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Brexit : What Will Be the Impact on Populations ?

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Brexit: What Will Be the Impact on Populations?

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www.population-demographie.org/revue03.htm ; www.cairn.info/revue-population-et-avenir.htm

In accordance with the Lisbon treaty¹, the British citizens' vote of 23rd June 2016 in favour of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union means that the European treaties would cease to apply on the other side of the Channel in 2019. What will be the demographic consequences of the *Brexit* for the European Union?

By Gérard-François Dumont



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▶ A smaller population than in 2004

The first, obvious, consequence will be the diminution of the EU population. Its size had been constantly increasing with each of the seven enlargements, excluding the advent of German reunification in 1991. The 28-country EU had, since 2008, exceeded the symbolic threshold of half a billion inhabitants; this will no longer be the case in 2018, with on the one hand the withdrawal of UK and on the other the fact that, by then, there will have been no further enlargement, as promised in 2015 by the President of the European Commission².

▶ ...and a decreased relative weight

The EU population will probably fall under its level of 2004, at the time of the fifth enlargement to ten new countries³. With an estimated 443 million inhabitants in 2018, against 510 in 2016, the European Union, as a whole, would remain the third biggest entity in the world, after the two billion-strong countries, China and India, and in front of the United States, with its 325 million inhabitants.

In 2015, the 28 EU countries represented 6.9 % of the world population. In 2018, the EU would represent only 5.9 % under the double influence of the UK withdrawal and the lesser population growth of the remaining countries.

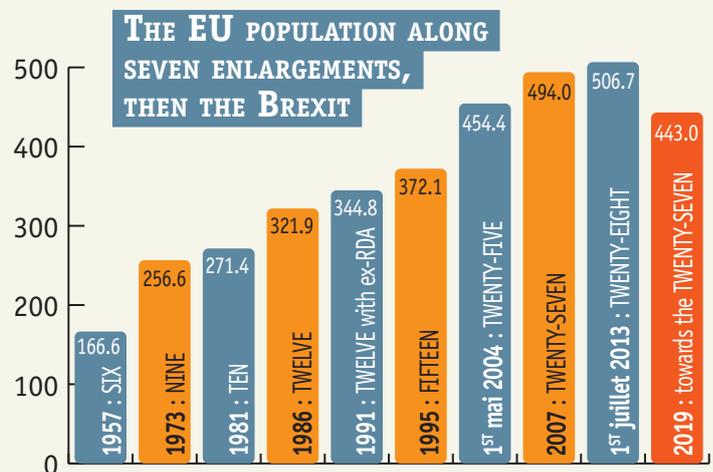
▶ Probably fewer births than deaths

The UK withdrawal would amplify the EU "population winter", *i.e.* a situation when fertility is clearly and lastingly below the replacement level. While the fertility rate would be 2.1 children per woman for a hundred women of the current generation – to be followed, thirty years later, by the same number of women – it is only 1.58 children per woman⁴, *i.e.* 25% lower, in the EU. As it happens, the fertility rate in the United Kingdom is 1.81, higher than the average for the 28, as is its birth rate.

As for the death rate, it would increase slightly, since the UK rate is a bit below the EU average. As a result, the natural increase in the EU population, which was already very weak⁵, would probably become negative, with more deaths than births.

▶ A reduced attractiveness for migrants

With respect to migration trends, the United Kingdom has belonged, at least since the fifth enlargement, to the group of EU countries with a clearly positive rate of migratory growth, as opposed to the 10 EU countries where the rate was negative (Greece, Ireland, Romania, Spain⁶...). If the migration dynamics remain the same, the rate of migratory increase would be less for the 27-country EU than for the 28. On the other hand, intra-European migrations could evolve, depending on various parameters: changes in migration policies with respect to the movements of persons and workers between UK and the 27; the attractiveness of the United Kingdom; the exchange rate developments between the pound sterling and the euro. If the migratory flows from Eastern European countries, especially from Poland to UK were to diminish, this would mean an inversion of the situation observed in the years following the fifth enlargement, when only the United Kingdom was open to migrants. At the time, the other countries had de-



cided not to accept the free movement of workers from the ten new countries during a period which was to extend, according to the rules provided, for a maximum of seven years⁷.

Overall, from a demographic point of view, the EU without UK would be weaker: less populated, with probably an excess of deaths over births and a reduced rate of migratory growth. ☹

(Translation: Sylvie Vanston)

1. "Any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in conformity with its own constitutional requirements. [...] The treaties shall cease to apply to the States in question from the date of entry into force of the withdrawal agreement or, failing that, two years after the notification [of intention]".

2. "No further enlargement will take place in the next five years", *Communication from the Commission, Commission Work Programme 2015*, 16 December 2014.

3. Dumont, Gérard-François, « Le cinquième élargissement démographique de l'Union européenne », *Population & Avenir*, n° 661, January-February 2003.

4. Eurostat figures.

5. With a rate of natural increase of 0.4 for a thousand inhabitants in 2014, the balance of 5.131 million births and 4.938 million deaths (Eurostat figures).

6. Sardon, Jean-Paul, « La population des continents et des pays », *Population & Avenir*, n° 725, November-December 2015.

7. Dumont, Gérard-François, Verluise, Pierre, *Géopolitique de l'Europe*, Paris, Armand Colin - Sedes, 2014.