

Edward McMillan-Scott: Letter from a Disunited Kingdom

Written by Edward McMillan-Scott on 17 March 2017



Edward McMillan-Scott | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

Edward McMillan-Scott calls on MEPs to engage with those in Britain who understand the EU and can put the case for continued membership.

Dear Brussels colleagues,

Some of you have complained that the leading lights in the Leave campaign in last year's UK referendum – Nigel Farage and Daniel Hannan – are still sitting in the European Parliament. Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the liberal group in which I sat from 2010-2014, has described Farage as the greatest waste of money in the EU. As a newly-elected MEP Hannan told me in 1999, while I was leader of the UK's 36 Conservative MEPs, that he would spend all his time campaigning for UK withdrawal from the EU. It is a small consolation that they regularly attack each other in books and articles.

At least Farage had the candour to say (although he expected a different result) the month before the

June 2016 referendum, that a 52-48 per cent result would be [“unfinished business”](#) [1].

And so it is. British prime minister Theresa May’s bland comments as she signalled in the House of Commons on March 14 the go-ahead for withdrawal from the EU were interrupted by reality when veteran Labour MP David Winnick told her that the UK was more divided than at any time since the Suez crisis in 1956.

After long and largely uncritical debates in Westminster, in which the UK Labour party was an ineffective opposition, the debate will become more realistic, especially as the EU institutions begin to express themselves and the reality of Brexit becomes daily more clear to the British people through the media and websites such as [Brexit Record](#) [2].

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As you all know, what started as former prime minister David Cameron’s attempt to pacify the UKIP tendency within the Conservative party – the reason I left it – has resulted in the dominance of that group in the Theresa May administration, and their determination to push for a hard Brexit – and as soon as possible. Do not underestimate their determination to sever all ties with the EU at whatever cost to the UK: they are ideologues, mostly inspired by what they believe is Thatcherism, but in reality in many ways resembles 1930s political extremism.

As a lifelong pro-European, with 30 years as an MEP, the last ten as a Vice-President, I know most of the key players on both sides of the argument in Britain, and many of the EU politicians too. I urge you to ignore the ideologues and listen to the silent majority: in a recent poll, 56 per cent said they do not want Theresa May’s [Hard Brexit](#) [9].

Today I am one of many in the UK campaigning not just for the British parliament to have a meaningful role in all the stages ahead and also for an “outcome” referendum if and when the negotiations produce an agreement. All agree that lies and exaggerations were used during the campaign – and it is now emerging that the [Leave campaign was improperly funded by ‘dark’ money through secret channels](#) [10] and paid US agencies to distort the social media to promote its message, although [one used by Trump has denied the suggestion](#) [11].

Various inquiries into the Referendum are under way by UK agencies such as the Electoral Commission and the Information Commission. And MPs are investigating the role of fake news. Comprehensive monitoring and analysis of the Press, broadcast and social media before and during the Referendum found an [80-20 per cent bias in favour of Leave](#) [12].

Because of the uncertainty surrounding the Brexit outcome, both sides continue to campaign. The two principal Eurosceptic camps, Vote Leave and Leave.EU (deeply hostile to each other) and Stronger In

(now Open Britain), the European Movement UK and Britain for Europe and many pro-EU organisations which meet regularly under the *In Crowd* title all continue their activities. On March 25 there will be another [March for Europe](#) [13]. New initiatives are under way, such as the [Convention on Brexit](#) [14] which intends to hold the debate which didn't take place in parliament at Central Hall in Westminster after the French and UK local elections, on May 12 and 13.

Recently, former British prime ministers Tony Blair and John Major, as well as former deputy prime ministers Nick Clegg and Michael Heseltine, spoke out strongly against Brexit in any form.

You may well ask why, with all the UK and international experts and almost all mainstream politicians in the UK and worldwide arguing against Brexit during the referendum, the usually level-headed Brits voted to leave the economic, political and social security of the EU, with Donald Trump on the horizon and aggressive totalitarian leaders in Moscow and Beijing.

The answer is best put by the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg at the end of an hour-long [documentary on the Brexit campaign](#) [15], which concluded that David Cameron relentlessly focussed on Brexit's threats to the UK economy, whereas the Leave campaign targeted electors with messaging about values and immigration:

"It was a coup by a small band of dedicated campaigners who were willing to take advantage of a Prime Minister fresh from a victory he thought he could win again and a Labour Party in disarray, who together out-foxed and out-fought the political establishment. I've never known a story like it - and I think this is just the start."

The small band of dedicated campaigners - who recruited the political figureheads Michael Gove and Boris Johnson - were Daniel Hannan and Douglas Carswell MP (UKIP), old friends and authors of a populist tract "The Plan" in 2008. They have for many years coordinated the Eurosceptic ideologues - as Tony Blair described them: John Major called them The Bastards. [Members of their shadowy European Research Group](#) [16] are not really interested so much in "take back control" for Westminster as a radical right wing revolution in which the pro-Remain Northern Ireland and Scotland are irrelevant. For a full description of their activities, here's a "long read" from the *Guardian* newspaper by the well-informed right-of-centre journalist [Mathew d'Ancona](#) [17].

And for the MEPs among you, here is how [Hannan portrays the reformed European Parliament of today](#) [18] - by describing his first day there in 1999

So please be prepared to engage with those who understand the EU in British business, trade unions, the media, the health and other public services - and put the case for continued membership for the UK. Time is short.

Yours

[Edward McMillan-Scott](#)

About the author

Edward McMillan-Scott was a UK MEP 1984-2014 and European parliament vice-president 2004-2014. A former leader of the Conservative MEPs, he opposed David Cameron's split from the mainstream EPP Group in 2009 and sat as a LibDem until 2014. He is a patron of the non-party European Movement and is a committee member of the Convention on Brexit

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- [10] <https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/peter-geoghegan-adam-ramsay/you-aren-t-allowed-to-know-who--aid-for-key-leave-campaign-adverts>
- [11] <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/03/06/data-firm-behind-trump-victory-hits-back-at-brexit-data-breach-allegations.html>
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