Brexit as a factor of political (in)stability: impact on European integration strategies and Ukraine's Security

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Abstract:

The article examines Brexit as both a manifestation of UK Euroscepticism and a catalyst for European transformation. It analyzes Britain's withdrawal from the EU, highlighting factors such as political uncertainty, mistrust in European institutions, and internal contradictions, which have not only challenged EU stability but also prompted reform in functioning and enlargement strategies. Special focus is given to the UK's post-2022 policy toward Ukraine, where the UK supports Kyiv militarily and financially despite its EU exit, offering an alternative model of inter-European cooperation. The accelerated European integration of Ukraine amid the full-scale war underscores this shift, although Euroscepticism among some European elites and the need for comprehensive reforms complicate the process. The study advocates a multi-institutional approach that merges Ukraine's aspirations for full membership with a strategic partnership with the UK, emphasizing the necessity for EU decision-making reforms and enhanced trust in times of global instability.

Keywords: *instability, trust, Euroscepticism, Brexit, European integration.*

Introduction

The British referendum vote in June 2016 to leave the European Union was one of the most important events in Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This decision could have meant the beginning of the end of the European Union as it was, as one of the leading democracies and key economies in Europe, along with Germany and France, was about to leave the EU.

Brexit is undoubtedly the most high-profile precedent of European disintegration to date, but it is not the only case: the small autonomous territory of Greenland, having achieved expanded self-government from Denmark, also left the EU after a referendum in 1982. The decision of the UK to leave the EU after the referendum "shocked" the political establishment in London, Brussels and other European capitals, and caused a serious public outcry in EU member states (De Vries, 2017). The immediate experience of Brexit for the UK, according to many estimates, was predominantly negative, and citizens of other member states perceived it as such (Hobolt, 2021).

Despite the fact that the most pessimistic forecasts about the consequences of Brexit did not materialise, the uncertainty surrounding the country's economic future affected financial markets. The pound sterling fell sharply, reflecting growing investor concerns. The political situation was also extremely unstable, with Prime Minister David Cameron resigning and the referendum results exposing deep divisions between the regions, constituent parts of the UK, and the main political forces in Parliament. In this context, the study of the impact of Brexit on modern integration strategies, including Ukraine's European integration aspirations, is of particular relevance. Understanding the (in)alternatives to the European course is critically important in a period of socio-political, financial and economic crisis, exacerbated by the war. Brexit has become a test of strength for both the EU itself and its potential future members, including Ukraine, which seeks integration into the European space.

Methodology

The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines the methods of political analysis, historical retrospection, comparative analysis and content analysis.

Political analysis is used to study the Eurosceptic sentiments in British political institutions that influenced the Brexit decision, as well as to assess its implications for the UK and EU foreign policy. The author analyses the impact of political uncertainty and the trust factor on the formation of strategic decisions on Ukraine's European integration.

Historical retrospection is used to trace the dynamics of changes in the UK's policy towards the EU, as well as its role in European security. An important part of this method is the analysis of political decisions after 2016, when the Brexit referendum took place, and until 2025, taking into account the current political context.

Comparative analysis allows us to assess the approaches of the UK and other European countries to integration processes. In particular, it compares Ukraine's European integration strategy with other candidate countries, as well as the UK's post-Brexit cooperation with the EU in the security and defence sector.

Content analysis is used to study official documents, government reports, international agreements, analytical publications and public speeches of political leaders on Brexit, Euroscepticism and European integration. Particular attention is paid to official statements of the EU, the UK and Ukraine, which allows us to identify key trends and positions of the parties.

Literature Review

A significant number of scientific works by leading foreign and domestic experts in the field of political science, economics, and international relations are devoted to the problem of the UK's withdrawal from the EU after the 2016 referendum, as well as the

causes and consequences of this process. In particular, T. Hunter focuses on the reaction of the political elites of the EU member states to Brexit, examining their strategies for adapting to new realities (Hunter, 2024). Christian & Peters study the phenomenon of (mis)trust in the British government in the context of the EU exit negotiations, focusing on the problems of legitimacy and political trust (Christian & Peters, 2024). A. Chojan offers a neo-realist analysis of the consequences of Brexit, focusing on how the UK's exit has affected the geopolitical architecture of Europe and the balance of power between the main actors in the region (Chojan, 2024). An important place in the scientific debate is occupied by B. Martill's study, which analyses the UK's response to the war in Ukraine in the context of EU security policy, emphasizing the change in the priorities of British foreign policy after Brexit (Sus & Martill, 2024). The economic dimension of the consequences of Brexit is also the subject of numerous scientific publications. Bissoondeeal, Binner, and Milas (2023) focus on the polarization of British society, particularly in the context of analyzing the UK's financial prospects after leaving the EU. J. Moloney focuses on the structural changes in the development of financial markets caused by Brexit (Moloney, 2024). Scholars also consider the impact of uncertainty caused by Brexit on the dynamics of capital markets (Kim et al.,2024). In the context of these studies, there is an urgent need to deepen the analysis of the political and economic aspects of Brexit's impact on the agenda of Ukrainian government and financial institutions. Given the prolonged state of military operations, research should cover not only the issues of Ukraine's adaptation to European integration challenges, but also the potential impact of Euroscepticism and post-Brexit uncertainty on strategic decisions of Ukrainian government and business circles.

The article aims to explore the political and economic aspects of Brexit, in particular its stages, causes, and consequences for the UK, the EU, and Ukraine in the context of integration strategies and public sentiment. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of such categories as uncertainty, loss of political trust, strategic control, and mechanisms for restoring trust after

disintegration. The article also considers the impact of Brexit on the development of European capital markets, which remain an important indicator of integration stability. In accordance with the purpose, the article has three main objectives: to study the impact of Brexit on public, in particular Eurosceptic, sentiment in the UK, EU countries and Europe as a whole; to analyze how this precedent has led to a rethinking of the interconnection of new political, economic and security challenges in Europe in the context of Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine; to assess how Brexit has affected strategic visions and integration processes in Europe, in particular Ukraine's place in these processes.

Brexit preconditions: economic trends, national identities, political populism

One of the main reasons often mentioned in academic and media discourses about Brexit is the issue of immigration. The freedom of movement of citizens between EU countries, a key principle of the Union, has become a target of criticism. Many British voters who supported leaving the EU believed that immigration placed a significant burden on public services, including the National Health Service (NHS), and made it harder for local residents to access housing (Gietel-Basten, 2016).

Identity also played a significant role in the British vote. Curtis (2017) notes that the proportion of UK citizens who identify themselves as Europeans is significantly lower than in other EU countries. In addition, the UK's economic development in recent decades has generally outpaced that of many EU member states, which has created a sense of economic self-sufficiency among voters. This strengthened the arguments of Brexit supporters and added electoral momentum to those who believed that leaving the EU was justified and appropriate. However, Eurosceptic sentiment in the UK existed long before the 2016 referendum. It was fuelled by concerns about the loss of sovereignty, increased immigration and restrictions on national policy. The media, especially some tabloids, contributed

significantly to this narrative by highlighting the problems and costs of EU membership (Simpson & Startin, 2022). The referendum campaign further reinforced these sentiments. During the referendum, both supporters and opponents of the UK's membership in the EU engaged in an intense media battle. Eurosceptics focused on the negative aspects of European integration: the loss of control over national borders, uncontrolled immigration, and the financial costs associated with membership. The media, while transmitting content favourable to Eurosceptics, often portrayed the EU as a bureaucratic and controlling structure that limits the sovereignty of member states (Kubin, 2018). This has contributed to the growing belief in the need to leave the EU.

In the political neorealist context, Brexit reflects a general trend of increasing aspirations for sovereignty and independence, which arises against the backdrop of growing nationalist sentiment among the population. The UK has experienced a particularly strong rise in such sentiment, coinciding with an emphasis on reclaiming national identity. Nationalist arguments were central to the campaign of Brexit supporters, who emphasized the need to regain control over borders, independent decision-making, and independent trade and immigration policies.

Brexit also became an expression of cultural identity issues that have long existed in British society. Many supporters of leaving the EU believed that membership in the Union undermined British national identity, traditions and cultural identity. The principle of freedom of movement, which enabled millions of EU citizens to work and settle in the UK, became for some a symbol of the country's loss of control over its own social and political processes. Thus, the original economic content of the EU was reconsidered in a value-based political sense.

In addition, the referendum result was also driven by broader societal trends. The government's austerity policies caused frustration in society, as did the inability of traditional political forces to address pressing issues. This has contributed to the rise of populism and a rethinking of the role of the nation state in the context of globalization. Brexit was the culmination

of many years of accumulated hostility to the European project, which, in the opinion of many Britons, limited their sovereignty and ability to make decisions on their own (Chojan, 2024).

As a result, a referendum on EU membership was held in the UK and Gibraltar on 23 June 2016. A total of 33.5 million people took part in the vote, which is 72.2% of the electorate. This was the highest turnout since the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, which confirmed the existence of a "high degree" of political tension in society and a significant demand for changes in relations with the EU, indicating a crisis of confidence in the current political course and growing social polarization. The 'leave' vote won by a narrow margin, with some differences: England and Wales supported Brexit (53% and 52.5%), while Scotland and Northern Ireland voted 62% and 56% respectively to remain in the EU (Bissoondeeal et al., 2023).

The EU and the UK in the context of political uncertainty: challenges of restoring institutional trust

The difficulties faced by the UK after the Brexit vote have significantly increased support for the EU in the remaining 27 member states (De Vries, 2018). The growing economic and political uncertainty of leaving the EU has forced the public to rethink the benefits of being a member state. Post-referendum opinion polls have shown growing support for EU membership in all member states, including the UK itself (Pew Research Center, 2017). Other studies, including those by the European Parliament (2018), have confirmed this trend.

Brexit is associated with increased attention in the political science field to the use of the word "uncertainty", which has become a key concept in this context, in particular in discussions about whether the UK's exit from the EU will be hard or soft. A hard Brexit meant a complete withdrawal from the single market and the cessation of free movement of goods, services and people, while a soft Brexit proposed a model whereby the UK would

retain certain privileges similar to those enjoyed by Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein. The question remained open, and uncertainty also extended to future relations with the EU and strategies to mitigate the negative effects of Brexit (Bissoondeeal et al., 2023).

The UK's official withdrawal from the EU in January 2020 coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly complicated the situation. The economic shock of Brexit was compounded by the financial turmoil caused by the pandemic: leading market indices suffered significant falls, which was a double blow to the British economy. Uncertainty also surrounded the Northern Ireland Protocol, which had been negotiated for four years, creating a domestic political crisis and undermining confidence in the governments of Theresa May, Boris Johnson, and Liz Truss. Only Rishi Sunak's government managed to restore trust by signing the Windsor Agreement in February 2023, which facilitates trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Binner (2023) expresses the hope that Northern Ireland's place within the UK will remain protected by this Agreement, amending the Northern Ireland Protocol and keeping Northern Ireland within the EU's single market for goods. Ellington et al., (2023) provide evidence of how Brexit and COVID uncertainty have negatively affected the economy, as well as econometric models that are likely to influence monetary policy decision-making. On the other hand, the analysis in Barnett et al. (2023) paints a less disruptive picture of Brexit and COVID. While there is no doubt that there have been short-term negative effects of Brexit and COVID, for example due to trade barriers or uncertainty, the medium- and long-term impacts remain uncertain. As Ellington et al., (2023) show, uncertainty can have a disruptive impact primarily on the economy. However, uncertainties do not last forever, at least not to the extent of those caused by Brexit and COVID. Governments and policymakers have an important role to play in mitigating this uncertainty by concluding trade agreements, providing more clarity on future relations with the EU, and increasing mutual trust in society and with international partners.

Trust and mistrust were key factors in the EU-UK Brexit negotiations. During the negotiations, EU and UK participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of trust as "the foundation of any lasting partnership" (von der Leyen, 2020). The negotiations demonstrated how trust can be lost and rebuilt, in particular in the context of the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol. Trust in international relations is based on expectations of the other party's honesty and good intentions, reducing uncertainty and simplifying interaction. Those who trust believe in their partner's good intentions and are willing to refrain from using control mechanisms because they have positive expectations about the other's intentions or behaviour. This leap of faith reduces uncertainty because it allows trusting actors to behave as if the future is certain, excluding "certain objectively possible futures" from their calculations (Wille & Martill**,** 2023). In the absence of trust, states are forced to strengthen control mechanisms, which makes cooperation more difficult (Christian & Peters, 2024).

Personal trust in leaders and institutional trust should be distinguished, but they are interrelated. For example, the UK's breach of international obligations during the negotiations undermined the overall credibility of its government. The President of the European Council, António Costa, tweeted that "breaking international law is not acceptable and does not create the confidence we need to build our future relationship" (Costa, 2020). Thus, leaving the EU has become a platform for analysing the loss and restoration of trust in international politics. Brexit has also highlighted the importance of cooperation for both sides. For the UK, this means maintaining influence on the world stage and mitigating economic consequences; for the EU, it means retaining a strategic partner, as the UK remains a nuclear power, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and one of the world's largest economies. Brexit has tested the EU as an independent player in international politics. In order to remain influential, the Union must not only adhere to its principles but also demonstrate political flexibility, adapting them to new challenges.

The Brexit case also highlights the issue of subjectivity in international politics, in particular the role of business actors in the international political process. After the referendum on the UK's withdrawal from the EU, business relations between the partners remain uncertain, which hinders economic activity and weakens the prospects for both economies. It is uncertainty that increases information asymmetry, which has an extremely negative impact on capital markets (Kim et al., 2024). Brexit also had a negative impact on the number of business visits from the EU to the UK, indicating a decline in the interest of EU businesses in the UK market at least in the first few years after the vote. However, business visits from the UK to the EU show the opposite trend, with a marked increase after the referendum, reflecting the extra effort and cost that UK businesses are putting in to maintain relationships with EU partners in an uncertain business environment (Kone et al., 2024).

It is worth noting that on 1 January 2021, UK companies lost their EU permits, and their access to EU capital markets became dependent on the "third country" regime. This has created a number of legal and market risks, including interruptions in contractual relations, threats to financial stability, reduced liquidity, and restricted access to finance due to the withdrawal of UK institutions from the single market. The changing legal environment has also called into question the long-term sustainability of the UK financial market as a whole, particularly as it could potentially reduce its attractiveness as a global financial centre. New trade arrangements could have mitigated these risks, but the UK was unable to achieve special conditions for access to the EU market, which remained consistent in its rejection of individual arrangements. This was due to the desire to avoid the precedent of "cherry-picking" - selective selection of the most favourable terms of cooperation, whereby a country receives the benefits of EU membership without sharing its responsibilities. This policy has allowed the Capital Markets Union to maintain its competitive advantage (Moloney, 2024).

Nevertheless, the UK is likely to retain incentives to liberalise access to its market in an effort to improve competitiveness and liquidity. In the medium to long term, the development of its capital markets will depend on market conditions, the policies of national regulators and political relations with the EU. The role of political conditions in this process is crucial. For example, the day-to-day management of the UK's third-country access regime to capital markets is in the hands of the Financial Conduct Authority and is therefore largely depoliticized, but in many respects remains dependent on the gateway equivalence determination made by HM Treasury, and the EU example shows how such gateways can be blocked for political reasons (Gross et al., 2023). However, the adoption of the EU-UK Memorandum of Understanding on Financial Services in 2023 was only possible after the normalization of political relations, which occurred through the signing of the Windsor Agreement. This episode demonstrates how deeply politics affects access to financial markets and capital market governance in particular (ESMA, 2024).

Euroscepticism vs European solidarity: transformations in the context of growing threats to international security

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which took place almost a year after the UK's final withdrawal from EU foreign policy structures, sparked unprecedented solidarity among European states. The UK took a leading role in providing weapons to Ukraine, training the Ukrainian military, and coordinating actions between NATO members and, especially, its northern partners (Melvin, 2023). The EU has also acted swiftly, coordinating military supplies, imposing sanctions packages, taking steps to diversify energy supplies, and accelerating Ukraine's membership application (Micheals et al., 2024). While Brexit created the conditions for deinstitutionalization, the Russian invasion created clear incentives for re-engagement in security, presenting the EU and the UK with a "direct, symmetrical and exogenous threat to collective security" (Genschel,

2022). The invasion contributed to a partial reset of political relations after Brexit, strengthened the sense of intra-group unity among European states and created strong incentives for coordinated action on both sides. In particular, on the EU side, the UK's quick response has created greater respect for the UK and its key role in ensuring Europe's security (Sus & Martill, 2024).

Since the invasion, we have seen increased cooperation between the UK and the EU at both the bilateral and multilateral levels. This includes frequent high-level meetings, increased contacts between officials on both sides, and generally more effective policy coordination. An important component of this cooperation has been the changes in the UK's relations with the EU's institutional formats, which demonstrate the evolution of the UK's approach to European security. European security has a complex architecture, characterized by an intertwining of multilateral institutions and bilateral relations, the relationship between which is gradually changing (Flynn, 2022). Changes in the degree of institutional choice and the UK's attitude to EU security issues have become particularly evident since the Brexit referendum and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This demonstrates the significant role of institutional choice factors in shaping the UK's political decisions. This dynamic is typical for other states that face changing incentives due to transformations in inter-institutional relations.

In Europe, a number of similar examples can be observed: changes in France's relations with NATO, the positioning of Turkey and Norway in relation to EU foreign policy (Svendsen, 2022), and the role of neutral states in relations with the EU and outside NATO. In the global context, this phenomenon has an even broader dimension. The existence of different regime complexes and overlapping organizational frameworks create conditions for similar dynamics in almost any region of the world (Cold-Ravnkilde & Jacobsen, 2020).

The focus on the United Kingdom is justified by the unique combination of changes in outsider/insider status and transformations in inter-institutional relations in a relatively short period

of time. The British example is also illustrative of the current debate on the role of an important geopolitical player in deterring Russian aggression, which is a key issue in modern European

Brexit means the United Kingdom's formal withdrawal from EU forums for cooperation in foreign and security policy. This has pushed the UK to become more actively involved in other international formats, such as the UN, NATO, bilateral arrangements and mini-formats. Brexit has also posed new challenges to the UK's foreign policy, forcing it to engage with European partners in a more "polycentric" manner, typical of third countries, rather than engaging in negotiations as an EU member (Whitman, 2019). It has also made Britain less useful to its transatlantic and Commonwealth allies, complicating existing relationships (Webber, 2023).

Updated European integration strategies on the example of relations between the EU, the UK and Ukraine

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Britain's interests focused on protecting Ukraine's territorial integrity and preventing the conflict from escalating to a wider scale. Under Boris Johnson's government, support for Kyiv became a priority of British foreign policy, accompanied by warnings that NATO should not intervene directly. Boris Johnson was the first Western leader to visit Kyiv in April 2022, followed by in June and August of the same year, demonstrating solidarity with the Ukrainian authorities. The United Kingdom has also provided Ukraine with military equipment, allocating £12.8 billion in total aid as of December 2024, of which £7.8 billion was for military support (UK Government, 2024).

Despite the tense relations between the UK and the EU as a result of Brexit, the European response to the UK's actions in support of Ukraine has been largely positive. This has allowed the UK to partially restore its international reputation, which was damaged by Brexit. According to one British official, the United Kingdom "was quicker than most to

realize what had happened and they pushed us in the right direction... the war in Ukraine, as horrible as it sounds, has really helped the UK's reputation abroad" (Martill, 2024).

Since gaining independence, Ukraine's integration choice has been one of the key political elements of its national strategy. The occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 was a turning point that finally determined Ukraine's European integration course and its aspirations to join the EU and NATO. Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 significantly accelerated European integration processes: Ukraine was granted candidate status and began formal membership negotiations on 25 June 2024. However, the martial law in Ukraine poses significant challenges to the implementation of in-depth reforms and commitments necessary to move to the next stages of integration. At the same time, according to Ukrainian experts, "these challenges also open up opportunities for Ukraine to fundamentally renew and modernize the system, including the development of institutional mechanisms, the establishment of the rule of law, ensuring transparency of governance, and creating conditions for sustainable economic development. From this perspective, the postponement of full membership can act as an additional incentive for Ukraine, pushing it to deepen and accelerate the reform process in line with European standards and values" (Gorinov et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, it is important to take into account the scepticism of European politicians, which is driven by both domestic political considerations and economic realities, and complicates Ukraine's prospects in the EU. In this regard, the unique disintegration phenomenon of the twenty-first century - the UK's withdrawal from the EU - is illustrative. Brexit has not only created new political and economic challenges for the European Union, but has also become a precedent that has influenced the perception of integration processes in the world, and in Ukraine as well. Preparing for future accession to the European Union, Ukraine must anticipate the range of institutional challenges that will inevitably arise after integration. One of the key lessons of Brexit is that large-scale migration flows can significantly affect political stability and public sentiment. For

Ukraine – where freedom of movement within the EU will become a guaranteed norm – one central challenge may be the socio-demographic consequences of intensive emigration and internal migration. Military operations and mobilization processes have already caused a significant outflow of labor resources to EU countries, increasing pressure on the labor market, the social-protection system, and the country's long-term demographic structure. According to the latest available data, the total number of Ukrainian citizens who have left for European countries since the start of the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation (February 2022) is about 5.3 million people, most of whom are of working age (UNHCR, 2025).

After the war ends – and prospectively following EU accession – the scale of labor outflow may grow. Family reunification is likely: women and children who have already adapted and socialized in European countries may be joined by their husbands. Differences in pay levels, social guarantees, and quality of life between EU states and a post-war Ukraine will further encourage such migration scenarios. Under these conditions Ukraine, as an EU member, could also become a destination for labor migrants from economically vulnerable regions of the South and East, accompanied by broader cultural and religious differences. Population increases in particular communities would raise pressure on infrastructure – above all on health care and housing, which have already suffered extensive damage during hostilities. This, in turn, could temporarily complicate access to medical services and housing for Ukrainians returning home after the war.

As in the case of the United Kingdom, national identity remains a central factor of political development for Ukraine. Following the revolutionary events of 2004 and 2013–2014, and especially during the recent years of full-scale war, Ukrainian society has gradually but steadily shed the political-cultural influence of Russia and consolidated around its own civic identity. At the same time, in the process of EU accession Ukraine will inevitably be exposed to EU normative and value pressures: implementing European rules

requires adjustment to standards that sometimes conflict with entrenched post-Soviet practices. Already today, harmonization of national legislation with the acquis creates significant challenges for domestic business and the regulatory environment, raising concerns about potential losses of economic, political and socio-cultural sovereignty. According to recent surveys by Transparency International (Transparency International Ukraine, 2025), the highest shares of sceptical or undecided citizens live in the country's eastern and southern regions – a pattern that indicates the risk of pockets of discontent among both the population and business elites in response to the introduction of new acquis norms. These attitudes must be accounted for when planning and implementing further European-integration reforms.

In the context of the above, a multi-institutional approach is seen as a promising direction for the development of Ukraine's European integration. On the one hand, this implies Ukraine's unquestionable desire to become a full member of the most important European institution, the European Union. On the other hand, it also includes establishing partnerships with the United Kingdom, one of the most powerful countries in Europe outside the EU. A good example is the visit of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer in January 2025, during which an agreement on a 100-year partnership between Ukraine and the UK was signed. This agreement covers a wide range of cooperation, including defence, economy, science, culture and other areas. It envisages strengthening security in the Baltic, Black and Azov Seas, joint military exercises, economic support and reconstruction, and the development of research and technology. This partnership aims to ensure the long-term stability and prosperity of both countries (Kucheryavets, 2023).The example of the United Kingdom demonstrates how cooperation with the EU can be developed without being a member, especially in the defence sector. Two further, contemporary examples underscore this point. Norway – though not an EU member but a participant in the EEA/Schengen framework – has provided substantial bilateral and multilateral support to Ukraine in recent years, demonstrating how close strategic, financial and security cooperation can be sustained outside formal EU

membership (Norway in Ukraine, 2025). Likewise, Turkey's long-standing Customs Union with the EU (established in 1995) illustrates how deep economic integration and ongoing regulatory alignment can exist without full membership, offering a model for strong sectoral ties that complement – rather than substitute – accession dynamics (Togan, 2012). Also, the policy of the newly elected US President Donald Trump, which, according to his statements in early 2025, is based on the requirement for European countries to increase defence spending to 5% of GDP (Posaner et al., 2025), puts Europe in a position to take greater responsibility for its own security. The European Parliament, based on its experience as a 70-year-old institution, is rethinking new and ongoing challenges and threats to international security and democracy. However, the current widespread view that international institutions that have failed to protect democratic values should be comprehensively reconsidered (Volianiuk, 2022). This will require the EU to create new security institutions, conclude multilateral agreements, including the participation of the UK as a nuclear and naval power with a powerful navy, and thus once again obliges it to pay attention to Eurosceptic sentiments and the role of various actors in spreading or refuting them.

Conclusions

The fifth anniversary of the UK's formal exit from the EU (Brexit), which took place on 31 January 2020, has recently been marked. Despite pessimistic forecasts of an economic downturn, IMF estimates suggest the opposite: the UK economy has grown faster than Germany and France in recent years, indicating that the most difficult period for the country's economy and social and political life has come to an end (Castle, 2023). Brexit also sent an important signal to other EU countries about the need to maintain strategic stability and avoid disintegration policies.

With the Labour Party coming to power in July 2024, led by Prime Minister Keir Starmer, the UK has set out to strengthen its role as a security leader in Europe, despite not

being a member of the EU. Starmer has stated that one of his priorities will be to achieve an ambitious security partnership with the EU and to build closer relations with European partners (The Guardian, 2025), which will mean building a more structured security and defense relationship between the UK and the EU; he has also signalled willingness for the UK to engage with Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects – notably by applying to take part in the Military Mobility project – a step reflected in recent UK parliamentary reporting (UK Parliament Research Briefings, 2025). This is largely due to the growing military tensions in the world, in particular due to the full-scale war in Ukraine. This approach demonstrates the UK's desire to maintain strategic influence in the European region, promotes stability and security on the continent.

As for the EU's prospects, an important challenge for further integration is to raise public awareness of the role of European institutions in the global agenda, as well as the European Commission's readiness to quickly change regulatory approaches in line with new challenges. At the same time, the existing contradictions between the interests of major players (Germany, France) and the distrust of less influential member states undermine unity. An example was the reaction of farmers to the European Green Deal, which led to large-scale protests in Poland and France in 2023-2024. Although Brexit didn't have a domino effect and to some extent forged greater cohesion among member states in negotiations with the United Kingdom, Eurosceptic movements have still gained ground within several countries: particular attention should be paid to the Eurosceptic positions of political elites in Hungary and Slovakia, which frequently amplify pro-Russian narratives and thus complicate consensus-building at the EU level. For Ukraine, this implies that reliance on personal ties with individual leaders is fragile and potentially counterproductive: Kyiv should prioritize constructive, institutional engagement – strengthening parliamentary and sectoral links, deepening multilateral cooperation within EU frameworks, and building long-term strategic partnerships based on shared interests – coupled with public diplomacy and civil-society exchanges

that address the domestic grievances Eurosceptic actors exploit, thereby reducing their capacity to undermine European unity. This shows that not all EU initiatives are automatically perceived by the public as legitimate or appropriate.

As for Ukraine, its rapid accession to the EU, let alone NATO, remains unlikely. Leaders of the leading EU countries are cautious about the timeframe for the membership of the current candidates, including Ukraine. Nevertheless, despite Ukraine's expedited granting of EU candidate status – a clear political signal of solidarity regarding the regional conflict – full accession remains a protracted and uncertain process that could take many years or never materialize; optimistic scenarios projecting membership by 2030 should therefore be treated cautiously given the scale of legal, institutional and socio-economic reforms required. However, Brexit can serve as an important lesson for Ukraine: both in terms of the need for domestic reforms and in terms of the complex dynamics of interstate relations within the EU.

European institutions are currently paying considerable attention to the issue of EU enlargement. More and more often, Brussels is proposing to introduce appropriate, up-to-date changes to the methodology of accession of new member states. A well-structured accession process with objectively established benchmarks will limit the risk that negotiations could get bogged down in agreeing on endless details insisted on by individual member states. In this context, it is very important to reform the EU Treaty to limit the effect of the unanimity principle, which would avoid the influence of individual pro-Russian politicians in Europe on strategic decisions.

Ukraine's accelerated acquisition of the EU candidate status during the aggressive attack by the Russian Federation has eliminated the strategic uncertainty that has long characterized Ukraine's economic policy towards European integration and has become a key to intensifying its further efforts to implement important political, legal, economic and social reforms. This process not only lays the groundwork for Ukraine's transformation in

line with European standards, but also demonstrates the EU's readiness to rethink its approaches in response to current geopolitical challenges.

With the change of administration in the United States and the return of Donald Trump to the presidency, geopolitical and geo-economic priorities are changing. First and foremost, this concerns the US demand that European countries assume responsibility for security in Europe, including helping Ukraine counter Russian aggression, and establishing new customs rules in international trade. In this context, the EU should not only strengthen its own competitiveness on a global scale with other states on other continents, primarily with the United States and China, but also become an important centre of stability and security on the European continent.

Prospects for further research include, on the one hand, a deeper analysis of the need to transform the EU's political institutions under the influence of Brexit; strengthening the EU's responsibility for security in Europe and stopping Russia's military aggression; geopolitical changes in customs and trade rules; and the development of new integration strategies for candidate countries, including Ukraine. On the other hand, it is about exploring ways to overcome Euroscepticism and strengthen institutional trust between member states in the context of global instability, accompanied by political and economic uncertainty. After all, this uncertainty, which is exacerbated by Russia's unwillingness to conclude peace agreements, which threatens to expand Russian military aggression into the territory of the member states, as well as by the US administration's ambiguous statements on the EU's activities, is an effective factor in reducing Eurosceptic sentiment both in the member states' governments and in the society of these countries.

Overcoming Euroscepticism requires a comprehensive approach: first, developing an effective EU communication policy that would explain to citizens the rationale for complex decisions; second, strengthening public participation in decision-making through participatory democracy institutions; third, ensuring a fair distribution of the benefits of European integration among member states, reducing development imbalances. It is also important to introduce inclusive

educational programmes on EU values and the role of the Union institutions, especially in regions with a high level of distrust. Finally, there is a need to strengthen analytical support for decision-making at the European Commission level, taking into account regional specificities and potential risks of resistance. Taken together, this creates the potential to strengthen the European identity and ensure the sustainability of the integration project.

In this context, it is also important to study effective communication strategies of the European Union aimed at explaining the benefits of integration, increasing transparency of institutions, and shaping a positive image of the EU in the public mind. In addition, the EU's internal challenges - from migration policy to the allocation of financial resources - that may contribute to the growth of Eurosceptic narratives require further analysis. Research on the role of youth policy and educational initiatives as tools to counter radicalization and populism is of particular relevance. All of this creates the basis for a multidisciplinary analysis of European integration processes in the current conditions of transformational turbulence.

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