensburg.de)

Flensburg University, Germany

The voting public, with the referendum of June 2016, have opted for a withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Since the shocking – and surprising even for those initiating the referendum – results have been made public, the EU and its citizens speculate about the possible withdrawal and its consequences. Media, and social media especially, have contributed to such speculations; however, they also reported on immediate social impacts which apparently are linked to the vote. The sentiments claimed to be mirrored by parts of the media were voices of pride, as well as voices of a not completely new but strengthened nationalism. Also among those sentiments were voices of regret, and of bitterness, too – the twitter hashtag “notinmyname” indicated that many young people of pre-voting age, especially, were terrified by the referendum’s outcome. In parallel, video footage of xenophobic harassment appeared online, and seemed to reflect an increasing hatred of foreigners, which, again, seemed to be linked to the referendum. All in all, the Brexiters, it appears, did not only protest the EU, but expressed a general feeling of being overlooked and left behind. Nevertheless, their voice will have a strong impact on the EU’s future, and thus on the lives of those who want to stay in the EU, people of pre-voting age, in particular. The media, as usual, were not the sole observer of the Brexit phenomenon. Social science takes part in both opinion-building, and commenting on the phenomenon. This journal, dealing with questions of Europeanization, European encounters and policies from interdisciplinary perspectives, wants to contribute to the ongoing debate by inviting scholarly representatives of different fields to speak up and comment. The contributors are experts in their fields, ranging from law to sociology to cultural studies and economics; at the same time, transdisciplinary considerations have their due share in all contributions. **John Benedicto Krejsler**, Department of Education, Aarhus University, provides a commentary on “Brexit: an exit disaster or entry into a Kafkaesque process? Reflections from a Danish education and research context”. Krejsler focuses on the potential – and in fact already present – impact of Brexit on the European education and research landscape. He discusses the possibility of exclusion of British research partners in ongoing grant application on EU level, due to uncertainty as to future policies after Brexit. Overall, national protectionisms might grow, whereas international collaboration within fields of education might decrease. In relation to the notion of a potentially new asymmetry, to the detriment of UK citizens, Krejsler touches upon the issue of English as a lingua franca in the EU and as the language of Higher Education; and he also addresses the mothertongue advantage of UK citizens in academia. Finally, Krejsler addresses the democratic deficit of the EU and the specific EU communication having alienated EU

citizens. This contribution is followed by the study of **Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen**, Department of Business Communication, Aarhus University: “English in the European Union after Brexit: Inclusion effects of a language without an owner”. Jacobsen deals with English as a lingua franca, and on the potential privilege this entails for native English speakers. The author, as a first step, reviews public discourse on the legitimacy of English as an official language of the EU. She identifies claims to let English, the language, follow “its nation” in withdrawing from the EU. After discussing linguistic and cultural concepts and after briefly sketching the history of the UK entry into the EU, Jacobsen concludes that English, as a shared foreign language, might well exert a democratizing effect on the remaining EU partners. English, she concludes, will remain the language of the EU, but maybe as a kind of democratized language without an owner. The third contribution to this volume, by **Georg Vobruba**, Institute of Sociology, Leipzig University, is titled “Center, periphery, shadow. The geopolitical pattern after Euro-, Schengencrisis and Brexit.” It embeds the Brexit phenomenon in the EU’s general modus of crisis, including the crisis of the common currency, as well as that of the Schengen area with its impact on further integration. Vobruba, in presenting 12 intertwined theses, informed by relevant sociological discourse and by observation of current political events, illustrates potential scenarios of change of the EU’s geopolitical character. **Béatrice Schütte**, PhD, legal journalist, contributes the title: “The Brexit Referendum – Legal Aspects”. She maintains that, legally and contrary to populist sentiments, there is significantly more to the exit process than a simple proclamation of exiting. In the UK, especially, legislation influenced by EU law may need to be adjusted and bureaucratic obstacles might increase, both for UK and for EU citizens. Schütte argues that, in order to prevent other EU member states from following the UK example, EU-adherent states will have to demonstrate strict negotiation power. A lenient EU policy may transport the message that “one can have one’s cake and eat it, too”: states may get rid of perceived inconveniences - such as the intake of refugees - while at the same time enjoying EU membership advantages. This latter consideration will also be found in the contribution “An Economic Perspective on Brexit”, by **Christian Soegaard**, Department of Economics, University of Warwick, and **Philipp J.H. Schröder**, Department of Economics and Business Economics, Aarhus University. They comment on short and long term consequences of the UK exit strategy. The exit strategy, they argue, might seem reasonable and attractive in the short run, and thus might tempt other states to follow suit. Despite the expectable negative economic impact of the decision to leave the EU and the single market, Britain might succeed in becoming an “island economy” with low taxes and little regulation. Yet this might lead to other EU countries pursuing a similar strategy of self-interest, while simultaneously aggravating the economic problems of other countries. **Michael Hartmann**, Institute of Sociology, Darmstadt University of Technology, and **Klarissa Lueg**, Institute of Sociology, Europa-Universität Flensburg, address issues related to Brexit as relevant for power structure research and research into elite communication. Centrally, in this interview, Hartmann argues that Brexit did reveal the relative lack of power of the internationally recruited economic elite in the UK, vis-a-vis a domestic political elite. The economic elite failed to prevent the Brexit referendum, which might harm British economy. Hartmann argues that the political and the economic elite, due to internationalized life courses, and, hence, to decreasing social similarities, have become alienated from each other.

Finally, **Hauke Brunkhorst**, Institute of Sociology, Europa-Universität Flensburg, in his essay “Comes the End of the Western Legal Tradition? – The world after Brexit, Trumpism, and the great authoritarian turn” describes a threat to a cosmopolitan and statist legal order by developments such as Brexit, Trumpism and the new authoritarian globalization. These recent phenomena could be signs for an ending Western Legal

Tradition with unpredictable consequences. Contributions to this volume, then, do represent different disciplines and sub-disciplines: they are closely interconnected, and even intertwined, nonetheless. We venture to say that they present a range of new and highly interesting insights into multidisciplinary perspectives and that, together, they are apt to provide an overview (certainly not complete) of issues having been raised by Brexit. All contributions are set to provide a nuanced perspective on what implications Brexit may entail, from language use and a potential cultural democratization to international cooperation in the field of education, or from the danger of a dynamic of beggar-thy-neighbor politics to changing dynamics between political and economic elites. Our collection of contributions is founded both on relevant social theory and on empirical observation. Although all of them circle around the Brexit phenomenon, some connect to other issues of crisis related to Europe and the EU (e.g., TTIP, CETA, Schengen crisis, Euro crisis), issues causing turbulence in the European solidarity project.

Finally, this overarching modus of crisis may be, at least partially, taken as a chance to rethink and renegotiate both national politics and policies and the European project and its society, altogether.