

Cross-Party Group on Europe

17/05/2023 at 1pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Michelle Thomson, Mark Ruskell, Katy Clark

Invited guests

Dr Neema Begum, University of Nottingham

Non-MSP Group Members

Bill Rodger, European Movement in Scotland
Christoph Crepas, Hon. Consul of Austria
Dr Andreas Zimmer, Consul General of Germany
Chris Sagan, The Polish Social and Education Society
Hugh McMahon
Peter Ferry, Hon. Consul of Estonia
Joanna Goodburn, European Movement in Scotland
Fiona Wishlade, Glasgow Loves EU
Dr Rogelia Pastor-Castro, University of Strathclyde
Councillor Annette Christie, Glasgow City Council
Councillor Martha Mattos Coelho, City of Edinburgh Council

Apologies

Neil Bibby MSP
Annabelle Ewing MSP
Sarah Boyach MSP
Foyso Choudhury MSP
Kristín Hannesdóttir, Consul of Iceland
Peter Müller, Hon Consul General Switzerland
Łukasz Lutostanski, Consul General of the Republic of Poland
Prof. Andrew Scott, University of Edinburgh
Kirsty Hughes
Michael Russell
Mark Lazarowicz
Ronnie Convery, Hon. Consul of Italy
Law Society of Scotland
Food Standards Scotland

Edinburgh 4 Europe

Agenda item 1

The Vice Convener, Michelle Thomson, opened proceedings by welcoming members to the meeting; noting that this was the first that the CPG had met for time. Members around the table introduced themselves and a list of apologies was read out.

Agenda item 2

AGM

Katy Clark MSP suggested, and it was agreed by members to appoint co-conveners for the CPG which would help in the efficient running of the CPG going forward. Katy Clark and Michell Thomson where nominated as co-conveners by Mark Ruskell and their appointment was agreed by members.

It was also agreed that the European Movement in Scotland (EMiS) would continue to act as the Secretary, with David McDonald appointed to the role and Bill Rodger of EMiS appointed as Treasurer.

Members then move on to a discussion to set priorities and themes for future meetings. A range of topics were suggested including Erasmus+, Energy, the environment and agriculture and building links with Europe and European institutions.

It was agreed that the co-conveners would discuss shaping a thematic programme for future meetings and share details with members of the CPG.

It was noted that there is a potentially large area of work for the CPG and it was agreed that a thematic approach would be both beneficial and pragmatic in dealing with any capacity issues in supporting the work of the CPG.

Other issues discussed at this session included how to make the CPG fully cross-party by involving MSP's from other political parties.

It was suggested that the CPG should explore opportunities for hosting joint meetings and events with other CPG's on broader themes such as energy security and that we should look at how to co-operate with CPG's focused on particular European countries.

Agenda item 3

To mark European Diversity Month 2023, the CPG heard from Dr Neema Begum from the University of Nottingham who addressed the CPG remotely.

She presented the finding of her recently published work on the attitudes of ethnic minority communities to Europe and explored their voting partners in relation to Brexit.

Dr Begum explained that although ethnic minorities were significantly more likely to vote to Remain in the European Union in the 2016 Referendum than the white British, there has been scant analysis of ethnic minority attitudes towards the EU.

Her work suggests that there is weak identification with Europe among ethnic minority Remain and Leave voters, with perceptions of “European” as a white identity.

Through her original empirical research, Dr Begum found that British ethnic minorities hold distinctive attitudes towards the EU on account of their experiences of being racialized as ethnic minorities in Britain and Europe. Despite the universalism espoused by the EU, the British ethnic minority participants were largely ambivalent towards the EU.

While perceptions of racism and xenophobia on the Leave side influenced ethnic minority participants to vote Remain, this coexists with the participants’ recognition of the whiteness of Europe, and evaluations of European societies being more racist (and Islamophobic) than the UK and a view among ethnic minority Leave-voting participants that Europe was a white racial formation, protecting white European economic interests while perpetuating disadvantages of the Global South.

These views raise a challenge for Europe and the existing picture of the modern EU as progressive and embracing diversity, while suffering from a weak sense of belonging to Europe from ethnic minority communities.

Members considered Dr Begum’s presentations and put forward points and questions about her findings and considered the Scottish context to her work.

In closing this item, the Convener thanks Dr Begum for her contribution to the work of the CPG during European Diversity Month.

Agenda item 4

AOCB

The Convener provided an opportunity for members to raise other business or provide updates.

Chris Sagan, spoke about a recent Europe Day celebration of Polish heritage/culture in Glasgow and explained he is working on establishing a Glasgow based EU citizens forum.

Annette Christie, Spoke about Glasgow City Councils Europe Day celebration and highlighted Glasgow’s role in the Eurocities Network, where it is now the Chair of the Social Affairs Forum.

Martha Mattos Coelho said that the City of Edinburgh Council had passed a motion to host future Europe Day events.

Andreas Zimmer, highlighted various Europe Day events as well as media reports about non EU students in Scotland. He also suggested contacting the EU delegation

in the UK and/or the EU ambassador to the UK who could be invited to address the CPG in the future.

Christoph Crepas, highlighted the need for the CPG to remain non partisan on the issue of Scottish independence and Scottish membership of the EU. This would allow for better engagement with the consular corps. With no disagreement this was noted by the CPG, which will remain focused on its main purpose.

It was agreed that dates for future meetings of the CPG would be issued in advance and that we would trial a range of different time slots for future meetings.

The Convener closed the meeting at 2pm and thanked everyone for their participation.