

MAB/SR ***PERTH&***

***KINROSS***

**COUNCIL**

27 August 2018

Dear Editor

**EU Referendum 2016 & Its Aftermath**

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**An Independent Councillor**

The failure of the European Union to be more flexible, particularly in relation to immigration controls, led to the referendum outcome. At least the Tory party gave the people a vote on the issue, denied them by the opposition parties.

I voted to leave (one of near 40% of residents in Scotland) despite the predominant political consensus for remain; principally for a host of reasons to do with issues of democracy and national control. The UK result should be democratically respected and not fragmented; it was a UK vote that the Scots should respect since the majority voted in the independence referendum to remain part of the U.K, with all that entails.

I am against any further referendums on constitutional issues unless a clear voting threshold of 60% is reached for a decision, since clearly if the vote is close the losing side don't accept the result.

I am critical of the failure of the UK Government to properly organise or at least offer a national negotiating strategy involving the devolved administrations and opposition political representatives. As a result we have a 'Tory' Brexit strategy rather than a British one. The current strategy results from interminable media and party discussion rather than keeping one's cards close to oneself and I feel it has been a real mistake to place a divorce settlement figure on the negotiating table with an intransigent and unelected **EU** team. Britain clearly requires 'a bespoke deal' and I don't see how Brexit is consistent with membership of the customs union and single market as they stand at present. In fact, the difficulty of even reaching the negotiating position we are at reinforces how much sovereign control of our own affairs we have lost and the need to regain it. The freedom to negotiate free trade deals on a global stage, particularly with our Commonwealth Partners, is essential. also don't accept there is a power grab proposed by Westminster in relation to Scotland; in fact the Tory party have recently delivered devolved tax raising powers to Scotland making the Holyrood Parliament one of the strongest devolved administration's in the world, although this will never be enough for the nationalists who don't accept the outcome of the Independence vote.

The Common Market we questionably joined in the 1970's has grown out of all proportion, becoming unmanageable and undemocratic with aspirations towards federation. I remember also the 'misguided' attempt in the 1990's to tie sterling to the European exchange rate mechanism and the loss of financial reserves resulting.

We have an unsustainable level of net migration into the UK, especially England, in relation to our available land area, something some other European countries do not share. I note, however, that attempted prevention of free movement in some other European countries i.e. Hungary, hasn't seemed to raise significant concerns with EU leaders. I noted on a recent visit to Sweden, the significant level of immigration they have allowed but they are re-considering the wisdom of this, following concerns expressed politically. Before Britain joined the E.U. we managed to organise seasonal workers for our agricultural sector and I see no reason why this couldn't continue and why a new UK immigration policy couldn't safeguard our need for 'key' workers for sections of our economy. I recently supported a motion, unanimously passed at Perth & Kinross Council, regarding clarity on the status of existing EU citizens in Britain, pointing out that most people I know, including those who voted leave, are relaxed about EU citizens in gainful employment and contributing to our society maintaining residential status and voting powers.

There is an urgent need to extract ourselves, without delay, from the disastrous common agricultural and fisheries policies. The UK is a major net contributor to EU budgets so there has to be a financial dividend from leaving that can be used wisely for our own national priorities.

Much has been made of the EU border issue, I suggest blown out of all proportion by the Irish political situation. I recently visited the border between Norway (outwith EU) and Sweden (within EU), noticing no apparent problem with travel across it and no long lorry queues, the use of CCTV and computers providing seamless transition.

We also do not need a return to an international border between England and Scotland, a quite possible outcome if Scottish Nationalist aspirations are realised.

Finally and depressingly, the last 2 years have seen the British establishment and media bring 'Brexit' into almost everything, with predictions under 'project fear' of 'Armageddon' should we deign to leave the E.U. We are not leaving Europe only a restrictive trading organisation under the significant control of big business. There is a tendency to suggest that those who voted leave 'are somehow misguided and lacking in intelligence' from those who don't seem to have any confidence in Britain controlling its own affairs, given its history and still global influence. This self-doubt is unedifying to me, especially the suggestion that we can't strengthen our economy without large scale in-migration, which in itself, as I have said, is unsustainable for a relatively small island with finite agricultural land for food production.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Michael Barnacle

Independent Member for Kinross-shire