

Those of our members and guests who were able to join us for the debate on 4th March were both entertained and informed by the panel. The breadth of experience covered politics with Christina Mckelvie, business, with Hugh Aitken and academia with Professor Michael Keating with the European viewpoint being clearly provided by Hans Blomeier of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.



The debate on Britain's future in the European Union is often framed by an inward looking and very narrow view of what Britain wants and might be satisfied with in pondering whether or not to remain a member. Politicians and citizens ignore at their peril the other members of the Union, who all have their hopes and plans for the future and often see the Union and their fellow members in a different light from us. We, individuals and countries, are coloured by our recent histories. The recent history of much of Europe is different from that of Britain, often more traumatic and with more recent experience of the fear of fascism and communism than here in Britain. Greece was a military dictatorship into the 1970's, Spain a fascist dictatorship and Germany split into two competing halves until 1989. Clearly the role of the EU as a means of promoting peace amongst its members is much more important to the citizens of mainland Europe than it is to the citizens of the UK.

From the debate on Wednesday I think we took away the understanding that Britain's place in the EU is not simply a question of whether we, as country, wish to stay in or not. There is also a view throughout Europe as to whether Britain is, or can ever be, a suitable and willing participant in the EU journey. The view from our continental EU partners is that whilst Britain should ideally remain a willing member of the EU, this cannot happen "at any price" and if Britain believes it's future lies outside the EU, then so be it.

What I believe a number of us may have learned for the first time is the informed view given by our German and French partners, Consul General Verena Gräfin von Roedern and Consul General Pierre-Alain Coffinier, that in the event that Britain was to leave the EU, there would be no compromises on the economic front as far as access to the common market is concerned. Out would mean out. The UK would be left with all the repercussions that would follow. This is surely logical and correct but as yet barely understood in Britain.

As with the Scottish Referendum, there is an absolute requirement on those who wish to leave to set out now, in great detail, what rules and international agreements Britain would sign up to immediately (and it would have to be immediate) to enable international trade to continue. Those who claim to want to set Britain free from the EU have to set out the alternative to the citizens of Britain and that alternative has to be believable. At the moment we have nothing other than specious assurances. I do not believe them and nor, I think, do the majority of Britain's citizens.

As for the campaign ahead to promote the benefits of EU membership to the citizens of the UK, it was pointed out that there is no clear one person to lead this campaign, whereas Nigel Farage is certainly the leader for a "No" campaign. This is a great weakness. The messages we send out need to be positive and not reactive against negative criticisms which means we are already starting out from a negative stand-point.

There are also lessons to be learnt from the Scottish Referendum. Despite the result, the matter is not over. And should the citizens vote to remain in the EU, the matter will still fester on, although an exit will be permanent.

Derek Hammersley

For those of you who are interested, we have posted some photos on our Facebook page. We are very grateful to Edinburgh University European Union Society for their help in putting on this discussion. Our thanks also go to the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and to all the members of the panel: John Aitken, Hans-Hartwig Blomeier, Christina McKelvie and Michael Keating, not to mention John Edward who so ably chaired the discussion.

As always, your feedback is welcome and you can email me at chair@euromovescotland.org.uk.

Events

Don't forget to let us know of any interesting EU-related events in your area. We have late notice of an event tomorrow:

Europe's Current Security Challenges

March 10, 18:00–19:30

This event is organised by the Europa Research Group at Edinburgh University.

The ongoing crisis in Ukraine, a country on the borders of the European Union, has fast become one of the most prominent threats to European security. Such is the danger that some suggest it to be on a par with international terrorism. The close proximity of the Ukrainian conflict and the economic and political relations between the EU, Russia and Ukraine raise several important questions: How should we expect the situation in Ukraine to develop in the future? What effects will it have on the rest of the European continent? What can and should the European Union do to address those challenges?

Panel

Dr Luke March, Senior Lecturer in Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics, University of Edinburgh

Dr Alex Marshall, Senior Lecturer in Russian Military History, University of Glasgow

Dr Carmen Gebhard, Lecturer in European Politics, University of Edinburgh.

More info: <https://www.facebook.com/events/868669723178878/>

A sense of place: Scotland and the UK in the EU

Thursday March 12th, 6.30 for 7.0pm

The Royal Overseas League, 100 Princes Street, EH3 6QE

This year's John G. Gray Memorial Lecture will be given by Sir Graham Watson who served as an MEP (for the South West England constituency) for 20 years. He served a term as President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the European Parliament and later as President of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party.

Cost: £5 (to include a glass of wine) – payable on the night.

Registration not required. All welcome.

More info from the [Liberal Club website](#).

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