

Fighting the good fight for Scotland

Written by Alyn Smith on 8 January 2020 in Opinion
Opinion

Veteran SNP MEP Alyn Smith shares with us some parting thoughts on Brexit, Scottish independence and the EU as he bids a fond farewell to Brussels and takes up his seat as MP for Stirling.



Alyn Smith | *Photo credit: European Parliament Audiovisual*

For those involved in political parties and movements, many of us will be hoping never to see another December General Election again in our lifetime.

While I thoroughly enjoyed the campaign and cannot thank the amazing Stirling SNP team enough for the shift they put in, even I have to admit the cold, wet and windy Scottish winter weather was beginning to take its toll as we marched up and down the streets, speaking to as many voters as possible.

I won in Stirling with an incredible 51 percent of the vote. Stirling, of course, voted 68 percent to

remain in the EU back in 2016, and we placed our position on Europe and Scotland's right to choose our own future front and centre of our campaign.

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I remember the SNP National Executive meeting just after the EU referendum where I held up a map of the UK vote showing just how clearly different Scotland is, and said I think this is going to deliver our independence.

We now have another map to add to it. Scotland voted to stop Brexit and indeed endorsed a Party that was quite explicit about being pro-independence and that Scotland should have a right to choose.

The Tories had little else to their nasty, negative and hectoring campaign but "No to indyref2" and the voters emphatically rejected them in our favour.

While I'm delighted with the Scotland-wide result and the result in my own constituency, the overall UK outcome means that it is now highly likely that Scotland will be taken out of the European Union with the rest of the UK at the end of January.

"I thought that in a hung Parliament, or even a government with a narrow majority, a second EU referendum was a plausible way out for everyone, even the Tories"

I've fought alongside colleagues from across the political spectrum for three and a half years to stop Brexit, however events beyond our control mean that we are now highly unlikely to do so.

I stood in Stirling to try and help stop Brexit, because I thought that in a hung Parliament, or even a government with a narrow majority, a second EU referendum was a plausible way out for everyone, even the Tories, and the status quo versus Mr Johnson's deal eminently winnable, even in England.

But that is now a forlorn hope of a path not travelled.

I, the SNP and Scotland delivered everything we could have done, but because of events elsewhere, I've failed before I could start. I had an amazing victory but still somehow feel I've let a lot of people down. I don't know what else we could have done.

So here I am at Westminster, the one Parliament I don't want to have anything to do with Scotland, facing the prospect of Mr Johnson's dreadful deal, which will in no sense get Brexit done - it will start an even more bitter argument over what comes next.

My 16 years in the European Parliament will, I hope, be of use in that discussion. The Tories will be fighting like ferrets in a sack soon enough and we'll be there to maximise Scotland's influence.

Given the state of Labour and the LibDems, I think the only effective opposition to the Tories will be us.

I've demitted office as MEP, which will be an emotional process as I wind things down in Brussels and prepare for hand over to Heather Anderson as my replacement.

“The Tories will be fighting like ferrets in a sack soon enough and we'll be there to maximise Scotland's influence”

Heather is a great candidate, a bright, hardworking farmer and already a well-respected Councillor in the Borders - she'll take over my Agriculture Committee place and shine.

I fear given the Tory majority at Westminster that will be something of a row, but we cannot allow the Tories to silence our voice in Europe, for however short a time remains.

And for the rest of us, we need to find ways to maintain our links with the EU and Member State capitals and smooth our process back into the EU so there are no cracks in the case.

There will not be, I'll make sure of it. More and more people, having seen us genuinely try everything to stop Brexit for the whole of the UK, are more and more convinced that independence is the best future for us. Let's keep them coming.

About the author

Alyn Smith was an SNP MEP in the European Parliament for more than 15 years and is now MP for Stirling.



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