

The brexit from the European Union, a culture and identity perspectives

(خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي، منظور ثقافي وهوياتي)

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Abstract:

The results of the British referendum on the membership of the European Union formed shock waves across Europe, as the British case raised question marks about the fate of European integration in light of the crises that the EU is experiencing. Based on the cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede, it appears to us that Britain had and still has feelings against European institutions, and it has never been eager to give up its national identity in favour of a common European identity. Brexit represents a serious challenge to the future of EU, as the cultural and identity factor emerged in the issue of the British voting in favor of leaving and not completing the process of European integration

Keywords: *European Integration, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, national identity, Brexit*

ملخص:

شكلت نتائج الاستفتاء البريطاني على عضوية الاتحاد الأوروبي موجات صدمة عبر أوروبا ، حيث أثارت الحالة البريطانية علامات استفهام حول مصير التكامل الأوروبي في ظل الأزمات التي يمر بها الاتحاد الأوروبي. بناءً على الأبعاد الثقافية لجيرت هوفستد ، يبدو لنا أن بريطانيا كانت ولا تزال لديها مشاعر ضد المؤسسات الأوروبية ، ولم تكن أبدًا حريصة على التخلي عن هويتها الوطنية لصالح هوية أوروبية مشتركة. يمثل خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي تحديًا خطيرًا لمستقبل الاتحاد الأوروبي ، حيث ظهر عامل الثقافة والهوية في قضية التصويت البريطاني لصالح المغادرة وعدم استكمال عملية التكامل الأوروبي.

كلمات مفتاحية: التكامل الأوروبي ، الأبعاد الثقافية لهوفستد ، الهوية الوطنية ، خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي

I- Introduction:

The date of June 23rd, 2016 was an important event in the course of the EU, as it is linked to the referendum on Brexit from the European Union, which formed a political crisis in European circles and raised many question marks about the extent of European integration.

The goal of integration was to establish a European entity, where it was clear to avoid wars between European countries and then create a unified entity capable of competing with other blocs in the world, Accordingly, the architects of European integration believed that European integration should not be limited to political and economic goals, but include cultural goals. According to the Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992, one of the goals of European integration is to create a closer union between Europeans and push them to adopt a common European identity. However the reality of the situation says the opposite, as European public opinion polls reveal little or no connection. With the common European identity, it seems that the British in particular are still closely linked to their national identity, British exit from the European Union reveals the extent of the deep gap between the European Union institutions and the European countries citizens.

Based on the foregoing, we will raise the following question: From a cultural and identity perspectives, does the cultural and identity factor have a role in Britain's non-engagement in European integration on the one hand, and in pushing Britain to vote in favor of leaving the European Union on the other hand?

This article is organized as follows: First, is reviewed the conceptual aspect of European integration and national identity. Then is analysed and studied the case of Britain within the EU from a cultural point of view based on the cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede, considering that Great Britain held a referendum on membership to the EU. Last is to give an explanation of brexit from identity point of vue.

II - European integration and national identity:

When talking about European integration, most scholars focus on the political and economic aspects of integration, but they ignore the cultural aspect. Since culture in general and identity in particular emerge in the integration process between the various political units, the meanings of European integration, and identity will be discussed.

The concept of integration in Europe was associated with the Cold War period to achieve European unity as a political project on one hand, and to use European integration as a liberal bulwark against Soviet communism, on the other hand. Paul Hoffmann was the first

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to use the term integration to describe the process by which states transfer their sovereignty to a supranational centre, while Ernst Haas defined integration as a process “whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states”. Furthermore, according to him, integration is the voluntary creation of larger political units involving the self-conscious eschewal of force in relations between participating institutions¹.

The final prospects of European integration have always remained somewhat ambiguous. In the first steps of integration, the European Union founders have put a set of goals represented in the establishment of a common European market and a customs union. On this basis, the European Economic Community began as an international organization with a limited power of six members, furthermore, the processes of integration and cooperation increased and produced a comprehensive model of cooperation between European countries. European integration began from the Treaty of Rome in 1957 to the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007. During this period, the membership to the European Union reached 28 members after it included six members. Therefore, the occurrence of such peaceful integration and without coercion made the European integration model as one of the most successful models in international politics². The European Union has succeeded in achieving a prosperous economic integration, but the decision-makers in Brussels want the European Union to be more than just an economic union or a supranational bureaucratic organization³.

The founders of the European Union believed that political integration can only be achieved through the establishment and success of economic integration⁴. On this basis, this idea was formulated by one of the eminent scholars in the field of European integration, Ernst Haas⁵ who in the theory of regional integration claimed that cooperation will lead, through "spill over " mechanism to increase cooperation and integration and create more supranational bases. In this vein, the participation of many actors in the European integration process will increase, which will conduct the national governments, parties and citizens to direct their expectations and political behaviour towards the European Union⁶.

During the 1960's, Ernst Haas was aware that the European project was not in the interests of the citizens of Europe⁷, he expected that the citizens of European countries would gradually shift their political activities and their loyalty towards Europe based on the various

¹ Samson, R. (2006). The Cultural Integration Model and European Transformation. *The Case of Romania*.

² Fligstein, N., Polyakova, A., & Sandholtz, W. (2012). European integration, nationalism and European identity. *JCMS: journal of common market studies*, 50, 106-122.

³ Polyakova, A., & Fligstein, N. (2016). Is European integration causing Europe to become more nationalist? Evidence from the 2007–9 financial crisis. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23(1), 60-83.

⁴ Fligstein, N., Polyakova, A., & Sandholtz, W. (2012). Op.cit.

⁵ Haas, E. B. (1961). International integration: The European and the universal process. *International organization*, 15(3), 366-392.

⁶ Fligstein, N., Polyakova, A., & Sandholtz, W. (2012). Op.cit.

⁷ Haas, E. (2020). *Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Forces, 1950-1957*.

regional policies of European integration⁸. Furthermore , Haas considered that integration will gradually produce a convergence of values and beliefs among the peoples of the European community, which will generate a new nationalism⁹.

In a similar context, the European Union founders, alongside political and economic projects, have aspired to create a common European identity that could make European citizens view Europe as their primary identity rather than their own identities, but the matter did not go according to expectations, as the citizens who have a European identity in the first place are very few, while the majority still consider the national identity to be of paramount importance¹⁰. Among the final goals set by the founders of the European integrative edifice¹¹ were attempts to create a cultural community to which all Europeans belong. The evidence is the creation of a national anthem, a common passport and making Brussels the capital of the European Union and an attempt to establish a European constitution. These signs and symbols are usually associated with the nation-state, not economic unions, in a similar vein, the European Union renewed, through the Treaty of Lisbon, the call for the consecration of the common European cultural, religious and human heritage¹².

Despite the successful achievements of the economic integration in the EU, it did not produce a sense of Europeanness. It is likely further economic integration may be a reason why Europeans do not feel belonging to the European Union, as the problems arising from economic integration are caused by the failure of political elites to find supra-state solutions, which created a feeling among European citizens of the weakness of the common affiliation with the European Union¹³. Moreover, even the most supportive of the European Union cannot deny that European integration is witnessing many crises, as the Brexit is one of the most crises that the European Union has experienced. In this regard, many believe that this crisis may pose an existential threat to the European Union and its future¹⁴.

In the context of explaining the position towards the European Union, the national identity is one of the important elements to explain this position. Europeans seem to be still linked to their national identities. It is possible that the high feelings of national identity may clearly contribute to the decline in support to the European project, which stands as an obstacle to European integration. Moreover, national identity is related to the level of intensity of individuals' feelings towards their country. It is also related to the level of attachment to

⁸ Haas, E. (1968). *The Uniting of Europe* (Notre Dame, IN. *University of Notre Dame Press*. Hermann, M.(2001). *How decision units shape foreign policy: A theoretical framework*. *International Studies Review*, 3(2), 47-81.

⁹ Fligstein, N., Polyakova, A., & Sandholtz, W. (2012). *Op.cit.*

¹⁰ Polyakova, A., & Fligstein, N. (2016). *Op.cit.*

¹¹ Monnet, J. (1978). *Memoirs* (London: *Collins*; New York: *Doubleday & Company Inc.*

¹² Polyakova, A., & Fligstein, N. (2016). *Op.cit.*

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Börzel, T. A., & Risse, T. (2018). From the euro to the Schengen crises: European integration theories, politicization, and identity politics. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(1), 83-108.

the nation compared to other entities, and finally, individuals' obsession and fear of other cultures and identities that may encroach on the dominant culture of the nation¹⁵.

Within the framework of the study of European integration, shedding light on the issue of national identities is a matter of major importance¹⁶, This study will address the consideration of the level of the nation's connection with respect to other entities, as well as the fear of other cultures that may pose a threat to the culture and identity of the nation. On this basis, throughout our study, we will shed light on European integration and Brexit from a cultural and identity point of view.

Some studies consider that the creation of a European identity may grow the possibility of increasing support for the European Union¹⁷. According to many researches, the issue of increasing the chances of successful integration is related to the extent to which the European Union is able to create a European identity. How countries define themselves culturally, politically and economically is significant for integration dynamics¹⁸. The Brexit referendum raises the issue of national identity and its impact on European integration; accordingly, we will address national identity from a conceptual perspective.

National identity has been of central concern to social scientists interested in the construction of modern categories of belonging.¹⁹, Gellner understood nationalism as a sort of (cultural pool in which individuals who are part of a national group can, like fish, swim comfortably'. Language and culture defined nation-states for Gellner, a point which led him to emphasize nationalism as 'a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent²⁰.

National identity has been described as "the intensity and type of relationship to the nation,"²¹. Accordingly, this is derived from Tajfel's classic definition of social identity: 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership²². So the stronger the individual's attachment to the nation, the less likely the individual will agree to measures that reduce national influence over the economy and politics. As a result, the individual who sees the increasing growth of the European Union in the areas of politics, economy and culture after it was under the control of the nation-state may inevitably influence his views towards the European Union²³.

Polyakova and Fligstein argue that the bases of a common culture can contain language, religion, and race. These factors can significantly contribute to the foundation of a

¹⁵ Carey, S. (2002). Undivided loyalties: Is national identity an obstacle to European integration? *European Union politics*, 3(4), 387-413.

¹⁶ Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity* (Vol. 11): University of Nevada press Reno.

¹⁷ Leonard, M. (1998). *Making Europe popular: the search for European identity*: Demos.

¹⁸ Laffan, B. (1996). The politics of identity and political order in Europe. *JCMS: journal of common market studies*, 34(1), 81-102.

¹⁹ Brubaker, R. (1996). *Nationalism reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the new Europe*: Cambridge University Press.

²⁰ Gellner, E. (2008). *Nations and nationalism*: Cornell University Press.

²¹ Blank, T., Schmidt, P., & Westle, B. (2001). *Patriotism—A contradiction, a possibility or an empirical reality*. Paper presented at the ECPR Workshop.

²² Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology*: Cup Archive.

²³ Carey, S. (2002). Op.cit.

national identity, as the historical and political factors influence which identity actually forms the basis for nationalism in a particular society²⁴. Deutsch argued that the way to build a nation-state is to find a horizontal kind of solidarity that appeals to a wide group of people of differing social strata and offers a sense of solidarity that justifies producing a state to protect the 'nation'²⁵.

Another perception of national identity stems from the attachments of individuals to various territorial entities. People feel an attachment to their neighbourhood, their town, their region, their country, perhaps even the world community. The highest political unit to which individuals feel they owe allegiance is the terminal community²⁶. Therefore, People derive their sense of national identity based on the neighbourhood in which they live, or the town or country, or perhaps even the global community. It can be considered that the highest political unit to which individuals owe allegiance is the final community, on this basis, individuals who believe in a common European identity are convinced that the European Union is likely to be their final community and responsible for making public policies, which will reflect positively on their view of integration. While people who do not believe in a common European identity may feel that the final community is manifested in their national state and they do not see that the European Union has no place to supervise the rights of citizens. Considering that European citizenship is incompatible with the concept of the nation to which they belong, and therefore they will adopt a negative attitude towards EU membership²⁷.

The last perception is about national identity and the potential threats from other cultures. Those with this perception embrace hatred of other cultures because they pose a menace to their national identity. Moreover, individuals see that the state and the resources of the national government are threatened by European integration and other cultures may encroach on local politics and culture. In addition, these individuals belonging to an internal group (the nation) have their own languages, culture and identity. So, they see that belonging to an external group (the European Union) may make their language used in a different way less and make their culture and identity lose its luster and distinction, so the owners of this perception adopt more negative views towards the European Union.

According to Fukuyama, identity grows out of a distinction between one's true inner self and an outer world of social rules and norms that do not adequately recognize that inner self's worth or dignity. Individuals throughout their existence find themselves in dispute with their societies. In modern times, a point of view about inner self has been adopted and consists of an authentic value of inner self. In this vein, the society itself needs to change and not the inner self that needs to change to conform to society's rules²⁸.

²⁴ Polyakova, A., & Fligstein, N. (2016). Op.cit.

²⁵ Deutsch, K. W. (1966). *Nationalism and social communication: An inquiry into the foundations of nationality* (Vol. 34): mit Press.

²⁶ Peters, B. G., & Hunold, C. (1991). *European politics reconsidered*: Holmes & Meier London.

²⁷ Carey, S. (2002). Op.cit.

²⁸ Fukuyama, F. (2018). *Identity: The demand for dignity and the politics of resentment*: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

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Based on the foregoing, it is probable that Britain was never ready to concede its national identity in favour of a European identity. Britain was always apprehensive that it would lose its culture and identity and decay within the framework of European identity. The British also felt that the rules of European integration conflict with their national identity. Accordingly, it is possible to say that the British preferred to leave the European Union, where the identity factor was one of the main reasons that led to leave the EU.

III-The course of EU-British relations from a cultural perspective:

Despite the European Union's economic and political gains over the past years, it has witnessed many crises, including the no vote in the Netherlands and France regarding the ratification of the European constitution proposal in 2005. In the same vein, in the recent years (2007) the financial crisis has played a significant role in raising the identity debate in the EU. The citizens have become more interested in their government's policies rather than the whole EU policy²⁹. However, the most severe crisis was the British poll in 2016, and The British people vote to leave the European house. The British exit was a shock in European circles and raised several questions about the future of the EU.

In this section of our study, the cultural dimensions of Hofstede will be highlighted and projected onto British-European relations throughout Britain's membership in the European Union. From the point of view of Geert Hofstede, culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others.”³⁰, In his book "cultures and organizations, software of the mind" he did a research about cultural dimensions in the context of national cultures between 1967 and 1978 in an attempt to arrive at an objective: to reach a well-defined terminology of culture based on empirical results of data which was collected of a large number of cultures, so according to his research, he has mentioned six dimensions of culture: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty, avoidance, and the sixth and last dimension, namely indulgence (see table 1).

Table 1: Cultural dimensions by Geert Hofstede

Power Distance: (PD) The extent of acceptance of distribution of power inequalities	
Culture rejects distribution of inequalities of power	Culture accepts distribution of inequalities of power
This culture is working on fighting inequality in the distribution of power between people and the opportunity of progress and development available for all. Therefore, this culture does not take into consideration the differences between people and it does not believe in the distribution	The inequalities in distribution of power between people in this culture are acceptable and normal. People in these societies accept the hierarchical order. The subordinates are not expected to express their disagreement with superiors because there is no opportunity of

²⁹ Fligstein, N., Polyakova, A., & Sandholtz, W. (2012). Op.cit.

³⁰Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (Vol. 2): Mcgraw-hill New York.

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of unequal power between their members and the power-use between people should be done in a legitimate manner.	superiority for all, therefore, they give the greatest importance to the differences between people in terms of power distribution.
Uncertainty avoidance (UA):The extent to which risks and the uncertain conditions are faced	
Cultures which avoid the risks and uncertainty conditions	Cultures which do not avoid the risks and uncertainty conditions
This culture gives more attention to the organization's rules. It also stands on obedience and serious working and the ambiguous feeling that spreads between people	In spite of the risks and the uncertainty of conditions in this culture, people still have the ability to go on toward ventures
Masculinity/femininity (MAS):The extent orientation by masculinity versus femininity	
Culture oriented by masculinity	Culture oriented by femininity
In these societies, the tendency is toward the distinction between the genders that supports the control of men who are characterized by assertiveness and toughness, furthermore, they focus on material success	On the other hand, in societies which are the dominated by femininity, the tendency is toward equality between the genders and the roles overlap between them. Furthermore, these societies focus on the improvement of life quality
Individualism/collectivism (DV): domination by individualism versus collectivism	
Individualism cultures	Collectivism cultures
These societies focus on self-interest and the ties between people are loose; everyone looks after themselves and their immediate family	On the contrary, in collectivist cultures, people are expected to be interdependent, and must show loyalty to their extended family and/or to the in-group to which they belong
Short-term orientation versus long-term orientation (LTO)	
Short-term orientation	Long-term orientation
In this culture, people focus on personal stability and caring about the present	In this culture, people focus on some values like perseverance, determination and savings

Indulgence (VR): High indulgence versus low indulgence	
High indulgence society	Low indulgence society
In this culture, there are no strict social norms, hence people can achieve their needs and desires, and as a result, they are supposed to be happy	In this culture, people live under strict social norms; their needs are suppressed and regulated

Source: ³¹

Hofstede's cultural dimensions will be projected on Britain and the European Union in a comparative study in terms of cultural dimensions, mainly two of the six dimensions which were mentioned above.

III.1.National and supranational: in the highlight of PD (index):

(Hofstede) has defined power distance as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Institutions are the basic elements of society, such as the family, the school, and the community; organizations are the places where people work³². (Hofstede) has restricted his work in this index only to the national level, but we will try to extend this index at the national-supranational level between UK and EU, so we will try to correlate this index with several topics.

1973, the UK joined the EC after submitting two requests that were rejected by French President Charles de Gaulle; However, Britain did not take a full position like France and Germany as it desired. Britain wanted to benefit from Europe like France did; the French economy benefited from modernization. Germany granted part of the sovereignty, while the British accession to the European Community coincided with the oil crisis in 1973, which limited the benefit from economic gains³³.

In the 1970s, Britain acquired the status of a reluctant and awkward partner, as its membership was not fully completed until the year 1975 after Harold Wilson promised to renegotiate the terms of accession, and then a referendum was held in 1975, and a victory was achieved with a large majority³⁴. British stubbornness saw within the European Community in the period of the Labour Party governments, the first led by Wilson (1973-1976) and the

³¹ Eddine, B. C., & Miloud, G. (2019). Understanding 'joining-up-government' reforms in Anglo-Saxon nations from a cultural point of view. *Вопросы государственного и муниципального управления*(5).

³² Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2005). Op.cit.

³³ Baker, D., & Schnapper, P. (2015). *Britain and the Crisis of the European Union*: Springer.

³⁴ Ibid

second led by Callahan (1976-1979), where the two main projects discussed at that time, the direct election project for the European Parliament and the EMS project, see The matter viewed as a threat to the sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament, and it was not accepted democratically. In the end, the European election bill was approved in 1978³⁵. In 1972, Edward Heath signed the Werner Report, which included plans to unify currencies by 1980, but the Callahan government refused to participate, justifying its rejection by the economic supremacy of the British pound and because it was still an international currency like the dollar and reliance on the latter is to stabilize currencies instead of adopting a single European currency³⁶.

In the period between 1979-1984, which coincided with the presence of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister, the issue of the budget dominated its relationship with the European Community, as it was determined to recover its money and reform the system that made Britain one of the main contributors to the budget of the European Community, was not completely satisfied in the agreement that took place in 1980. Tension remained prevalent in its relationship with its European partners, as this emerged in the issue of agricultural price negotiations, which enabled it to reach an agreement in 1984 in the Fontainebleau European Council, where an agreement was made with a permanent deduction mechanism for the United Kingdom and reducing the gap between them and its contribution and that of its partners³⁷. In her famous speech in Bruges in 1988, Thatcher refused in any way to abandon nationalism in favour of a European conglomerate. She preferred more cooperation between independent European states. Concerning her position about unity, she desired a united Europe but in a way that conserves parliamentary authority, different national traditions and national pride of her country³⁸.

John Major, the successor to Margaret Thatcher, followed the path of his predecessor, and maintained the intergovernmental approach to the nature of British-European relations. During the intergovernmental conference that led to the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. John Major was able to secure the British goals of withdrawal from the European Monetary Union, the Social Charter of the European Union, the common foreign policy, security policy, domestic affairs, and justice, and this was a victory from the British point of view over the draft treaty in 1991, which wanted all policies to remain under the control of the European community³⁹. John Major was able to secure Britain's interests within the European Union, which is the freedom to join or not join the single European currency in the future. In a similar context, the British Prime Minister was keen to replace national policies with a common

³⁵ Young, H. (1999). *This blessed plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair*: Overlook Books.

³⁶ Peet, J., & La Guardia, A. (2014). *Unhappy Union: How the Euro crisis--and Europe--Can Be Fixed*: Hachette UK.

³⁷ Wall, S. (2008). *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair*: Oxford University Press on Demand.

³⁸ Watts, D. (2008). *European Union*: Edinburgh University Press.

³⁹ Baker, D., & Schnapper, P. (2015). Op.cit

foreign policy. And NATO remaining the primary provider of security, and this confirms The Atlantic orientation is more than the European orientation of Britain⁴⁰.

During 2003, the European Union was against the American occupation of Iraq. However, Britain supported the United States at the expense of Europe, which caused a crisis between the two parties. It confirmed Charles de Gaulle's view of the United Kingdom's Atlantic orientation at the expense of the European orientation. British support for the war on Iraq brought disagreements and the latest tensions with its European partners, as France and Germany saw that Britain's instinctive Atlantic orientation revealed the true limits of the British presence within the European Union. British-French differences appeared again, but this time because of the European Union's budget for agriculture in the extended period. From 2007-2013, as Tony Blair wanted to reduce it while Jacques Chirac wanted to reduce the British rebate⁴¹.

The draft convention submitted to the Intergovernmental Conference in 2003 showed Britain's consent, as the phrases "federalism" and "union closer to ever" were dropped. The common foreign and security policy remained the concern of the national government only, and there are red lines for the Kingdom that it is not worth approaching, Including taxes, border police, and defence⁴². The British government was able to a large extent to achieve success during the ICG, in June 2004, as QMV did not extend to affairs of taxation, social policy, or placing European banks under the supervision of the European Central Bank or budget deduction⁴³.

In 2010, the conservative party won the general elections over the labour party, and the new government was led by David Cameron. Cameron's presence at the head of the government came in the midst of the Eurozone crisis, which struck the stability of several members of Eurozone, although Britain was outside Eurozone, it was still impacted by the crisis. This was due to its wide commercial relations⁴⁴. The Eurozone crisis cast a shadow over Britain and Europe alike, as mistrust in European integration emerged once again, as the Eurozone crisis and then the immigration crisis helped reinforce narratives based on the dread that British sovereignty was endangered and voices rose again. In Britain, there were calls for a renegotiation of the UK's membership in the European Union⁴⁵.

III. 2. Individualism and collectivism in the context of European political and economic environment:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Mölder, H. (2018). *British Approach to the European Union: From Tony Blair to David Cameron Brexit* (pp. 153-173): Springer.

⁴⁵ Ibid

Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty⁴⁶.

Hofstede sees that individualism and collectivism on the level of society has an impact on the economy. Economics as a science was founded in Britain in the eighteenth century. Adam Smith, as one of the founding fathers, assumed that the pursuit of self-interest by individuals through an "invisible hand" would increase the wealth of nations. This idea has come from a country that ranks high on individualism⁴⁷.

The main reason for British accession to the European Community was economically based on pragmatism and was not political or ideological. Britain, which was witnessing the establishment of the European Community in 1957 from afar, quickly changed its view in the early 1960s and this is due to several reasons, including the Suez Crisis in 1956 and its impact on Britain. The economic hurdle of British accession has shifted at the political cost⁴⁸. The United Kingdom joined the European Community because the Commonwealth was no longer able to compete, in parallel with the failure of the free trade area integration model, so Britain saw that joining the European project would stop the economic decline. As a comparison between two periods, in the year 1950, the per capita GDP in the UK was nearly a third larger than the average for the six European Union countries. In 1973, it was almost 10% less⁴⁹.

IV- An explanation for Brexit from Identity perspective:

Robert Eggleston argues that the British exit from the European Union is not limited to political, economic or administrative factors only, but rather that is linked to the cultural aspect in general and the identity aspect in particular. According to him, the UK's departure from the European Union arose from cultural beliefs and the arguments for leaving before and after the referendum were attached to cultural aspects and the differences between Britain and Europe⁵⁰.

In the cultural side, Britain saw itself as a great cultural power capable of exporting its culture based on the fact that it was a colonial empire. Later, the British had to accept the diminishing role of Britain in the world which negatively affected the performance of the British economy, while the economies of Western European countries were recovering from the effects of the world war two, these countries began to enter into supranational economic

⁴⁶ Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2005). Op.cit.

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Schnapper, P. (2014). Le Royaume-Uni doit-il sortir de l'Union européenne? *Revue du Droit de l'Union Européenne*(1), 168.

⁴⁹ Campos, N., & Coricelli, F. (2015). Why did Britain join the EU? A new insight from economic history. *Vox EU*, 3.

⁵⁰ Habermann, I. (2020). *The road to Brexit: A cultural perspective on British attitudes to Europe*: Manchester University Press.

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blocs. Based on these facts, Britain saw the necessity of joining the European Economic Community, but in the same time it developed doubts towards Europe⁵¹.

The UK never wanted to participate in the European integration processes only after the economic decline of the United Kingdom during the sixties of the last century, but, finally it has joined the European economic community in 1973 after two failed attempts, however, UK decided to hold a referendum on its membership in the European community in 1975, and the decision was to stay in the EC, however it stressed not to adopt the European project. Moreover, for the past forty years, Britain has been one of the most sceptical countries about the nature of European integration. More precisely, a large part of the British public, in addition to a significant part of politicians and opinion makers in Britain, has adopted sceptical attitudes towards European integration⁵².

According to opinion polls, the British are among the least in favor of more European integration and do not trust the institutions of the European Union, and they also view their country's membership in the European Union with pessimism⁵³, furthermore, throughout Britain's membership to the Union, a large part of the British have tended to identify themselves as British, while a small part identify themselves as Europeans. It is possible that there is a number of people who have an exclusive identity in many countries of the European Union, but their number in Britain is greater than in the countries of the European Union. On this basis, British scepticism is behind the weakness of European identity⁵⁴. People's identities affect the way they think and engage with the matter of European integration, Individuals who have a more exclusive identity, such as the British, often adopt a sceptical attitudes and views about Europe and its integration process⁵⁵.

In recent years, Eurobarometer has conducted surveys among citizens of European Union member states about whether they are more inclined towards their national identity or consider themselves Europeans⁵⁶. Based on the results of the survey, the United Kingdom ranked first. Approximately 60% of Britons tend only to their national identity and do not consider themselves as Europeans, while the proportion was less than 50% among Italians, less than 40% among French, and only 30% among Germans⁵⁷.

In a related vein, from 1992 to 2015, a question was raised about national identity and European identity among the citizens of the six founding countries of the European Union plus the United Kingdom. The result was expected, as the British have constantly had a weak attachment to the European identity, unlike their counterparts from the six European countries. Among the aspects of this weakness is the rate of British immigration within the

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Carl, N., Dennison, J., & Evans, G. (2019). European but not European enough: An explanation for Brexit. *European Union politics*, 20(2), 282-304.

⁵³ Fitzgerald, R., & Sibley, E. (2016). The United Kingdom in the European context: Top-line reflections from the European Social Survey. *European Social Survey online report*.

⁵⁴ Carl, N., Dennison, J., & Evans, G. (2019). Op.cit

⁵⁵ Clarke, H. D., Goodwin, M., & Whiteley, P. (2017). Why Britain voted for Brexit: An individual-level analysis of the 2016 referendum vote. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 70(3), 439-464.

⁵⁶ McLaren, L. M. (2004). Opposition to European integration and fear of loss of national identity: Debunking a basic assumption regarding hostility to the integration project. *European journal of political research*, 43(6), 895-912.

⁵⁷ Carl, N., Dennison, J., & Evans, G. (2019). Op.cit

European Union, where the United Kingdom has the lowest percentage of immigrants within the European Union compared to all 28 members⁵⁸.

The British strong sense of national identity can be traced back to historical factors. Britain is an isolated island surrounded by water which made it separate from Europe. As a result, it has not witnessed the cultural developments that the European continent witnessed⁵⁹. Moreover, England has its own common legal system which is dissimilar with the European civil law system⁶⁰. Also the religious aspect distinguishes Britain from Europe. Most Britons throughout history owe allegiance to the church headed by the king, while Europeans tend to the church headed by the Pope⁶¹. In this context, the majority of the British adhere to the Protestant sect, while the Europeans embrace the Catholic sect. Protestants tend not to support European integration, unlike Catholics, and the reason lies in the centralization, as the latter seeks to link peoples under the cover of a central authority, which is compatible with Catholicism and is incompatible with Protestantism, the latter convinced that the reform came against centralism and collectivism and for individualism⁶².

It is possible that the British difference and scepticism does not lie only in the European Union and its institutions, but also lies in Europe and the Europeans in general. The British see themselves more honest and more democratic - to put it more correctly - Protestant - than their European counterparts - Catholics. It is likely that British scepticism is intrinsically a cultural phenomenon, which is emphasized by David Cameron when he spoke of British sensitivity towards Europe and Europeans⁶³.

The cultural and historical factor plays a key role in determining the British view towards Europe. The British believe that their relations with the Anglo-Saxon peoples such as Canada, Australia and especially the USA are more intimate than their relations with their European neighbours⁶⁴. Besides, The United Kingdom was the only country that entered the battle line in World War II and survived from the occupation of its lands and the collapse of its institutions and emerged victorious from World War II and turned up as a global power in parallel with the United States and the Soviet Union⁶⁵. Therefore, the United Kingdom considered itself that it could still play major roles in global politics without having to engage in European integration tracks.

In the case of European identity, Stanley argues that there is neither a European identity nor the preconditions for its future existence, according to him, the European Union

⁵⁸ Dennison, J., & Carl, N. (2016). As the EU moved closer to political union, Britain drifted away. Brexit became inevitable. *LSE Brexit*, 18.

⁵⁹ Grant, C. (2008). *Why is Britain eurosceptic?*: Centre for European Reform London.

⁶⁰ Roger, S. S. (2015). Nexus masterclass: 'Brexit: Yes or no?' with Roger Scruton. *Nexus Institute*.

⁶¹ Scherer, M. (2015). The Religious Context in Explaining Public Support for the European Union. *JCMS: journal of common market studies*, 53(4), 893-909.

⁶² Tournier-Sol, K. (2016). *The UK challenge to Europeanization: the persistence of British Euroscepticism*: Springer.

⁶³ Tournier-Sol, K. (2016). Op.cit

⁶⁴ Adam, R. G. (2019). *Brexit: causes and consequences*: Springer.

⁶⁵ Ibid

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cannot historically combine its twenty-seven members into one European common identity overnight. Moreover, if the EU wants to continue the processes of political integration without popular support, the EU member states will continue to oppose membership such as the UK⁶⁶.

It is likely that Britain's vote in favour of leaving the European Union was the result of an interaction between the British weak sense of European identity and the political and economic developments that the European Union witnessed during the last two decades. The interaction of these factors has pushed more than 50 per cent of Britons to choose the option to leave⁶⁷.

Brexit also was motivated by the expansion processes of the European Union and its transformation from an organization consisting with a small number of rich countries to an organization of 28 with varying levels of development, in this regard, the European Union changed from an economic organization into one headed more and more towards deepening political integration⁶⁸.

Based on many studies, in which it shows the possibility of national identities affecting people's attitudes towards the issue of membership in the European Union, where individuals see the nation-state as the main axis of political loyalty, but the other factor that also plays a significant role in determining identities is "the fear of others"⁶⁹. Matthew Goodwin and Caitlin Milazzo argue that the UKIP has grown in strength and public support based on concerns about the negative repercussions of immigration and its potential threats to British identity and culture. Moreover, when it comes to shaping public attitudes and opinions on the issue of European integration, concerns about national identities are more important than economic calculations⁷⁰.

Following the large influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe towards the United Kingdom in 2004, the British have become more convinced that their country no longer fully controlled its borders⁷¹. During the Leave campaign, the UKIP played on anti-EU and anti-immigration sentiments. The Leave campaign took advantage of the influx of Eastern European citizens and the refugee crisis to employ them in favour of leaving the European Union, justifying this with fear and xenophobia among the British as a necessary measure to protect British security and stability⁷². In a similar vein, UKIP used the rhetoric of nostalgia to a time before joining the European Union when full sovereignty was in favour of the Parliament of Westminster, the entire British society was a white Anglo Saxon society and the industry was booming, as it still provided safe positions for workers with good salaries, and despite the decline of the British Empire, this did not prevent Britain from remaining a military and economic power

⁶⁶ Stanley, L. (2013). A European Supra-National Identity. *The Bruges Group*.

⁶⁷ Carl, N., Dennison, J., & Evans, G. (2019). Op.cit

⁶⁸ Geary, M. J. (2012). The process of European integration from The Hague to Maastricht: An irreversible advance? *Debater a Europa*, 6, 6-23.

⁶⁹ Clarke, H. D., Goodwin, M., & Whiteley, P. (2017). Op.cit

⁷⁰ Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2004). Does identity or economic rationality drive public opinion on European integration? *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 37(3), 415-420.

⁷¹ Carl, N., Dennison, J., & Evans, G. (2019). Op.cit

⁷² Day, H. E. (2018). *Brexit: The Causes and the Consequences*. Paper presented at the Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union.

leading the Commonwealth⁷³. Besides, Ukip considered immigration as a threat to the British national identity and the economic well-being of workers in Britain⁷⁴.

Certainly, there are many reasons that prompted the British to leave, but the most prominent reason probably is the issue of immigration, in this context, Hall explained that opinion polls confirmed that 75 percent of voters who voted in favour of leaving considered the immigration file as the most important reason in the referendum⁷⁵. In fact, issues of sovereignty and immigration were the two topics that preoccupied those who voted to leave the European Union⁷⁶. As a result, Britain's strong sense of national identity interacted with the changes in the European Union and its orientation more towards political integration, which hastened the vote in favour of the option to leave⁷⁷.

V - Conclusion:

In the end, on the basis of what has been previously said. First, Europe succeeded in stopping the war between France and Germany and placing both countries within the framework of integration and cooperation instead of competition, then the European Community was able to achieve remarkable political, economic and security achievements. But the significant thing that attached to integration and achieving European unity is the identity factor, where the establishment of a common European identity is an important factor for the continuation of European integration. As the identity variable appears as a cornerstone in achieving unity and solidarity among European peoples, but the truth says opposite, according to European public opinion polls, the latter reveal that the British, for example, still have a strong attachment to their national identity. Moreover, probably, European identity cannot replace national identity because it does not have deep-rooted memories and traditions that can generate a sense of loyalty as national identity does.

Talking about identity and culture led us to the case of Britain in the course of its relations with the European Union. Based on the cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede, it is likely that Britain was not at all eager to deepen its relations with the European Union, or rather, it was never ready to give up at all its national identity in favour of a common European identity. Its accession and exit from the European Union have dictated considerations, interests, and economic and security calculations.

⁷³ Inglehart, R. F., & Norris, P. (2016). Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash.

⁷⁴ Goodwin, M., & Milazzo, C. (2015). *UKIP: Inside the campaign to redraw the map of British politics*: Oxford University Press.

⁷⁵ Day, H. E. (2018). Op.cit

⁷⁶ Ashcroft, L. (2016). How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday... and why. *Lord Ashcroft Polls*, 24, 1-14.

⁷⁷ Carl, N., Dennison, J., & Evans, G. (2019). Op.cit

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Among the findings of our study, it is possible that Britain joined the European Economic Community based on economic factors that were mainly related to the performance of the British economy at that time, but when it came to national identity, the British throughout their membership in the European union were among the least supportive of European integration. This can be traced back to several reasons, including language, religion and geographical nature of the country and its isolation from the rest of the European continent. Brexit could be the outcome of interaction between the British national identity and the political and economic developments that the European Union witnessed during the past two decades. Among these evolutions is the process of European Union expansion to include Eastern European countries on the one hand, and the influx of refugees towards Europe starting in 2015 on the other hand. It is possible that these two causes were behind Britain's preference to withdraw its membership from the European Union. Among the most prominent issues that topped the British leave campaign was the issue of taking back control of the borders, and the issue of immigration. This latter was considered as a potential threat to the British culture and identity.

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