European and External Relations Committee
The EU referendum and its implications for Scotland
Written submission from Dr Anja Gunderloch

I write in response to the call for evidence in relation to Scotland’s relationship with the EU, specifically the position of EU nationals in Scotland, of whom I am one. This is a matter that has caused me a considerable amount of concern since the Brexit referendum.

Until the end of June, I considered myself happily settled in Scotland and secure in my right to live and work here. The referendum result was a shock, and since then I have been waiting for official clarification of what exactly the status of EU citizens will be in the future. I was much heartened by the First Minister’s early reassurance that we would continue to be welcome in Scotland but at the same time I was quite disturbed by the then Home Secretary’s characterisation of EU citizens as potential ‘bargaining chips’. For the first few weeks after the Brexit vote I caught myself thinking that I should perhaps not do or say anything that might draw attention to the fact that I was not born here, and I am not usually easily scared. I have not actually experienced anything that could be interpreted as racism – on the contrary, I have had nothing but support from anyone I spoke to on the subject of Brexit – but the reports especially from England about such incidents have caused me considerable disquiet.

I first came to Scotland in 1985 to study for a year at the University of Edinburgh. As I enjoyed my courses a great deal and as it would have taken me as long to finish my original degree in Germany I decided to stay and continue at the university, becoming the first ever graduate in the then new degree of Scottish Ethnology and Celtic. I followed this up with a PhD in Celtic at the same university and since then have been in continuous employment as a university lecturer, first at the University of Glasgow and since 2001 at the University of Edinburgh. Teaching Gaelic language, literature, and culture to students from Scotland and elsewhere is a responsibility that I both enjoy and take very seriously, and in my research I try to shed light on aspects of my field that have so far not received much attention. I like to think that I am making a contribution to the intellectual life of the country in this way. I also see the benefits that movement of EU citizens brings to the university environment at first hand every day. Students coming here on ERASMUS exchanges bring variety and new experiences to their peers, and our own students return intellectually enriched and with a better understanding of the wider world from such programmes. Colleagues with different backgrounds contribute to a lively and exciting research environment, as do international research projects. Brexit may very well damage such networks, many of which have developed over decades, to the detriment of all who work in academia. In my own department, we have links with Ireland that have enabled us to offer PhD scholarships to Irish students to study at Edinburgh, and the loss of such opportunities would be detrimental to our teaching and our research. European links are stronger in other language departments and their work is likely to be adversely affected in many ways if these links are severed. In fact, I have never encountered an atmosphere of such palpable shock around the university as after the Brexit referendum.
My husband (a Manx national) and I celebrated our Silver Wedding anniversary this May. We have always enjoyed going on holidays in various EU countries and are not looking forward to joining different queues at airports in future just because of the passports we hold. Admittedly this is a small inconvenience compared to the likelihood of the much more drastic negative consequences for the economy that are likely to develop once Brexit comes into force but surely small-scale consequences for individuals should have a place in the debate. While we do not have children we have a circle of close friends, and we try to contribute to our local community as much as our full-time jobs allow. We consider ourselves well integrated in Scotland, and the fact that we have bought a property to live in further demonstrates that we have put down roots. We have both paid taxes and National Insurance contributions for quite some time now, and I am a member of the USS pension scheme. When my husband and I reach retirement age we intend to stay in Scotland, and to continue to be part of our community.

Having now spent thirty years (more than half my life) in this country I consider that I qualify for permanent residence several times over, and since EU citizens were expressly excluded from voting in the referendum that was to have such a dramatic effect on our status I feel very strongly that all those who qualify at the point when Brexit will come into force should be given permanent residence automatically and with a minimum of bureaucratic fuss. By one manner of reckoning it appears that at present staffing levels and with current procedures it would take the Home Office around 140 years to deal with applications if all current EU citizens decided to apply now\(^1\) so a degree of streamlining is clearly in order to speed up the process a bit.

I never saw any need to apply for a British passport because thanks to EU legislation I had a right to live and work in this country, anyway. Now I do not want to give up my European identity in favour of a British one, given the way that Britain will be viewed by the rest of Europe and the wider world from now on. The fact that all my friends and colleagues who are entitled to apply for an Irish passport are already doing so for themselves and their children shows that I am not alone in taking this view. Being able to vote in all elections except Westminster ones is another right that I appreciate greatly, and a right I have made use of whenever an election came round. I may be overly pessimistic here but the prospect of having such rights taken away is truly worrying, and I feel that we EU citizens are owed some reassurance. Developing a clear and fair pathway towards guaranteeing and maintaining our current rights should be a priority for those in power, both in Scotland and Westminster. In my view, any arbitrary decision to curtail the existing rights of EU citizens in the UK is a human rights matter, and should be automatically subjected to the scrutiny of a court of justice. We all came here in good faith, with the desire to find our place in Scotland’s society and to contribute in various ways. I am sure I am not alone in settling in Scotland because I like the open and welcoming outlook of its people that I have experienced over the years. The endorsement of the European idea that is evident in the strong showing of the Remain votes in Scotland was one of the few positive aspects to come out of the referendum, and in an ideal world Scotland would be able to remain in the EU on the strength of this. If that means

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\(^1\) [http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/commentary/here-today-gone-tomorrow-status-eu-citizens-already-living-uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/commentary/here-today-gone-tomorrow-status-eu-citizens-already-living-uk)
going down the path of independence at the same time I have no problem with this solution.

Returning to Germany is not an option I am prepared to contemplate. I have never worked or paid any taxes there, I have no German health insurance or paid into the pension system, and apart from a few friends and fewer relatives I have no ties that bind me to any place there. As an academic with specialisms in Gaelic language, literature, and culture, I have effectively removed myself from the German employment market for good because there are very few German universities that offer Celtic Studies. The fact that I am now past 50 years of age is also likely to put me at a serious disadvantage should I have to seek a job in Germany, and my husband would be at an even greater disadvantage because his German is reasonably fluent but not sufficient to function at a professional level. Put succinctly, I do not want to live in Germany. My home is in Scotland and I like it just fine here.

I hope you find the above useful. Please feel free to get in touch with me if you think that I can contribute in other ways as well and I would be very happy to do so.