



FEDERICA SANTACROCE

IL CONFINE IRLANDESE

GLI EFFETTI DELLA BREXIT E IL RISCHIO IMPLOSIONE DEL MOSAICO BRITANNICO

Prefazione di

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PREFAZIONE

Il volume di Federica Santacroce si incardina nel radicato e complesso dibattito sull'evolutive quadro geopolitico dell'Unione europea nel contesto post Brexit. L'autrice, attraverso una spiccata amalgama tra riferimenti teorici e lo specifico caso di studio, esplora le molteplici ambiguità emergenti dall'entrata in vigore dell'accordo di recesso che, alla mezzanotte del 31 gennaio 2020, ha sancito l'uscita del Regno Unito dall'Unione europea.

Nel corso di questo lungo iter negoziale è emerso, però, sul fronte britannico, un non trascurabile ostacolo da dover valicare, ovvero, il cosiddetto nodo irlandese, motivo per cui è stata avanzata l'ipotesi sulla concreta fattibilità di una possibile riunificazione irlandese in un contesto di implosione del Regno Unito.

Se l'intento della Brexit era quello di creare un'*extra omnes* geopolitica, ipotizzando un nostalgico, quanto utopistico, ritorno ai fasti imperiali, nella realtà dei fatti e degli effetti il Regno Unito sembra essere negativamente tornato ai primi anni Novanta del secolo scorso. Secondo i dati diffusi dall'Ufficio nazionale di statistica (ONS), nel primo trimestre del 2002, l'inflazione ha raggiunto il 7%, il livello più alto negli ultimi trent'anni. Un aumento dei prezzi che sta avendo un impatto negativo sulla vita degli inglesi, trascinandone milioni sotto la soglia della povertà e facendo, ulteriormente, emergere le profonde fratture sociali del di un Paese che si scopre oggi estremamente vulnerabile, anche alla luce dei dolorosi eventi scaturiti dalla pandemia da Covid-19.

Il libro fa tesoro di tale contesto e indagando con il giusto piglio metodologico sulle ragioni della lunga fase di stagnazione dei negoziati tra Bruxelles e Londra, prende in seria considerazione la questione del confine irlandese. L'Irlanda del Nord, difatti, anche in virtù di una sua collocazione geostrategica, ha sempre avuto un'indiscussa rilevanza per il Regno.

Il focus di analisi primario afferisce, nello specifico, al "confine marittimo irlandese", previsto nel relativo protocollo e che, a sua volta, si inserisce in seno all'accordo commerciale tra Regno Unito e Unione europea raggiunto alla fine del periodo di transizione.

L'autrice, dunque, dà voce e sostanza a uno studio che ben descrive questo nuovo scenario, in un metaforico braccio tra Londra e Bruxelles che rischia, però, di riaccendere tensioni mai sopite tra le comunità irlandesi.

Certamente apprezzabile, infine, e non meno rilevante è la valutazione che il contributo monografico pone sull'impatto che la Brexit ha generato anche sulla mobilità studentesca dell'Unione. Un consolidato asse didattico, noto genericamente come programma Erasmus, che è oggi minacciato dalle tante conseguenze derivanti dalle sovraesposte dinamiche e che coinvolge un numero significativo di studenti europei alla ricerca di programmi alternativi come possibile soluzione al problema.

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ABSTRACT IN ITALIANO

L'indagine proposta all'interno della mia tesi si concentra su un quesito fondamentale: È possibile ipotizzare una riunificazione dell'Irlanda del Nord con la Repubblica d'Irlanda? Questo quesito alla base della mia ricerca è stato avanzato inserendolo in un contesto di una ipotetica implosione del Regno Unito che si ipotizza possa verificarsi dopo l'uscita del Regno Unito dall'Unione Europea.

Partendo dall'analisi degli eventi legati alla cosiddetta Brexit è emerso che uno dei nodi più critici per la Gran Bretagna è sempre stato il cosiddetto confine Irlandese, un tema caldo ampiamente dibattuto al fine di far raggiungere in maniera totalmente pacifica un accordo commerciale tra l'Ue e la Gran Bretagna, prima del divorzio definitivo da parte di quest'ultima.

Il mio obiettivo è stato quello di ripresentare uno studio già condotto, dal politico Lord Ashcroft, prima della fine del periodo di transizione e dell'abbandono definitivo da parte del Regno Unito dall'Unione Europea. Lo studio si compone quindi del metodo delle interviste sottoposte ad alcuni partecipanti, le cui risposte sono state esaminate in maniera dettagliata anche alla luce dei recenti sviluppi post Brexit. Una metodologia quest'ultima che mi ha permesso di confrontare i dati del precedente sondaggio con quelli attuali.

Per approfondire la questione legata al problema del confine Irlandese, il presente lavoro offre una panoramica generale del processo Brexit focalizzandosi sull'origine dello stesso. Viene esaminata nel dettaglio la disgregazione dell'impero britannico e l'evoluzione dell'euroscetticismo inglese, sottolineando il concetto di anglosfera.

Il secondo capitolo si apre con l'indagine circa gli esiti referendari del 2016, compresi quelli del Galles e della Scozia, concentrandosi nell'esaminare sia le percentuali di coloro che votarono per lasciare l'Unione Europea che di quelli che invece si schierarono per rimanere all'interno della stessa.

Il terzo capitolo si concentra sulla questione irlandese, in particolar modo sulla disamina della situazione in Irlanda del Nord e del processo di pace, chiarendo anche eventuali rischi connessi ad un backstop Irlandese.

Nel quarto capitolo si è proseguita l'analisi riguardo la linea politica assunta in Irlanda, focalizzandosi su tutti i possibili impatti che una Brexit senza accordo avrebbe potuto causare.

Nell'ultimo capitolo l'analisi si struttura in due parti: la prima tratta degli ultimi negoziati in merito ad un accordo tra i due paesi, la seconda parte si concentra nell'indagine delle risposte fornite da alcuni campioni a cui è stato sottoposto il quesito.

I principali risultati scaturiti da questa indagine mostrano che a livello quantitativo non si presentano variazioni significative, se confrontate con il sondaggio precedente, e che la maggior parte della popolazione sembra essere ancora abbastanza scettica riguardo la riunificazione dell'Isola ma dai dati sperimentali relativi alla fascia di popolazione giovane si evince che la speranza, riposta da quest'ultimi nel referendum del 2025, sia ancora molto forte.

Infine l'appendice si dedica all'approfondimento del programma Erasmus, supportato da dati e tabelle che mostrano i cambiamenti riguardo la libera circolazione degli studenti nel territorio britannico dopo la Brexit e la pandemia da Covid-19. Viene inoltre rivolta particolare attenzione alle controproposte di programmi affini da parte di alcune università.

ABSTRACT IN INGLESE

The investigation, which is carried out within my thesis, is based on a fundamental question: Is it possible to assume a reunification between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland? This kind of question underlying my research has been put forward in a context of the possible implosion of the United Kingdom following the so-called Brexit.

Starting from the events that were linked to Brexit one of the most challenging knots for Britain is the Irish border, a priority issue which needed to be sorted out before discussions could start concerning a trade deal and before the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

My purpose is to resubmit a study, that was already led by the politician Lord Ashcroft, before the transition period for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU ended. The study, using several interviews, focuses on the analysis of the questionnaire replies bearing in mind recent events after Brexit. This survey has allowed me to compare previous data with current ones.

Moving from the Irish question related to the Irish border, the present study gives a general overview of the Brexit process focusing on its roots. Also, the first chapter looks in detail at the disintegration of the British Empire, the growing Euroscepticism and the meaning and definition of the Anglosphere.

Chapter 2 opens with the analysis of the outcome of the Brexit referendum, including those of Wales and Scotland, paying attention to percentages of remain and leave.

Chapter 3 explores the Irish question, in particular by examining the status of Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement, making clear possible risks of the backstop.

Chapter 4 examines the political approach in Ireland, focusing on projected consequences that a No-deal Brexit would cause.

In the last chapter the study is divided in two different sections: Firstly, the chapter assesses the latest Brexit negotiations between both countries, the second half pays attention to the main focus of this research, in other words, focuses on the experiment and the examination of the participants' replies.

The analysis showed that there are no significant differences between the current achievements and the previous ones but if attention is focused on young people who were interviewed, there is still a chance for the reunification of Ireland. Further insights about the referendum in 2025 and the results of the survey are reported in the conclusions.

Finally, the last part deals with additional insights concerning the Erasmus student exchange programme in the United Kingdom gleaned from after Brexit and the spread of the Coronavirus, including figures and articles. Furthermore, a replacement of this programme proposed by various Universities is included.

ABSTRACT IN CINESE

我的论文中提出的调查集中在一个基本问题上:是否可以假设北爱尔兰与爱尔兰共和国统一?这个问题是在英国脱欧后假想的英国内爆的背景下提出的。

从对与所谓的英国脱欧有关的事件的分析开始,应该指出,影响英国的最重要因素之一是所谓的爱尔兰边界,这是一个阻碍协议达成的热门话题。

我的目的是重申政治家阿什克罗夫特勋爵在过渡时期结束之前和英国最终被欧盟拒绝之前就已经进行了一项研究。因此,该研究包括采访一些参与者的方法,并根据英国脱欧后的最新发展对他们的反应进行详细研究。后一种方法使我能够将前一次调查的数据与当前调查的数据进行比较。为了调查与爱尔兰边境问题有关的问题,这项工作对英国脱欧进程进行了总体概述,重点是其起源。

详细研究了大英帝国的瓦解和英国的欧洲怀疑主义的演变。

第二章从对 2016 年公投结果的调查开始,包括威尔士和苏格兰的结果。

第三章侧重于爱尔兰问题,特别是对北爱尔兰局势的回顾。第四章继续分析爱尔兰的政策路线和无协议脱欧的影响。

在第五章中,分析分为两个部分:第一部分处理最新的谈判,第二部分着重于分析的一些样本给出的答案。

结果表明相信爱尔兰统一的年轻人口似乎有希望。最后,附录致力于国外课程的深化以及英国脱欧和冠状病毒大流行后的变化。

INTRODUZIONE

«There is no plan for no-deal because we are going to get a great deal» (Freedland, 2020). This is the quotation from British prime minister Boris Johnson during the negotiations of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. This dissertation is the result of a detailed analysis of the evolution of the Brexit process.

Recently, we have heard about the so-called Brexit phenomenon and the painstakingly long negotiations. Before dealing with the problems related to the stalemate in the negotiations it is appropriate to clarify what Brexit is.

Brexit refers to an abbreviation formed by the merging of two terms, British and exit, it is nothing more than a portmanteau, with the meaning of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union. The word brings into mind the term Grexit, which has a similar sound to Brexit and was used to refer to the assumption that Greece would leave the Eurozone ("The Economic Times", 2021). The so-called Brexit is a process, that under the provisions of Article 50 of the European Union Treaty, allows the United Kingdom not to be bound by the European Union, because it is no longer associated with it.

The proposal of this controversial unbundling dates back to 23 June 2016, when after a referendum, called by the former prime minister David Cameron, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union by 51,9 % to 48,1%. The consequences starting from this referendum were devastating. A country that has proved to be vulnerable, cracked in two. One of the consequences was an endless series of negotiations that lasted five long years.

From 2016 on, the Brexiters (those that supported Brexit) claimed that Brexit was a priority for the country as a means of pointing out the value of

the British Empire. Many argue that the ultimate goal of Brexit was to restore the Anglosphere myth, a geopolitical illusion.

The reason that led me to deal with this particular topic was the will to understand the meaning of the true British issue, which is not only strictly linked to the relations with the EU but also associated with the idea of the revival of the golden years. As I have said, the Brexit process was seen by many people as a demand for Great Britain's independence. Proof of this are slogans promoted by the Leave campaigns, "Take back control" "Say no to Europe" (Prescott 2019, p. 86).

The study of this anguished decision-making process has become interesting over the past year since the year 2020 represented a turning point. Furthermore, it was considered to be the end of the transition period. In addition, making matters worse, was the spread of a new unknown virus, Covid-19. That pandemic did nothing more than delay the negotiations. After various meetings, Ursula Von der Leyen and Boris Johnson managed to ward off the risk of a No-deal Brexit.

Because of some political mistakes, the hatred of the people was stirred up by populist parties, such as that of Nigel Farage. No one was really able to demolish the idea of this political party, neither Cameron nor Theresa May. Moreover, the rise of these ideas has contributed to the spread of Euroscepticism, for this reason, many people that have studied the UKIP political party, including professor Matthew Goodwin, claimed that «Nigel Farage is the most influential politician of the modern era» (D'arcy, 2019).

The basis of this dissertation is the analysis of the Brexit process and the reasons for the stagnation of negotiations between Brussels and London, especially I will pay attention to the Irish Border which seemed to be so vexing for negotiations. For the British people, the border issue between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland plays an important geopolitical role. To avoid a return to a hard border between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, politicians propose the creation of a border in the Irish Sea. Based on the separation from the EU the case of Ireland became the priority case. In addition, the Brexit process pointed out the uncertain future of the Anglo-Irish relationship and the Good Friday Agreement (1998) too.

According to the outcome of the Brexit referendum, the highest percentage of leavers was recorded in underdeveloped small communities, while remain won in big cities such as London. Moving to Northern Ireland the result of the referendum on Brexit showed a strong majority of those who voted to remain in the EU. All the discussion about the Brexit process on the is-

land focused on the economic implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland, the loss of the open-land border, and the appalling impact on the peace process (Connolly & Doyle 2019, 223).

One of the solutions was the permanence of the whole United Kingdom in the single market or the possibility of the permanence of Northern Ireland in the Custom's union and the single market. The "Irish Sea Border" is a consequence of Brexit in Ireland, this solution consists in creating a unique economic status for Northern Ireland with the EU which was different from the rest of the UK, but which would not alter the current position where the territory is part of the United Kingdom sovereign state (Connolly & Doyle 2019, 224).

Specifically, the present study in the first chapter has been looking to analyse the historical stages of the country and the roots of Brexit. Firstly, Great Britain's journey towards EU membership was hostile and full of doubts. Furthermore, it is possible to understand, within the chapter, the origin of Euroscepticism in England. The reasons and the events leading up to Brexit will also be outlined, including the British Empire crumbling and the loss of British independence.

Following the economic collapse Great Britain tackled in the 1950s and 1960s, the United Kingdom remained isolated in comparison to the countries that were already involved in the process of European Integration. In 1973 the United Kingdom joined the European Union. The decline of the British Empire also involved Northern Ireland and occurred around 1969 with the troubles.

After 1975, the Maastricht Treaty was approved and this was the cause of the disappointment of Thatcher's Eurosceptics who dreamed of Great Britain as a new world power. Secondly, the evolution of Euroscepticism would be deepened in the UKIP party and the fact that the politician Nigel Farage campaigned against Europe. Finally, this chapter will offer a short analysis of the Anglosphere concept and the explanation of Global Britain.

In the second chapter, a focus will be dedicated to the result of the Brexit referendum and the difficulties of the conservative party led by David Cameron (2010–2016). This chapter will present different strands of political parties. On the one hand, we can find Boris Johnson and Michael Gove; on the other, there are the Labour party, Liberal Democrat, David Cameron, and George Osborne. It is clear why pro-Brexit factions began the leave campaign.

Also, the basic differences between the Remain and the Leave campaign are shown. The leave campaign focused on popular problems related to work,

education, immigration, and the return of Britishness. On the contrary, the remaining campaign highlights an overview of Britain's future, focusing the attention in particular on London's geopolitical importance. The Brexit referendum became a contributing factor to the split within the country. In addition, the chapter will also include the result of the referendum in other countries such as Scotland and Wales. As regards the Brexit process, the meaning of "Brexit means Brexit" and the aims of Theresa May: Soft Brexit or Hard Brexit, will be explained. In the end, this chapter focuses on the concerns in Ireland because of the Irish border and the demand for the salvific backstop.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that the idea of Brexit was related to the creation of geopolitical extra omnes which included all the provinces in the United Kingdom such as Scotland, Northern Ireland, and certainly to Wales and London forming a new border between the United Kingdom and Europe.

The chapter argues that the fear of new terrorist attacks and the risk of a Hard Brexit. The Anglo-Irish Agreement and the importance of the Good Friday Agreement will also be explained. This chapter explores the role of the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party). This chapter also will focus attention on the outcome of the referendum vote in June 2016, in fact, in this country, the percentage of people who voted for the remaining was 56%. One of the areas of this chapter focuses upon the risk of the backstop in Ireland and the so-called Withdrawal Agreement.

Chapter 4 looks into the Brexit process in Northern Ireland, one of the most important Brexit knots. The process of Brexit represents a serious threat to the relationship between Great Britain and Ireland and raises the question of how common travel will be implemented outside the Custom's Union. Also, this chapter explains how Brexit was in breach of the Good Friday Agreement, the Act of Union, and the Northern Ireland Act.

The chapter assesses the consequences of the implementation of Hard Brexit with *no deal*. This chapter sets out the fact that the United Kingdom has created credit lines between the Bank of England and other banks. For instance, in 2018 credit lines with China were created through One Belt One Road. The following paragraphs of this chapter were dedicated to the analysis of the political approach of the new prime minister Boris Johnson and the central issues of his plan.

The idea of the backstop thought by former prime minister Theresa May was scrapped. As we have heard, the date 31 December 2020 would have decreed the end of the transition period. By that date, Northern Ireland was

supposed to become part of the UK Customs. It was a controversial matter. The chapter also introduces another political plan which is the internal market bill thought up by Boris Johnson. This inevitably links the idea of Boris Johnson into violation context, a real violation of the Good Friday Agreement and the International Agreement between London and Brussels.

Chapter 5 examines the Brexit negotiations from a wider perspective and their impact. The final chapter is divided into two parts: Firstly, this chapter focuses on the draining negotiations between Michel Barnier and David Frost during the crucial and disastrous year because of the global pandemic. This chapter also assesses the attempt both Great Britain and the European Commission made to avoid “No deal”. Furthermore, I also paid attention to Northern Ireland.

This section examines the geopolitical balance between Great Britain and Brussels, focusing on countless negotiations and the realization of the trade agreement with Europe. So, on 24 December 2020, Boris Johnson and Ursula Von Der Leyen announced that the Agreement had been reached. The terms of the Agreement will be discussed, focusing on the Irish border in the Irish Sea. And as expected, Northern Ireland remained within the European Single Market

Secondly, the thesis investigates the hypothesis of a future referendum in Ireland after Brexit, probably in 2025 intending to unite the two Irelands. This thesis intends to assume by using interviews of Irish and English people if people still believe in the reunification of Ireland. All of this was based in the context of a possible post-Brexit slow implosion in Great Britain.

I conducted in-depth research interviewing people from second generations aged 35–60, and come from England and Ireland. I have repeated the same investigation of earlier studies done by the politician Lord Ashcroft which led his study before Brexit and the expiry of the transition period. It emerges that there are no significant differences among the older generation but the research demonstrates that young people still have hope concerning the reunification of Ireland. The outcome in terms of percentage will be discussed and explained in detail in the conclusion of this thesis.

Thanks to this thesis it was possible to obtain important information about this controversial process lasting four/five years. It also sought to understand and solve the so-called Irish question.

Finally, the thesis will dedicate an appendix in which will be analyzed the Erasmus Programme, enduring the surveys with figures and charts showing changes about free movements of students in Great Britain after Brexit and the spread of Covid-19. Particular attention shall be given to the proposals of different Universities.

