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Working paper №10, 2016 (№24)

The day that changed Europe

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«Shock and awe» was the name of military invasion of the US and UK to Iraq, that shook the world order to its foundations. The same name British euroskeptics can give to the operation of their country's exiting the European Union («Brexit» – from English «Britain» and «exit»). London and Brussels are shocked. Brussels is overwhelmed with awe in face of an unprecedented political crisis. Just a while ago the possible exit of Greece from the euro zone, not from the EU, was considered unacceptable and dangerous for all 28 EU states. Now, the second largest economy of the Union, UN Security Council member, nuclear power and the closest ally of US decided to leave the EU.

Fate lands one blow after another on the EU, as though testing its integrity. The constitutional crisis in 2005, the «great recession», pacification of Greece, Ukrainian drama, migration tsunami – what could have been worse? But Britain, that for the last 40 years has been wearing the title of an «awkward partner» for its neighbors on the continent, came up with another surprise of historic scale, this time acting as an assassin of the European dream. The founding fathers of the United Europe, first of all Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, are surely perplexed in the better world, while General De Gaulle's spirit must be grinning. It was him who in 1960s did not want to let the British lion in the «European pound», anticipating that it might cause serious problems. The disappointed shadows of Edward Heath, Georges Pompidou and Willy Brandt, who witnessed Britain's accession to the European Economic Community in 1973 by the third attempt only, are levitating somewhere close.

There are other similarities to the invasion of Iraq: in March 2003 many countries and experts warned that the consequences could be drastic. But just as George Bush Jr. got caught on the hook of «creative destruction» of states, David Cameron swallowed the lure of euroskepticism. Today, just like in 2003, there are numerous warnings that the common sense dictates the change of course, that the risks are too high. But Cameron once again decided to play the Russian roulette, with Britain itself at stake.

In 2011, London and Paris, without proper accord with partners in the EU and NATO, sent their troops to Libya to help the «democratic revolution», using the UN Security Council ban on flights as a disguise. After the state collapsed and plunged into chaos, the helpers of «revolution» washed their hands and left it to the EU and UN to solve the problems that followed. The British referendum proved to be just another gamble.

And once again Cameron is avoiding the responsibility by declaring his resignation. Yes, he did not do it at once, awaiting the yearly Conservative party conference. Yes, he paid for it with the positions of Prime Minister and Tory leader. Yes, his wife Samantha was in tears standing at Downing Street 10 beside her husband, declaring his resignation. But the right to use Article 50 of the Lisbon treaty on leaving the EU, the right to go through difficult divorce negotiations with Brussels and, in parallel, to cope with the crisis inspired by Scotland's intention to use the second attempt to exit the UK, Cameron left to his successor.

The similarity of the two dramas does not end there. The strategic mistake of the Prime Minister is aggravated by his playing double, just like Bush Jr. did. The latter, to initiate the Iraq assault, used Saddam Hussein's alleged mass destruction weapons threat. Cameron, under the disguise of promoting EU modernization, in reality, solved his internal political problems, trying to neutralize the influence of the right populists within Tory and to stop the outflow of conservative electorate to the UK Independence party. At an intermediate stage the risk was justified — Cameron kept and even multiplied his power at Parliamentary elections in May 2015. But if a strategy is wrong, the «judgement day» comes, sooner or later. Iraq today is not a sustained state. Considerable part of its territory is not controlled by Baghdad. Libya is a battle field of radical and less radical Islamists, representing another case of a non-sustained state. In Britain, London is losing control both over situation, and over territory, first of all, over the Scottish one. This is the result of a chain of events, each of them would not have been critical, but together they lead to radical consequences.

First, Cameron outwitted himself by favoring euroskeptics in his and other parties at first, and by trying to persuade the British people to stay in the EU later on. Many citizens of the country sensed the lies, which consolidated their distrust to the political establishment. And the Tory leader did not expect to «stumble» like that. It was just a year ago that he received the clear mandate of electorate to form a single party government, having persuaded the majority of voters that his cabinet led the country out of the crisis and on to recovery.

It was not the first time that British voters let their leaders «down». Winston Churchill was righteously enjoying his title of one of the victors over the fascist Germany in WWII, when at Parliamentary elections in summer 1945 he unexpectedly lost to the Labour party. They say he was very disappointed with the «ingratitude» of British citizens. But, despite his defeat, Churchill is still a great figure in the British history of the XXth century. Tony Blair

and David Cameron are not likely to follow the suit, even though each of them had some considerable achievements. Achievements of the former, first of all, the conciliation in Northern Ireland, were erased by the war in Iraq. The latter will be remembered as a leader, who got lost in his own arguments and motives, and let Britain exit the EU, possibly, starting its own decay.

Second, Cameron plotted an overly complicated combination, which instead of disguising his inconsistency, eventually highlighted it. The idea looked elegant at first and could have, in case of success, given to the Prime Minister, as Englishmen say, «the best of the two worlds» (in that case – the compromise between opponents and proponents of the European idea). But history ruled everything out in accordance with another English saying – «you can't have your cake and eat it».

The idea was for Cameron to remain euroskeptical, not bullet-headed and narrow-minded, but creative. That required negotiations with the EU on new fundamental concessions of Brussels to UK, not for national well-being, but for the good of the whole integration union. His progressive form of euroskepticism Cameron explained by the necessity to make the EU economy more competitive, liberating it from excessive red tape. Cameron was to return to London victorious over Brussels and to easily convince British citizens to stay in the EU.

The EU, urged primarily by Berlin, did make some concessions to the stubborn islands across the English Channel. The British state did receive the right to cut child allowances to those EU citizens, who live on its territory, but whose minors live in other EU countries. The British Parliament potentially gained more rights in evaluating new EU laws. The country obtained protection from possible discrimination by euro zone members. Those and other concessions – real and symbolic – were sizable, but not fundamental.

And there is another parallel with the events in 2003. Tony Blair was extremely active then, travelling around the world and persuading foreign partners that the strategy of London and Washington on Iraq was correct. Blair needed to talk the majority of the UN Security Council into supporting the Anglo-Saxon position. But he failed. Cameron in 2015-16 conducted a lot of meetings and negotiations with European partners and seemed to have secured their support. But he failed to gain the support of the majority of British citizens. Through this strategic blunder, Cameron, just like Blair, lost his career.

The mere fact of referendum is extraordinary for Britain. Up to now, the government allowed for only two direct expressions of will – in 2011 on changing the voting system at Parliamentary elections and in 1975 on membership in the EEC. In the latter case, the country's participation in regional integration was supported by 67% of voters; in 2016 – by 48% only. This is how the EU idea became less attractive to the Europeans over the years.

The UK's diffidence on its relations with the EU divided the country into confronting camps once again in its history. The dividing lines ran between parties and within them, between regions and between generations. An especially pronounced breakdown took place in the Conservative party and even in the government, several members of which, in spite to the Prime Minister, supported the euroskeptics campaign. Scotland in its eurooptimism became the direct opposite of England. Northern Ireland, even though not so apparently,

followed the suit of Scotland. The sharp contrast repeated when the cosmopolitan London found itself plunged into the «English sea» of euroskepticism. The majority of youth voted for staying in the EU, while the «exit» was supported by older white British citizens.

The greatest potential threat of the referendum results is to the country's own territorial integrity. The decision to exit the EU «starts the program» of the second independence referendum in Scotland. A future referendum on Ulster's reunification with the Irish Republic is possible too. In the first case, the state will not be called Great Britain anymore, as it obtained the name after the union of England and Scotland in 1707. In the second case, the term «United Kingdom», obtained in 1800 after the union of Great Britain and Ireland, will become obsolete. The only name that will remain is Britain (England and Wales).

The negative results of the referendum have a lot of reasons. Cameron's fault, as well as the efficiency of the euroskeptics campaign, is beyond any doubt, but the outcome cannot be viewed as an accident or misunderstanding. The resigning Prime Minister, through his mistake, unintentionally revealed the sad reality – the European integration project has accumulated a critical mass of structural defects which threatens to set it back for decades, at least to the stage before the common market (created in 1986 by Single European Act).

Possible decay of the country through the exit of Scotland is not directly related to it. This threat is mainly caused by internal reasons, political, social and economic. But the principal motivation of Brexit proponents lied in the dissatisfaction and disappointment with the state of affairs in the EU. Mainly, it was the dissatisfaction of outside observers, and not those who really «suffered». Britain is not a part of the euro zone, and thus it was not directly affected by the crisis in this dimension of the European integration. Neither it is a part of the Schengen zone, and thus it independently regulates its external migration flows.

The main supporting source of euroskepticism in the country was the principle of free movement in the EU, which London is bound by. In contrast to Greeks, Italians, Germans, Austrians, Swedes and other nations, scared by the uncontrolled inflow of refugees and economic migrants from third countries, the British people are unhappy with the right of EU citizens to freely access the islands. The fact that they do not distinguish between those categories of visitors demonstrates the peculiarity of Foggy Albion citizens' world outlook. In its worst implementation it leads to xenophobia that is widely spread in the country.

The island mentality, skeptic attitude to foreigners, and the open sore of the lost empire did make their contribution to the referendum results. The world outlook of many British people (mainly Englishmen) paradoxically combines the outdated illusionary image of the great empire (the complex of greatness and lordliness), and the directly opposite image of the «small England» (the complex of inferiority and «besieged fortress»). But both images lead to the same result – growth of isolationism, intentional or not.

For the EU political establishment Brexit is a real nightmare. The referendum could be the final verdict on whether the European integration reached its limits of quantitative and qualitative expansion for a foreseeable perspective. But there is a «bright side» to the story – the EU will breathe easier without the stubbornness of London on deepening the federative principles of integration. For decades, Britain has been the main critic of the

EU's deepening, while lobbying its quantitative growth. There will be better prospects for EU's movement at multiple speeds, when some countries will be able to advance considerably further in political integration, for example, in common foreign and security policy, in budgetary union. The creation of the United States of Europe is just as harmful as a goal for this project as the return to a regional inter-state union. To balance these two «pillars», the EU has to efficiently redistribute leadership and responsibility on its territory.

This raises the question of disparities within the EU, both macroeconomic and political. The original «driver» of European integration was in the tandem of France and Germany with support of Italy. Later on, the «big three» were formed with Britain joining not as much as an opinion ally, but as the third «vertex of the triangle», approaching either Paris or Berlin as the time went by. In recent years, Germany established itself as the EU leader, mainly through economic reasons. A new saying was coined (more flattering than condemning), that Germany has grown too big for Europe, but still too small for a global role. After the «De Gaulle» France passed away and the euroskeptic moods in Britain grew, a lot of hope was placed on Berlin as the political leader of integration union.

But FRG proved to be the prisoner of the same situation as the EU – an economic giant, but a political midget. On the one hand, Germany was able to use to its benefit the idea of «sovereignty pool» and common currency. On the other – in contrast to London and Paris, it could not (or would not) «win» autonomy for itself in conducting foreign policy not only within the EU, but also beyond. The sovereignty of Germany was held by «two locks» – the «sovereignty pool» and the elements of external governance. As a result, it kept the status of a «diffident leader», who has no desire to assume more responsibility. Thus, after Brexit there will be a potential for other large countries, like France, Italy and Poland, to increase their influence in the EU. But none of them is capable of doing it at the moment. In France the ratings of the President set new record lows. Italian economy is in poor shape, and Matteo Renzi is preoccupied with Constitutional reforms, including the risky reform of the upper chamber of Parliament. Warsaw, with the new right government and President, spoiled its relations with the EU, because Brussels considered its actions authoritative and non-democratic.

Brexit is hardly going to provoke the domino effect. In the remaining 27 member-states none of the ruling political forces plan to conduct such a referendum, or stand for exiting the EU. Imminent coming to power of a political party with such a program in any of the countries is not expected either. There are a lot of them in the EU, but, in contrast to Tory, they are in the second or third echelons of political power. Although, the success of British euroskeptics will surely give a new impulse to such forces.

The impact of Brexit on the «internal separatism» in the EU is dubious as well. The Catalans, Basks, Flemish, Scottish and other communities with strong aspiration for independence belong to the camp of dedicated eurooptimists. Their goals work for future multiplication of EU members, not for breakdown or exit. In general, after the burst of centrifugal processes, represented by Brexit, a certain consolidation within the EU might take place, provoked by the self-preservation instinct and realization of the urgent necessity to prevent further erosion of the organization.

Finally, the greatest meaning of Brexit lies in its reflecting the «deep currents», defining the pace of events far beyond our continent. The phenomenon of D. Trump in USA, external and internal separatism in Europe, the rise of right and left populism, structural changes in party and political systems in numerous Western countries – these are the symptoms of new social polarization. In the last decades, social disparities grew in the majority of countries. Global economic crisis sped this process up. Middle class dissolution is progressing, with its division into richer and poorer layers. And the reasons to call the social protests and voting for critics of political establishment an «uprising of the middle class» are becoming more and more obvious.

Europe and the EU will face a lot of interesting and extraordinary events that will continue to fundamentally change the traditions and firmly held views of life in the Old Continent.

Date of initial release in Russian: July 4, 2016.

This publication can be downloaded at: <http://en.instituteofeurope.ru/publications/analytics>