BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

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VISIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AFTER THE 2016 BRITISH REFERENDUM

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ABSTRACT

The history of European integration is full of challenges and obstacles from its beginnings, starting from economic cooperation between states and reaching the supranational structure that we call the European Union today. The crises that this construction has undergone have been driven mainly by the prerogatives that the structure has received from the Treaties, essentially the European Union being based on the role of a structure that supports the countries economically. The existing approaches in the literature intensify the changes brought to the European integration process, which generates a response, manifested in the form of the skepticism of some states or the emergence of new visions on European integration.

The aim of the paper is to outline a classification of visions for the future of the European Union and to understand the mechanisms that influence its shaping. The thesis supports the importance of these visions for the future of European integration and how they influence relations between Member States.

Keywords: European Union, scenarios, political integration, challenges, Brexit, public policies, discourse analysis, political integration.

SUMMARY

This research thesis sets out the framework for identifying the main visions and perspectives for the future of the European Union, following the outcome of the 2016 UK referendum. Since the outcome of the referendum was announced, researchers from all over the world have focused on exploring the assumptions behind this decision and the short-term effects that this decision entails.

The thesis explores the visions outlined around European citizens, political figures that present both the official perspective of state governments and the opposition, the theorists who studied this phenomenon and transnational groups that are directly involved in shaping the development directions of the European Union. The document investigates the visions expressed by the above-mentioned actors, with a focus on the realisation of a classification of these perspectives on the future of the European Union. The European context influenced the shaping of strategies on the future of the European Union, with both the British referendum and the COVID-19 pandemic being two contextual variables that influenced relations between the states. Europeans have become increasingly concerned about efforts to overcome crises that have

overlapped in recent years, such as the protracted negotiation of the British referendum or the resolution of the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, European states have tried to find solutions on how they will act within the European Union, reconfiguring their strategies on the future and what kind of relationships they should promote inside the Union in order to overcome these crises that they have faced. All these solutions are shaped in a context dominated by populist movements manifested within the borders of some of the EU Member States.

The date 23 June 2016 marks a moment of crisis for the European Union, a relevant moment to the its consolidation, because in the referendum convened by Prime Minister David Cameron, the British electorate decided to leave the European Union. A few months later, in March 2017, the UK Government invoked Art. 50 of the *Treaty on European Union* for the scheduled exit to take place on the night of 30 March 2019. Two years after the invocation of Art. 50 and three failed rounds of voting in the British Parliament on the post-Brexit agreement, Britain caused a new crisis for the European Union. He is committed to taking part in the European elections, precisely in order to buy more time before taking the decision to leave the European Union.

In this context, with the UK's decision to leave the EU and the coming end of the transition period, we need to analyse the impact of Brexit on the European Union and see what new needs can be identified. After this episode the question arises: what are the visions and perspectives for the future of the European Union?

The thesis aims to identify and clarify the relevance of shaping visions and perspectives on the future of the European Union, trying to capture those distinct peculiarities of the visions and perspectives formulated. These are based on the analysis of political leaders and relevant actors' discourses, with the first part of the research process focusing on identifying relevant actors at national and supranational level, highlighting what the main visions are and what their defining peculiarities are. In the selection of actors who are relevant for the analysis of speech, the following are important:

a). whether the actor analysed is sufficiently relevant to customise the proposed vision

b). the impact of this actor in relation to the other Member States and in the decision-making process at European level.

British skepticism towards European integration was integrated throughout the process of research into thinking and developing visions of the European Union, in order to support the

different motivations regarding the similarities found between the peculiarities of sovereigntist visions and the British visions that led to the crisis caused by the British referendum.

The academic and exploratory challenge of the research thesis is to determine the connecting variables and the main correlations between the visions outlined after 2016 and those of the historical past of European consolidation. The next step is to shape a classification of visions according to the particularities resulting from the qualitative analysis of the relevant actors in this process. The literature highlights the visions expressed throughout the history of European integration, with models corresponding to the existing relations between Member States.

The identity component and the rest of the added values have contributed to the generation of new crises within the European Union and this is why the investigative challenge was to identify the process by which visions are built, understood and classified at the EU level.

The key concept used to operationalise variables is vision. We must bear in mind that the alternative ultimately involves a comparison. The vision is conceptualised by analysing speeches of political leaders, citizens or critics, using perspective theory. The vision encompasses the sum of all the results obtained from the analysis of the discourse and is the variable that validates the presumption that decisions are taken following a value judgment.

This thesis aims to identify and investigate the classification and characteristics of the main visions of the future of the European Union. In order to be able to identify the main visions and perspectives, the visions outlined around European citizens, political figures presenting both the official vision of state governments and opposition, theorists and transnational groups that are directly involved in shaping the development directions of the European Union will be analysed. A comprehensive analysis of these actors is needed in order to be able to conceptualise the characteristics of each vision identified.

Another specific objective is linked to the importance of policy instruments, whose role is to support the activities proposed by the European Union. They come to address key public policy issues on the European Commission's agenda, including finding legislative alternatives to address public policy issues. In this regard, we will examine whether the current legislative framework allows action under the current prerogatives or will result in the need to sign a new constitutive treaty.

The paper identifies those key European public policies, which should focus all of the attention of the European Union in the coming period, in order to increase citizens' confidence

and reduce the scale of the Eurosceptic phenomenon. Areas of interest in public policies include: trade, energy and climate policy, European digital market and innovation policy, security and justice policy, trade and Schengen policy, enlargement policy, migration and refugees' policy, defense policy, single market and euro area policy and cohesion policy.

The aim of the thesis is to formulate perspectives on the future development of the European Union, outlined in the political discourses of European leaders. At the level of the functionalities of European public policies, public policy instruments will be identified to support a stronger Europe capable of facing external challenges.

Classification of visions is the main result of the investigatory process of this research sentence. The ranking model presented by the author starts from the analysis of the five scenarios proposed by the European Commission on the future of the European Union — presented *in White Paper on the Future of Europe — Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025*[1].

The research hypothesis under test claims that a number of visions regarding the future of the European Union have emerged after the 2016 British Referendum: Federal visions, sovereign visions and moderate visions. This research outlines a classification of visions outlined by discourse analysis and customised by the distinct elements of each actor analysed.

The visions relate strictly to the way in which European states conceive and what is their opinion on the future of the European Union. The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union was a time of crisis which marked the history of construction and to some extent influenced the fate of European integration.

For the majority of authors analysing the debates on Brexit and the evolution of the European Union after this crisis, the focus was focused on a retrospective process of events within the European Union, trying to focus on the underlying causes of events. The theorists followed further the analysis of the impact that Britain had on the European economy and how the future effects of this detachment will be felt at this level in the European Union.

One of the main problematic dimensions of the research process on this sentence was to take into account all factors and actors with potential impact on the perspectives outlined for the future of the European Union.

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[1] European Commission, *White Paper on the Future of Europe — Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025*, COM (2017) 2025, 1 March 2017. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/white_paper_on_the_future_of_europe_en.pdf., [accessed 13.03.2021].

The main research questions addressed in the thesis are:

1. What are the main visions and perspectives outlined at EU level after the 2016 British Referendum?
2. What similarities exist between the current visions of the future of the European Union and those identified throughout the history of construction?
3. What are the similarities between the sovereigntist visions and the UK's vision?

The study hypothesis is tested by a thorough analysis of the speeches outlined around European citizens, of the political figures presenting both the official vision of state governments and opposition, of the theorists who studied this phenomenon and of transnational groups directly involved in shaping the development directions of the European Union.

The methodological tools identified and proposed to analyse the visions and behaviours of European countries are mostly qualitative. This method has allowed us to identify the main common features of the speech of European political leaders and experts covering European integration, with a direct bearing on public policies and the evolution of European integration. An eclectic approach is therefore recommended to understand the main developments, features and variables associated with the scientific literature to the process of European integration on the one hand and public policies on the other.

The analysis started from the observation and analysis of the phenomena existing at the European Union level, so that the results were later interpreted in terms of theory. This approach is based on the investigation of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used include interviews of four heads of state, two prime ministers, one chancellor and seventeen MEPs. Interviews are added as primary sources: the political strategies of the governments of the Member States, regulations, directives, decisions taken at European level and the Treaties establishing the European Union at the various stages of its existence. The secondary sources used are: the volumes and articles of expertise which have followed the development of the European construction from its origins to the present day; studies and reports prepared by the European Commission or other specialised institutes.

Among the sources of data collection used, we can point out that information from the country reports provided by the European Commission has been used through qualitative analysis techniques. These techniques aim to highlight key concepts during research. To quantify the

progress made by the Member States, the World Bank Group and EUROSTAT reports, which have carried out quantitative research on British skepticism, as well as other social and economic analyses, will also be used to support the objectives of this research. All these data will help us to gather information and present the phenomenon studied in figures, and in their perspective we will analyse how the European Union will evolve in the formula of the 27 states.

The discourse analysis is a starting point for the researcher in the complex analysis of the subject under research. This analysis is based on two essential components of the discourse: the linguistic component (coherence of speech) and the social-cultural component (refers to the social practices addressed by the message transmitter). We will also use some methods of analysing the discourse, underlining the persuasion of key political leaders' speeches on the stage of international relations, and how they will convince or at least try to convince citizens, thereby regaining their trust in the European Union.

The analysis of the discourse tries to describe and explain linguistic phenomena in affective, cognitive, situational and cultural terms of their use and identifies the linguistic resources through which we (re)build our lives (identity, role, activity, community, emotion, position, knowledge, faith, ideology and so on)[2]. We use discourse analysis to "address how language is used to create, maintain and provoke power relationships and ideologies"[3.]

Critical analysis of the discourse is the most appealing psycholinguistic theory for designers of convincing political speeches. Defined as a "pre-condition for language", mind theory resumes two aspects: recognition of words such as "this", "here" and "I" being used to characterise the speaker and "story". Recognising that speaking refers to the speaker and not to the listener, the latter becomes "obliged" to react to the story told by the speaker and to understand his values and beliefs and ultimately to validate their claims. Such a circumstance allows speakers to shape their productions in a way that convinces or manipulates feelings[4].

During the research paper, we will gradually answer the research questions that we have set out in the introductory chapter, aiming to highlight the novelty elements brought by the work. This discourse analysis will support the visions outlined on the future of the European Union,

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[2] Agnes Weiyun He, "Linguistic Anthropology and Language Education", in Wortham and Rymes (eds.), *Linguistic Anthropoly of Education*, Praeger: Westport and London, 2003, p. 429.
[3] Paul Baker and Sibonile Ellece, *Key Terms in Discourse Analysis*, London: Continuum, 2011, p. 167.
[4] Stephen J. Field, Psycho *Linguistics. The Key Concepts*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 302-303.

highlighting the elements that distinguish them and the political personalities that support them. The speeches of the political leaders will support the European Union's development directions and confirm the assumptions proposed as a benchmark for the future development of the European Union and the public policies that will become priorities for its future development.

The paper will be analysed from the perspective of the theories of international relations, which will help us best capture the essence of the research hypotheses originally proposed. The methodological tools identified and proposed to analyse the visions and behaviours of European countries are mostly qualitative. This method has made it possible to identify the main common features of the speech of European political leaders and experts covering European integration, with a direct bearing on public policies and the evolution of European integration. An eclectic approach is therefore recommended to understand the main developments, features and variables associated with the scientific literature to the process of European integration on the one hand and public policies on the other. The basis for this approach is a balanced combination of arguments based on: liberal intergovernmentalism theory, neofunctionalist theory, constructive theory, perspective theory and referential perception theory.

The research paper will be structured on five distinct chapters that will test the hypotheses outlined in the research thesis. Each chapter will have a clear structure and will come at the end of each chapter with the conclusions related to the concepts or visions outlined. The literature will be a landmark that will guide the researcher in the analysis he/she intends to carry out throughout the research thesis.

The first chapter of the thesis aims to fix the theoretical framework of the entire research process. All the variables analysed over the next chapters of the research paper will be conceptualised and the qualitative investigative approach will be explained in detail. We will come to the end of the chapter to present our own contribution on the contribution that this research thesis brings to the level of the current literature.

The second chapter of the research paper aims to present the history of the European Union, from the idea of European construction to the structure it currently has. This chapter is relevant to the research paper, because it aims to highlight that the visions for the future of the European Union have existed since the beginning of its evolution: Federalist, moderate and sovereign. They will be operationalised on the basis of the variables proposed in the first chapter of the research

thesis and aim to highlight certain similarities between the visions from the beginning of the European construction to the present day.

Historical-interpretative analysis will highlight the main stages of the European consolidation, which could present similarities to the visions outlined today. The theoretically non-functional framework will help us understand the evolution of the European construction and the way in which certain concepts have changed the paradigm approach to the future of the European Union. As the representatives of this theory said, in order to be able to project a future as close as possible to reality, it is necessary to understand the process of integration and to see what the relationship between actors and structure was. The historical-interpretative analysis will be based on the analysis of the primary sources, the treaties underlying the main changes that the European construction has undergone over the years, highlighting a number of variables used in the analysis of the discourse in chapter four.

The third chapter will look at sovereignism through the use of British Euroscepticism, a phenomenon that has manifested throughout Britain's membership of the European Union. The subject of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in relation to the European Union has been examined in order to test whether this model identifies itself with the sovereign view of the future of the European Union. In this chapter we will turn to the theory of referential perceptions, in order to identify the type of Euroscepticism identified and how human perception is influenced by the different contexts in which it is located. The theory of referential perceptions argues that when national conditions are good at political and economic level, Euroscepticism tends to develop. When conditions are poor at national level, the support of the European Union tends to become a viable alternative. We will try to identify whether this theory will help us explain Britain's behaviour towards the European Union and how this theory should be integrated into the analysis of visions and perspectives for the future of construction.

The visions for the future of the European Union will be outlined in chapter four, following the 2016 UK referendum, with a view to classifying them in: Federalist visions, moderate visions and sovereign visions. The classification model presented builds on the analysis of the five scenarios proposed by the European Commission on the future of the European Union. To exemplify the views outlined by the author, states with similar profile and characteristics similar to federalist visions, moderate visions and sovereignist visions were selected. The most relevant

countries for this classification were: Germany, France, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Romania.

Although five visions for the future development of the European Union have been outlined in the European Commission document, namely: *the scenario continues on the same path, the single market-only* scenario, *the multi-speed* Europe scenario, the *less but more efficient* scenario and the *much more scenario together*; changes at European level have reduced them to three patterns.

The operationalisation of the variables used in the discourse analysis will lead to a classification of visions: moderate visions, federal visions and sovereign visions. Member States' visions will develop around the three patterns: collaboration, cohabitation and competition — models have existed since the beginning of the European construction.

The key concept of this chapter is the vision, a concept that will be supported in the scientific approach by referring to the theory of perspective. States' perceptions of the future development of the European Union will shape the visions and perspectives of the states on the future of the European Union, contributing to the realisation of the classification proposed by this research paper.

The last chapter of the research thesis complements the previous chapter, proposing a transnational approach to the visions outlined at the level of the European Union and its future. The political doctrines of the eight political groups in the European Parliament provide an insight into the evolution of the future of the European Union, the perception of these groups is shaped not at national level, but at supranational level.

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