

# MEETING MINUTES

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## **Cross Party Group on Germany**

**Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2017, 5.30pm**

### **Committee Room 6**

Next Meeting

Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2017, 5.30pm

TG.20/21

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#### **Attendees**

Colin Beattie MSP, Scottish Parliament  
Cameron Buchanan, former MSP  
Wolfgang Enstler, German Consulate  
Graeme Henderson, Scottish Parliament  
Kirsten Herbst-Gray, Langholm Academy  
Colin Imrie, Scottish Government  
Juliane Krenz, German Consulate  
Nikolai Petersen, Goethe Institut  
Sabine Möllney-Petersen, Goethe Institut  
Michael Russell, Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe  
Elaine Smith MSP, Scottish Parliament  
Barbara Strickland, German citizen  
James Trolland, Ridrum International  
Petra Wend, Queen Margaret University

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**Apologies** Eleoma Bodammer, Manuela Calchini, Annette Götzkes, Jens-Peter Voss.

Colin Beattie (CBe) opened the meeting at 17.30.

#### **Topics Discussed:**

##### **1. Approval of previous minutes**

The group approved the minutes from the January meeting.

##### **2. Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe**

CBe welcomed the Minister, Michael Russell (MR) to the group's meeting. MR spoke to the group on a range of topics related to his role, including:

- The three fundamental aspects of his role:
  - o Acting as lead negotiator with the UK Government in the Brexit talks
  - o Examining the various options for Scotland going forward (as related in the Scottish Government's 'Scotland's Place in Europe' publication)

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- Listening to and learning from various stakeholders and organisations
- Examining the common key issues, including:
  - The rights of EU citizens currently living and working in Scotland, and the rights of Scottish citizens living and working in the EU
  - How the Scottish economy and employment rates are likely to be affected post-Brexit
  - What current investment in Scotland is likely to move away post-Brexit
- The circumstances and likely effect of the Great Repeal Bill
- The financial support currently in place from the EU for Scotland
- The steps the Scottish Government is taking as part of negotiations:
  - Continuing to negotiate and engage with the UK Government and other stakeholders
  - Actively engaging in the Great Repeal Bill process
  - Preparing to allow Scotland a second referendum on independence

MR stated that the Scottish Government believed Scotland should unequivocally be a member of the EU.

CBe asked if the situation was similar to the ongoing EU-Singapore free trade deal negotiations. MR replied that EU state parliaments would need to vote on any proposed Brexit deal, but that these did not include Scotland as it is not a state member of the EU.

Elaine Smith (ES) asked MR to comment on Westminster's perceived lack of support for rural communities and whether the Scottish Government would take a different approach post-Brexit. MR noted that, as an example, he has been critical of the Common Fisheries Policy in the past and that, if these powers were repealed to Scotland, the Scottish Government would seek to a better deal in this area.

ES asked what effect was likely to be felt by fruit farms. MR said that fruit is a growing, year-round market and stated that, in his recent discussions, the Romanian consulate had commented on the vast growth in Romanian passport applications, suggesting fewer Romanians available for employment on such farms in future.

Petra Wend (PW) remarked on the adverse effects of Brexit both Queen Margaret University and herself personally were noticing, and asked what more is there we could do across the UK to stem these issues. MR replied that, while we have to keep going with the process, people across the country do not have to accept this is a done deal. MR noted people may change their mind about Brexit once the consequences become clear, and that the forthcoming General Election may provide opportunities for change.

Kirsten Herbst-Gray (KHG) asked if there was any likelihood of immigration becoming devolved, and what help the Scottish Government can provide with the costs of citizenship such as taking a language test. MR said immigration becoming devolved was unlikely, although if immigration numbers were to be reduced in the

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rest of the UK this could be balanced with an increase in Scotland; alternatively, MR noted an independent Scotland would have its own immigration plan. MR said that they have examined ways of helping foreign employees with citizenship costs but ultimately they would not be able to help everybody.

Barbara Strickland (BS) asked MR to comment on the supposed veto from Belgium and Portugal of Scotland's EU membership. MR replied that both Belgium and Portugal hold the same view – that due process should be followed - and that neither have said they would interfere. MR further stated that there is no 'queue' to join the EU.

CBe asked for MR's thoughts on the Liberal Democrats' proposal for a second Brexit referendum. MR felt this was unlikely to happen.

Nikolai Petersen (NP) asked if the Scottish Government is planning for different post-Brexit scenarios. MR said they are making plans based on five potential outcomes:

- Collapse of negotiations
- Soft Brexit with enhanced devolved powers
- Hard Brexit with fewer powers subsequently devolved
- Hard Brexit with no powers subsequently devolved
- Scottish independence

NP asked if Article 50, which triggered the Brexit process, could be reversed. MR said it could but he thought this was unlikely to happen.

KHG asked if the Scottish Government had risk-assessed the consequences and main issues of Brexit. MR referred to the Fraser of Allander report, which outlined the likely effects on GDP, wealth, and population growth. KHG asked if there were any plans to include European awareness as part of the school curriculum. MR noted that there was no national curriculum in Scotland but that schools could amend their own teaching policies.

James Trolland (JT) asked MR to comment on his experiences relaying the effect of Brexit to businesses in Scotland. MR replied that he gives businesses the 'reality' of the situation and how they are likely to be affected, and stated that given the present circumstances he would ideally like to see a 'soft' Brexit with the UK remaining in the single market.

CBe and the group thanked the Minister for attending the meeting.

### **3. Political, cultural, economic update**

NP gave the group an update on the Goethe Institut's forthcoming events, such as the forthcoming presentation by Syrian-German artist Manaf Halbouni, 'What If'. KHG spoke of a recent Q&A session her class was partook with Udo Michallik, the General Secretary of the Standing Conference of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the German Government.

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CBe noted the result of the French election provided some relief in a stability context. The group then discussed the political situation across Europe and the world, and some of the potential opportunities and concerns of Brexit.

#### **4. AOB**

CBe asked for suggestions for future speakers/topics. It was agreed to invite the Secretary of State for Scotland to the September meeting to discuss the issues facing Scotland post-Brexit, and the Cabinet Secretary for Education to revisit the issue of German language teaching in Scottish schools.

CBe closed the meeting at 7.01pm.