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Vivisection of Britishness, or how Brexit happened book review:

Łukasz Danel (2022), *Zrozumieć Brexit. Przyczyny wystąpienia Zjednoczonego Królestwa i Irlandii Północnej z Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 197 pages

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Łukasz Danel took on the challenge of explaining why in 2016 the majority of the British voted in a referendum to leave the European Union and launched a process, the effects of which will be felt for many years to come. The author carries out his narrative in such a way as to prove that a scenario other than Brexit was not possible and it was an inevitable culmination of the complicated relations between the United Kingdom and integrated Europe. The question was not "if" but rather "when" it would happen. After all, it is difficult to disagree with Ł. Danel, especially because on each page he provides us with arguments that prove this thesis. We also know from the very beginning that the author's goal is to reconstruct the British point of view on Europe and the European Union, which is symbolically expressed by calling the strait separating the British Isles from continental Europe the English Channel, not the La Manche Channel, as it is usually called in Poland. The reader is also informed from the first pages of the book that, in the author's opinion, the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union was a mistake. Focusing on the perspective of one side only and clearly articulating own position on the analysed subject of research did not stand in the way of achieving the set goal, i.e. explaining how Brexit happened.

The major advantage of the book *Zrozumieć Brexit...* is that when analysing the reasons for the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union, we receive a large dose of political observations and conclusions

about political leadership, the necessity to take into account intraparty determinants in decisions taken on the international arena, conflict management in a political party, or (in)predictability of social behaviour. However, the strongest side of the book is the vivisection of Britishness, which the author carries out with a scientific precision as well as with favour. He does not avoid humorous remarks, showing great understanding for the British point of view. No wonder, after all, it says on the cover of the book that he is "an outspoken anglophile and Britishness enthusiast".

The book is easy to follow, the storytelling style makes even difficult matters and a large dose of facts easy to absorb. The author is a political scientist, so he does not carry out complex economic analyses, focusing on recalling historical, sociological and political arguments. Keeping the reader's attention is all the more surprising and worth emphasising as everyone knows the end of the UK's rough relations with the European Communities. Despite this, many fragments of Danel's book in terms of emotions resemble a political thriller.

Accepting and understanding the perspective adopted by the author to place the British point of view in the center of attention and not counter it with the EU perspective or the optics of other Member States, I get the impression that ignoring this aspect can sometimes lead to debatable conclusions. Leaving aside the European policy of other Member States, the aim of which was and is to deepen political integration by delegating further competencies to the supranational level, i.e. something that in the book is called the drive towards the federalisation of the EU, led the author to the conclusion that if British politicians were more skillful diplomats, they would have convinced other EU Member States to their vision of European integration. In fact, Great Britain was for a long time alone in its efforts to dismantle political integration, which changed after the United Right won the parliamentary elections in Poland in 2015, when the Conservative Party gained a loyal ally in Beata Szydło's government, which, however, had no influence on the will to leave the EU expressed in the referendum in June 2016. The divergence of interests between the United Kingdom and continental Europe in relation to the EU, cherished by politicians, turned out to be too large to be compensated for by greater dexterity in the EU salons, which – according to the author – British politicians lacked.

Some parts of the book on the United Kingdom's relations with the European Union can be read as a warning or guide on how to leave the EU. For Polish supporters of the EU, this may be a warning, because it is difficult to resist the impression that since 2015 the United Right government, similarly to British Eurosceptics, has been consistently building a narrative critical of the EU, based on emotions, understatements, resentments, and distorted data. There are many politicians on the Polish political scene who, like Nigel Farage – the former leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party and the Brexit Party – are trying to prove that Poland is financially losing on EU membership. The fact is that the Polish perceive the European Union differently from the British. However, repeating the argument about the Euro-enthusiasm of Polish society, where the level of support for membership does not fall below 80%, should not be reassuring. The positive opinion about the EU in Poland is largely based on the belief that accession to the EU

has brought us measurable economic benefits. That is why Polish Eurosceptics want to challenge these arguments, for example by referring to the analyses of scientists who, in a once-famous report, argued that Western European countries benefit much more from our membership in the EU than Poland itself. A large part of the public opinion did not go into the details of scientific calculations, but assumed that our country has lost over 500 billion PLN since joining the EU. It is vividly similar to the arguments of Brexit supporters who argued that after leaving the EU, the money saved on the contributions paid could be redirected to the health system. Even the numbers were similar, albeit in a different currency. The UKIP leader said the UK has lost a staggering £ 500 bn since 1973.

The book can also be a perverse guide on how to wage a populist political campaign. Cynical use of the migration crisis to arouse a sense of fear and insecurity, repeating that the EU is taking away national sovereignty from its Member States, disqualifying reliable analyses and expert opinions, referring to emotions, drawing a vision of a bright future outside the EU by referring to the historical greatness of the United Kingdom are only part of British Eurosceptic arsenal used in 2016. At the same time, Łukasz Danel analyses the list of mistakes made by EU's supporters: remaining defensive and conducting a reactive campaign, mentoring tone, lack of positive message about the benefits of membership, scaring with the consequences of leaving the EU. Perhaps the author's criticism of the campaign in favour of the option "remain a member of the European Union" would be smaller if the referendum result was consistent with the predictions of the bookmakers. Just before the referendum, they set the chances of Great Britain remaining in the European Union at 90%. I do not know if Łukasz Danel was betting on the results, but it seems that with his knowledge of the mentality of the British, he had a chance to earn a lot. Ultimately, 51.89% of the British when asked: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?" indicated the option "leave the European Union".

Łukasz Danel's book is a valuable source of information for European scientists, political scientists and political sociologists. This is evidenced not only by its substantive content, legible structure, but also by a storytelling style, which may not be too frequent in academic works, but in case of this book it seems to be tailor-made. Therefore, the book *Zrozumieć Brexit...* has a chance to reach a wider audience, which is also encouraged by the eye-catching cover of the book.

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