

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S PLACE IN BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY IN 2010–2016

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The article examines the place of the European Union in the foreign policy of Great Britain, as well as those adopted in the period 2010–2016 documents related to British policy concerning the EU: European Union act 2011, European Union [referendum] bill 2013–2014, European Union referendum act 2015. The role of referenda in the political life of Great Britain and the impact of relations with the EU on their development are characterised. Foreign policy with the EU has long been a priority for Britain but has given the way to internal political struggle, including on the issue of participation in the European integration project. In the 2010s referenda began to play a large role in the political life of the United Kingdom and attempts were made to legislatively formulate a referendum on EU membership, which was done only in 2015.

Keywords: the UK; EU; foreign policy; Brexit; UK referendum 2016; Conservative party; coalition government; David Cameron.

МЕСТО ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО СОЮЗА ВО ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКЕ ВЕЛИКОБРИТАНИИ В 2010–2016 гг.

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Рассматривается место Европейского союза во внешней политике Великобритании, а также принятые в период 2010–2016 гг. документы, относящиеся к политике Соединенного Королевства в отношении ЕС: акт о Европейском союзе 2011 г., билль о референдуме по вопросу членства Великобритании в ЕС 2013–2014 гг., акт о референдуме 2015 г. Дается характеристика роли референдумов в политической жизни Великобритании и влияния отношений с ЕС на их развитие. Внешняя политика в отношении ЕС долгое время была приоритетным направлением деятельности Великобритании, однако уступила место внутривнутриполитической борьбе, в том числе по вопросу участия в европейском интеграционном проекте. В 2010-х гг. в политической жизни Соединенного Королевства большую роль начинают играть референдумы и предпринимаются попытки законодательного оформления референдума о членстве в ЕС, что было сделано только в 2015 г.

Ключевые слова: Великобритания; Европейский союз; внешняя политика; Брексит; референдум 2016 г. в Великобритании; консервативная партия; коалиционное правительство; Дэвид Кэмерон.

Образец цитирования:

Пашковская ЕО, Шарапо АВ. Место Европейского союза во внешней политике Великобритании в 2010–2016 гг. Журнал Белорусского государственного университета. Международные отношения. 2020;2:54–61 (на англ.).

For citation:

Pashkouskaya AA, Sharapo AV. The European Union's place in British foreign policy in 2010–2016. *Journal of the Belarusian State University. International Relations*. 2020;2: 54–61.

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Introduction

The European Union is a unique integration association and a significant actor in international relations. Over the past decades, the union has strengthened and expanded, more and more structures have appeared. Great Britain, which was the part of the EU since 1973, conducted foreign policy in the period under review aimed at reviewing relations within the integration association and critically assessing interaction with it. Period 2010–2016 is characterised by the increasing influence of Eurosceptics on British foreign policy, and, in general, a change in priorities in favour of domestic politics. In 2010–2016, during the premiership of D. Cameron, the UK made a radical shift in its EU policy. General elections of 2010 brought the Conservatives to power as a part of the coalition government, therefore making right-wing conservative Eurosceptics more influential. The referendum institution played a significant role in this. In 2016, the referendum outcome was to withdraw the state from the EU (which happened for the first time in the history of the union) and on 31 January 2020, the United Kingdom left the union.

The relevance of the research topic is due to the large role of both the EU and the UK in international relations. Brexit is an example of the EU disintegration process that developed in the UK during the study period and has implications for all participants and millions of citizens.

The study of European policy in Great Britain is carried out by R. Whitman [1; 2], R. Niblett [3], W. Wallace [4], T. Andreeva [5], D. Galushko [6], B. Davies [7], S. Collard [8], B. Wellings and E. Vines [9], J. Shaw [10], and others.

R. Whitman specialises in the analysis of UK foreign policy towards the EU. His works are distinguished by a high degree of generalisation and systemic presentation. His articles analyse the British diplomatic strategy, its tools, and its parameters. The authour also characterises the foreign policy of Great Britain towards the EU, outlines its main objectives. R. Whitman notes the special role of the referendum in determining future relations with the EU.

T. Andreeva represents the Russian school of British policy research. The authour specialises in analysing the relations of Great Britain with the EU, the foreign policy of the United Kingdom in a wider context, as well as the study of internal political processes in the UK. Separately, it is worth noting her monograph “European policy of the D. Cameron – N. Clegg Cabinet (May 2010 – July 2013)”, giving a detailed description of an important period in the formation of relations with the EU.

D. Galushko examines the institution of a referendum in the context of EU membership and identifies three categories of such referenda. The authour also

assesses the importance of referenda in making socially important decisions and concludes that their results can have not only national but also international significance, as the referendum in the UK in 2016 showed.

R. Niblett owns a new concept of UK foreign policy priorities in the context of limited funds for its implementation. According to this concept, the priority of British foreign policy should be the EU, then the Transatlantic Partnership, and then bilateral and multilateral relations with the rest of the world. Being part of the EU, the UK has more influence than outside of it.

W. Wallace's research interests are in UK foreign policy. The author proves the overestimation of the “special relations” between the UK and the USA and indicates the limitedness of its influence on its former colony. At the same time, the United Kingdom should be more actively involved in the European integration project, and relations with the United States should not be built to the detriment of relations with continental Europe.

B. Davies and S. Collard draw attention to the fact that according to the European Union referendum act 2015, some groups of UK citizens were excluded from the voting process and emphasise that this was not only at variance with the intentions of the conservatives to introduce a vote for life, but also contradicted the advocate of maintaining government membership, as excluded groups are more likely to vote against leaving the EU.

J. Shaw considers concepts such as “will of the people”, “democracy” and criticises the referendum franchise, which did not allow many British citizens to speak out on the issue of EU membership. Analysing the course and results of the 2016 referendum, the authour raises some problems arising from the decision to withdraw from the EU.

B. Wellings and E. Vines examine in detail the 2011 act, which called for a referendum if relations between the UK and the EU change significantly. Researchers conclude that EU policies for 2010–2015 and the debate over membership included populist nationalism as opposed to the European integration project and became part of British political culture.

The purpose of the study is to determine the role of the European Union in the foreign policy of Great Britain and its change during 2010–2016.

To achieve this goal, the authour posed several tasks:

- to determine the priority of UK European policy and to specify its objectives;
- to examine UK decisions related to the EU;
- to define the role of referenda in UK political life;
- to analyse critically the stages of legislative consolidation of the referendum on UK membership in the EU.

Methods

To cover the topic, a combination of general scientific and special historical methods was used.

Among the general scientific methods, the author used a historical and systematic approach. Of the general scientific logical methods, analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, scientific study, and generalisation were used. The study involved special historical methods, such as historical-genetic and historical-descriptive methods.

In the process of studying the European Union in Britain's foreign policy, a significant role was given to descriptive research. Moreover, during a descriptive study, a connection was established between various elements. It was supplemented in part by an analytical study aimed at establishing causal relationships. Evaluation of the studied articles on the problem was carried out based on critical analysis.

The foreign policy of Great Britain was determined by three priorities – three interlocking circles proposed by W. Churchill: relations with Europe, relations with English-speaking countries with special emphasis on Anglo-American cooperation, relations with the Commonwealth of Nations. In the European direction, relations with the EU and NATO, as well as regional organisations, stood out [4]. An alternative to this concept was proposed in 2015 by R. Niblett. He argued that, due to global problems and limited resources, the UK could no longer pay equal attention to all three areas, and therefore should prioritise cooperation. The researcher was given a gradation of the importance of relationships for the United Kingdom. He put the EU in the first place, followed by relations with the United States, and third with relations with international organisations and other states [3].

Foreign policy towards the EU was not regulated by one document. In the absence of a comprehensive strategy for Europe (including the EU), the European direction was mentioned in the context of foreign policy and security. The strategic goals of the state were outlined in the National security strategy and the Strategic defence and security review [1, p. 2].

The National Security strategy and Strategic defence and security review 2015 note that a prosperous and secure EU is essential for a prosperous and secure UK. "We want Europe to be dynamic, competitive and outwardly focused, delivering prosperity and security" – reflects the desire of the state to reform the union. Mention was made of cooperation with the EU and NATO in the field of security, as well as the economic importance of the EU for the United Kingdom. At the end of the section, a referendum on the issue of EU membership until the end of 2017 was mentioned¹.

The main strategic goals of the European policy of Great Britain were deepening and further liberalisa-

tion and deregulation of the single market, free trade; support for further EU enlargement; preventing the formation of a political union in the EU, resistance to deepening integration, avoiding the mention in the documents of the "United States of Europe" as the ultimate goal of European integration, the predominance of intergovernmental relations, rather than a supranational approach; ensuring the decisive role of Great Britain in EU affairs and preventing the dominance of Germany and France in the union [2, p. 510–511]. Britain sought to maintain autonomy from the EU in matters of foreign policy, security, and defence. The various composition of British governments adhered to these goals since the 1990s and ending with the government of D. Cameron in 2015 [1, p. 4].

British diplomacy in relations with the EU consisted of two dimensions. The first included UK relations with EU institutions, the possibility of resolving issues in a multilateral format. The decision-making process and coordination of the UK within the EU took place between the United Kingdom permanent representation to the EU, the Foreign and Commonwealth office (FCO), and the UK cabinet office [2, p. 512]. The second included UK foreign policy outside the EU. It was influenced by the obligations of the United Kingdom to the EU – in the foreign economic sphere and economic development policy particularly.

Starting with the premiership of G. Brown and continuing first with the coalition government of conservatives and liberal democrats in 2010–2015, and then with the conservative government, the UK increasingly deviated from the strategic goals of European politics. During the crisis of the eurozone and the migration crisis, the government demonstrated the priority of internal political processes (preserving the unity of the Conservative party, the proximity of elections) excessive involvement in European affairs [3, p. 6]. At the same time, the UK still sought to play one of the main roles in the union, influence decision-making, and to prevent the strengthening of the role of Germany and France but turned out to be an outsider in solving EU problems [5, p. 185].

The period of the premiership of D. Cameron is characterised by the desire to change priorities in foreign policy, to shift emphasis from the EU by developing relations with rising powers such as India and China, overlapping with the growing popularity of Euroscepticism, largely due to the crises that have fallen during this period, the increase in immigration from the EU countries and the inability to control it, the miscalculations of previous governments and, as a result, the population's discontent with the ruling elites.

During the first term of D. Cameron as prime minister in the domestic policy of the state, there was an

¹National security strategy and Strategic defence and security review 2015 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf (date of access: 19.05.2020).

increase in contradictions regarding relations with the EU both within the coalition and within the Conservative party, aggravated by the global economic crisis and the eurozone crisis. Once again, proposals were made to hold a referendum on EU membership by the right wing of the Conservative party and the United Kingdom Independence party, which advocated secession from the EU. Throughout 2011–2015 attempts were made to legislate the holding of such a referendum. The institution of the referendum itself became an integral part of the political life of the state.

It is worth noting that the very possibility of exiting the EU was introduced only in the Lisbon treaty in 2009 with Art. 50 providing the formal withdrawing procedure². Therefore, the UK became the first EU member state to advocate such changes in its status in the union.

During the period under review, the importance of referenda in the United Kingdom was growing. The European Union act 2011 introduced a universal vote on the transfer of EU powers; in 2012, a referendum was held in the state on the issue of changing the electoral system; in 2014, the referendum decided the status of Scotland; in 2016, a referendum was held on UK membership in the EU.

Referenda are considered as a tool to maintain the status quo and a mechanism to give popular legitimacy to already adopted decisions [9, p. 317]. Nevertheless, in the case of the UK referendum of 2016 this tendency was overturned by unexpected outcomes of the popular vote.

In the context of EU membership, three types of referenda can be distinguished: referenda on EU accession, referenda on the adoption of amendments to EU constituent agreements, and referenda on the country's exit from the EU [6]. The 2016 referendum in the UK also belongs to the latter category.

Referenda are an atypical phenomenon for the UK political system. Historically, parliament always played a big role in the country. Parliamentary sovereignty is one of the basic constitutional principles of the United Kingdom. According to it, the parliament's highest legislative body in the UK, which can accept or repeal any law³. On the other hand, there is popular sovereignty and popular representation. Traditionally, the state is governed by legislative and executive powers, elected by the people. Parliamentary sovereignty and representative government restrained popular sovereignty, which is embodied through referenda. The idea of a strong parliament, which knows what and how to do, albeit less reactive and accountable to the people, prevailed in British political culture [9, p. 312].

The problem of referenda in the UK also lies in their advisory nature and the issue of representation of the electorate. So, any decision made in a referendum can be reviewed by the next government, and the lack of a homogeneous political community recognising its legitimacy affects the voting results, as was the case with the Northern Ireland border poll in 1973 [7, p. 325].

In the history of the state, there are examples of holding referenda at the local level, and the first national referendum was held only in 1975 on the issue of European integration. Then 2/3 of the voters, contrary to estimates, voted for the state to remain in the European Economic Community (EEC) [9, p. 316]. The referendum was initiated by the Labour party, which was in a split, and its leader H. Wilson sought to reconcile the parties by, firstly, negotiating with the EEC and obtaining concessions for the country, and secondly, by submitting the issue of community membership to a nationwide vote. Domestic political motives here prevailed over foreign – the unity of Europe. This referendum is often compared with the 2016 referendum on the UK membership in the EU initiated by D. Cameron.

Researchers B. Wellings and E. Vines believe that this referendum laid the foundation for a populist policy towards Europe. The issue of participation in the European integration project turned out to be too complicated for the ruling party, and it transferred responsibility for making decisions to the people. "The 1975 referendum led to a situation whereby "the People" underwrote parliamentary sovereignty" [9, p. 316]. According to M. Loughlin, the British parliament gave part of its power not only to the government and EU institutions but also to the people [11, p. 18]. From that moment, questions of holding a referendum periodically arose in debates around the UK in the process of European integration, especially when it came to the ratification of European Union treaties, for example, Maastricht and Lisbon.

One of the first steps of the coalition government towards the EU was the adoption of the European Union act in 2011 and the launch of the competence balance with the EU in 2012.

The European Union act 2011, also known as the referendum lock, prevented the transfer of more competencies to EU bodies without approving such a transfer through a referendum and was one of the key points of the conservative election program, which later became a coalition programme⁴.

The purpose of the adoption of the referendum lock was to confirm the supremacy of the national parliament over EU law, that is the fact that EU laws are

²The Treaty of Lisbon [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/5/the-treaty-of-lisbon> (date of access: 20.09.2020).

³Parliamentary sovereignty [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/parliamentary-sovereignty/> (date of access: 20.05.2020).

⁴The coalition: our programme for government [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/83820/coalition_programme_for_government.pdf (date of access: 14.07.2020) ; The Conservative party manifesto 2010 [Electronic resource]. URL: http://media.conservatives.s3.amazonaws.com/manifesto/cpmanifesto2010_lowres.pdf (date of access: 27.06.2020).

applied and act in the UK only after their status is recognised by European communities act. However, the 2011 document also established that further transfer of powers from the UK to the EU could only be carried out after approval in a referendum, which made the people, not parliament, responsible for the final decision. Researcher M. Loughlin believes that “the 2011 Act was a self-conscious abdication of parliament’s supposedly ultimate legal sovereignty in favor of popular political sovereignty” [11, p. 18].

When considering and analysing the European Union act 2011, questions were raised about the powers of parliament and its sovereignty; the feasibility of holding referenda and their place in the UK constitution; the impact of the document on relations with the EU [12].

The list of issues on which a referendum could be convened was quite wide and included topics that were difficult for citizens to understand, for example, “decisions relating to common foreign and security policy to which qualified majority voting applies”, social security, judicial cooperation in criminal matters, coordination of economic and employment policies⁵. It remained unclear how, in the event of a referendum, to formulate a question for better understanding if it implies the existence of special knowledge among voters and whether simplification will lead to a distortion of the meaning of the issue put to the general vote. It was suggested that for this reason small interested groups and individuals with strong beliefs to the EU would take part in this kind of referendum and it would be they to determine its results [12].

The document also contained ways to avoid referenda. In several cases, in order to hold a referendum, a change in relations with the EU had to comply with the “significance condition” determined by the government [9, p. 312].

The European Union act 2011 was also criticised for the wide range of areas covered by referendum. Theoretically, with their frequent conduct on issues insignificant for the electorate, voter fatigue could have formed. This would reduce turnout and cast doubt on the legitimacy of both real decisions and direct democracy [12].

It should be noted that this law did not initiate a single referendum in the period 2011–2015 and was

repealed by the European Union [withdrawal] act in 2018⁶.

When D. Cameron announced his intention to hold a referendum on UK membership in the EU in January 2013 it caused a public outcry⁷. Although this step was aimed at maintaining the integrity of the Conservative party and it corresponded to the interests of its right wing, the words of the prime minister were not enough.

The European Union [referendum] bill was an attempt to legislate the promise made by D. Cameron to hold a referendum on state membership in the EU no later than 2017. The initiator of the bill was D. Wharton, a representative of the Conservative party. The attempt was unsuccessful, and, after considering the bill in the House of Commons, it was no longer considered in the House of Lords at the Committee stage. On the second day of the Committee’s meeting, the backbench-labourer lord Lipsey put forward a proposal to complete the Committee’s work⁸ and thereby stop the consideration and amendment of the bill. According to the results of the voting in the House of Lords, the majority voted in support of his proposal – 180 against 130⁹. Thus, the European Union [referendum] bill was no longer considered in this parliamentary session.

It was suggested that the bill would be considered at the next session of parliament. In a coalition government with liberal democrats as partners, conservatives would inevitably again face resistance from them on this issue.

The bill successfully passed the stage of consideration in the House of Commons, for the most part, because the Liberal democrats boycotted the meetings to consider it, citing the fact that these are internal affairs of the Conservative party. The Liberal democrats did not participate in the vote following the second reading, there were few Labour [13, p. 178]. Due to opposition from the Liberal Democrats, the bill could not become government and was proposed as a private member’s bill¹⁰.

Nevertheless, the consideration of the bill prepared the basis for further work towards securing a referendum on UK membership in the EU in subsequent years. Even at the stage of amending the bill 2013–2014 there was wide discussion, debate, and consultation with the election commission. In particular, it was possible to

⁵The European Union act 2011 [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/12/enacted/data.pdf> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

⁶European Union [withdrawal] act 2018 [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/16/enacted/data.pdf> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

⁷EU speech at Bloomberg [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/eu-speech-at-bloomberg> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

⁸House of Lords: European Union (referendum) bill. Committee (2nd day) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/140131-0002.htm> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

⁹European Union (referendum) bill 2013–14-progress of the bill [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06711/SN06711.pdf> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

¹⁰Who killed the EU referendum bill? [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-26031550> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

discuss issues such as the duration of the campaign period, the wording of the question, the franchise, the possibility of combining the referendum with other votes, creating uncertainty in relations with the EU between the adoption of the law and the referendum itself (which would have been four years from 2013 to 2017) and others¹¹.

It should be noted that an identical bill was nevertheless put forward for consideration at the next parliamentary session 2014–2015 by B. Neill, however, as the previous one was not adopted, this time due to disagreements on the issue of financing¹².

In 2015, after the victory of the conservatives in the general election and the formation of the majority government, the question about the legislative consolidation of the referendum arose again. Conservatives could not abandon this idea, firstly, because it was required to maintain the unity of the party, divided over the EU issue, and secondly, because this provision was spelled out in their manifesto¹³. For these reasons, D. Cameron decided to hold a referendum on UK's membership in the EU. Prior to that, he aimed at conducting successful negotiations and gaining more opt-outs from the union and then campaigning against Brexit.

The bill was proposed for consideration by parliament on 28 May 2015, and on 17 December of that year received royal assent¹⁴.

The law on the referendum, according to which the referendum on the issue of UK membership in the EU should be held no later than 2017, was criticised in several ways.

B. Davies notes that in the process of determining the right to vote in a referendum, the government made several decisions against its interests.

According to the EU referendum act 2015, people who have the right to vote in general elections, i. e. persons over 18 years of age, a registered voter, citizens of the Commonwealth of Nations, or Ireland, residing in the United Kingdom. Moreover, to have the right to vote, a citizen of the United Kingdom had to live in the UK for the past 15 years. Peers entitled to vote in local or European elections and citizens of Gibraltar could also vote¹⁵.

The following conclusions follow from this.

First, it should be noted that in this case, the government, which advocated maintaining EU membership, did not take the opportunity to reduce the age for voting, as was the case with the referendum on Scottish independence, where it was possible to participate from 16 years old¹⁶. Young people are supposedly more inclined to vote for preserving EU membership, as they take more advantage of the union's educational programs and freedom of movement. Unlike the general election, in which people aged 16–17 will be able to take part the next time after 5 years, in the case of Great Britain's exit from the EU, which is potentially irreversible, it is the youth who will face the consequences of this decision – and they did not have the right to vote on the issue.

Secondly, the rule that only people who have lived in the UK for the past 15 years can take part in voting automatically excludes UK citizens who enjoy the right of free movement within the EU and reside in another country of the union. Citizens of other EU states residing in the United Kingdom for any number of years cannot participate in general elections, i. e. are also excluded from the voting process according to the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU)¹⁷. This situation is significant because it affects enough people who could not participate in the referendum, but who were directly affected by its result – Brexit. Potentially, with the possibility of participating in a referendum, they would also be more inclined to vote for maintaining EU membership as persons enjoying its privileges. It should also be noted that EU citizens living in Scotland could participate in the referendum on the independence of the region¹⁸.

Having established such a right to participate in a referendum, the government excluded two groups from the voting process that could change its outcome [7]. This decision was unsuccessfully challenged in court by two British citizens deprived of the right to vote because this is incompatible with EU law [8].

It is noteworthy that the conservatives' election program in 2015 included a provision on changing the suffrage to include UK citizens living abroad for more than 15 years: "We will introduce votes for life, scrapping the rule that bars British citizens who have lived abroad for more than 15 years from voting" [26, p. 49].

¹¹European Union referendum bill 2015–16 [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7212/CBP-7212.pdf> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

¹²Ibid.

¹³The Conservative party manifesto 2015 [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/ukmanifestos2015/localpdf/Conservatives.pdf> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

¹⁴EU referendum bill receives royal assent [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/eu-referendum-bill-receives-royal-assent> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

¹⁵European Union referendum act 2015 [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/36/contents> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Consolidated version of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

¹⁸Scottish independence referendum (franchise) act 2013 [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2013/13/contents/enacted> (date of access: 19.05.2020).

This proposal was not considered before the referendum of 2016 and was not considered in the parliament until the announcement of the next general election of 2017 [10, p. 566].

The lack of provisions on checking the results of the referendum in the law was also criticised [10]. On such an important and far-reaching issue as state membership in the EU, no threshold was set for the votes, and the result was determined by a simple majority. The researcher J. Shaw believes that to guarantee equal treatment of voters, the referendum act could include provisions such as:

- the need for the same (for or against) results in all four regions of the country to recognise the results of the referendum, i. e. Great Britain leaves the EU only if in all four regions the majority votes for it;
- the establishment of the minimum number of votes in case of a change in the status quo, which may concern both voters directly and persons registered for voting;
- the requirement for a second vote after negotiations on the conditions for withdrawing from the EU

if, according to the results of the first, the state should withdraw from the union [10, p. 568].

If Great Britain left the EU, the changes would affect such rights of British citizens as the right to reside, labour rights, access to the social system and the health care system, and the pension benefit payment system [8].

After the results of the referendum were announced and the forthcoming exit from the EU, politicians appealed to the fact that this was the will of the people, which is a populist statement. Only 51.9 % of voters voted to leave the EU, with a turnout of 72.2 % with the exclusion from the voting process of some groups that were directly affected by this decision, therefore it is rather controversial to declare that “the people decided”¹⁹.

Even though referenda on European integration are advisory, they impose obligations on the implementation of their decisions on the government, which cannot go against the fear of causing widespread discontent or undermining its authority [6, p. 171].

Results and discussion

The European policy of Great Britain was one of the three priority areas for the state, but it came to the fore after the country acceded to the EEC. Even though the United Kingdom did not have a separate document setting out the main provisions of European politics, its main tasks were to deepen economic integration and develop a common market, prevent further political integration, and influence decision-making in the union. The UK was gradually moving further away from the realisation of these goals, paying more attention to domestic politics, where there were significant contradictions on the issue of European integration. The result was a referendum on state membership in the EU.

In the 2010s, referenda became an integral part of Britain's political life, largely due to the lack of consensus on European politics, which led to a referendum on UK membership in the EU in 2016. Many researchers regard this step as transferring part of the parliament's power to the people and government, weakening rep-

resentative democracy. Referenda as a form of direct democracy have several features and shortcomings that make it possible to question its results.

Britain's participation in the European integration project and the topic of the referendum originates in 1975 when the first national vote was held on this issue. Since then, the topic of referendum and EU membership periodically arose in political discourse, especially during the adoption of new EU treaties.

The documents adopted during 2010–2015 in regard to relations between the UK and the EU demonstrate a high degree of politicisation of the issue of EU membership, largely due to contradictions within the Conservative party. The adopted laws have some shortcomings and have been criticised. After several attempts to legislatively consolidate the referendum on UK membership in the EU, such a law was adopted in 2015. In 2016, a referendum was held that determined the future of relations between the UK and the EU for years to come.

Conclusions

Britain's policy towards the EU was one of the priority areas, along with its special relations with the United States and the Commonwealth of Nations. The emphasis of the UK was given to the economic importance of the common market and security cooperation. By 2010 there was a tendency for Great Britain to move away from the goals of foreign policy towards Europe and shift its focus to domestic political pro-

cesses, which entailed the inclusion of populism and nationalism both in the political life of the country and in the discussion on relations with the EU, making the question of membership in the union increasingly politicised.

The main goals of British foreign policy towards the EU were the development of free trade; the enlargement of the EU; the opposition to political integration

¹⁹Results and turnout at the EU referendum [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum> (date of access: 19.05.2020)

in the union and the predominance of a supranational approach and also ensuring a central role of the UK in EU affairs.

During 2010–2015 in the UK decisions are made to limit the EU's influence on the country. These decisions were generated by internal political processes and were defiant in nature. These include the introduction of a "referendum lock" in 2011, which was never used, the analysis of the balance of competencies 2012–2014 as well as D. Cameron's statement on holding a membership referendum on Great Britain in the EU 2013 and two unsuccessful attempts to consolidate it.

During the study period, the role of national referenda in the political life of Great Britain is growing, which is argued by the fact that people need to be allowed to choose. However, researchers argue that the institution of a referendum is not characteristic of British domestic politics and that the growing importance of referenda undermines the sovereignty of the traditionally strong British parliament.

Legislative consolidation of the referendum on UK membership in the EU went through several stages. First, it is worth noting two unsuccessful attempts in 2013 and 2014, which nevertheless laid the foundation for the future European Union referendum act 2015. The referendum could only be legally consolidated after the general elections and the Conservative party won them. The 2015 document was criticised for the franchise, which did not include UK citizens living outside the country for more than 15 years, as well as people aged 16 to 18, but including the people of Gibraltar, commonwealth citizens living in the UK, and also citizens of Ireland.

Thus, the foreign policy steps of the UK in 2010–2016 were motivated primarily by internal political processes and included populism, Euroscepticism, and nationalism. They were criticised because they contained many inaccuracies, allowing freedom of interpretation, excluded some groups of people from the voting process.

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Received by editorial board 27.06.2020.