

# MEETING MINUTES

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## **Cross Party Group on Germany**

**Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2019, 6pm**

**TG.20/21**

Next Meeting

5.30pm, TG.20/21, Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September

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### **Attendees**

Colin Beattie MSP, Scottish Parliament  
Grant Stanley, Scottish Parliament  
Annette Götzkes, Edinburgh University  
Barbara Strickland, German citizen  
Manuela Calchini, Visit Scotland  
Petra Wend, Queen Margaret University  
Jens-Peter Voss, Consul General of Germany  
Hans-Georg Thönges, Director at the Goethe-Institute  
Maureen Watt MSP, Scottish Parliament

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**Apologies** Elaine Smith MSP, James Trolland, Eleoma Bodammer.

### **Topics Discussed:**

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

The group approved the minutes from the January meeting.

Before moving on Colin presented Jens-Peter Voss with a bottle of Whisky to thank him for his work within the group and wish him all the best for his retirement.

#### **2. Dr Ulrich Hoppe, Director General, German-British Chamber of Industry & Commerce**

Colin Beattie (CB) welcomed Dr Hoppe (UH) to the group's meeting.

UH spoke to the CPG on his role as Director General for German-British Chamber of Industry. He covered aspects such as:

- Imports and Exports – In the UK, Germany and Scotland. Also discussed the importance of Trade for both the UK and Germany
- Businesses in the UK/Scotland and Germany. Investment is important to both nations and must continue after Brexit.

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- The Mission of the Chamber for Industry and Commerce is to promote Trade and Investment between the UK & Germany. Exports must flow in both directions.
- This is a young chamber that was founded in 1971. With 750 Member Companies 400 in the UK and 350 in Germany. 23 Employees and £2.5 million turnover.
- There Main Tasks are – Official Representative of German Companies – Offering Support; Membership Organisation – Interacting with organisations providing support, Service Provider – Help SME's with advice
- Main Activities – Membership and Events – Hold 50 events per year. 2 in Scotland (Edinburgh and Glasgow), Legal and Tax Services – Company Information Admin Support.
- CB Asked – How do people get these services? UH Mostly online and some people from the ground.
- Marketing Services – Recycling from the UK/Scotland. Companies have to be registered to recycle packaging.
- Facts – 2,000 Visitors to the website, 4000 enquiries (2000 trade and 2000 Legal), 1,500 readers of magazine. 500 customers for on-going services.
- European College of Business and Management – Offer courses to create linkages. Good way to show life goes on despite Brexit. 20% of young Brits in Germany have a knowledge of German.
- The German-British Chamber of Industry & Commerce can assist every British and German company, which wants to do business across the Channel.

KL – Asked about communication with other organisations and UH replied that there is a circle of Friends across the different organisations help each other out.

CB – Asked about the new Berlin House - UH advised had met with the new lady in Berlin House.

UH noted that he has been looking at Brexit as part of his role, he recognises that Scotland is greatly valued in Germany and will never change. He then done a brief presentation on Brexit, which covered:

- Survey carried out with 124 online interviews between 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019 from German-British Companies that operate in the UK.
- Brexit Effecting Business – 50 % Positive and 32% Negative
- Business Performing 54% positive in next 12 months 21% negative

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- 33 % plan more investment over next 12 months and 22 % plan less investment.
- 66% of businesses would like a Soft Brexit. 25 % Deal Brexit and 9% Hard Brexit. 2/3rds of respondents are willing to accept a much longer political uncertainty if it leads to a Softer Brexit.
- 73% of businesses feel the biggest risk for operations is trade barriers or administrative burdens.
- 37% don't see the UK economy changing over the next 3 to 5 years.

The Group gave its thanks to UH for speaking with them.

### **3. Political, Economic and Cultural updates**

#### **Political**

CB – It is hard to predict the outcome of the EU Elections. CB hopes that there will be 3 SNP MEP's elected to go to Brussels. Lib Dems likely to get a seat or maybe 2 seats in Scotland. Predicts that in England the Brexit Party will do very well as the Labour and Tory vote is falling.

JPV – Advised that he had a meeting with the London Embassy and others - the meeting concluded that Brexit was a Complex issue. They believe there is very little chance of a Soft Brexit and revoking Article 50 is not a choice. The main views was leave without a deal. New ways must be found to strengthen ties. Image for Scotland is very important and after Brexit he hopes that ties with Germany can be made stronger.

Maureen Watt (MW) – It is fascinating what is going on in Westminster. How the media has given so much air time to Nigel Farage and not to the Pro EU parties. MW has no idea how the vote will go. It does look as if Boris will be the new PM and that will be negative for Scotland. How strong a far right group will be in the EU?

Annette Götzkes (AG) – Hopes that the Green Party can do well to stop the AfD. With the ongoing Environment issues that currently ongoing it may help them. CB concerned of Political Stability. We want a good relationship with England if there is an Independence Referendum called however people are fed up and just do not care.

#### **Tourism-**

Manuela Calchini (MC) – German Market is doing really well at the moment. People arriving and touring Scotland. MC feels this may be because of Brexit and people coming before it is too late. There is a Scotland is Now campaign ongoing and MC not sure if it sends the right message. Was great to see that the Lonely Planet rated Shetland number 6 in places to visit. There is a new information centre opening on the Royal Mile on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May for German Visitors. MC was asked about staff shortages, not sure how bad the issue is yet however in the Highlands there are some shortages now but not sure it can be blamed on Brexit.

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### **4. Dates of Future Meetings**

CB – Advised that Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September at 5.30pm would be the date for the next meeting.

### **5. AOCB**

AG mentioned that Edinburgh University have started a group which meet with S2 students at high school and they teach them languages to gain credits. They gain experience and provide a presentation after working along with them. No figures as yet but very positive feedback has been provided so far. This may stope people dropping the languages at the end of S2.

CB – Thanked both Petra Wend and Jens-Peter Voss for their support to the group over the years and wished them both well on their retirement. The group gave both their thanks.

CB closed the meeting at 7.02pm.