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THE UK'S EUROPEAN DILEMMAS FROM THE SCHUMAN PLAN TO BREXIT

The British voted to leave the European Union in the June 23, 2016 referendum. This outcome has triggered a wave of comments, most of which focus on the problems in the UK-EU relations. The key reasons that are most frequently invoked to justify this decision are: the rapidly increasing British resentment towards immigrants, including the migrants from the new member states, the widespread conviction about the high costs of EU membership, and the British fears that the EU's power will grow too strongly, at the expense of national sovereignty.

Even though these issues undeniably had an impact on the result of the referendum, it needs to be stressed that the British took a cautious, if not reluctant, approach to European integration right from the start of this process. For a long time, they did not want to become involved in it, trying to slow it down. When they eventually joined the European Communities (EC), they did not think about potential benefits for their country or Europe; they did it because they were forced by circumstances. It should be borne in mind that on its accession, the UK had to accept the solutions that had long been in force and that were not in line with the British political tradition. The core problem was the role of constitutional norms. The European continental states were governed by basic laws (constitutions), which did not exist in the British legal system.¹

Through its EC accession, the UK could seize an opportunity to become one of the leaders of unifying Europe, alongside France and West Germany. This, however, never happened. The British never came around to the idea of integration endorsed by the European continental states, and – unlike the French or Germans – they never came to appreciate the benefits of reconciling national and European interests. Instead, on many occasions, they opposed the proposals for closer cooperation, thereby slowing down the process of European integration. After 1973, the successive governments viewed European cooperation not as a chance but as a threat to the UK's

¹ A. Jassem, *Wielka Brytania a Wspólnota Europejskie: aspekty ustrojowo-polityczne*, Studia Europejskie, 2003/1, pp. 55-57; L. Jesień, *Europa w lustrze eurosceptyźmu. Brytyjska Partia Konserwatywna wobec integracji europejskiej*, Nowy Sącz 1999, pp. 19-20.

interests. The Brexit decision, while surprising to many, was a consequence of this approach.

The present paper aims to show the reasons why the successive British governments since the end of World War II have distanced themselves from closer cooperation with continental Europe and why for a long time they were reluctant to join the EC. An answer is also sought to the question why, following the 1973 EC accession, the British remained divided over the membership issue and viewed it primarily in terms of resultant costs and threats. Coupled with this approach is the weakness of European values in British political life, a point which also deserves explication. Even though the mainstream parties in France and Germany have often criticized or even rejected the reforms of European institutions, in contrast to the Tories and the Labour Party, they have never undermined the very idea of cooperation; nor have they ever openly called for leaving the European structures.

As the paper addresses multiple issues, it is by definition synthetic in nature, which is why some of the related problems will be either omitted or discussed very briefly. The subject literature has been restricted to key references, primarily to sources that contain the statements of British leaders on European integration and the UK's role in this process.

The paper's timeframe is the UK's refusal to join the Schuman Plan up to the Brexit decision.

A WASTED OPPORTUNITY FOR LEADERSHIP IN EUROPE?

With the end of World War II in 1945, the United Kingdom was perceived as a natural leader of Western Europe.² For small states, the British presence in Europe was to be a guarantee against the German threat. But also in France there were advocates of British leadership in Europe. Jean Monnet wrote in 1948: "I believe that only the establishment of a federation of the West, including Britain, will enable us to solve our problems quickly enough, and finally prevent war"³.

However, the British government did not intend to become involved in any projects for closer European cooperation. British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin stressed that Great Britain had always been separate from Europe and for that reason there was no full prospect for integration with it.⁴ In his view, the UK's key role in Europe was that of a leader in the fight against Communism as an internal threat. At the same time Bevin reiterated that his country supported all of the proposals that were aimed at closer European cooperation in various fields.⁵ That approach was shared by an

² For more on British policy on European integration in the years 1945-1950, see M. Mikołajczyk, *Wielka Brytania wobec integracji europejskiej w latach 1945-1950*, Przegląd Zachodni, No. 2/2015, pp. 71-96.

³ J. Monnet, *Mémoires*, Paris 1976, p. 322.

⁴ S. Ingle, *The British Party System*, Oxford 1987, p. 75.

⁵ *Documents on British Policy Overseas (DBPO)*, Series II, Vol. I, appendix to the memorandum of August 16, 1951, p. 679.

overwhelming majority of the British people. Their war experiences had deepened their traditional feeling of independence from the rest of Europe, which was perceived as a source of wars and chaos and a threat to democracy.⁶ In the process of European integration the British also saw a threat to the Commonwealth and the independence of the British Parliament. Furthermore, the view that European integration was primarily designed for losers rather than for winners had a strong following.⁷ The Labour Party, which was in power from 1945 to 1951, was also of the opinion that the process of European integration threatened the interests of the working class as it fostered the growth of capitalism. Many Labour leaders shared the view that Catholic conservatives, such as Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer, were striving to reconstruct the Carolingian Empire based on French-German cooperation and the exclusion of Great Britain. Similar concerns were voiced by a number of Conservatives.⁸

The cornerstone of the Labour's foreign policy was the idea of "three concentric circles", according to which the United Kingdom was to be part of Europe but at the same time remain outside it.⁹ Under this approach, the priority was the Commonwealth, then the British Empire, and finally the English-speaking world centred around the United States. The priority given to the Commonwealth resulted from political, economic, financial and sentimental reasons. Over this issue, there were no major differences between Labour and the Tories. The intention of continuing privileged relations with Americans resulted from the conviction that the UK and the US had developed special ties. However, Dean Acheson, the US Secretary of State in the Truman administration in the years 1949-1953, was critical of this approach. He argued that the British efforts to maintain privileged relations with the United States in the post-war period was a dangerous intellectual obstacle, which prevented the UK from playing a more substantial role in Europe.¹⁰

When Labour was in power, the main advocate of European unification in the United Kingdom was opposition leader Winston Churchill, who on September 19, 1946 in Zurich called for a United States of Europe, which this time would be based on French-German cooperation.¹¹ The guarantors of that new European order were to include the powerful United States and the United Kingdom along with the Commonwealth states. In early 1947, the former Prime Minister founded the United Europe Movement, whose members were personalities from different backgrounds calling for European unification. The Movement was officially inaugurated on May 14, 1947 in

⁶ M. Blackwell, *Clinging to Grandeur: British Attitudes and Foreign Policy in the Aftermath of the Second World War*, London 1993, p. 35.

⁷ N.J. Crowson, *Britain and Europe. A political history since 1918*, Oxford 2011, p. 10.

⁸ G. Wilkes, *Introduction*, in: G. Wilkes (ed.), *Britain's failure to enter the European Community 1961-1963. The enlargement negotiations and crisis in European, Atlantic and Commonwealth relations*, London 1997, p. 15.

⁹ L. Jesień, *Brytyjskie wahania integracyjne za czasów Schumana i dziś*, in: A. Radwan, *Schuman i jego Europa*, Warsaw 2015, p. 126.

¹⁰ D. Acheson, *Present at the Creation - My Years in the State Department*, New York 1969, p. 377.

¹¹ S. Parzymies, *Integracja europejska w dokumentach*, Warsaw 2008, p. 56.

the Royal Albert Hall. In his keynote speech the former Prime Minister spoke about Europe as one of the four pillars of the temple of peace along with the United States, the Soviet Union and the British Empire with the Commonwealth. The UK was to be at the core of this system in a loose relationship with Europe, in close relations with the United States, and in strong ties with the Commonwealth.¹² Churchill also chaired the Congress of Europe in the Hague from May 7-10, 1948, during which he called for a United Europe.¹³ However, these public declarations did not mean that he was an open and devoted supporter of the UK's engagement in the construction of European unity. They should be viewed in terms of a calculated political game plan to defeat the Labour Party and return to power.

On May 9, 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman brought forward a proposal for putting the French and German coal and steel industries under the Community's High Authority within the framework of an organisation that would be open to other European states.¹⁴ Two days later, Prime Minister Clement Attlee speaking in the House of Commons approved the idea of French-German reconciliation. However, he was not enthusiastic about the UK's potential involvement in the French blueprint.¹⁵ The French plan was well received by the opposition. Churchill described it as courageous and interesting.¹⁶ The Conservatives were even in favour of the UK's entry into discussion on the French blueprint.¹⁷

However, in early June, the British government decided to decline the invitation to the talks on the Schuman Declaration.¹⁸ The British cabinet had no doubts that it was a primarily political project, which was strongly linked with French-German partnership and was aimed at limiting sovereignty. Given its world position and interests, the United Kingdom could not irrevocably become involved in political or economic cooperation in Europe. On July 5, the Prime Minister raised this point in his House of Commons speech, emphasising that the United Kingdom was not ready to accept solutions under which the most developed British industries would be controlled by authorities that had not been democratically elected and could not be held accountable for their actions.¹⁹

Contemplating why the British were opposed to the coal and steel community, Schuman came to the conclusion that a supranational authority was an inconceivable concept for them and that they would join a European community only if they were forced to do so by external circumstances. For the British, the only point of reference was the Commonwealth, which had nothing to do with supranationalism.²⁰ They were

¹² W. Churchill, *Europe Unite. Speeches 1947&1948*, London 1950, p. 77.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 310.

¹⁴ R. Schuman, *Pour l'Europe*, Nagel 1963 [Polish translation: *Dla Europy*, Kraków 2003, p. 94].

¹⁵ J. Monnet, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

¹⁶ "Le Monde", May 11, 1950.

¹⁷ N. J. Crowson, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁸ D. Gowland, A. Turner, *Britain and European Integration 1945-1998. A documentary history*, London, New York 2000, pp. 24-25.

¹⁹ *House of Commons Debates*, 5th Series, vol. 477, col. 472, 5 July 1950.

²⁰ R. Schuman, *Dla Europy...*, pp. 58-59.

hoping that France would not manage to arrange talks on the Schuman Declaration, and believed that even if these talks were held, they would end in failure.²¹ Their expectations proved wrong, though, and in 1951 six states signed a treaty that established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The United Kingdom had to accept this fact, and in 1954 it signed an association agreement with the ECSC.

When Churchill returned to power in 1951, he made it clear that he did not intend for the UK to become engaged in the process of European integration. He perceived his country as a world power and, as he used to say, he did not want to bring it down to the level of France or Belgium.²² Churchill declared his political credo on the UK's role in the process of building European unity during one of the first cabinet meetings on November 29. He referred back to his speech in Zurich, where he called on France to lead Europe along with Germany. However, he was already convinced then that Germany was potentially much stronger than France from the military and economic standpoints. For this reason, European integration required support from the United Kingdom as well as the United States. The Prime Minister emphasised that he was not opposed to the gradual construction of a European federation which could also be open to countries from behind the Iron Curtain. However, he strongly objected to the United Kingdom or the Commonwealth joining such an institution, either individually or collectively.

The British Prime Minister's priority was the unity and consolidation of the Commonwealth and the remainder of the British Empire. His second was goal to strengthen the fraternal relations with the English-speaking countries. At the same time, he expected the United States to have better relations with the UK than with any other European countries. Churchill also wanted to cooperate with a united Europe, and viewed the UK as its ally and friend.²³

In early June of 1955, during the Messina Conference, the foreign ministers of the ECSC member states supported the idea of a common market and cooperation on atomic energy for peaceful purposes. The Benelux countries wanted to engage the UK in both projects to balance the French-German impact. Their calculations as to the likelihood of the UK's involvement were not groundless. They were actually supported by economic indicators: in 1955, 14% of British exports went to the ECSC founding members (the inner six) and 25% to the whole of Europe. However, as much as 50% of British exports still went to the Commonwealth states.²⁴ Europe was also exporting an increasing amount of goods to the United Kingdom. It was also believed that closer cooperation could lead to faster economic growth in the UK, whose economy was not in the best shape. In 1950-1955 the British GDP rose by an average of 2.9% compared to the average growth of 6.2% in the inner six in the same period.²⁵

²¹ R. T. Griffiths, *The Economic Development of the EEC*, Cheltenham, Lyme 1997, p. 108.

²² R. Czulda, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa Wielkiej Brytanii w latach 1945-1955*, Łódź 2014, p. 22.

²³ D. Gowland, A. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁴ N. J. Crowson, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

²⁵ W. Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans: Britain and European Integration, 1945-63*, Basingstoke 1999, p. 30.

The Messina Conference evoked hardly any response in the United Kingdom. Before it began, Churchill was replaced as Prime Minister by Eden, who had no wish to revise the course of British policy towards Europe. The new Foreign Secretary, Harold Macmillan, in his House of Commons speech did not say a word about the inner six meeting.²⁶ However, the British were aware of the significance of the conference decisions. The Treasury warned that a common market might mean that Great Britain would face discrimination in Europe.²⁷ In the end, the British government decided to delegate its representative to the Spaak Committee, which had been established to work on the creation of a general common market. That decision was designed to secure British interests in the final report.²⁸ The British also hoped that they would be able to influence its shape.²⁹

However, after several months, the British government found that joining a common market would have political implications, as it would infringe on the obligations and loyalty towards the Commonwealth states.³⁰ It was also feared that the creation of a common market would harm further negotiations on world trade and payments. Moreover, the government assumed that its involvement would deepen European integration, which would result in the establishment of a political federation. The United Kingdom also feared competition from European industry. Finally, the British were convinced that the work of the inner six states on a common market would end in failure.³¹

Due to the above fears and reservations, the United Kingdom decided to withdraw from the Spaak Committee in late 1955. Some of the six inner countries were disappointed in that decision (Belgium and the Netherlands) while others felt relieved (France and, to a smaller extent, West Germany). The UK's government decision was disappointing to Americans, who pointed to potential political benefits that could be derived from the enhanced cooperation among the inner six states. US Secretary of State John Dulles wrote in his letter to British Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan that the inner six states, which cooperated at the supranational level, made more effective efforts to unite Europe than the OECD countries which favoured intergovernmental cooperation.³²

After withdrawing from the Spaak Committee, the UK government began to work on its own blueprint for economic cooperation in Europe, a "plan G", which provided for the creation of a West European free trade area with the involvement of the

²⁶ D. Gowland, A. Turner, A. Wright, *Britain and European Integration Since 1945*, London, New York 2010, p. 36.

²⁷ CAB/129/76, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

²⁸ Letter by Macmillan of July 1, 1955, *Correspondence arising out of the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Governments of Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands held of Messina on 1-2 June 1955*, London (HMSO), July 1955, Cmd. 9525, p. 10.

²⁹ N. J. Crowson, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³⁰ D. Gowland, A. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³¹ R. T. Griffiths, *A slow one hundred and eighty degree turn: British policy towards the Common Market, 1955-60*, in: G. Wilkes (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³² Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955-1957, IV, p. 363.

common market states.³³ The plan foresaw the abolition of tariffs and quantitative restrictions on industrial goods. It did not apply to agricultural or food products due to the system of imperial preferences and the interests of British farmers, who could compete with cheaper food imports only thanks to state subsidies.³⁴ Another factor at play was that the British were accustomed to food imports at world prices with no tariff restrictions. As a result, food prices were below the European average.

Following the approval of plan G, the British government took action to halt work on a common market. However, its plan failed and on March 25, 1957 the inner six states signed the Treaty of Rome that established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Euratom Treaty. For the British, it was a painful defeat. They ignored the opportunity of enforcing a continental integration programme and overestimated their own political position in Western Europe. By contrast, the inner six states capitalized on the unwavering US support for the supranational integration of Western Europe. They also selected the right tactics to halt the British initiative.³⁵

After the signing of the EEC agreement, the British continued their efforts to establish a free trade area. That issue was to be addressed by the so-called Inter-governmental Committee, established in 1957 and headed by Reginald Maudling; hence it was called the Maudling Committee. Despite good atmosphere, the negotiations did not move ahead.³⁶ They were practically suspended when de Gaulle came back to power in France in May 1958. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was so disappointed that he threatened to revise all British political and economic relations with Europe. He even mentioned the possibility of withdrawing the British troops from Europe, leaving NATO and returning to the policy of isolationism.³⁷ When talking to de Gaulle, the British Prime Minister was openly critical of the common market, which he referred to as a continental system and called for its rejection.³⁸ His efforts brought no results, though, as in mid-November of 1958, France broke up the talks within the Maudling Committee. This put an end to the British dreams of a large European free trade area. Among the key reasons were serious differences in economic and political interests between the United Kingdom and France, which under de Gaulle strove to lead Western Europe.³⁹ What also contributed to this decision were tactical mistakes made by British diplomacy and an overly optimistic assessment of the chances to implement plan G. The British negotiators failed to notice that the signature and ratification of the Treaties of Rome had considerably weakened its bargaining posi-

³³ Z. Janiec, *Współpraca zamiast integracji: brytyjskie zmagania z Traktatami Rzymskimi*, *Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna*, 2012 No. 2, p. 169ff.

³⁴ N. P. Ludlow, *British agriculture and Brussels negotiations: a problem of trust*, in: G. Wilkes (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109.

³⁵ Z. Janiec, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

³⁶ R. Maudling's memorandum of January 30, 1958, CAB/129/91, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk>.

³⁷ *House of Commons Debates*, 5th Series, vol. 591, cols. 1438-1439, 17 July 1958.

³⁸ H. Macmillan, *The Macmillan Diaries*, Vol. 2: *Prime Minister and After 1957-1966*, London 2012, p. 129.

³⁹ For more on why the blueprint for a free trade area failed, see Z. Janiec, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-186.

tion vis-à-vis the EEC countries, which were increasingly keen to maintain solidarity outside. The Foreign Office diplomatic offensive failed to convince Americans that the implementation of the common market would have a negative impact.⁴⁰ The British also held false hopes that France under de Gaulle would block the growth of the common market. Finally, the UK underestimated the significance of French-German cooperation initiated by de Gaulle and Adenauer.

Following the failure of the West European free trade area project, the British had to settle for a much less ambitious project. In mid-1959, together with several other countries, they embarked on the creation of a small free trade area. For the UK, that project was meant to boost its prestige and was politically rather than economically motivated. Macmillan thought that at stake in those talks was the survival of British industry as well as the UK's position on the global stage. He had no misgivings that if the talks failed, other negotiating countries would, one by one, join the inner six.⁴¹ The Stockholm Convention to establish the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), initialled on November 20, 1959, was officially signed on January 4, 1960, and came into force in May of that same year. The EFTA agreement, unlike the Treaties of Rome, did not include any ambitious plans for integration.⁴² The British government was aware of its weaknesses and regarded the establishment of the EFTA as a substitute solution. A British minister compared it with marrying the engineer's daughter when the general manager's had said no.⁴³

KNOCKING ON THE EEC'S DOOR

In the election platform of the Conservative Party, which took a landslide victory in 1959, there was not a single reference to the common market.⁴⁴ At that time, however, there were some indications of change in the British policy towards the EEC. Macmillan's new government came to include several pro-European ministers, and the Prime Minister himself became head of a committee that was supposed to consider the potential effects of closer economic relations with Europe. The committee's report contained specific suggestions as to changes in British policy to improve the relations with the inner six states.⁴⁵ Under the revised policy, the UK was to stop discrediting the EEC, refrain from any actions aimed at provoking arguments among its member states, and show willingness to enter into constructive dialogue with them. Moreover, the United Kingdom was to opt out of pursuing its own ideas of regulating the rela-

⁴⁰ D. Gowland, A. Turner, A. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁴¹ *The Macmillan Diaries*, Vol. 2, pp. 230-231.

⁴² K. Łastawski, *Historia integracji europejskiej*, Toruń 2006, pp. 128-129.

⁴³ N. P. Ludlow, *Paying the price of victory? Postwar Britain and ideas of national independence*, in: D. Geppert (ed.), [Polish translation: *Cena późnego akcesu: Wielka Brytania a Wspólnota Europejskie 1950-1973*, in: J. Kranz, J. Reiter (eds), *Drogi do Europy*, Warsaw 1998, pp. 153-154].

⁴⁴ D. Gowland, A. Turner, A. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁵ R. T. Griffiths, *A slow one hundred...*, p. 46.

tions between the EEC and EFTA. However, the shift to Europe was not synonymous with any dramatic change in British policy, under which the US was to remain the UK's main partner. The Foreign Office warned that British policy should never lead to the point in which the United Kingdom would need to choose between the United States and Europe. Such a choice would in essence entail the break-up of the Atlantic system.⁴⁶

A change in the British policy towards Europe would not have been possible without changing British awareness, which was far from strong when it came to international affairs. In 1959, as many as 72% of Britons thought that Great Britain was the world's third power.⁴⁷ An average British person knew hardly anything about the European Communities, what they dealt with, and how they operated. The majority did not know whether the UK was a member of the EEC or the EFTA⁴⁸.

There were, however, first indications of increased interest in European affairs. The British, who were disappointed with the limited successes of the free trade area, looked with growing admiration at the fast development of the EEC states.⁴⁹ The campaign for EEC membership received support from the British press, which increasingly featured stories about the threat of political and economic isolation, and even the division of Europe if the United Kingdom remained outside the EEC. There were also more and more economic reasons for the UK's membership in the common market. They were embraced by British industry leaders as the EEC countries had become the UK's second trade partner, ahead of the United States, which is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Imports to the United Kingdom in 1960 in percentages

EEC	EFTA	Commonwealth	USA	Others
14.5	10.1	38.5	12.4	24.5

Source: P. Wandycz, L. Frenzl, *Zjednoczona Europa. Teoria i praktyka [United Europe. Theory and Practice]*, London 1965, p. 169.

Table 2

Exports from the United Kingdom in 1960 in percentages

EEC	EFTA	Commonwealth	USA	Others
15.1	10.6	41.2	7.5	25.6

Source: P. Wandycz, L. Frenzl, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁴⁶ PRO, CAB 134/1929, FP (60) 1, February 24, 1960, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

⁴⁷ N. J. Crowson, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

⁴⁹ D. Gowland, A. Turner, A. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

The US also supported the UK's EEC membership. President Kennedy in his letter to Macmillan of May 23, 1961 emphasized that the UK's accession to the common market would politically strengthen western countries.⁵⁰

Despite their reluctant, if not hostile, attitude to supranational solutions, many British leaders did not have great fears of losing sovereignty as a result of European integration. The British started to understand that sovereignty, especially after the Suez Crisis, was not something absolute and that it could be partly limited, if this could provide added value to their country.⁵¹

The main obstacle on the UK's road to the common market was the Commonwealth.⁵² The British government was afraid that its breakup would weaken Great Britain's political and economic interests worldwide.⁵³ Another problem was agriculture. For the British, food was a strategic resource and for this reason they aimed at self-sufficiency, which was possible only thanks to cheap agricultural products from the Commonwealth states, for which they paid with industrial goods.⁵⁴

It is difficult to pinpoint a specific date when Macmillan decided to submit the UK's application for EEC membership.⁵⁵ He put his thoughts on this topic in a memorandum written between December 29, 1960 and January 3, 1961.⁵⁶ A large section was devoted to France and its leader. Macmillan had no doubts that the success of his plans was up to de Gaulle. The Prime Minister was afraid that if the UK did not manage to reach agreement on the membership issue in the shortest possible time, the breakup in Europe would become more serious and its economic consequences would be harsh to Great Britain.

After several cabinet meetings, at the July 21 meeting, the British government finally decided to submit its application for EEC membership.⁵⁷ On July 31, in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister made assurances that joining the common market posed no threat to British identity. Unlike federalists, he did not believe that Europe would ever be transformed into a United States of Europe. The Prime Minister also emphasized the political aspects of EEC membership, indicating above all the strengthening of European unity and power, which he believed to be the UK's responsibility and interest.⁵⁸ Macmillan also explained that the British application was conditional because the final decision would be made only after the inner six states had taken their stand on the issue.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ FRUS, 1961–1963, XIII, telegram from the Department of State to the London Embassy, May 23, 1961.

⁵¹ N.J. Crowson, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

⁵² S. Ward, *Anglo-Commonwealth relations and EEC membership: the problem of the old Dominions*, in: G. Wilkes (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁵³ D. Gowland, A. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁵⁴ L. Jesień, *Europa w lustrze eurosceptyzmu...*, pp. 54-55.

⁵⁵ D. Gowland, A. Turner, A. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

⁵⁷ Ch. Williams, *Harold Macmillan*, London 2009, p. 391.

⁵⁸ D. Gowland, A. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁵⁹ N. P. Ludlow, *Cena późnego akcesu...*, pp. 156-157.

During the parliamentary debate on the government's proposal, Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell took a cautious approach, trying to balance the arguments of the followers and opponents of the British membership. He agreed with the Prime Minister that its political effects should not be overestimated because Europe was not likely to become a federation.⁶⁰ By contrast, Harold Wilson, the leader of Labour's anti-European wing, sharply criticised the common market, emphasizing the need to protect the interests of the Commonwealth and the EFTA. Wilson swore that he would not sell his friends in return for problematic and marginal advantages in selling washers in Düsseldorf.⁶¹

Finally, the House of Commons, albeit not without difficulty, authorised the government to formally apply for EEC accession.⁶² The decision was approved by nearly all Conservatives, a dozen or so of whom abstained. All Labour MPs abstained from voting.

The British press did not comment on that decision with much enthusiasm. "The Economist" of July 22, 1961 wrote about clear reasons behind the government's decision. "The Times" of July 31 wrote about the advantages and threats resulting from the common market membership. According to this daily, the majority of British people thought that EEC accession would primarily result in food price increases.

The announcement of the British government's decision to join the common market evoked mixed responses among the inner six states. Some of them saw a sign of profound change, if not of a revolution in British policy, while others viewed it as a tactical trick to help them achieve traditional goals. For obvious reasons, London was most eager to listen to French voices. The French leader assured the British Prime Minister that France had responded favourably to the UK's application. However, he made it clear that the decision would entail many problems for Great Britain.⁶³

As expected, the British initiative evoked a favourable response from Washington. The Department of State's memorandum emphasized that the success of accession negotiations would lead to profound changes in world political and economic relations.⁶⁴

The negotiations on the UK's EEC membership began on October 10, 1961. On that day, the head of the British delegation, Edward Heath, said that the UK supported the aims of the common market and was ready to participate in its further construction and development.⁶⁵ He expressed the view that "faced with the threats which we can all see, Europe must unite or perish. The United Kingdom, being part of Europe, must not stand aside".⁶⁶ Heath indicated three fundamental issues connected with British membership in the common market: relations with the Commonwealth, relations with

⁶⁰ *The Macmillan Diaries...*, Vol.2, pp. 402-404.

⁶¹ D. Gowland, A. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁶² N. P. Ludlow, *Cena późnego akcesu...*, p. 157.

⁶³ Documents Diplomatiques Français (DDF), 1961, Vol. 2, p. 225.

⁶⁴ FRUS, 1961-1963, XIII, the telegram from the Department of State from September, 5 1961.

⁶⁵ DDF, 1961, Vol. 2, p. 496.

⁶⁶ Quoted after: K. Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1992*, London, New York 1994 [Polish translation: *Zmierzch wielkiego mocarstwa. Wielka Brytania w latach 1870-1992*, Wrocław 2000, p. 307].

the EFTA and agriculture. He maintained that to resolve these problems what the British government expected was not changes in the EEC treaty but the adoption of additional protocols.

However, after several weeks of negotiations, it seemed that the British, instead of seeking agreement, were coming up with multiple issues, which was in stark contrast to their initial declaration that they were intent on bringing the talks to a quick end. The British government justified its position by the need to convince public opinion and the opposition, which accused it of conducting the negotiations on its knees. In mid-1962 only 35% of the British were in favour of joining the EEC, down from 53% at the end of 1961.

In spite of the difficulties, Heath hoped that the negotiations would come to an end by mid-1962. Macmillan was not so optimistic.⁶⁷ The British side kept blaming de Gaulle for the lack of progress in the talks. However, Macmillan thought that the French president would not openly or directly oppose the UK's membership but that he would continuously come up with various obstacles, slow down the talks or propose conditions that would not be acceptable to the British. Macmillan viewed it as a dangerous game, which aimed to secure French hegemony in Europe or in its parts.⁶⁸

Despite assurances from the British leaders that they were genuinely keen to join the EEC, de Gaulle was critical of the British application. Macmillan learned this in mid-December 1962 during a meeting in Rambouillet. The French president spoke highly of the change in the UK's policy towards Europe and expressed satisfaction with the state of French-British cooperation. However, at the same time, he was afraid that if Great Britain joined the common market, along with other countries, no one would know how it would evolve and what would become of Europe. After this visit, Macmillan had to admit that he and de Gaulle disagreed over the issue of the UK's EEC membership. There was still, however, a faint hope that the negotiations would be continued because the French did not want to be responsible for rejecting British membership in the eyes of the world.⁶⁹

After the Rambouillet meeting, Macmillan returned to the policy of close cooperation with the United States and accepted Kennedy's proposal to join the Multilateral Force (MLF) within NATO.⁷⁰ The US offer was, however, rejected by de Gaulle. Moreover, in his view, Macmillan's decision to sign the MLF Treaty confirmed that the United Kingdom was America's "Trojan horse" and for this reason it could not join the European Communities. He informed the public about his decision on this issue during a press conference on January 14, 1963.⁷¹ De Gaulle stressed above all that England, due to its insular position, had ties with various, sometimes distant, states. It was a primarily industrial and trade country, and to a small extent agricultural. He asked:

⁶⁷ *The Macmillan Diaries...*, Vol. 2, p. 448.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 473.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 526.

⁷⁰ FRUS, 1961-1963, XIII, President Kennedy's memorandum to Prime Minister Macmillan of December 21, 1962.

⁷¹ Ch. de Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, Vol. IV : *Pour l'effort 1962-1965*, Paris 1970, p. 61.

what should be done for England the way it is to join the common market the way it is? And he answered that it was up to Great Britain whether this would ever happen. The French president also argued that there were no obstacles for the United Kingdom to sign an association agreement with the common market.

De Gaulle's veto raised a real storm in London. According to Macmillan, the French arguments against the UK's EEC membership were ridiculous. In the Prime Minister's view, by vetoing the British application, de Gaulle was not driven by the idea of partnership but by the desire for hegemony as in the times of Napoleon or Louis XIV.⁷² De Gaulle's stand had also outraged Edward Heath, who said in the House of Commons: "What has happened is a bitter blow to all those who believe in true European unity, but it is not a mortal one. The events of the past few weeks have shown how many people throughout Europe want us to play a full part in its creation. The Governments of the five member States of the Community—whose peoples together number about 120 million—have clearly shown that they are among those who share with us a common view of the Europe we want to see. There is a foundation of friendship and good will for the future"⁷³.

The British press wrote extensively about the French president's arrogance and despotism.⁷⁴ The pro-European *Guardian* in the January 18 issue said that de Gaulle's veto had been dictated by his fear of the growth of US influence in Europe. However, not all of the British were outraged by the French veto. The Labour politicians were even satisfied. Future Prime Minister Harold Wilson thought that de Gaulle was right in having blocked the UK's application.⁷⁵ Little did he know that he would soon face a similar problem.

The rejection of the UK's application to the EEC was one of the factors behind the Conservative defeat in the 1964 election. The Labour Party came back to power after 13 years in opposition. The common market membership issue was not raised in the election campaign either by Labour or its opponents. Both parties were internally divided over the issue and their leaders were afraid that any discussion on this topic could only harm them. Neither party had any idea of how to overcome the French veto. Within the Labour Party, there was only a small pro-European faction of MPs, centred around Roy Jenkins.⁷⁶ However, the new British Government intended to continue cooperation with Europe. This topic was raised by Foreign Secretary Patrick-Gordon Walker in mid-November 1964 at a Western European Union (WEU) meeting. Walker emphasized that the United Kingdom had not turned its back on Europe and still remained its integral part.⁷⁷ However, he could not see any option of resuming

⁷² *The Macmillan Diaries...*, Vol. 2, p. 536.

⁷³ S. Parzymies, *Integracja europejska w dokumentach...*, p. 230.

⁷⁴ C. Johnson, *De Gaulle face aux demandes d'adhésion de la Grande Bretagne à la CEE*, in: *De Gaulle en son siècle*, Vol. V: *L'Europe*, Paris 1992, p. 209.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 216.

⁷⁶ E. Delaney, *The Labour Party's Changing Relationship to Europe*; *Journal of European Integration History*, 2002, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 126.

⁷⁷ DDF, 1964, Vol. 2, p. 465.

membership talks in the near future given that another defeat would be a deadly blow for the United Kingdom. He thought that the best solution would be to tighten the contacts with the inner six states within the WEU. A similar stand was taken by Walker's successor, Michael Stewart, who announced in Brussels on February 11, 1965 that he could not see any reason why the UK should support European unity to a smaller extent than the EEC member states.⁷⁸

During the first meeting with de Gaulle, which took place on April 2, 1965, Wilson made it clear that he had a pragmatic, not dogmatic, approach to the common market. He also emphasized that the Labour Party had always supported the creation of the common market. However, they were critical of the negotiations conducted by the Conservative government because they threatened the position of the Commonwealth and British agriculture. He added that the British government could return to that issue provided that it could reconcile the national interests with the interests of the Commonwealth, which, in his view, was not possible at the moment. Further on, the Prime Minister expressed his regret that the tariff wall between the EEC and the EFTA had been rising, and that hurt their mutual trade. Wilson was keen to search for various ways of overcoming the division of Europe and said he was ready to participate in the talks on the development of political cooperation on the continent. He added that, just like de Gaulle, he was opposed to supranational solutions, especially in the fields of foreign policy and security.⁷⁹

By the end of 1965, the Foreign Office began to consider submitting a new application for the UK's accession to the EEC⁸⁰. Among the factors behind this decision was the programme of the common market reforms launched by the EEC Commission. It had proposed in its 1966-1974 report the introduction of elements of social policy, which in the eyes of Labour toned down the capitalist image of the EEC. The Commission had also proposed establishing a regional policy, arguing that it was intertwined with social policy. This initiative also met with Labour's approval. The Labour Party also had a positive attitude toward the proposal to set up a fund that would provide aid to developing countries through the development of infrastructure and public institutions, including schools and hospitals.⁸¹

What also led to increased pro-European sentiment in the Labour Party was the shift in the relations with the United States, which had worsened during Johnson's presidency. The main reason was the refusal to send British troops to Vietnam. According to many accounts, the US president did not hold Wilson in high esteem, and the special relations with the United Kingdom were regarded in Washington as a thing of

⁷⁸ K. Steinnes, *The British Labour Party and the Question of EEC/EC Membership, 1960-1972*, Trondheim 2010, p. 80.

⁷⁹ DDF, 1965, Vol. 1, p. 385.

⁸⁰ L. M. Boehm, *Our Man in Paris: the British Embassy in Paris and the Second UK Application to join the CEE, 1966-1967*, *Journal of European Integration History*, 2004, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 43.

⁸¹ E. Delaney, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-131.

the past. Despite those reservations, the Johnson administration was willing to support the UK's EEC membership.⁸²

Another reason for the revised British stand on the common market issue was the so-called empty chair crisis, which occurred in 1965 after France decided to recall its representatives from all of EEC institutions.⁸³ The British followed these developments closely, hoping that they would weaken France and lead to the adoption of solutions that would be advantageous to British agriculture.

What prevented the Labour government from taking a new initiative was the UK's difficult economic and financial situation. However, finally in 1966, the Labour Party in the election campaign under the slogan *Time for Decision* declared its willingness to join the EEC. According to the opinion polls from that period, this solution was favoured by as many as 70% of British people.⁸⁴ This pro-European mood was toned down by Wilson, who stressed that over the previous three years, the British membership issue had been a theoretical discussion due to France's negative approach. He also brought attention to the fact that Great Britain could apply for EEC membership as long as its and the Commonwealth's interests were safeguarded. Moreover, the Prime Minister warned that the common market should not be regarded as a panacea for the economic ills.⁸⁵

Despite these reservations, on November 10, 1966 Wilson announced in the House of Commons that the government intended to see whether there were sufficient conditions for holding talks on the possibility of the UK's accession to the EEC.⁸⁶ That declaration was criticized by some members of the Labour Party, who accused the Prime Minister of changing the existing policy.⁸⁷ Wilson, who wanted to allay their concerns, assured them that the final decision had not been made and that each problem would be discussed with both the party members and the EFTA partners. He also added that he was going to meet with the leaders of the EEC member states to discuss the terms of British membership.

Those meetings took place in early 1967. During his European tour, Wilson spoke about the need to politically strengthen the continent to make it an equal partner in negotiations with both superpowers. At the same time, he made it clear that he aimed to retain close relations with the United States and improve East-West relations. He also maintained that the United Kingdom did not want to weaken the EEC by enlarging it with the EFTA states. The final conclusions from the talks held in various European capitals were fairly optimistic. The British were convinced that they had managed to curb a number of issues linked with the UK's accession to the common market. Besides France, all of the EEC countries expressed huge support for British member-

⁸² D. Gowland, A. Turner, A. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

⁸³ M. Mikołajczyk, *Francuska batalia o Wspólną Politykę Rolną w okresie rządów Charles'a de Gaulle'a w latach 1958-1969*, *Przegląd Zachodni*, 2014, 4 (353), pp. 232-233.

⁸⁴ P. N. Ludlow, *Cena późnego akcesu...*, p. 161.

⁸⁵ U. Kitzinger, *The Second Try: Labour and the EEC*, London, 1968, p. 108.

⁸⁶ D. Gowland, A. Turner, A. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁸⁷ K. Steinnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-108.

ship. Some member states even promised to put pressure on France with regard to the British application.⁸⁸ After those meetings, Wilson had a better understanding of the Treaty of Rome, and as a result he could grasp the differences between its provisions and their practical applications.

The EEC application was the main topic on the agenda of the government meeting in late April.⁸⁹ The advocates of membership argued that even if the economic benefits were debatable, they were outweighed by the political gains. The EEC followers were keen to strengthen the recently weakened British influence, which could especially be seen in the relations with the United States. They were convinced that the UK's EEC membership would allow Britain to take the leader position and strengthen European cooperation in a more liberal spirit. The opponents of the common market pointed to its negative effects for the British trade balance. They were concerned about the state of the economy and emphasized the risk of deteriorated living standards as a result of increased food prices. Finally, in the vote, 13 cabinet members were in favour of the membership while 8 were against.⁹⁰ A few days later, Wilson informed the House of Commons of this decision, which caused dissatisfaction among a number of Labour MPs.⁹¹ Despite this opposition, on May 11, after a three-day debate, the House of Commons approved the government's decision to enter into negotiations. This outcome was satisfactory to Wilson.⁹²

In late September of 1967, the EEC Commission provided an opinion on the United Kingdom's application. The report contained a critical assessment of the UK's financial and economic situation. One of the conclusions was the need for restoring permanent economic and payment equilibrium through joint action on the part of the UK and the EEC. Despite these critical remarks, the document concluded with the recommendation to launch negotiations. However, just like four years earlier, the British road to the EEC was blocked by de Gaulle, even though Wilson tried to convince him that the UK's situation had considerably changed, compared to 1963.⁹³ The Prime Minister emphasized that his government's honest decision had been made after a deep analysis. He did not rule out that Great Britain would incur some economic costs as a result of its membership in the common market. However, the issues at stake were primarily political, and the UK was willing to strengthen Europe's position worldwide.

De Gaulle announced his decision on the British application on November 27 at a special press conference.⁹⁴ He focused primarily on the UK's economic and financial problems, and spoke little about the political issues. Referring to the Commission's

⁸⁸ C (67) 33, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary's memorandum of March 16; <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

⁸⁹ D. Gowland, A. Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.

⁹⁰ D. Gowland, A. Turner, A. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁹¹ "Tribune", May 5, 1967.

⁹² N. J. Crowson, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁹³ DDF, 1967, I, p. 764.

⁹⁴ Ch. de Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, Vol. V : *Vers le terme 1966-1969*, Paris 1970, p. 227.

report, he stressed that the common market was not compatible with the British economy, whose permanent external deficit was indicative of permanent imbalance. De Gaulle also found it necessary to remedy the financial situation of the United Kingdom, which suffered setbacks due to the role of the British pound as an international currency. Considering the above troubles, he had no doubt that British membership would contribute to the breakup of the European Community. De Gaulle also stated that his decision did not mean that he was opposed to the UK's membership in the common market. He admired and respected British recent attempts and assured that he sincerely wished that those efforts would eventually result in the UK's EEC membership.

In the UK, it was felt that France's second veto was more categorical than the first one. The British press and political leaders launched a fierce attack on de Gaulle. However, according to historian Keith Robbins, the French president's analysis of the UK's woes, even if too personal in nature, had more truth to it than it was commonly assumed. Yet the British were comfortable in self-delusion and Wilson did not want to investigate to what extent his own country, through its policy and approach, had actually excluded itself from the EEC.⁹⁵

THIRD APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

The failure of the second EEC application could have delayed the UK's accession to the common market for a long time, had it not been for some factors that helped unblock the application process. The most important changes occurred in France. In April 1969, de Gaulle was forced to resign after losing a constitutional referendum. He was succeeded by Georges Pompidou, who thought that the UK's accession to the Economic Communities would strengthen it as long as that process did not undermine the basic principles of the common market.⁹⁶

In early December 1969, during the Hague summit, the EEC member states expressed their willingness to deepen cooperation and admit the UK to the common market. The decision was well received in London. *The Times* reported: "The door has been opened". British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart was pleased by the fact that the idea of European unity was developing and that Europe's citizens had come to realise that that development was not possible without the United Kingdom, which is a part of the continent.⁹⁷

However, with regard to the EEC accession process, the British were not inclined to bear too heavy a burden. For that reason, the government took a flexible approach, under which the membership application could be withdrawn if the membership costs

⁹⁵ K. Robbins, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-310.

⁹⁶ H. Young, *This blessed plot : Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair*, London 1998, p. 234.

⁹⁷ M. Pine, *Harold Wilson and Europe: Pursuing Britain's Membership of the European Community*, London-New York 2007, p. 152.

proved too high.⁹⁸ In the White Paper, published in early 1970, they were estimated at less than 1% of the GNP. It was assumed that the membership costs would be fairly high in the first stage of the membership, but they were to be balanced by future economic benefits. In his House of Commons speech, the Prime Minister, referring to the White Paper, stressed that the document did not provide a clear answer to the question whether common market accession was justified. However, there were also no indications that maintaining the status quo would be a better solution. Wilson also maintained that the membership decision would be made, not on the basis of the White Paper, but after completing the negotiations, and that it would be dependent on their result. If the membership terms proved unfavourable, the UK would remain outside the EEC, but this outcome would have a negative impact not only on the United Kingdom but also on Europe.⁹⁹

Before the start of the negotiations, the British government wanted to stabilize the economy and finance to increase its credibility in the eyes of the EEC member states. In order to strengthen British support for the EEC membership, Wilson introduced several pro-European ministers into his cabinet. He also accelerated work on preparing the application for the UK's EEC membership; in March 1970, the British negotiation strategy was in place.¹⁰⁰ When asked about his personal reasons for supporting the UK's EEC membership, the Prime Minister emphasized that the world needed a more coherent European voice.¹⁰¹ He also spoke about the need to create new European institutions for the sake of closer cooperation. Wilson did not see anything wrong with limiting the sovereignty of the member states; nor did he see any threats to the interests of the United Kingdom, which had already accepted similar solutions as a member state of NATO, EFTA and the UN.

However, Wilson experienced an unpleasant surprise. His party, to general surprise, lost parliamentary elections and had to hand power to the Tories. The new government was headed by Edward Heath, who had long enjoyed the reputation of a committed supporter of EEC membership.¹⁰² Being a European was not anything abstract for him. Even before World War II, he had had a chance to get to know the old continent fairly well. As an observer to the Nuremberg trials, he became convinced that Europe needed to be rebuilt and reconciled. Heath was an advocate of Germany's close ties with Europe and he also supported the Schuman Declaration.¹⁰³ In 1961, he found the UK's EEC application to be a turning point in British history. As head of the British delegation during the 1961-1963 negotiations, he received excellent insights into the European mechanisms. Importantly, the failure of that application did not make him resentful towards the EEC. A few years later, in 1967, he said that the common market was an organisation which was more than just a market: it was a Community whose members would live and

⁹⁸ F. Gołębski, *Polityka zagraniczna Wielkiej Brytanii*, Warsaw 2001, p. 76.

⁹⁹ M. Pine, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 158.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 156-157.

¹⁰² H. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 215-216.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 219.

work together. He was of the opinion that negotiations could not get underway until the Community as a whole had unanimously been approved.¹⁰⁴ Heath was also a proponent of French-British nuclear cooperation, and he also spoke of establishing a European defence system.¹⁰⁵ The new Prime Minister was the first post-war British leader who decided to put European issues first at the expense of special relations with the United States and traditional ties between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.¹⁰⁶ He found it strange that the British Embassy in the US, which accounted for only 8% of British trade, had a staff of 750, while in Brussels, the United Kingdom had only four senior officials even though the EEC accounted for 20% of British trade. Heath stressed that the UK's foreign policy should serve its real purposes and should not be driven by emotions or biases. That approach involved relinquishing a special status in international relations in favour of integration with the EEC.¹⁰⁷

In their election manifesto entitled *A Better Tomorrow*, the Conservatives were rather cautious about the possibility of EEC membership. The mood in the UK was not good. In April 1970, only 19% of British people were in favour of EEC accession while more than a half were against.¹⁰⁸ In their election platform, the Tories said that if they managed to negotiate favourable membership terms, the UK, in the long term, would become a prosperous and secure country. Access to a broader market would also entail economic growth and better living standards. But the Conservatives also focused on the obstacles. They assumed that the membership costs would be particularly felt in the initial period but they would be compensated for by future benefits. They also warned that not until the negotiations got underway, would it be possible to determine whether the balance would be favourable and whether the UK's interests would be protected. The Tories promised to provide constant updates on the negotiation process through Parliament.¹⁰⁹

The United Kingdom began its EEC entry negotiations on June 30, 1970 by presenting its negotiating position at a special meeting in Luxembourg. In his speech, the head of the British delegation, Anthony Baker, referred to the two previous applications and expressed his deep conviction that that time the talks would end in success. He assured his audience that Great Britain wanted European unification because only a united Europe could develop economically, provide for its security, serve other countries and strive to improve the East-West relations.¹¹⁰

The United Kingdom aimed to join the EEC by January 1, 1973.¹¹¹ The main problem in the negotiations was the amount of the British contribution to the com-

¹⁰⁴ E. Heath, *Old World, New Horizons, Britain, the Common Market and the Atlantic Alliance*, London 1970, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ H. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁶ S. George, *An awkward partner: Britain in the European Community*, Oxford 1990, p. 83.

¹⁰⁷ J.W. Young, *Britain and European Unity, 1945-1999*, New York 2000, p. 248.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

¹⁰⁹ D. Gowland, A. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹¹⁰ Note of June 19, 1970, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/heath-ec.asp>

¹¹¹ H. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

mon budget. Great Britain proposed to introduce a transitional period of a few years, during which the membership fee would be steadily increased. That solution was opposed by France, which led to a negotiation stalemate. The breakthrough came during the British-French summit in Paris on May 19-21, 1971.¹¹² After the summit, in a joint declaration, Heath and Pompidou emphasized a principally identical vision of Europe's development. Their common objective was to strengthen Europe worldwide by reinforcing its international identity. Both leaders agreed that the Community would not replace nation states but that it would provide a new framework for them. They expressed their conviction that the issues of budget financing and the pound zone would be resolved during the Brussels negotiations.¹¹³

The May summit did not mark the end of the negotiations but it definitely accelerated their conclusion. The results of the first rounds of the negotiations and the estimated costs were presented by the British government on July 21, 1971 in the white paper: *The United Kingdom and the European Communities*. Its authors stressed that the UK's EEC membership would be a better guarantee of the economic growth than the existing cooperation with the Commonwealth and the EFTA states. It was predicted that food prices would increase by 15% in the transitional period, which meant that the costs of living would grow by 3%.¹¹⁴ The document became the topic of a stormy parliamentary debate, which consisted of two rounds that were held on July 21-26 and October 21-28. Opponents of membership argued that the EEC did not cover the whole of Europe, and instead of unifying the continent, the common market would exacerbate the divisions. They also complained about severing the traditional ties with the Commonwealth. For the Labour Party the major menace was capitalism, which was perceived as a threat to its plans of introducing socialism. Among other threats were increased prices and decreased living standards. A large proportion of MPs demanded a referendum on the UK's entry into the EEC.¹¹⁵

Speaking in the government's defence, Heath explained that his objective was not only EEC accession but also entry into the planned economic and monetary union. He assured that those changes would not undermine the vital interests of the United Kingdom¹¹⁶. The Prime Minister also argued that EEC membership would not pose a threat to sovereignty as the United Kingdom would be able to protect its position in the European institutions. Moreover, he reminded people that the issues that were considered by the governments of the member states to be vital were subject to unanimity. Heath assured that the British legal system would remain in force in its entirety.¹¹⁷ He also expressed his conviction that EEC membership would create conditions for the growth of British industry and pay raises. He stressed that in 1958 pay in the United Kingdom was close

¹¹² <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/heath-eeec.asp>.

¹¹³ The Times, May 22, 1971.

¹¹⁴ B.H. Toszek, *Proces integracji Wielkiej Brytanii ze Wspólnotami Europejskimi w latach 1961-1975*, Toruń 2009, pp. 184-185.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp.185-187.

¹¹⁶ D. Gowland, A. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

to pay rates in France, the Netherlands, Belgium and West Germany; however, by 1969 British real wages had risen by 40% while in those four states by 75%.

In contrast to the two previous applications, this time the membership issue was the subject of genuine public debate that involved not only the government or Parliament, but also a considerable proportion of British people. The interests of the Commonwealth or the EFTA were discussed much less frequently than before. The most important topics on the agenda were the financial costs of membership and the threat of losing sovereignty. Many demanded to submit the membership issue to a referendum, but Heath was opposed to the idea, arguing that the final say-so should rest with the House of Commons, which is the representative of the nation.

Heath's situation was not easy. He had to confront the opposition not only of Labour but also of some Conservatives. One of his major opponents within the party was Enoch Powell, the Minister of Health in 1960-1963.¹¹⁸ In numerous speeches, he criticised the government's decision on the UK's accession to the EEC, emphasizing that it posed a threat to British sovereignty and national identity. In his view, the European Communities were above all political in nature, which was the fact that many people forgot about or did not understand. Powell accused the leaders of applying for EEC membership behind the backs of British people. For that reason, he was in favour of holding a referendum even though this solution was not rooted in the British institutional system. Powell went so far as to urge the British to vote for the Labour Party, which was opposed to EEC membership.

The British Parliament approved the UK's membership in the EEC on October 28, 1971. The Treaty of Accession was signed on January 22, 1972 in Brussels not only by the United Kingdom, but also by Denmark, Ireland and Norway. Speaking on that occasion in Brussels, Prime Minister Heath said that the negotiations were his government's main foreign policy objective. He also added that the success of the 20-year-long negotiations was the most important event in British foreign policy since the defeat of Hitler.¹¹⁹ A few days later, Parliament started to work on a piece of legislation called the European Communities Act 1972, which concerned the UK's entry into the European Communities. The only way to reconcile the membership with parliamentary sovereignty was to introduce Community law into the domestic legal order by an act of Parliament.¹²⁰ It was enacted by the House of Commons on September 28 and came into force on January 1, 1973.

A BRAKE TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION?

Heath's government resigned in early 1974. The Labour Party returned to power under Wilson as head of the government. After several weeks in office, the Prime Minister called on the EEC Council of Ministers to renegotiate the accession treaty.

¹¹⁸ <http://www.enochpowell.net>.

¹¹⁹ N. J. Crowson, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹²⁰ A. Jassem, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

At the Council of Ministers meeting, the new foreign secretary, James Callaghan, criticised the idea of creating a European union, which he found unreal and contradictory to the expectations of the British public.¹²¹

After the victorious election, the Labour leaders proposed holding a referendum on whether to remain in the European Communities. They emphasized the extraordinary and unique nature of that solution. The government was officially in favour of remaining in the EEC but some ministers were opposed to this and were ready to resign their posts. The Conservatives were not unanimous, either; some of them called for leaving the Communities, which were viewed as a threat to the existence of the United Kingdom as a nation state.¹²²

The United Kingdom European Communities referendum was held in June 1975. With a national turnout of nearly two thirds of the voters, 67.2% were in favour of continued EEC membership, while 32.8% were against. As shown in the table below, British membership was supported much more strongly by the Tories than by Labour.

Table 3

Voter preferences among party supporters before the referendum on continued EEC membership in percentages

Party	Yes	No
Conservative	82	12
Labour	52	35
Liberal	64	29

Source: A. King, *Britain says yes. The 1975 referendum on the Common Market*, Washington D.C. 1977, p.145, Appendix.

Of equal interest is the analysis of results by UK constituent countries. As Table 4 shows, the strongest support for EEC membership was recorded in England, while the smallest in Northern Ireland. However, all four countries returned “Yes” majority votes.

Table 4

The 1975 referendum results across the four countries of the United Kingdom

Country	Support for continued EEC membership in percentages
England	68.7
Wales	65.5
Scotland	58.4
Northern Ireland	52.1

Source: L. Jesień, *Europa w lustrze eurosceptycyzmu [Europe in the mirror of Euroscepticism]*, p. 20, footnote 9.

¹²¹ P. A. Cieślak, *Wielka Brytania a integracja polityczna państwa EWG*, Sprawy Międzynarodowe, No. 12, 1975, pp. 48-51.

¹²² K. Robbins, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

The victory of supporters of continued EEC membership did not mean that the British were eager to become engaged in any projects aimed at closer cooperation between the member states. Due to its traditional fear of federalism, the UK was hostile to any solutions geared towards establishing a closer union. That approach partly resulted from the complete lack of any sense of European identity. In the media as well as in everyday language, “Europe” and “the United Kingdom” were used as separate concepts. For years, the British were taught that “British history” was something different from “European history”.¹²³ They accused Europe of being after British money and being too generous to French farmers or Brussels bureaucrats. It was not easy to change this mindset given that the successive British governments were not keen on closer European integration and focused on the protection of the domestic interests.¹²⁴ That approach was particularly characteristic of Margaret Thatcher, who was quoted as saying “I want my money back”.¹²⁵ Her policy led to a deadlock in the talks on European reforms, which lasted several years. Annoyed by this, French president François Mitterrand even threatened to remove the United Kingdom from the EEC. Finally, Thatcher agreed to participate in the establishment of the single market, and in 1986 she signed the Single European Act. However, she was opposed to any plans to establish an economic or monetary union.¹²⁶ In her view, it did not make any sense. She held similar views on a European union because she thought that Europe would never become a federation.

Interestingly, the Labour Party, after the Conservative victory in 1979, turned its back on Europe and called for leaving the EC. Before the 1983 election, Labour promised that in the case of victory, it would withdraw the United Kingdom from the European structures within a single term. After some time, the Labour politicians toned down their criticism and became more pro-European in their declarations. This strategy was meant to counterbalance the Prime Minister’s rhetoric.

Thatcher laid out her position on European integration on September 20, 1988 in her speech at the College of Europe in Bruges.¹²⁷ In her view, the main principle of European policy was the construction of a European Community based on the cooperation of sovereign nation states. She made it clear that any attempt “to suppress nationhood and concentrate power at the centre of a European conglomerate would be highly damaging and would jeopardize the objectives we seek to achieve”.

In 1990, a new Tory government was formed under John Major, who supported the EU treaty. He thought that the UK’s place should be in the very heart of Europe. However, he was soon countered by Thatcher, who led the Eurosceptic group in the Conservative Party. Finally, the United Kingdom signed the Maastricht Treaty, but

¹²³ K. Robbins, *op. cit.*, pp. 441-442.

¹²⁴ A. Moravcik, *A Negotiating the Single European Act: National Interests and Conventional Statecraft in the European Community*, International Organisation, 45/1991 (1), p. 29.

¹²⁵ M. Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, New York 1993 [Polish translation: *Moje lata na Downing Street*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 92-99].

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 762-764.

¹²⁷ S. Parzymies, *Integracja europejska w dokumentach...*, p. 340.

only because it secured the right to refuse to apply some of the provisions that were in force in other member states. However, the majority of Conservatives thought that the establishment of the European Union would be a step in the wrong direction and would pose a threat to the UK's fundamental interests. To ensure support for the ratification of the EU Treaty, Major called on the House of Commons to hold a vote of confidence in his foreign policy. That political manoeuvre proved successful because the treaty was ratified even though it did not allay the Tory concerns.¹²⁸ Major laid out his views on the EU in Leiden, emphasizing that the United Kingdom was irrevocably part of Europe but that it must be the right sort of Europe. In his view, of key importance to the EU's future was its political dimension. The British Prime Minister also said that the EU's development would not be possible without the support of ordinary people.¹²⁹

The supporters of closer UK-EU cooperation had high hopes for Tony Blair's premiership, which began in 1997. Many viewed him as a declared European. He himself was convinced that the United Kingdom could play a significant role worldwide only as an influential EU member, which is why he emphasized on many occasions that EU membership was the only alternative for Great Britain.¹³⁰ Under Blair, the Labour Party gave up its anti-European rhetoric and became more pro-European. However, Labour was not inclined to join the European mainstream, by adopting, for example, the single currency. They wanted to improve cooperation in the field of security, as manifested by the negotiations with France, which in late 1998 led to the signing of the Saint-Malo agreement on the establishment of the European Security and Defence Policy.¹³¹

Blair laid out his vision of Europe in Warsaw in the year 2000. In his speech he focused on the European institutions in the new enlarged Europe. The British Prime Minister viewed the EU not as a superstate, but as a superpower which would play a prominent role worldwide but it would not replace nation states.¹³² However, in the following years he did little to anchor the United Kingdom in the European Union. One half of the UK was in Europe while the other one was outside it. In the wake of the prevailing Eurosceptical approach in Britain, the press campaign and the opposition within his own party (especially from Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown) Blair decided not to call a referendum on joining the euro.

In the new millennium, pro-European sentiment in the UK increasingly declined, largely due to David Cameron, who already as candidate for Prime Minister declared that the EU should focus on trade and economy. With the intention of calming down EU opponents within his own party, he promised to withdraw the Conservatives from

¹²⁸ A. Jassem, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹²⁹ L. Jesień, *Europa w lustrze eurosceptyzmu...*, pp. 115-116.

¹³⁰ F. Gołembski, *Brytyjskie koncepcje UE*, w: E. Haliżak, S. Parzymies, *Unia Europejska. Nowy typ wspólnoty międzynarodowej*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 135-136.

¹³¹ *From St-Malo to Nice. European defence: core documents*, (compiled by M. Rutten), Chaillot Papers, No. 47, Paris, May 2001, p. 8.

¹³² S. Parzymies, *Integracja europejska w dokumentach...*, p. 426.

the European People's Party. He delivered on that pledge as Prime Minister, which, however, resulted in the marginalisation of the Tories in European politics. In a 2013 interview given to several European journalists, Cameron promised a referendum on continued EU membership by no later than 2017. While he admitted that he himself was opposed to leaving the EU, he also said that he supported a Europe which would be more open, competitive, flexible and ready to face the challenges of the modern world. He also reminded the journalists that British parties had long been promising a referendum on European issues, but they went back on their pledges, which had seriously weakened the approval of British membership in the EU. The Prime Minister returned to his promise to hold a referendum after the May 2015 election victory. "It's got too big, too bossy, too interfering", that's how Cameron criticised the EU at the Conservative Party conference several months later.¹³³ He made it clear that the only things he was interested in were Britain's prosperity and Britain's influence. By referring to the UK's refusal to join the eurozone, he was proving that British non-conformity in the EU had paid off. He also indicated that his goal was to secure special status for the UK in the EU or to withdraw from some of the EU provisions.

Cameron laid out his expectations in the October 10, 2015 letter to President of the European Council Donald Tusk. He focused on four major areas of European politics where the UK expected reforms: economic governance and the role of non-euro members, competitiveness, sovereignty, and immigration within the EU.¹³⁴ The British Prime Minister emphasized that the EU had "a long history of respecting the differences of its many Member States" and indicated that in the past it had successfully dealt with the concerns voiced by Denmark and Ireland. While referring to the idea of sovereignty in its broad sense, Cameron indicated that he expected to bring an end to the UK's obligation to work towards an "ever closer union" in a formal, legally-binding and irreversible manner. He added that his government would demand an enhancement to the role of national parliaments that would be able to stop EU legislative proposals. With regard to migration within the EU, Cameron expected that in the future, new EU member states would not be granted the right of free movement until their economies had converged more closely with the existing member states.

Initially, the referendum campaign generated little interest. Opinion polls showed that a strong majority were in favour of the United Kingdom remaining in the EU. However, as the referendum date neared, the support for Brexit grew. The compromise that David Cameron had been working on with the EU did not satisfy even his own party members.¹³⁵ By contrast, the Labour leaders, with little commitment, occasionally pointed to the benefits of EU membership. The struggle between Brexit supporters and opponents was fought until the last hour. Finally, on June 23, 2016, with a turnout of 72.2%, the UK's exit from the EU was supported by 51.9% of voters.

¹³³ <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl>.

¹³⁴ "Gazeta Wyborcza", November 12, 2015.

¹³⁵ The key point of the agreement concluded on February 19, 2016 was the settlement under which the United Kingdom was officially allowed to restrict immigrant benefits for seven years, <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl>.

The British decision caused a considerable stir not only in the United Kingdom but in the EU member states. Norman Davies attributed it to a fraud committed by the followers of Brexit and to the disenchantment with the British government's austerity policy.¹³⁶ For many it was a dramatic moment and a very bad day for Europe. Even Brexit supporters were taken aback by the course of events. As British historian Antony Beevor said, they got on a plane whose pilot had just been killed. To put it precisely, they actually kicked out the pilot, i.e. Prime Minister Cameron, themselves.¹³⁷

We already know the price Cameron paid for Brexit: he was forced to resign in disgrace to be replaced by Theresa May, who offered the Foreign Secretary post to Boris Johnson, one of the leaders of the "Leave" campaign. What we do not know, though, is the price the UK and the EU will have to pay. Even though, according to BBC, the British did not actually vote against the EU, but rather for their own nation, it is highly likely that Britain's adventure with Europe, which began in 1973, is now coming to an end. Maybe the Europe as we have known it for several decades is also coming to an end. Any scenario is in fact possible, including the breakup of the European Union or even of the United Kingdom itself. The British may have to prepare for upheavals they have not experienced for decades, if not for centuries.

CONCLUSION

It is too early to answer the question why the British have chosen to leave the European Union. The present paper attempted to show that this decision did not result from recent problems, which undoubtedly should not be ignored. Brexit should rather be viewed as the culmination of Britain's distrustful and distanced policy towards Europe, which has been followed since the end of World War II, and which is actually rooted in a more remote past. The sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness from Europe, shaped over the centuries, has made British people view European issues in terms of their superpower status, which has led to the birth of the policy of splendid isolation. In the geopolitical dimension, the British have developed the balance of power theory, under which European stability is primarily dependent on the premise that no single power dominates others. This mindset has entailed lack of stronger involvement in European affairs. What also separated the British from Europe was its imperial tradition and the conviction about special relations with the United States.

The United Kingdom's situation after World War II was certainly different from other countries which embarked on building a united Europe. A potential decision to become involved in the process of European integration at that time would have triggered an upheaval in the system of mutual relations with the Commonwealth and the United States. Such a solution was ruled out and was in every way unprofitable. The United Kingdom, being uninvolved in European integration, could only support

¹³⁶ Interview to "Polityka" of June 29, 2016.

¹³⁷ Interview to "Newsweek" of July 4, 2016.

it from the outside or search for some sort of cooperation, which it eventually did, by concluding an association agreement with the ECSC.

The UK's international position deteriorated in the mid-1950s, when its ties with the Commonwealth weakened, and the Suez Crisis showed that the British could no longer hope for special relations with the United States. However, that period saw new opportunities for closer cooperation with the inner six states. But instead of seizing those opportunities, the British government embarked on a policy of confrontation, trying to prevent the enforcement of provisions for the creation of a common market, which was viewed as a new form of the Continental System. As a result, the British were becoming increasingly convinced that European integration posed a threat to them. By contrast, the EEC countries, especially France, started to perceive the United Kingdom not as a future partner within the Common Market, but as a country which aims to prevent its growth. No wonder then that when the British government applied for membership in the European Communities, that decision aroused many doubts among the British themselves and caused concern about the future of the Common Market. De Gaulle used that as a pretext to block the UK's road to the EEC.

When finally in 1973, the United Kingdom joined the European Communities, some hoped that the British would become involved in the mainstream of European integration, and alongside the French and Germans would drive that process forward. However, they were hugely disappointed because the British leaders were unable or unwilling to convince their citizens of the benefits of EEC membership. They exploited European issues for their own purposes, having current political gains in mind. They succumbed to societal moods instead of shaping them. There were few British leaders who would not only talk about Europe but who would also engage in its construction. The previous deep divisions between membership supporters and opponents, both among the Tories and Labour, did not cease to exist after 1973. To a British mind, the terms "Europe" and "Great Britain" remained two separate and ultimately contradictory concepts. An average British person had a limited knowledge of the way the European Communities work, which is why the British were susceptible to manipulation. Since the 1950s, as various opinion polls have shown, support for the UK's involvement in European integration has fluctuated rapidly and inexplicably. In the end, on the winning side was the view that European cooperation does not serve well the national interests and that it actually poses a threat to them.

Finally, the problem addressed in the title of this paper needs to be explained. The UK's European dilemmas can be summed up in the following question: how strongly did this country want to become involved in European affairs? While until the early 20th century the main principle of foreign policy was splendid isolation, after the two world wars Great Britain was willing to pursue a policy of restricted involvement in European issues. Despite joining the European Communities, that policy did not fundamentally change.

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ABSTRACT

On June 23, 2016, in the Brexit referendum, the British voted to leave the European Union. The decision has triggered a wave of comments, most of which focused on the problems in the recent relations between the United Kingdom and the European Union. The present contribution aims to show that even though those issues have undoubtedly affected the outcome of the referendum, there are other reasons behind the British decision. First of all, it needs to be emphasized that the British had a cautious, if not reluctant, approach to the integration process right from its start. For a long time, they did not want to participate in it, and even tried to slow it down. When in 1973 the United Kingdom joined the European Communities, it did not become involved in the mainstream of European integration, and it did not become, along with France and West Germany, a driving force. The British leaders were unable or unwilling to convince their citizens of the benefits of EC membership. The successive British governments exploited European issues for their own purposes, focusing on the current political gains. Moreover, on the issue of European integration both the Tories and Labour remained internally divided. As a result, the British were becoming increasingly convinced that European cooperation did not serve their national interests but posed a threat to them. The policy pursued by Prime Minister Cameron, who awkwardly tried to reconcile the interests of the opponents and followers of EU membership, eventually led to the victory of the Leave camp.