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## Brexit Takes Root in the Caribbean

By Manuel E. Yepe

*Havana.*

“Brexit” has been defined by many as “a real political earthquake with national and international implications”.

It seemed a difficult fight for the separatists, because top English leaders –headed by their Prime Minister David Cameron– led the opposition to this demand promoted by the most conservative politicians.

The British political leadership was defeated and, with them, all of Europe, its allies and even the president of the United States, Barack Obama, who saw his position of remaining within the European Union (EU) his most loyal and powerful ally in all main issues for the US power defeated.

The result of the referendum on Brexit, which has affected all the world in various ways, has the countries of the Caribbean region in anxious expectation, torn between forecasts and preparations, because of the ties –both historical and current– that link them to the United Kingdom.

“No need to panic. Every effort will be made to ensure the UK market,” told Jamaican Tourism Minister, Edmund Bartlett, told the media. At the same time, he acknowledged that the decision

of the British electorate “is of importance to us in Caribbean tourism for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most important is the fact that it will have an impact on arrivals of travelers and tourism throughout the region.”

As reported by the Italian digital magazine *Travel Trade Caribbean (TTC)* which specializes in tourism in the Caribbean region, “Bartlett recalled that the Caribbean is highly dependent on British visitors”. Therefore “it is important to consider the implications the decision will have.”

“Brexit creates a trade nightmare for the Caribbean,” said a headline the newspaper *Bahama Tribune*. It estimated that independent English-speaking countries in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) will have, at most, two years to formulate a plan to address the serious consequences of the British departure from the EU”.

“Once Britain finally leaves the European Union, the twelve Caribbean countries will lose the commercial relationship structured through trade with the British market.”

“When Britain joined what was then the then European Economic Community in 1973, control of trade agreements were transferred to the Community. Since then, formal trade, aid and investment among the twelve Caribbean countries have gone through the EU. These relations were formalized successively at the Lomé Convention, the Cotonou Agreement and the Economic Agreement Partnership (EPA),” the newspaper added.

According to *TTC*, experts in the region believe that Brexit could push more Caribbean states to Washington in search of more security in sensitive financial and economic areas that might be safer than those offered by the traditional British links.

The Caribbean region certainly has strong historical and cultural ties with Britain. Considering this, the rector of the University of the West Indies (UWI), Sir Hilary Beckles, warned the region in a message that “they must prepare for the impact of the breaking of the UK with the European Union” because “all aspects of life in the Caribbean will be negatively affected.”

Sir Hilary said in his statement, released by the official website of CARICOM, that the fragile economic recovery in the region is “death threatened”, and that the exit of Britain could lead to immediate regional strategic reactions, even before the Heads of Government meet in Guyana this July.

“Brexit is a long-term threat to the performance of CARICOM economies,” he said. He also predicted that “the commercial relations, immigration, tourism, financial relations, cultural commitments and foreign policy of the Caribbean will have a major redefinition, due to the reorganization of the CARICOM-United Kingdom commitments,” the expert added.

He urged the region to strengthen its internal policies and relations with the rest of the world.

Brexit has also had a strong impact on Puerto Rico –a Caribbean island which, like Cuba and the Philippines, was booty of the opportunistic war launched by the US against Spain at the end of the nineteenth century. Puerto Rico remains under Washington’s domination, despite the

presence of strong national feelings –often conflicting– on their shared situation: most reflect a passionate love for their country, an obvious resentment against Washington, and a painful appreciation of the benefits that US citizenship can bring.

There, angry shouts have been heard clamoring for a “Prexit” for their country; that is, the exit of Puerto Rico from the United States.