Politeja
No. 5(68), 2020, pp. 257-277
https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.17.2020.68.13

Stephen DAVIES
Polish Academy of Sciences
dsteve910@gmail.com

Małgorzata KUŁAKOWSKA
Jagiellonian University in Kraków
malgorzata.kulakowska@uj.edu.pl

MORE THAN A STORM IN A TEACUP?

BRITISH NATIONALS IN POLAND IN THE TIME OF BREXIT

ABSTRACT The paper will present and analyse the results of qualitative research conducted by Stephen Davies with British nationals residing in Poland. The research questions explore their attitudes towards Britain and Brexit, as well as their future plans connected with their place of residence. The dominant themes of the paper are the questions of belonging and attachment. The analysis is preceded by a short introductory section which presents the context of the Brexit processes, as well as the results of research into EU migrants in the United Kingdom and British nationals living in different parts of the European Union.

Keywords: Brexit, British nationals, belonging, social anchoring, Poland

CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL INSPIRATIONS

In the years following the 2016 Brexit referendum many people still hoped that the process might somehow be stopped or reversed. These hopes were mostly extinguished in the general election of December 2019, when Boris Johnson secured a decisive Conservative majority in the House of Commons, making Brexit almost inevitable.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland left the European Union on January 31, 2020, entering a transition period which should finish by the end of 2020.[1] As the end of the year approaches, the UK does not seem to be well prepared for leaving without a trade deal, while the media report immanent delays and possible chaos on January 1, 2021.[2] The added impact of the coronavirus pandemic has made the challenging UK-EU negotiations almost impossible to manage. Pressure is mounting to find a solution to the controversial issues of the fishing industry and government subsidies to business. To further exacerbate these tensions, the issue of border checks in the Irish Sea threatens the possibility of the smooth flow of goods, while the attempt of Boris Johnson's cabinet to seriously modify clauses of the previously agreed Withdrawal Agreement has undermined trust and added new layers of uncertainty.[3] As we approach the end of the year, on-going negotiations are intensifying, while the country is coming to grips with the second wave of coronavirus under the newly implemented strategy of regional tiers.[4]

Brexit has created a new reality for British citizens living in Poland and EU citizens living in the UK. Even though all current EU citizens residing in the UK or EU member states before the end of 2020 will have their rights to work and their residency protected (due to the Withdrawal Agreement), there are still many new regulations and obligations to process.

The British Government has been preparing a number of documents designed to assist British citizens living in EU member states during the transition period. The website devoted to the transition period emphasises the significance and the urgency of the process, with headlines such as 'Make sure you're ready' and 'Time is running out'.[5] The special section devoted to 'Living in Poland' lists all the necessary steps required of British citizens

1 N. Walker, "Brexit Timeline: Events Leading to the UK's Exit from the European Union", *UK Parliament*, at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7960/>, 22 June 2020.

2 D. Molloy, "Brexit Border Software Developers Warn of Delays", *BBC News*, 27 October 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-54706263>, 27 October 2020.

3 C. Morris, "Brexit: Why is the Internal Market Bill Ruffling Feathers?", *BBC News*, 10 November 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/54088596>, 30 November 2020.

4 See "Brexit: UK in 'Last Leg' of Trade Talks with EU, Says Raab", *BBC News*, 29 November 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-55120814>, 30 November 2020; "Covid: What Are the New Tiers and Lockdown Rules in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?", *BBC News*, 27 November 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-52530518>, 30 November 2020.

5 "The UK Transition", *gov.uk*, at <https://www.gov.uk/transition>, 30 October 2020.

from January 1, 2021, with advice on residency rights, travel and work.[6] Furthermore, over the last couple of years, meetings have been organised by British Embassies and consulates across Europe, also in Poland, to provide information on the progress of Brexit.

Certainly, much has been clarified by the Withdrawal Agreement, but there are still ongoing concerns relating to future UK-EU relations. It is certain that travelling to and working in the EU will no longer be a friction-free experience. There are questions and doubts concerning travel arrangements, taxation, access to healthcare, pensions and other financial issues, as well as political rights. Having two 'homes', one in mainland Europe the other across the English Channel, or managing a company that deals with export and import of goods will become much more difficult.

POST-BREXIT MIGRATION DILEMMAS

This situation has prompted researchers to analyse how Brexit processes might impact the livelihoods and feelings of belonging of the EU migrants in the UK and British nationals in EU member countries. The research on EU migrants reveals a growing sense of anxiety, with many questioning their migration choices or bonds with the host country. A key impact of Brexit on EU citizens is the long-running uncertainty connected with the process.[7] Migrant affiliation and incorporation in the receiving society is seen from an emotional perspective, combined with the existing bonds.[8]

EU citizens in the UK live with the feeling that they are not wanted, despite many years of working hard, paying taxes, and building their lives in the country. Europeans, who have relocated to the UK, exercising their right to freedom of movement as EU citizens, now have their sense of security threatened. Crucially, as their status is repositioned from that of EU citizen to migrant or third country national, it also has an impact on their sense of belonging.[9]

Research on Polish migrants in the UK by Agnieszka Trąbka and Paula Pustulka highlights social anchors and significant others as important factors influencing migrants' post-Brexit plans and attitudes.[10] The concept of social anchoring is taken from Grzymala-Kazlowska, who describes it as *the process of finding significant reference*; thus understood, anchors enable migrants to *locate their place in their world, give form to their own sense of being and provide them with a base for psychological and social*

6 "Living in Poland", *gov.uk*, at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/living-in-poland>, 29 October 2020.

7 M. Kilkey, L. Ryan, "Unsettling Events: Understanding Migrants' Responses to Geopolitical Transformative Episodes through a Life-Course Lens", *International Migration Review*, vol. 55, no. 1 (2020).

8 R. MasGiralt, "The Emotional Geographies of Migration and Brexit: Tales of Unbelonging", *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2020), pp. 29-45.

9 R. Ranta, N. Nancheva, "Unsettled: Brexit and European Union Nationals' Sense of Belonging", *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2019), p. 2199.

10 A. Trąbka, P. Pustulka, "Bees & Butterflies: Polish Migrants' Social Anchoring, Mobility and Risks Post-Brexit", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 46, no. 13 (2020), pp. 2664-2681.

functioning.[11] Trąbka and Pustulka also refer to the concept of 'differentiated embedding' as explored by Louise Ryan in her research on Polish migrants.[12] The aim of this concept was to explore how various structural and social settings intertwine with the processes of migrants negotiating attachment and belonging.

BRITS ELSEWHERE

Research has also been conducted into British nationals living in EU member countries.

This situation in which many British citizens are now questioning whether they qualify to live in an EU country after Brexit is new and disorientating, particularly for older Brits who had expected to peacefully retire in a community in which they have found a new life and a sense of belonging.

Information is scarce and often unclear or contradictory, and UK citizens abroad do not have confidence in the UK government to act in their best interests. A poll carried out among British residents in France and Spain in 2018 found that 70% were not reassured by government actions in announcing phase one of the Withdrawal Agreement.[13] It should be added that this post-referendum period has also been emotionally challenging, with a lack of clarity and false hopes of remaining options still on the table. The situation has led many British nationals to consider applying for the citizenship of the country in which they reside.

Fortunately, most EU countries allow dual nationality (with a few exceptions like Austria, Estonia, Slovakia, The Netherlands) and applying for a second citizenship has been one of the ways in which those living in mainland Europe can safeguard the rights they stand to lose as a result of Brexit.

During Michaela Benson's research in France 2003–2005, she found no one interested in the idea of applying for French citizenship.[14] However, by 2017 this had become a common way of securing dual nationality. Pierre Breteau also documented evidence of what he calls an 'explosion of naturalisation' in the Schengen area (Fig. 1).[15] The most significant countries for numbers of Brits applying for naturalisation are Germany, France, and Belgium.

---

[11] A. Grzymala-Kazlowska, "Social Anchoring: Immigrant Identity, Security and Integration Reconnected?", *Sociology*, vol. 50, no. 6 (2016), pp. 1123-1139; Ibid., p. 11.

[12] L. Ryan, "Differentiated Embedding: Polish Migrants in London Negotiating Belonging Over Time", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2018), pp. 233-251.

[13] M. Benson, K. O'Reilly, K. Collins, *What Does Brexit Mean for UK Citizens Living in the EU27? Talking Citizens' Rights with UK Citizens Across the EU27*, 2018, at <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/research-papers/what-does-brexit-mean-for-uk-citizens-living-in-the-eu27-talking-citizens-rights-with-uk-citizens-across-the-eu27/>, 6 November 2020.

[14] M. Benson, *Brexit and the British in France*, London 2020, at <http://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/28222/>, 5 November 2020.

[15] P. Breteau, "Brexit: le nombre de naturalisations de Britanniques dans l'espace Schengen a explosé en 2017", *Le Monde*, 16 November 2018, at <https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/

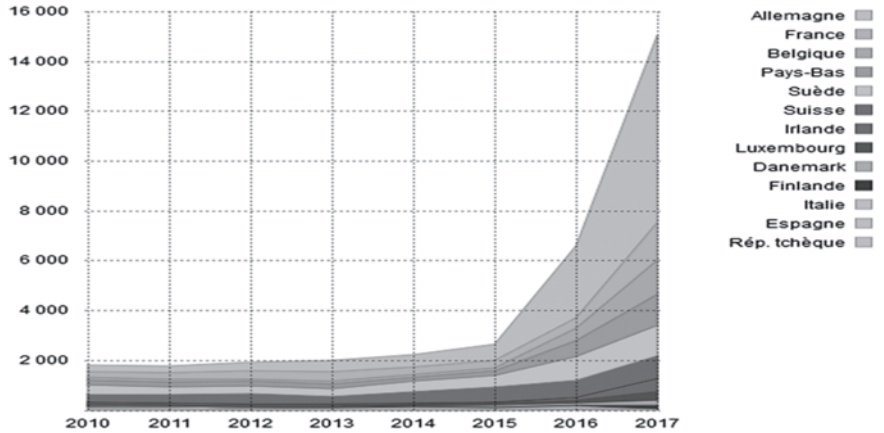

Figure 1. The number of British nationals securing citizenship in the EU countries (2010-2017).[16]

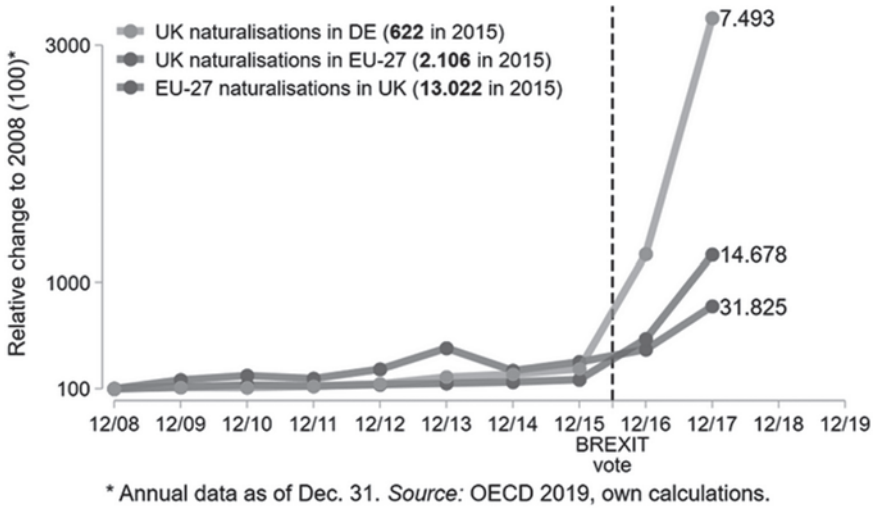

Figure 2. The rising number of naturalisations of UK citizens in Germany and EU-27 and of EU-27 citizens in the UK.[17]

Auer and Tetlow's analysis of EU-27 naturalisation figures highlight this dramatic rise throughout Europe and particularly in Germany (Figure 2).[18]

article/2018/11/16/brexit-le-nombre-de-naturalisations-de-britanniques-dans-l-espace-schengen-a-explose-en-2017_5384517_4355770.html>, 6 November 2020.

16 Ibid. The top 7 countries are: Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the Republic of Ireland.

17 Ibid.

18 D. Auer, D. Tetlow, "Guest Blog: More Britons Willing to Leave UK to Escape Brexit Uncertainty", *Compas*, 28 October 2019, at <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2019/brexit-uncertainty-

In his account of becoming a Belgian citizen, Gareth Harding explains that he has too much to lose and very few remaining connections with the UK.[19] He describes Belgium as *where I learned to drive, got my Master's, met my partner, had my kids, bought my first house and spent almost all my working life.*[20] Although he admits to not feeling at all Belgian after 25 years in the country, having lost his rights to vote, work and exercise freedom of movement in the EU, he really feels there is no other choice.

Michaela Benson found in France that the majority of residents have had little trouble in demonstrating their ability to satisfy the requirements for residence or citizenship. Not everyone has the financial means to do this, however, and they are facing the possibility of being unwillingly repatriated. Such situations *emerge as new sites for bordering, sorting 'deserving' from 'undeserving' (EU) citizens.*[21]

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

The aim of this paper is to present the results of research conducted among British nationals living in Poland. It is definitely not the most numerous or visible group of migrants in Poland and is not always visible in official statistics. For example, estimates published by the National Office for Statistics (Główny Urząd Statystyczny) in June 2020 suggested more than 2 million foreigners would be residing in Poland at the end of 2019; it included no data on British nationals (as they did not make the top 10 of the most popular nationalities).[22] On the other hand, official data provided by the Office for Foreigners states that among the 450 000 foreigners with valid residence permits in 2019, more than 6 000 were British nationals.[23] Fortunately, more insight can be gained on those numbers.[24] Out of those 6476 people, the greatest numbers were

motivates-risk-taking-by-brits-who-decide-to-leave-the-uk-and-theres-usually-no-turning-back/>, 30 November 2020.

19 G. Harding, "Becoming Belgian", *The Brussels Times*, 19 February 2019, at <https://www.brusselstimes.com/opinion/53868/becoming-belgian/>, 6 November 2020.

20 Ibid.

21 M. Benson, *Brexit and the British in France...*, p. 4.

22 M. Beręsewicz, Z. Kostrzewa, D. Godlewski, "Populacja cudzoziemców w Polsce w czasie COVID-19", *GUS*, p. 9.

23 J. Dudziak, "450 tys. cudzoziemców z zezwoleniami na pobyt", *Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców*, 21 July 2020, at <https://udsc.prowly.com/103682-450-tys-cudzoziemcow-z-zezwoleniami-na-pobyt>, 25 November 2020. The differences in data available illustrate challenges connected with monitoring the international migration flows. These discrepancies should not be that surprising if we take into account that official British data from 2017 point to 2200 British nationals residing in Poland, while UN data suggest more than 36 thousand. See G. Sturge, "Migration Statistics", *UK Parliament*, 5 June 2020, at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06077/>, 26 November 2020. Compare United Nations, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, at <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>, 26 November 2020.

24 Statystyki – Polska – Aktualne dokumenty – Wykresy – Rok: 2020 – Kraj: UK, *migracja.gov,pl*, at <https://migracje.gov.pl/statystyki/zakres/polska/typ/dokumenty/widok/wykresy/rok/2020/kraj/UK/>, 26 November 2020.

registered in Mazovian Voivodeship (2260) and Malopolskie Voivodeship (1016). Most of them (almost 80%) were men (5032) versus women (1444), and most were between 20 and 59 years old (more than 80%). The data gathered for this project also reflects these trends.

The following analysis will be based on qualitative research conducted by Stephen Davies from June 2019 to May 2020. However, some preliminary research undertaken by Malgorzata Kulakowska at the beginning of 2020 was also used in the pre-conceptualisation stage.[25]

The data gathered by Davies are part of a larger study into UK nationals living long-term in Poland. Between June 2019 and May 2020, 56 semi-structured interviews were conducted with UK nationals living at least three years in Poland. The age of participants ranged from mid-20s to mid-70s, many of whom have been living in Poland for over 20 years. 14 participants were female and 42 were male. The study sample was evenly split between the metropolitan area of Warsaw and smaller cities, towns, and rural locations around Poland. The Warsaw group mostly consisted of English teachers, academics, self-employed business people, and workers in multinational companies. The group from outside of the capital also included teachers, some of whom own their own language schools, self-employed business-people, and retired couples (one partner usually with Polish heritage).

The initial group of participants included personal contacts and participants identified through a loose 'snowballing' approach. The sample was then extended through a general invitation to participate posted on social media groups made up predominantly of UK citizens living in Poland. The sample includes UK nationals from all parts of the UK, including citizens with Polish and other minority ethnic heritage. The main criteria for participation in the study was that the participant held a British passport and had spent a significant part of their life in the UK.

The Warsaw interviews took place face-to-face between June 2019 and January 2020. For the most part, interviews outside of the capital were conducted by phone or via social media platforms between February and June 2020. This was extremely fortunate timing, since the national lockdown imposed by the government in March to stop the spread of COVID-19 would have had a disruptive impact on the possibility of conducting further face-to-face interviews. All interviews were recorded either on a smartphone or Dictaphone. They were then transcribed, coded, and analysed using MAXQDA 2018 software. All names and identifying details are anonymised. Follow-up interviews in Spring/Summer 2021 will aim to estimate the impact of Brexit on the lives of the project participants.

A significantly large number of participants in this study share an armed-forces background, usually as forces children, but there are also former servicemen.[26] A large

[25] It took place in February 2020, and involved unstructured individual and group interviews with five British nationals, all men.

[26] There is also evidence of this phenomenon on closed Facebook groups for British migrants, in which former servicemen proudly display their regimental badges as avatars.

majority of British citizens in the research sample are financially secure and in a stable partnership, usually with children. For the most part, their basic psychological needs of financial security, self-esteem, and the opportunity to lead a good life are met. Second, many Brits living in Poland have sufficient capital investments to make them financially secure: several have worked in the city of London and have money invested in property in the UK and Poland; those of retirement age are often protected by multiple pensions which are unlikely to lose value, even in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Moreover, the vast majority of UK citizens in Poland live in a house with a garden or a spacious flat with a balcony. They usually have unlimited access to broadband internet and at least one car. They are registered as long-term residents and pay their taxes. Most are in long-term relationships with Polish partners and many have children. Generally speaking, they are cushioned from the full impact of Brexit and coronavirus and know they are lucky. One resident described her Warsaw suburb during the pandemic as *a monoculture of middle-class families who jog a lot* where everyone wears masks and gloves. Aware that life is very different in other parts of the city, she describes her experience as "my little bubble".

RESULTS

As the title or the article suggests, although many or even most British residents in Poland (and elsewhere in Europe for that matter) may not be too materially disrupted by the UK leaving the European Union, it is a generally unsettling experience in which a large number of individuals face difficult choices and possible hardships. The dominant themes of the paper are the questions of belonging and attachment. We cover the topic of social relations with relatives and friends, the feelings caused by Brexit, anticipated difficulties linked with it, and finally, dilemmas concerning citizenship and future plans.

SUPPORT GROUPS AND ANCHORS

It seems clear that the most significant social group for British residents during the Brexit process has been close family – parents, siblings, children and their partners, both in the UK and Poland. For this reason, these relationships needed protection from becoming too politicized over the divisive issue of Brexit.[27] Close family members in Britain very often had the same political convictions as participants and voted for the UK to remain in the European Union. However, this was not always the case.

[27] Research conducted in the UK by Katherine Davies showed that despite often having radically different political beliefs and stances over Brexit, family members made skilful efforts to avoid divisive language when discussing politics. Strategies for avoiding conflict often involved conceding points, changing the topic to something more neutral, or biting your tongue. See K. Davies, "Talking Politics? Brexit and Everyday Family Relationships", *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 19 June 2019, at <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/talking-politics-brexit-and-everyday-family-relationships/>, 6 November 2020.

Although having different views on Brexit to one's close family was not common, it was not entirely unrepresented in the sample. It was more likely that a more distant relative, by British standards, such as an aunt, uncle, or the spouse of a sibling, would hold views that were opposed to those of the participants. Implied but not always clearly stated was the sense that these family members were not particularly close and were not, therefore, worth worrying about in the long term. This shows that long-distance family relationships tend to remain strong, despite the physical distance and years of living abroad. In times when there is a significant focus on and reorientation around the sense of national belonging, it would seem unwise to take any action that might weaken one's support network.

Indeed, the potential disruption to future visits, particularly when accompanied by a Polish spouse or children, is a direct consequence of Brexit that is often upsetting to the research participants and their families:

Erica: My parents are basically sad about it because they're in their 70s now. They're annoyed that it's going to potentially make my son visiting them more difficult. OK, I can get him a British passport, but it's the cost, the hassle...and they're pretty angry about it still.

Jill: I remember going back to the UK before Poland was in the EU and my husband standing in a different queue at the airport from me. Are we going to go back to that?

Friends also constitute a strong reference and support group. As a result, friendship ties are also being protected against becoming politicized. However, this is true mostly for closer friends, and the most important connections. Patterns of topic-avoidance, such as avoiding the subject or agreeing to disagree, are in evidence with friends back in the UK. Links are likely to be severed with all but best friends, who along with close family are usually the most important links in participants' support groups and who represent strong anchoring points with the home country for the transnational identities of Brits living in Poland:

Alek: There were some people I stopped talking to because of it [Brexit], who were never very strong friends...but, for my best friend, it wasn't worth losing a relationship over.

When it comes to Polish partners and children, there seems to be a divide across gender lines on openness about or the need for British citizens to discuss Brexit with close family in Poland. When asked, male participants usually said they had not discussed the process with their partners in any depth. This could be bound up with the way in which participants are socialised into coping with emotional distress, with men perhaps more likely to internalise their feelings or to distance themselves from the issue through humour.

Tony: It's a tough thing to discuss with people, because politics always is.

Jason: I talk quite a lot about it with my daughter and have a good laugh.

Alternatively, female participants more often expressed a need to discuss the issue with family, despite the fact that their needs were not always understood.

Jill: My son, I guess he's too young to understand it. He knows that when my brother sends text messages to me, he always asks how many times Uncle Ian was swearing...because it's usually about Brexit. (...) My husband is just sad because he doesn't understand why a country would do that. But he says he wishes that I could let it go.

Lynn: My husband laughs about it...he has a different perspective. He says 'You Brits. Look what you've done in the world. And look at you now'.

Furthermore, most Poles were shocked by the outcome of the Brexit referendum. Living in one of the most pro-membership countries in the EU, many struggled to comprehend what had motivated the UK to commit what they view as cultural and economic self-harm. English teachers and employees in international companies report students and colleagues asking them to explain why it had happened and generally being unable to do so. For others, the workplace was a space for letting off steam through jokes and banter:

Sonia: I was teaching a group of kids who were very interested in England....and they were just all the time 'Why do you want to leave?' (laugh)

FEELINGS ON BREXIT

Concerning the attitudes and voting behaviour of participants during the 2016 Brexit referendum, most (48) of the UK nationals residing in Poland declared a desire for the UK to remain within the European Union, with only 8 in favour of leaving. Interestingly, although UK nationals in Warsaw were almost exclusively 'Remainers' (26/28), almost one quarter (6/28) of those living outside of Warsaw could be described as 'Leavers'. The small number of participants who actually voted in the referendum heavily favoured the remain option (8/11).[28]

It should not be surprising then that Brexit causes strong emotions and makes many people reflect on their future decisions. With the commencement of the withdrawal process, a few were still angry about the referendum result, but most were sad and frustrated. By equal measure, most had moved on, conceding that the general election of December 2019 had taken the Brexit process beyond the point of return. Now they described their reaction as "ambivalent", "generally indifferent" and "rather detached". Several participants arranged Brexit parties or had a few drinks, symbolically marking the removal of another anchor as their country drifted further away.

The participants in the study often admitted to feelings of general confusion caused by the lack of clear and direct information and the sense that no one was really in control of the Brexit negotiations. For most, it was very difficult to predict what the final outcome would be and what impact Britain leaving the EU would have on their personal and working lives. This situation has left most participants feeling unsettled and having to re-examine aspects of their lives which had previously been unproblematic.

Key concerns with the drawn-out Brexit process, which have existed since the referendum, are the confusion over the status and rights of British residents in EU countries. There are also worries about long-term health provision, particularly for those with pre-existing or chronic conditions, how state pensions might be affected, about the

[28] The issue of disenfranchisement is briefly analysed in the further sections of the paper. See also footnote 31.

rights to cross borders and to work or live in other EU countries, about voting rights, property rights, and how their partners' and children's visits or future settlement in the UK might be restricted.

Many UK citizens moved to Poland, particularly after 2004, with the reasonable expectation that they would have the same rights and benefits as all other EU citizens, that freedom of movement would allow them to relocate to another EU member country or return to the UK with their partners and children with no problem, or that they could choose to settle down and eventually retire in the receiving country with full access to state health care and pensions accrued throughout their working life. The majority of UK citizens in Poland are of working age and many still have young or dependent children, but the referendum result has left several questions hanging over these families and the previous assumption of security and continuity.

FEELINGS ON BRITAIN AND BRITISH INSTITUTIONS

In terms of the institutional support, as previously mentioned, meetings have been organised at the British Embassy in Warsaw and consulates in large Polish cities to provide information on the progress of Brexit. A couple of respondents had been to these meetings and shared their notes in social media groups online. For the most part, they found the meetings relatively uninformative and the embassy staff and guests often unable to clearly answer questions. Other respondents mentioned having worked on embassy projects or sending proposals for future projects. However, they were unimpressed with a perceived lack of responsiveness and disinterest from embassy staff. The general feeling is that the British Embassy is not particularly interested in its own citizens living in Poland.

Carol: I did some work with them...then they lost contact with me and didn't seem to bother about it. They didn't seem to realise I was doing them a favour...It's commerce and trade, especially post-Brexit.

In November 2019, using iconic British foods such as Marmite on toast, and Bourbon and Custard Cream biscuits, advertisements on the Embassy website exhorted the audience to 'feel more at home' by voting in the upcoming UK general election. It might have been assumed that these 'homely' traditional images would provoke nostalgia for the 'old country' and remind viewers of those conservative values that might motivate them to vote in the general election.

However, the idea missed the mark, since many of those who saw it were disenfranchised.[29] In the run-up to the referendum, many participants discovered that they were

[29] For British nationals residing abroad to be entitled to vote in national elections, they need to have been registered to vote in the UK in the last 15 years. That has been a divisive and contentious issue, especially in the context of Brexit. See "Types of Election, Referendums, and Who Can Vote", *gov.uk*, at <https://www.gov.uk/elections-in-the-uk>, 28 November 2020; "Overseas Voters", *The Electoral Commission*, at <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/overseas-voters>, 28 November 2020; E.-M. Poptcheva, "Disenfranchisement of EU Citizens Resident Abroad.

ineligible to vote after an absence of 15 years from the UK. This meant that close to half of the sample (23/56) were disenfranchised, the vast majority (17/23) being long-term residents in Warsaw.

Figure 3.[30]

Figure 4.[31]

The images posted by the British Embassy, rather than galvanising the audience, led some Brits to express resentment and alienation, and a feeling of greater distance from the home imagined in the promotional material. Trust in British institutions has

Situation in National and European Elections in EU Member States", *Publications Office of the Europe Union*, 2015, at <http://bookshop.europa.eu/uri?target=EUB:NOTICE:QA0215514:EN:HTML>, 28 December 2019; M. Benson, "The Election and the Overseas Vote in the EU", *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 9 December 2019, at <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-election-and-the-overseas-vote-in-the-eu/>, 28 November 2020.

30 Profile: "British Embassy Warsaw", *Facebook*, at <https://www.facebook.com/ukinpoland/posts/2976992492315770>, 28 November 2020.

31 Ibid., at <https://www.facebook.com/ukinpoland/posts/2976988958982790>, 28 November 2020.

generally declined, particularly in the ability or willingness of the British government to safeguard the interests of their own citizens in other EU Member States.

Almost no one was optimistic about the future of their birthplace and some felt a particular bitterness about what they perceived to be happening in their country:

Steve: I think people going nuts in the UK honestly believe the great British Empire will suddenly rise again tomorrow while they're all hungover!

Ryan: British society has become unpleasant. A cold shower may be what it needs.

Most participants are upset that the drawn-out and chaotic Brexit negotiations within the UK parliament and with the EU have made their birth country a laughing-stock. Julian also believes *the myth about Britishness has been seriously damaged... fair play and all the rest of it*. This is a view mirrored by others over the UK government's struggle to push through an Internal Market Bill, which would knowingly break international law.[32]

ACQUIRING POLISH CITIZENSHIP

Common tropes of the British living abroad, fuelled to a large extent by the media and popular imagination, picture them as colonial expat types, retirees who sold up to seek a place in the Spanish sun or middle-class bon-viveurs who convert old French farmyards and enjoy the local cuisine. Although they might go a long way towards assimilating by learning the language and immerse themselves in Polish culture, it has not been standard practice for Brits to wish to adopt a new Polish citizenship. Once Poland joined the EU, there was no real reason to apply for citizenship, since living within the EU guaranteed most of the rights a Polish passport would bring, without some of the hidden obligations it might entail. However, Brexit has turned lives upside down and citizenship appears a lot more attractive than previously.

Polish citizenship can be obtained in four ways. It may be restored, requiring the production of several proofs and documents. It can be acquired by law due to one parent holding Polish citizenship, which is automatically passed on to their children, and it may be granted by the President of Poland.[33] However, the most likely option for British citizens is to seek legal recognition as a naturalised Polish citizen. There are several ways in which this recognition may be acquired, the most likely being: living continuously in Poland for three years and holding an EC residence permit or permanent residence permit, issued on the basis of a regular legal income; living continuously in Poland for two years and being married to a Polish citizen for at least three years, or living legally and continuously in Poland for 10 years with a stable income whilst holding an EC residence and being considered a long-term resident and the owner of the premises

[32] L. O'Carroll, "Government Admits New Brexit Bill 'Will Break International Law'", *The Guardian*, 8 September 2020, at <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/sep/08/government-admits-new-brexit-bill-will-break-international-law>, 28 November 2020.

[33] See "Uzyskaj polskie obywatelstwo", *gov.pl*, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/uzyskaj-polskie-obywatelstwo>, 27 November 2020.

where you live. Another significant factor is the requirement to pass a Polish B1-level language examination.

Several of the participants in this study are of Polish parentage and have come to live in Poland with an English spouse. Aside from the daunting paperwork, this has made application for citizenship relatively easy and they have no worries concerning any direct impact of Brexit for them, their partner or their children, whether or not they were born in Poland. Dual nationality also gives them the option to return to the UK in the future if they wish.

Erica: If we'd dropped out on March 31, I would have been able to turn up with my Irish passport.

Dual nationality is also helpful for some of the participants who hold Irish passports. Some have an Irish parent or grandparent, whilst others have had an Irish document since childhood; others like Aron, who arrived in Poland two years ago, have only just received their passport. Aron just happened to be born in Northern Ireland: *I cheated a bit…As far as the Polish government is concerned, I'm an Irishman*. Knowing the risks he faced as a British citizen coming to live in Poland, Aron took the opportunity to secure an Irish passport. As an armed forces child, being born in Northern Ireland had previously meant very little in the scheme of his life.

The study has only found one British citizen who has applied for and received Polish citizenship through the presidential route. For those who do not have Polish citizenship, it seems that no one in the sample had seriously considered applying for it in the past. There are several possible reasons for this position. Firstly, until recently many of them considered themselves to be Europeans with the full rights of EU citizens. Secondly, having juggled their European identity, along with an official British identity, as well as other regional and local feelings of allegiance, most do not feel Polish at all.

Joan, for example, is a Cold-war veteran who had previously travelled the world as a performer. She has lived in Poland through thick and thin with her Polish husband since the 1970s; however, she is proud to be British and, although it would be a simple procedure for her, she has no desire to obtain a Polish passport. Nevertheless, she did decide to obtain passports for her children when she considered the fees of their private school to be unreasonably high, thus ensuring a state education for them. After almost 30 years in Poland, Eric has similar feelings. Even with a Polish passport, he would still feel British, and obtaining citizenship would be a purely instrumental decision to ensure his right to work and own property.

The above attitude now seems to be the exception rather than the rule, however. Many are considering or are actively involved in the process of obtaining Polish citizenship in order to retain or recover what they consider to be their fundamental rights. Although Erica could apply and qualify for Polish citizenship, for the moment she chooses not to. She is not the only British citizen who is wating to see how things develop. She has no real problem with losing her right to vote in British elections as she believes this privilege should only be afforded to people resident and paying taxes in the country, a view which is not uncommon among participants in this study. However, she is aggrieved not only that she has fallen victim to the 15-year rule, but that she also stands

to lose her right to vote in European Union and Polish local elections. Her friend Jackie, however, has decided to apply for citizenship in order to retain her voting rights. Tony has similar views on taxation and representation. Although he is only beginning his third year in Poland, he is already thinking about how to integrate into Polish society and apply for citizenship in order to exercise his rights:

Tony: I don't see why I wouldn't... I live here, I pay my taxes. You know, I'm a contributing member to the economy here and to society. I don't see why I wouldn't want to be a citizen and be freely able to come and go from the country.

Jill lives in Warsaw. Several of her colleagues have already acquired citizenship as a logical way of securing their livelihood in Poland when the UK leaves the EU, but the issue was not so cut and dried for her:

Jill: It feels a bit fake getting the citizenship of another country, becoming Polish. They're much more matter-of-fact about it, you know. Brexit's coming, do it! But I found I needed to get my head round it a bit more.

However, Jill did finally register for the Polish language exam and passed it relatively easily. Now she is in the final stage of securing Polish citizenship. Billy lives in a large town in the south of the country. He has a British friend who already has Polish citizenship, but he feels different here and self-identifies as European, rather than English or British. He knows he could go back to the UK if he wished but he is worried about the status of his wife and children should they return after Britain has left the EU. He admits that, *Before Brexit, it didn't seem relevant. I couldn't see any sense in dual nationality*. Now he is more interested in the potential of dual nationality and would definitely consider it seriously if it became necessary for employment or freedom of movement purposes.

Jason: My national status would be changed to non-EU national...which made me think about getting a Polish passport...but that was the only reason I feel I need a Polish passport.

Like many others in the study, Oliver is taking a wait-and-see attitude. He is adamant about only applying for citizenship as a last resort. He does, however, maintain a stance toward his hybrid migrant position that I would describe as 'double patriotism':

Oliver: I'm English and I always will be. I would go to arms for Poland...it's my home... I'm a part of this country. I know I'm not Polish. I could be on paper but I'm not interested in that. But I see the Polish people as my family.

The biggest obstacle facing Brits who might consider applying for citizenship is the Polish language. Many believe the language is too hard and that it will take them a long time to learn it to B1 level, the intermediate linguistic competence which is required for all skills – speaking, reading, listening and writing – in order to receive the certificate.

FUTURE PLANS

There seems to be a certain ambiguity in the respondents' attitude towards future plans. Some seemed not to be bothered too much by the whole situation. Interestingly, there was no specific mention of expected negative side-effects of the whole process,

suggesting that, to some degree, problems were being strategically dealt with. Despite not being entirely convinced about their future prospects, most seemed to believe that they would not be unduly affected. A mostly unspoken sense that being a British citizen constituted some guarantee of future security pervaded the discussion, even if their own government seemed in no hurry to vouch for them. However, those who supported the 'leave' option were less reticent about voicing this conclusion:

Tony: I don't believe now that Brexit will have too much of an impact on travelling and residency if you're meeting the right criteria for the place you're living in.

However, not everyone was in such a secure position, since the financial circumstances of some British migrants place them in an uncertain situation. Health care is a good example, as those with chronic conditions are entitled to free medical care under the conditions of S1 entitlement. This system may not be supported by the British government in the case of a no-deal outcome. Pam, for example, is not sure whether her husband Jim will qualify for state health insurance:

Pam: We may have to move back to England, but we won't go happily. We'll be kicking and screaming going back. We'll lose our healthcare. At our age, that's the most important thing.

It seemed clear though that the prospect of coming back to the UK was not especially appealing.

Another factor which makes some respondents decidedly uncomfortable is the political direction in which their adopted country is heading. The social divisiveness resulting from the struggle over Brexit and the particular hostility towards those who voted to remain is one of the reasons they do not consider returning to the UK as an option.

However, they are also not unequivocally enthusiastic about the situation in Poland or Polish politics. After Hungary, Poland is considered to be the most illiberal democracy in the EU.[34] The undermining of the rule of law, the increased political control over the state television, particularly the news programmes, the encroachment of the government on women's reproductive rights and the attack on LGBT freedoms have all been seen as a drift to the political and cultural right. One participant stated *This is not the country I came to!* another now regards herself as "doubly stateless".

For those respondents who might consider moving on, in the near or distant future, there is no question of returning to the UK, a country they left many years ago and a place they feel largely estranged from. Several respondents imagine a career move or taking retirement in another EU country, preferably located close to the Mediterranean. However, while some are considering relocation away from Poland, judging by the number of enquiries in Facebook groups, there is no shortage of others planning to settle in the country, since they consider 'Brexit Britain' to be a country they no longer wish to live in.

From Davies' observations of dedicated Facebook groups, there are British couples and individuals preparing to move to Poland in the very near future who ask a range

[34] S. Bill, B. Stanley, "Whose Poland Is It to Be? PiS and the Struggle Between Monism and Pluralism", *East European Politics*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2020), pp. 378-394.

of questions concerning insurance, employment law, accommodation and other issues related to starting a new life in the country. There are also questions about how best to learn Polish, suggesting that they intend to stay for a length of time, although, at present, there seem to be few enquiries about how to secure Polish citizenship.

Several factors are key in the ability of British nationals to maintain or take back control of the situation. First is the ability to live in an environment which is generally benevolent to British and American citizens in Poland. UK citizens living in Poland generally experience greater acceptance among the general population than most other migrant groups. No single British citizen in Poland in this study has reported a feeling of being unwelcome or experienced any form of discrimination from the general public or authorities in Poland. Second, as mentioned before, is the ability to manage Brexit risks thanks to financial security acquired before. Finally, due to the length of time spent in Poland in full-time employment, and having a Polish spouse and usually children, eligibility for permanent settlement or citizenship, should they decide to apply for it, is more or less taken for granted.

Some decisions have already been made or strategic choices followed. Those with Polish heritage have usually exercised their right to hold dual citizenship, most of those (but not all) with Irish heritage or by accident of birth in Northern Ireland have secured their rights with an Irish passport, and many others who do not already have Polish citizenship are either engaged in the application process or thinking about how to apply and how to improve their Polish language skills. There is also a small group who trusts that things will somehow work themselves out and that they will be able to continue living in Poland as they have so far without having to secure Polish citizenship.

However, these factors do not entirely resolve the sense of unease. With the combination of the pandemic and Brexit, many anticipate some degree of unsettlement and personal financial hardship in the long term

There are also UK citizens who currently do not have the peace of mind of their compatriots. For a range of different reasons their life situations do not fit neatly into the categories of family life, citizenship or financial security described above:

Ade is a cross-border awareness trainer. Although he has worked on government and private contracts for over 10 years in Poland, he is registered in another EU country. However, for personal reasons he cannot apply for citizenship in that country. His British passport is due for renewal soon and his attempts to clarify his situation after Brexit have been inconclusive.

Jo moved to Poland as a child. When Poland joined the EU, there seemed no need to apply for Polish citizenship. After studying in the UK and marrying a US citizen, she thought her recent return to Poland would be "like coming home". However, she senses a change in people's attitudes to outsiders and struggles to recognise the place where she grew up. Now she fears that she will lose her EU citizenship as her language skills may not be good enough to pass the language exam for Polish citizenship. She feels torn about going to live in a third country as she does not want to leave her English mother behind.

Recently divorced, Carol has bought property to give her "more roots". However, despite concluding the paperwork for her new residence papers, with Brexit in the UK

and an awareness of the growing illiberal influence in Polish politics, she confesses: "I don't feel like I'm safe anywhere."

A number of teachers of English have found that work with language schools and private students has dried up during the pandemic. Those who own language schools are fortunate enough to have switched to online teaching, but often with a reduced income. Less integrated individuals, who have no partner or family to fall back on, find themselves in a situation where they may need to return, temporarily or permanently, to the UK. Their chances of finding work or even finding their feet in the UK in the short-term are slim.

CONCLUSIONS

A large majority of British citizens in the research sample are financially secure and in a stable partnership, usually with children. For the most part, their basic psychological needs of financial security, self-esteem and the opportunity to lead a good life are met. Nevertheless, a range of factors connected with Brexit have led to additional worry and stress; they have impacted some more than others, but no one is untouched by the process. These factors have included disenfranchisement during the referendum vote and future disenfranchisement within their birth country; potential interpersonal conflict with friends, family and colleagues; poor feedback from governmental authorities and a widespread ambiguity and lack of predictability concerning the future rules and regulations by which to secure the livelihood and rights to which they and their families are accustomed.

This paper has attempted to describe some of the human costs of Brexit for British citizens currently living in Poland and how they are attempting to negotiate their way through the subsequent changes in their lifeworld. It may well be that this research has generally reached those people who are more settled in country and that it omits other British citizens who are less easily found: those who may not be registered as resident in Poland, a trailing spouse, children, or elderly parents living with UK citizens in Poland. It is likely that there are many other British citizens, not only in Poland but across the EU, who do not fit neatly into the legal categories imagined by the Brexit negotiators and who lead a precarious existence filled with anxieties each time they switch on the television, log on to a British news website or visit a local council office.

The disorderly and chaotic way in which the withdrawal process has been managed means that Brexit *has all the hallmarks of an extremely stressful life event.*[35] It has had a deep emotional impact on British citizens' identities and how they experience their lives. How citizens categorise themselves through their varied, and not always harmonious, multiple networks of allegiance to nation, family, locality, culture, work and society will shape how they understand self-interest and will significantly influence consequent attitudes and actions in the face of Brexit's impact on their lives.

[35] B. Hughes, *The Psychology of Brexit: From Psychodrama to Behavioural Science*, Galway 2019, p. 12.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Auer D., Tetlow D., "Guest Blog: More Britons Willing to Leave UK to Escape Brexit Uncertainty", *Compas*, 28 October 2019, at <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2019/brexit-uncertainty-motivates-risk-taking-by-brits-who-decide-to-leave-the-uk-and-theres-usually-no-turning-back/>.

Benson M., *Brexit and the British in France*, London 2020, at <http://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/28222/>.

Benson M., O'Reilly K., Collins K., *What Does Brexit Mean for UK Citizens Living in the EU27? Talking Citizens' Rights with UK Citizens Across the EU27*, 2018, at <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/research-papers/what-does-brexit-mean-for-uk-citizens-living-in-the-eu27-talking-citizens-rights-with-uk-citizens-across-the-eu27/>.

Benson M., "The Election and the Overseas Vote in the EU", *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 9 December 2019, at <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-election-and-the-overseas-vote-in-the-eu/>.

Beręsewicz M., Z. Kostrzewa, D. Godlewski, "Populacja cudzoziemców w Polsce w czasie COVID-19", *GUS*.

Bill S., Stanley B., "Whose Poland Is It to Be? PiS and the Struggle Between Monism and Pluralism", *East European Politics*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2020.1787161.

Breteau P., "Brexit: le nombre de naturalisations de Britanniques dans l'espace Schengen a explosé en 2017", *Le Monde*, 16 November 2018, at <https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/11/16/brexit-le-nombre-de-naturalisations-de-britanniques-dans-l-espace-schengen-a-explose-en-2017_5384517_4355770.html>.

"Brexit: UK in 'Last Leg' of Trade Talks with EU, Says Raab", *BBC News*, 29 November 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-55120814>.

"British Embassy Warsaw", *Facebook*, at <https://www.facebook.com/ukinpoland/posts/2976992492315770>.

"British Embassy Warsaw", *Facebook*, at <https://www.facebook.com/ukinpoland/posts/2976988958982790>.

"Covid: What Are the New Tiers and Lockdown Rules in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?", *BBC News*, 27 November 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-52530518>.

Davies K., "Talking Politics? Brexit and Everyday Family Relationships", *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 19 June 2019, at <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/talking-politics-brexit-and-everyday-family-relationships/>.

Dudziak J., "450 tys. cudzoziemców z zezwoleniami na pobyt", *Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców*, 21 July 2020, at <https://udsc.prowly.com/103682-450-tys-cudzoziemcow-z-zezwoleniami-na-pobyt>.

Grzymala-Kazlowska A., "Social Anchoring: Immigrant Identity, Security and Integration Reconnected?", *Sociology*, vol. 50, no. 6 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515594091.

Harding G., "Becoming Belgian", *The Brussels Times*, 19 February 2019, at <https://www.brusselstimes.com/opinion/53868/becoming-belgian/>.

Hughes B., *The Psychology of Brexit: From Psychodrama to Behavioural Science*, Galway 20192019, p. 120, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29364-2>.

Kilkey M., Ryan L., "Unsettling Events: Understanding Migrants' Responses to Geopolitical Transformative Episodes through a Life-Course Lens", *International Migration Review*, vol. 55, no. 1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918320905507.

"Living in Poland", *gov.uk*, at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/living-in-poland>.

MasGiralt R., "The Emotional Geographies of Migration and Brexit: Tales of Unbelonging", *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2020).

Molloy D., "Brexit Border Software Developers Warn of Delays", *BBC News*, 27 October 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-54706263>.

Morris C., "Brexit: Why is the Internal Market Bill Ruffling Feathers?", *BBC News*, 10 November 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/54088596>.

O'Carroll L., "Government Admits New Brexit Bill 'Will Break International Law'", *The Guardian*, 8 September 2020, at <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/sep/08/government-admits-new-brexit-bill-will-break-international-law>.

"Overseas Voters", *The Electoral Commission*, at <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/overseas-voters>.

Poptcheva E.-M., "Disenfranchisement of EU Citizens Resident Abroad. Situation in National and European Elections in EU Member States", *Publications Office of the Europe Union*, 2015, at <http://bookshop.europa.eu/uri?target=EUB:NOTICE:QA0215514:EN:HTML>.

Ranta R., Nancheva N., "Unsettled: Brexit and European Union Nationals' Sense of Belonging", *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2199.

Ryan L., "Differentiated Embedding: Polish Migrants in London Negotiating Belonging Over Time", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1341710.

Statystyki – Polska – Aktualne dokumenty – Wykresy – Rok: 2020 – Kraj: UK, *migracja.gov,pl*, at <https://migracje.gov.pl/statystyki/zakres/polska/typ/dokumenty/widok/wykresy/rok/2020/kraj/UK/>.

Sturge G., "Migration Statistics", *UK Parliament*, 5 June 2020, at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06077/>.

"The UK Transition", *gov.uk*, at <https://www.gov.uk/transition>, 30 October 2020.

Trąbka A., Pustulka P., "Bees & Butterflies: Polish Migrants' Social Anchoring, Mobility and Risks Post-Brexit", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 46, no. 13 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1711721.particularly>.

"Types of Election, Referendums, and Who Can Vote", *gov.uk*, at <https://www.gov.uk/elections-in-the-uk>.

"Uzyskaj polskie obywatelstwo", *gov.pl*, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/uzyskaj-polskie-obywatelstwo>.

Walker N., "Brexit Timeline: Events Leading to the UK's Exit from the European Union", *UK Parliament*, at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7960/>.

Stephen DAVIES, MA, is a 3rd-year doctoral student at the Graduate School for Social Research (IFiS PAN) in Warsaw. His Ph.D. research is a case study of UK nationals living long-term in Poland. He is a member of the European Studies Unit and Zespół badań demonstracji at IFiS PAN and his research interests include intra-EU migration, social protest movements and sociology of education. Since coming to Poland in 1993, he has worked full-time in foreign-language teacher training and as a lecturer in academic skills. He is currently a full-time lecturer in academic skills at Warsaw University.

Malgorzata KUŁAKOWSKA, Ph.D., is a political scientist currently working at the Institute of Political Science and International Relations of the Jagiellonian University. She holds an MA in both political science and sociology. She is an author of more than a dozen articles devoted to British politics and society, multiculturalism and migration, and a monograph on community cohesion project in the United Kingdom (*Searching for community cohesion. British policies 2001-2010)*. She is also a co-editor of three books (*Studies on multiculturalism*, 2010; *Facets of election campaigns in 2015*, 2016 – both in Polish, and *Political Science in Europe at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, 2015) as well as an Editorial Assistant of an academic journal "Teoria Polityki". Her research interests focus on two areas. Firstly, the analysis of contemporary transformations of British society, with particular emphasis on the relations between ethnocultural communities in the context of such political changes as devolution or Brexit. Secondly, broadly understood political anthropology, focusing on the analysis of the concept of culture and its significance in power relations. Consequently, she is also interested in related research methods, mostly of qualitative and interpretive character. Both areas of interest fall within the scope of political sociology.