

Inquiry into EU reform and the EU referendum: implications for Scotland

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I worked and lived in Brussels for 18 years, working as an independent consultant on EU programmes (mainly in areas of development, equality, and science and society).

To what extent and in what policy areas is there a need for EU reform?

Overall, the EU needs urgently to return to pre-Maastricht/Lisbon priorities, so that social policy (including employment) is on a par with – and not subservient – to “growth and competitiveness”, or at least not subservient to the narrow ways in which the latter are defined. The post-1989 neoliberal agenda has to be challenged. This is the only way to rebuild people’s trust in, and identification with, the EU, and to re-establish some sense of EU solidarity. This means, inter alia:

- Re-establishing and reformulating “Social Europe”, a Europe functioning for the benefit of its citizens
- Abandoning or reformulating TTIP, especially removing the ISDS mechanism and protecting public services and EU standards on the environment, etc
- Migration/refugees: The freedom of movement (and the right for EU citizens to live as equals in any EU country) needs to be re-asserted. An EU-wide policy on external migrants and refugees is clearly needed, without opt-outs.

What are the implications of EU reform for Scotland both in relation to devolved and reserved policy areas?

Given the secrecy and mystery surrounding the precise nature and content of the UK Government’s “negotiations” on possible EU reform it’s difficult to respond to this question, other than to say that in no way do Scotland’s specific interests seem to be addressed, whether on devolved or reserved policy areas. Moreover, it’s important to point out the huge damage done to the UK’s standing in EU, not only by the way in which the UK is currently conducting its so-called negotiations, but also by previous Governments, both New Labour and the Coalition (especially by their respective Chancellors of the Exchequer in meetings of the Finance Ministers). The UK has been arrogant, hectoring and smug – and has been incredibly incompetent at engaging with the EU.

What the role of national parliaments should be in relation to EU legislation and whether there should also be a role for substate legislatures?

On the second part of this question, yes there should definitely be a role for substate legislatures. The Committee of the Regions already exists, and was always intended as contributing to EU policy development, albeit at a different level to the main EU institutions. It could play a much stronger role, and could be a means to making closer links between the EU and its citizens.

Intergovernmental relations

Are the proposed arrangements working now? Given the differences in policies and priorities (and behaviour) of the UK and Scottish Governments, the Smith proposals do not seem strong enough, either at UK or EU levels. What voice does the Scottish Government have within the EU, to communicate its own needs and interests?

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