CULTURAL NARRATIVES OF BREXIT

CAMELIA ELENA VLĂSCEANU[*]

Abstract. The present article is dedicated to the cultural narratives of Brexit, through in-depth and implemented research on the axis of ideas recognized in the European agenda for culture as a form of European soft power, the defining dimensions of European cultural diplomacy and the process of rethinking the unity in diversity under the pressures of exit. To the previously mentioned structure we will add a series of indices that will perform as patterns of a qualitative analysis of a selection of interviews/ conferences with political personalities representing the power poles on the European continent which are relevant to the equation of the studied issue: Boris Johnson (current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom) and Theresa May (former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom); Emmanuel Macron (President of France) and Angela Merkel (Chancellor of Germany). The formulated hypotheses will be verified through an interview with professor Ian Browne, an intellectual who represents a part of the British university stream (Cambridge and St. Andrews University), a researcher whose studies and interviews focus mainly on Brexit, Neo-Liberalism, religious discourse or cultural heritage, therefore a well-informed personality in guiding and highlighting what becomes – here – a central element of the research: the relationship between Brexit and the soft power synergy of the European Union.

Keywords: *Brexit; Cultural Narrative; Unicorn; Cultural Diplomacy; Soft Power*

Methodology

The parameters proposed as part of the mentioned quantitative analysis, are sinuous or unable to operate a comparative analysis, thus the subjects and the interpretations have a higher degree of individualization and particularization in the context. To capture the dynamics of the phenomenon we will apply a template which will be related to the following indices: terms related to national (NP) or European (EP) power; items referring to British (BC) or continental

(CC) culture; expressions related to the following diplomacy sequences: socio-cultural relations (SCR), economic relations (ER), freedom of movement (FM) – listing each one with the optimistic (o) or pessimistic (p) connotations in regards to the relationship between Great Britain and the European Union and to the relationship between the other Member States of the Union. The obtained results will be catalogued and interpreted, as an integral part of two scoring tables: the first will analyse the thematic score on the predisposition for the preservation and reaffirmation of national/European power and will measure the degree of cultural integration/ fragmentation; the second will consider the thematic score of the debated topics, with relevance for diplomatic relations. The results aim for a further clarification of the European situation compared to the European idea and the issue of Brexit, basing an overview or a context with a reference.

The approach is required to be related to the two arguments that Ian Browne considers clarifications and necessary contextual references. On one hand, we have the antagonistic manifesto perpetuity of placing Brexit in the area of unveiling differences within the groups of voters (guided by options rather than by sharing a common set of beliefs) which is found in a set of "deeply hostile" and incompatible narratives. In this register a comparison is possible: "It might be interesting to compare the views of a serious left wing intellectual like Richard Tuck, Professor of Politics at Harvard and who has written extensively on Natural Law theories, with those of an idiot like Nigel Farage. Both were in favour of Brexit, but for profoundly different reasons. Richard Tuck's book, The Left Case for Brexit: Reflections on the Current Crisis hasn't appeared yet, but his article The Left Case for Brexit appeared in Dissent just before the referendum. So, I think we need to think of how competing narratives operate within the same Brexit framework. Anti-Brexiter thinking is generally not interested in the internal differences within the Brexit vote"[1].

On the other hand, we have the premise of revisiting Brexit as a phenomenon that "exposes the divisions of British society" and which particularly suggests that there is a set of similar reasons for the vote cast. All this converges towards the announced dynamics of the present case study, according to which Brexit displays the less popular side of soft power, inscribed in a European synergy (instead of the classic one proposed by Joseph Nye); moreover, with a twist, starting from some concepts regarding the cultural industry proposed by Theodor Adorno, the records will expose the illustration of a double direction of the concept of soft power that is born within the idea of a culturally-supranational dimension of Europe: one is "horizontal" (as one type of magnetism existing between the member states of the European Union as they are), and the other one is "vertical" (the same magnetism, disguised in the clothes of international legitimacy).

---

[1] Interview with Researcher and Translator Ian Browne, 23 April 2020, part of the MA thesis, "Agenda diplomației culturale europene raportată la fenomenul exit", University of Bucharest, Faculty of Letters, Department of Cultural Studies, coord. Viorella Manolache, Bucharest, June 2020.

With a necessary clarification, asking researcher Ian Browne to identify the first/relevant narrative in the Brexit cultural narrative file, he called for more attention and in-depth research: "I suspect there is no single cultural narrative which has genuine explanatory value. I think that in the context of Brexit, the cultural narratives on offer do not fit the facts, have little explanatory power and are largely propagandistic devices designed to falsify rather than clarify"[2].

Pessimistic Effects and Optimistic Reactions

I. *Emmanuel Macron*

In an interview[3] with the *British Broadcasting Corporation* (*BBC*), Emmanuel Macron discusses not only Brexit, but also the future of the European Union. The inventory of the dedicated analysis, using the parameters mentioned above, can be found in the table below:

Time indicator	Key Ideas and Phrases	Topics
00:48	An agreement on military investment will be negotiated between France and the United Kingdom.	oER
01:09	An agreement on defence against Russia will be negotiated.	EP, CC
01:31	An agreement on the war on terror will be negotiated	EP, CC, pSCR, pFM
02:22	Not being part of the single market is necessary if the decision is to withdraw from the single market.	pER
02:54	A special relationship of the European Union with the United Kingdom may be similar to the relationship with Norway, in contrast to the relationship with Canada.	oSCR, oER, oFM
04:03	The special relationship cannot interfere with the single market and the collective interest of the European Union.	oSCR, pER, pFM
04:41	The ideal relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom would be "something between full access to the single market and trade agreements"[4].	oSCR, oER, oFM
06:02	The UK's relationship with the European single market is seen in stark terms: "either *in or out*"[5].	pSCR, pER, pFM

---

[2] *Ibidem*.

[3] *French President Emmanuel Macron on Brexit and Trump*, uploaded by *BBC News* on 22nd of January 2018 on *YouTube*, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_aLROw98NA>.

[4] The idea suggests the desire for a particular relationship between the archipelago and the continent (a "unicorn" as an imaginary landmark for reporting on Brexit).

[5] The ideal/desired relationship of the United Kingdom is antagonistic point of view to the administrative reality of the single market.

08:57	"I want to preserve what we created after World War II".	oSCR, oER
09:32	The failure and dysfunctions of globalization decide that structures such as the European Union are not beneficial.	pSCR, pER, pFM, NP
11:39	A free market is something that many years ago seemed ultra-liberal.	CC
12:59	It is necessary to dedicate the European Union project to the protection of its citizens.	oSCR, oFM
14:25	The European Union must expand, including through treaties or agreements with Turkey and Russia.	oSCR, oER, oFM
15:24	"More sovereignty, more unity, more democracy – that is the recipe in order to succeed in Europe. If you lose your sovereignty and you do not protect people, they will not believe in you. If you are not based on a democratic approach, they will not follow you. If you are not following this unity, I crane consistence and convergence, they will leave you".	NP, EP, CC, oSCR, oER, oFM

Scoring table 1

Approached topics	NP	EP	BC	CC
Times mentioned	1	2	0	3

Scoring table 2

Types of diplomatic relationships and prospects	oSCR	pSCR	oER	pER	oFM	pFM
Times mentioned	6	4	6	4	5	4

From the tabulated data it is observed that for Emmanuel Macron it is essential to remain within the community construct of the European Union, even in the recognition and acceptance of the differences between states. His speech focuses more on a pro-European and optimistic attitude on socio-cultural and economic relations, but there is also some balance with the pessimistic side on the future of diplomatic relations. Therefore, Macron's speech is a balanced one, yet slightly ambiguous, because although he avoids the extremes of the option,

he clearly delimits his pro-European tendencies. The terms used, as well as their connotations, suggest that his attitude as a whole is optimistic about the future of the European Union's enlargement, and not in any way directed towards the idea of fragmentation or of an uncertain future.

Regarding the demonstration of the existence of a European soft power in which exit is a defensive reaction to an acculturation or the denial of the existence of a soft framework for European power, Macron considers that there is a "recipe for success" that can avoid perpetuating exits: a perfect balance between national sovereignty and supranational unity. The use of the comparative degree of superiority "more" in the structure "more sovereignty, more unity, more democracy" indicates that there is a shortcoming in the construct of sovereignty – unity – democracy, part of a self-sufficiency found in European Union.

II. *Angela Merkel & Boris Johnson*

In a joint conference[6], Angela Merkel and Boris Johnson address the importance of the close relationship between Germany and the United Kingdom, as well as the issues related to the Brexit negotiations (at the time of the negotiations).

Speaker	Time Ind.	Key Ideas and Phrases	Topics
Angela Merkel	00:42	"We need to shape the UK leaving the European Union in such a way that we continue to have close relations between the United Kingdom and the European Union".	EP, CC, oSCR, oER
	00:57	"We also need extremely close bilateral relations because bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and Germany have always been characterized by a friendly spirit".	NP, BC, oSCR, oER
	01:16	"From Germany's point of view, a negotiated Brexit is obviously something we have received warmly".	NP, oSCR, oER
	01:26	"But I have said many times that we are prepared for the no deal option".	NP, oSCR, oER
	01:36	"But we are also thinking about the lives of the many British citizens currently living in the Member States of the European Union".	oFM
	07:34	On the question regarding the crisis of fragmentation in the United Kingdom, the Chancellor emphasized that the situation should not be entirely up to the British people and that it was still a matter that was awaiting a resolution, if any. It is also suggested that there is a possibility of finding it in about two years or even thirty days.	EP, CC, BC, oSCR, oER

[6] *Boris Johnson and Angela Merkel give joint statement*, uploaded by *The Sun* on 21st of August 2019 on *YouTube*, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqxVl-KjZi4>.

Angela Merkel	10:06	The twenty-seven Member States of the European Union want consistency in creating a visa system for the United Kingdom and not separation, considering the situation in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but they need the United Kingdom to explain how it can be solved because it is delicate internal problem, which cannot be addressed by any of the twenty-seven Member States.	oFM
	10:56	"Our goal is to preserve the integrity of the single market".	EP, pER
	14:19	Two truths must be respected: the first one is the Good Friday Agreement from Belfast regarding the flexible border between Northern Ireland (which seeks to remain a member of the European Union) and the rest of the United Kingdom; the second one is the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union for good.	NP, EP, BC, CC, oSCR, oER, oFM
	15:39	There are still problems whose solutions are yet to be found; a sustainable response to this is still expected.	oSCR, oER, oFM
Boris Johnson	03:21	The United Kingdom works with Germany in many areas, areas "in which we collaborate and in which we work powerfully together".	NP, oSCR, oER
	03:33	The relationship between the United Kingdom and Germany is based on defending the rule of law in the international system, democracy and equality, human rights and the collective security, and resolving the current climate crisis.	NP, oSCR, oER, oFM
	04:31	"We in the UK want a deal, we seek a deal and I believe that we can get one".	NP, BC, oSCR, oER
	04:52	"But clearly, we cannot accept the current withdrawal agreement, arrangements that either divide the UK or block us into the regulatory and trading arrangements of the EU, an order of the EU without the UK having any say on those matters".	NP, BC, oSCR, oER
	05:33	"We in the UK are absolutely dedicated to the protection of the rights of 3.2 million EU nationals in our country".	oSCR, oFM
	06:45	To a question that raises the no deal option, the Prime Minister expresses again his dissatisfaction with this option for such a negotiation and his desire to commit to the security of the citizens of the European Union.	oSCR, oFM
	11:33	The importance of finding a solution whereby the United Kingdom can be part of the single market without imposing taxes on the border with Northern Ireland is emphasized[7].	oSCR, oER, oFM
	12:06	It is suggested to eliminate the idea of a *no deal* and the rigidity of the European economic system and to find creative solutions[8].	oSCR, oER, oFM
	13:42	Solutions regarding the avoidance of a hard border, through variants intended for reliable traders, through prior electronic control, etc.	oER, oFM
	17:04	The conclusion is that negotiations may seem impossible as an idea, but that alternative ways can be found through patience and optimism.	CC, oSCR

---

[7] Here again, it sums up a functional imaginary construct – the unicorn as a metaphorical sign of reporting to Brexit.
[8] A hint to either a possible breach of the rule of law or a shift towards technological advancement.

Scoring table 1

Approached topics	NP	EP	BC	CC
Times mentioned – Angela Merkel	4	4	3	3
Times mentioned – Boris Johnson	4	0	2	1

Scoring table 2

Types of diplomatic relationships and prospects	oSCR	pSCR	oER	pER	oFM	pEM
Times mentioned – Angela Merkel	7	0	7	1	4	0
Times mentioned – Boris Johnson	9	0	7	0	6	0

The table shows, sequentially, the discursive balance of German Chancellor Angela Merkel. With an equal score between the terms used on European power in contrast to national power (sovereignty), as well as through equality in relation to the relationship of friendship and collaboration between a British and a continental culture, A. Merkel opts for asserting a plus-optimism. The terms on diplomacy and economic and socio-cultural relations are marked by a binding optimism for the end of the negotiations. With the necessary clarification: Chancellor Merkel is also seemingly optimistic about the free movement of goods and citizens, considering that there will be a solution at some point. Her optimism is only apparent in this context, as they provoke different nuances in contrast to the message of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The endless delay of a solution that may or may not exist, as A. Merkel points out, can also mean a middle ground that avoids direct confrontation or a type of imposed and arbitrary political correctness. The placement of solutions in an uncertain future is the result of the negative reactions that the German Chancellor faced in the refugee crisis because she expressed a clear point of view and it came with immediate effects.

The attitude of Prime Minister Boris Johnson is not fundamentally different from that of Chancellor Angela Merkel, with approximately equal scores in the topics addressed in the first table. The only notable difference is that B. Johnson is a little more optimistic about post-Brexit relations.

III. *Theresa May*

During the public reaction speech at the European Union Summit in Salzburg, held on the 20th of September 2018[9], former Prime Minister Theresa May displays an outraged attitude regarding the choice and decision of Member States on the issue of Brexit.

Time Ind.	Key Ideas and Phrases	Topics
00:17	Despite the made progress, there are two issues in which the perspectives are contrasting. For the economic relationship, it is argued that the European Union has offered the British people two unacceptable options: either the United Kingdom will remain in the European Economic Area and in the customs union, thus still under pressure from immigration control and the European institutional trade agreements with other countries from outside the European space, or they will have a simple free trade agreement with the European Union, but because Northern Ireland will remain in the Customs Union and in the single market, this will lead to the imposition of a customs duty with Northern Ireland.	pSCR, pER, pFM
01:43	Creating a border that would mean that Northern Ireland is no longer part of the United Kingdom (Belfast Good Friday Agreement): "It's something that I would never agree to. [...] If the EU believe I will, they are making a fundamental mistake".	NP, BC
02:31	"No deal is better than a bad deal".	pSCR, pER
02:35	"But the best outcome would be for the UK to leave with a deal".	oSCR, oER
02:47	"We proposed a third option [...]: a frictionless trade in goods"[10].	pSCR, oER, pFM
02:58	It is repeatedly emphasized that a strict border between Ireland and Northern Ireland is avoided, while respecting the outcome of the referendum and the integrity of the United Kingdom.	NP, BC
03:23	The personal view is that the European Union wants to keep Northern Ireland in the customs union, so it is considerate as unacceptable because it would mean the fragmentation of the United Kingdom. Thus, she advocates an alternative that preserves the integrity of the United Kingdom.	pSCR, pER
04:19	"Neither side should demand the unacceptable of the other [...] We cannot accept anything that threatens the integrity of our union just as they (the Union/Europeans we note) cannot accept anything that threatens the integrity of theirs. We cannot accept anything that does not respect the result of the referendum, just as they cannot accept anything that is not in the interest of their citizens".	NP, EP, BC, CC

---

[9] *The Sun – Theresa May demands respect from EU and says their behaviour is unacceptable*, uploaded on 21st of September 2018 on *YouTube,* URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZCqsX0jsx4>.
[10] We find again the idea of a special relationship, of the "unicorn" mentioned as an imaginary landmark, by explicit reference to the reduction of the free movement of people and the preservation of the free movement of goods.

04:48	The United Kingdom expects the same treatment regarding the relationship of mutual respect and friendship with the European Union after the exit process is completed.	oSCR
05:31	"In the meantime, we must and will continue the work of preparing ourselves for *no deal*".	pSCR, pER
05:41	Even if the *no deal* option is chosen, the rights of the approximately 3 million European citizens in the United Kingdom will be upheld; they will be protected and will be able to remain on the British territory.	oFM
06:09	For the Irish people, she promises to do everything in her power to prevent a border from fragmenting the United Kingdom	NP, BC, oFM
06:26	Finally, she argues that she does not want to lose the legitimacy of the United Kingdom's political institutions by not respecting the referendum and/or by fragmenting the territory.	NP

Scoring table 1

Approached topics	NP	EP	BC	CC5
Times mentioned	5	1	4	1

Scoring table 2

Types of diplomatic relationships and prospects	oSCR	pSCR	oER	pER	oFM	pFM
Times mentioned	2	6	2	4	2	2

Overall, the speech of former Prime Minister Theresa May is well-founded on pessimism (especially regarding the European destiny of Northern Ireland). The result regarding the prospects of diplomatic relations concerning European power and continental culture resides in the idea that maintaining integrity is the only common ground between the two sides of the Brexit process. Equality of values regarding optimistic or pessimistic perspectives on free movement suggests the ambiguity of the discourse and highlights the effects on the symbiosis of unity with diversity, a conjunction that ends when the diversity of choices violates legal/normative unity (in Northern Ireland the referendum illustrated an opposite vision from the rest of the UK) and when the unity of one structure causes the fragmentation of the other (keeping Northern Ireland within the European single market implies notable differences and can cause an unprecedented political-administrative crisis). Regarding the dimension of European cultural diplomacy,

T. May's speech has a pessimistic undertone: socio-cultural and economic relations are seen "in black and white", considering that the negative effects of Brexit are inevitable and prevail over the positive ones. Regarding European soft power, T. May strongly supports the idea of British nationalism, in the sense that the interests of the United Kingdom are as important as those of the twenty-seven-member states of the Union. The interpretation concerns two open angles: one which reflects upon the common sense that the European Union, a unitary and unanimous systemic construct, is no higher than the royal union of the British archipelago, even when the latter faces an unprecedented administrative mishap, and one which considers that the supranational, political and cultural dimension of the European construct directs the action and choice of the Member States of the European Union to the detriment of individual-asserted sovereignty.

For Ian Browne, the option can be summed up in a one-off inventory formula: "Britain has 12 Regions, of which 9 are in England. The other three are Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Eight of England's regions voted leave. Only London voted remain. Remain was not popular in England. If you subtract the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish vote from the total, England voted by around 53% to 47% in favour of leave – a six-point margin, which is really quite large, much larger than Remainers want to acknowledge. (There was a tremendous reluctance on the part of Remainers to accept that if there had been a second referendum and they had won, it would be Scottish, not English votes that would have won it for them"[11].

But, more than that, there would be five points with a conclusive role that give the measure of the reality of Brexit: the acceptance of the phenomenon as a way of a bigger visibility of the already existing divisions; the "convenient" political option to start such a process; the religious reasons of Northern Ireland, even if they did not prevail; the "national vote" in and from Scotland and the "national model" that worked in Wales.

With a sharp mention, as Ian Browne confesses bluntly: "Britain has never seen itself as part of Europe, at least not since Henry VI lost Calais to the French in the fifteenth century! Thatcher called a meeting in 1990 at which her real views were revealed – Timothy Garton Ash was there. She said the Germans were arrogant, drank beer and wanted to dominate Europe. It's quite amusing to read what was said. She was the embodiment of what is known as a "Little Englander" mentality. She tried to make an alliance with Gorbachev to prevent German re-unification (unsuccessfully, obviously). She embodied a very typical English attitude – the continent is all very well for holidays, but unfortunately it is filled with foreigners. As with Cameron's quote above, Britain never saw the EU as a cultural project and wasn't interested in a "dream of peace". NATO – a defence against the Russians – was what they favoured as a way of achieving peace. They showed minimal interest in Franco-German rapprochement, or Europe as cultural project, or in pan-European peace. For Britain, the EU was always about economic integration – a wide but shallow EU. Lots of countries, including Romania, but with very little cultural integration"[12].

---

[11] Interview with Ian Browne. See previous notes.
[12] *Ibidem*.

The Hard Way and the Soft Option

In the mentioned interview, to the question regarding the priority arguments of exit (apart from Euroscepticism and economic aspects), researcher Ian Browne highlights the perspective offered by Robert Colls (in the article *After Bagehot*), with which it resonates in the sense that the "vacuum of self-image" is the consequence of the collapse of "the institutions that supported the British state for one hundred and fifty years" and the disappearance of the "ethics of the old British state". The vacuum becomes in this context a morbid symptom – awaiting the birth of post-nationalism – in the sense that the hard effects of exit are cultural, referring to "neo-liberalism as a cultural force that destroyed the old idea of British identity and did not leave much else in its place". To the belief in constitutional practice is added the relationship between practice and identity, a trust in rulers/politicians. Against the background of economic austerity, David Cameron's argument is equated by Ian Browne with a management failure: "We are rightly suspicious of ideology, and sceptical of grand schemes and grandiose promises. So, we have always seen the European Union as a means to an end – the way to boost our prosperity and help anchor peace and stability across the European continent – but we don't see it as an end in itself... I have just one yardstick – how do we best advance our national interest… If my experience as Prime Minister had taught me that our membership of the EU was holding Britain back or undermining our global influence, I would not hesitate to recommend that we should leave"[13].

Starting from these findings, we will reposition ourselves in relation to the cultural narratives of Brexit analysed previously, in order to extract from here the hard or soft landmarks of the proposed options. In Emmanuel Macron's cultural narrative, nuances of optimism and pessimism are distinguished by an inconsistent attitude as a product of the refugee crisis and the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015. One of the solutions to Europe's problems, expressed both in the European public space, as well as by Macron is to limit bureaucratic extensions and to facilitate the integration of the Member States of the European Union[14]. Macron is firmly convinced that Europe can succeed if it follows a "strict diet", with weighed doses of sovereignty, democracy and deep unity/integration. The hard option (in the present context not in the sense of hard power, but of a detached, firm and concrete approach to the supranational system) of integration, proposed by Macron, does not necessarily mean an economic approach, as Joseph Sitglitz insists[15]. Macron's arguments are based on unity, in the opposite direction of the expansion of populism in Europe and

---

[13] David Cameron, 9th of May 2016, *apud* Ian Browne.

[14] Cristina Arvatu Vohn, *Perspective asupra viitorului Europei*, Partea I. Criza europeană: dileme, texte și pretexte, Collective volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, Edited by Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu" Publishing House, 2016, pp. 118-119.

[15] Joseph E. Stiglitz, "The Future of Europe", *UBS Center for Economics in Society at the University of Zurich*, URL: http://www.ubscenter.uzh.ch/index.php/en/events/opinions/stiglitz, *apud* Cristina Arvatu Vohn, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

Eurosceptic reflexes. Europe's problem is the shortage of real leaders[16], which leaves room for the soft options of unofficial leadership[17].

A key point of Macron's theory on the future of the European Union is the expansion of influence and the increase in openness to Turkey. Taking into account the European chronology in regards to Turkey, from the intention expressed in 1959, to the evolution of the request for the Association Agreement from 1963-1999, to the opening of negotiations in 2005 and the probability of accession in 2015, to the postponement of accession for 2023 (on against the refugee crisis and the rise of terrorism in Europe), association with Turkey is a sensitive choice that can change not only the European physiognomy but also its attitude towards the Islamic community[18]. Turkey needs to be repositioned in the European soft power equation dominated by several poles of power, whose configuration needs balance and balancing, to manage what Jean-Claude Juncker proposed through the "two-speed Europe" project[19].

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's speech is closely linked to the growing popularity of the *Ordnungspolitik* current in Germany, according to which the "policy of order" represents and applies the idea that the state must operate according to strict rules and constantly update them according to contemporary requirements[20]. The Chancellor's insistence on postponing a solution to the border problem between the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland is not accidental or evasive, but is based on the *Ordnungspolitik* matrix, in the sense that it is relevant to consult all possible truths before taking a decision, that is why A. Merkel is asking the British Prime Minister to come back with a full picture of the border issue in the next official meetings for the Brexit negotiations. If we were to synthesize the proposed options, they are reduced to a type of obvious logic: "French cultural pride" versus "German metaphysics and nebula" versus "empirical and foggy England")[21].

The position of German Chancellor Angela Merkel is dominated by the attitude towards extra-European (especially American) recommendations on "who should answer Europe's metaphorical telephone"[22], as Henry Kissinger posed, weighing Germany's position on hard mistakes (here with a reference to hard power and the two world wars) and software errors (here with reference to the Berlin Wall and its fall[23]). *Ordnungspolitik* is a form of "good guard that passes bad danger"; hence the discursive recourse to how many landmarks (the

---

[16] Jean-Michel de Waele, "The European project needs to be re-established", *Euractiv*, http://www. euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/interview/jean-michel-de-waele-the-european-project-needs-to-be-re-established/, *apud* Cristina Arvatu Vohn, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

[17] Cristina Arvatu Vohn, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-132.

[18] Ruxandra Iordache, *UE și candidatura Turcă*, Partea a III-a. Apogeul furtunii: migrația și terorismul, Collective Volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, *op. cit*., 2016, pp. 215-250.

[19] Cristina Arvatu Vohn, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

[20] Cristian Ion-Popa, *Ordnungspolitik – soluția germană*, Partea a II-a. Provocări multiple: fațete ale crizei europene, Collective Volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-140.

[21] Edgar Morin, *Gândind Europa*, București: Editura Trei, 2002, *apud* Viorella Manolache, "*Europastorm": Brexit – criza Europei în criză*, Partea a II-a. Provocări multiple: fațete ale crizei europene, Collective Volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-164.

[22] Cristina Arvatu Vohn, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.

[23] Lucian-Ștefan Dumitrescu, *Cultura strategică a Uniunii Europene. Dilemele de securitate ale unui proiect anti-geopolitic*, "*Problema germană*". *De la Germania europeană la Uniunea Europeană germană*, Partea I. Criza europeană: dileme, texte și pretexte, Collective volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa, op. cit.*, pp. 54-60.

Belfast Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland that wants to remain a member of the European Union and the fact that the United Kingdom wants to leave the European Union permanently) and the mention of imminent realities – respecting the integrity of the single market of the European Union.

Boris Johnson's speech is accurately weighed, carefully repeating after each pessimistic "but", an optimistic "but", as part of a carefully managed neopopulism: "Neopopulism makes some more common promises: cleansing the political world, reducing taxes, strengthening citizens' powers in referendums, helping poor regions, restoring the dignity of the elderly, supporting the integration of young people, sending the corrupt to the courts, limiting waves of immigration, etc."[24].

It is required to highlight here yet another finding, according to which: "Viewed and interpreted through the magnifying glass of the foretold obituary, the exit of Great Britain reifies its only interest – the single market –, all other aspects of the European project causing either indifference or hostility in the United Kingdom. [...] A good relationship with Europe is a vital element, confessed David Cameron, when Ian Traynor found that Britain and the rest of the European Union are heading in completely different directions (...) Britain is not part of the structure either, nor is it integrated into the draft legislation based on the European Central Bank's supervisory role in the banking sector"[25].

The two quotes, arranged in order of cause and effect, summarize the valences of the hard-soft options, with the emphasis, through Theresa May's speech of the first option, germinated by the crisis of legitimacy/credibility of institutions[26], or what is theoretically accepted by the "trust in supranational political institutions"[27]. It should be mentioned that distrust in institutions is not synonymous with distrust in the European concept, the first arising from practice, while the second is a term and a construct "on the agenda", theoretically[28]. The statement is useful to explain the differences in perception and trust, between West and East: Eastern trust in the European institutions lies in distrust in their own institutions/state[29]. Hence, we get the *attractiveness* from J. Nye's terms, attractiveness which the European soft power implicitly preserves, but which also deepens economic inequality[30]. Thus, *hard* would equate here with a surplus of confidence in their own state capabilities, and *soft* would become an import model, being refined and adapted.

———————
[24] Lorena-Valeria Stuparu, *Globalizarea și semnificația populismului în Europa*, *Populismul în țările Uniunii Europene*, Partea I. Criza europeană: dileme, texte și pretexte, Collective volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

[25] Viorella Manolache, *"Europastorm": Brexit - criza Europei în criză*, Partea a II-a. Provocări multiple: fațete ale crizei europene, Collective Volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

[26] Paul Whiteley, Harold D. Clark, David Sanders, Marianne Stewart, *Why do voters lose trust in governments – public perceptions of Government Honesty and Trustworthiness in Britain 2000-2013*, Oxford: The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 2016, pp. 116-131.

[27] Darie Cristea, Diana Didă, *Criză de încredere sau criză instituțională? Scăderea încrederii în instituții ca simptom al crizei instituționale în spațiul UE*, Partea I. Criza europeană: dileme, texte și pretexte, Collective volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-96.

[28] European Parliament, *Parlamentul 2018 – Acceptarea provocării: de la sprijin (tăcut) la votul efectiv*, last updated on 29th of January 2019, accessed on 25th of May 2020, URL: <https://www.europarl. europa.eu/ at-your-service/ro/be-heard/eurobarometer/parlemeter-2018-taking-up-the-challenge>.

[29] Political Capital, "Conspiracy theories in Europe: a compilation", *Deconspirator*, uploaded on 1st of July 2014, accessed on 26th of May 2020, URL: <http://deconspirator.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ Conspiracy-Theories-in-Europe-Final.pdf>.

[30] Bogdan M. Popescu, *Europa între criza legitimității și Brexit*, Partea a II-a. Provocări multiple: fațete ale crizei europene, Collective Volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-180.

The Unicorn – An Imaginary Landmark
for Reporting on Brexit

The unicorn is a mythical creature, in the shape of an ordinary horse whose horn with a magic symbol has grown on its forehead. In his essay, *The Lion and The Unicorn*, George Orwell refers to the British unicorn as a symbol of the middle path represented by English socialism[31]. Tailored for Brexit, Ian Browne considers the use of a metaphorical analogy called a useless act of demagoguery and mutual attack, in the sense that: "For Remainers *unicorn* simply means magical thinking, thinking not based in reality, stupidity, post-Imperial nostalgia etc. It's simply an insulting term used by Remainers to categorize views they don't like and can't be bothered to try to understand. (...) Orwell's unicorn was something different – he was attempting to build a national coalition of what Colls would see as the old-fashioned gentlemanly Bagehot-ian dignified part of the constitution, the technocratic part – the middle class, and the productive part – the working class. Orwell wanted unity of purpose to pursue a goal that everyone wanted – the complete opposite of what Remainers mean when they talk about unicorns. They are simply selfish, and want their own way"[32].

Although the title of George Orwell's essay refers explicitly to one lion and one unicorn (the last symbol of the coat of arms of Scotland), it contains a single explicit name, as a military symbol and insignia, which is relevant and is of interest in Orwell's text by being a series of issues to which the author refers: the "English" attribute, patriotism, national identity, traditional virtues, etc. The appeal, this time, is applied and customized for the case of Brexit: the January 2019 vote in the United Kingdom's Parliament was likened to one in search of unicorns; the online message of a British girl, addressed to Donald Tusk, is accompanied by a drawing with a unicorn; or the most common allegations against Theresa May who "hunts/chases unicorns". The unicorn narrative thus prevails as an imaginary landmark for reporting on Brexit.

Returning to the interview with Ian Browne, the use of the unicorn is associated with the perspective issued by the *remain* camp with references to the desires of those who voted for Brexit and whose reason is based on fiction, on something that cannot be implemented in the physical world.

If we refer to the author and the text mentioned by I. Browne, Robert Colls in *After Bagehot*, the unicorn would be more than an imaginary construct or metaphor, but a very morbid symptom of the lack of respect for democracy. G. Orwell's unicorn contains the founding data of a national coalition of gentlemen, technocrats and workers who can create a balanced social climate in Orwell's democratic socialism. Returning to the concrete reality of Brexit and to the data

---

[31] George Orwell, "The Lion and The Unicorn", *The Orwell Foundation*, online reproduction of *Searchlight Books* from 19th of February 1941, accessed on 20th of May 2020, URL: <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/the-lion-and-the-unicorn-socialism-and-the-english-genius/>.

[32] Interview with Ian Browne.

of European democracy, the latter is assaulted, exhausted, threatened[33]. Against this background we have Euroscepticism, right-wing movements, inflamed populism, or as I. Browne would call it, a political deficit or incapacity, an economic failure, a loss of identity, a lack of trust in politicians and experts and deep social inequities etc.

In conclusion, Brexit brings together a number of narratives interested in the use of four levels/directions: the social level/social perspective (*remain* versus *exit*), the administrative level (the situation of Northern Ireland's border post-Brexit), the political and civil level (the discrepancy between the view of politicians and that of British citizens) and the diplomatic level (Euroscepticism versus Europeanism). Noting that the difference between the social level (*remain-exit*) and the diplomatic level (Europeanism-Euroscepticism) is not rigid or explicit: the *remain* camp is not necessarily pro-European Union just as the *exit* camp is not completely Eurosceptic[34].

Of additional interest remains the questioning of cultural narratives about Brexit, in the sense of clarifying and projecting the phenomenon as an "isolated and typical British case" or as a precedent of a series of reactions to the failure of the European project. For Ian Browne, Brexit is required to be placed in the context anticipated by Margaret Thatcher in her 1988 Bruges speech. Its beginning is relevant to this context: "Mr. Chairman, you have invited me to speak on the subject of Britain and Europe. Perhaps I should congratulate you on your courage. If you believe some of the things said and written about my views on Europe, it must seem rather like inviting Genghis Khan to speak on the virtues of peaceful coexistence"[35].

But M. Thatcher directs the continuation of the discourse towards the enumeration of the elements related to European culture *per se* and emphasizes the deep cultural connection between Great Britain and Europe, through specific examples. One of these is the British struggle against a hegemonic power on the continent. If power was obtained through the hard option (in the military sense), Thatcher's fears were linked to a construct that brings together a unique hybrid type of power (*hard* – in the sense of economic power – and *soft*, as a cultural monopoly), a supra-state pretext for Germany to regain European dominance without violating the jurisdiction of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

We can reaffirm that the file of Brexit's cultural narratives is marked by predominantly pessimistic reactions, part if not effect or even triggering element of what seems to be hovering over Europe – what studies and research in the field call, by another metaphorical appeal, a "perfect storm".

––––––––––––

[33] European Economic and Social Committee, *Fascism on the rise: where does it come from, and how to stop it, with a common European response*, updated on 30th of October 2018, accessed on 27th of May 2020, URL: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/news/fascism-rise-where-does-it-come-and-how-stop-it-common-european-response>.

[34] Interview with Ian Browne.

[35] *Margaret Thatcher's famous Bruges speech on Europe*, uploaded by *The* Core on 20th of April 2019 on *YouTube*, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3l_OMSXnaXg>.

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY (SELECTIVE)

Arvatu Vohn, Cristina, *Perspective asupra viitorului Europei*, Partea I. Criza europeană: dileme, texte și pretexte, Collective volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, Edited by Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu", 2016;

Cristea, Darie, Didă, Diana, *Criză de încredere sau criză instituțională? Scăderea încrederii în instituții ca simptom al crizei instituționale în spațiul UE*, Partea I. Criza europeană: dileme, texte și pretexte, Collective volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, Edited by Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu", 2016;

Dumitrescu, Lucian-Ștefan, *Cultura strategică a Uniunii Europene. Dilemele de securitate ale unui proiect anti-geopolitic*, "*Problema germană*". *De la Germania europeană la Uniunea Europeană germană*, Partea I. Criza europeană: dileme, texte și pretexte, Collective volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, Edited by Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu", 2016;

European Parliament, *Parlamentul 2018 – Acceptarea provocării: de la sprijin (tăcut) la votul efectiv*, last updated on 29th of January 2019, accessed on 25th of May 2020, URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/ro/be-heard/eurobarometer/parlemeter-2018-taking-up-the-challenge;

Iordache, Ruxandra, *UE și candidatura Turcă*, Partea a III-a. Apogeul furtunii: migrația și terorismul, Collective Volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, Edited by Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu", 2016;

Manolache, Viorella, "*Europastorm": Brexit – criza Europei în criză*, Partea a II-a. Provocări multiple: fațete ale crizei europene, Collective Volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, Edited by Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu", 2016;

Orwell, George, "The Lion and The Unicorn", *The Orwell Foundation*, online reproduction of *Searchlight Books* from 19th of February 1941, accessed on 20th of May 2020, URL: https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/the-lion-and-the-unicorn-socialism-and-the-english-genius/;

Political Capital, "Conspiracy theories in Europe: a compilation", *Deconspirator*, uploaded on 1st of July 2014, accessed on 26th of May 2020, URL: http://deconspirator.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ Conspiracy-Theories-in-Europe-Final.pdf;

Popa, Ion Cristian, *Ordnungspolitik – soluția germană*, Partea a II-a. Provocări multiple: fațete ale crizei europene, Collective Volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, Edited by Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu", 2016;

Popescu, Bogdan M., *Europa între criza legitimității și Brexit*, Partea a II-a. Provocări multiple: fațete ale crizei europene, Collective Volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, Edited by Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu", 2016;

Stuparu Lorena-Valeria, *Globalizarea și semnificația populismului în Europa*, *Populismul în țările Uniunii Europene*, Partea I. Criza europeană: dileme, texte și pretexte, Collective volume *Furtună perfectă în Europa*, Edited by Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu", 2016;

Whiteley, Paul, Clark, Harold D., Sanders, David, Stewart, Marianne, *Why do voters lose trust in governments – public perceptions of Government Honesty and Trustworthiness in Britain 2000-2013*, Oxford: The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 2016.

Video sources:

Boris Johnson and Angela Merkel give joint statement, uploaded by *The Sun* on 21st of August 2019 on *YouTube*, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqxVl-KjZi4;

French President Emmanuel Macron on Brexit and Trump, uploaded by *BBC News* on 22nd of January 2018 on *YouTube*, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_aLROw98NA;

Margaret Thatcher's famous Bruges speech on Europe, uploaded by *The* Core on 20th of April 2019 on *YouTube*, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3l_OMSXnaXg;

The Sun – Theresa May demands respect from EU and says their behaviour is unacceptable, uploaded on 21st of September 2018 on *YouTube,* URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZCqsX0jsx4>.