European and External Relations Committee

The EU referendum and its implications for Scotland

Written submission from Scottish Seniors Alliance

Introduction

Prior to the EU Referendum the Scottish Seniors Alliance (SSA) produced the enclosed Briefing Paper (February 2016), which we sent to the five main party leaders in Scotland and to the main campaigning organisations; we also shared it with several of the relevant NGOs. You will see that the Briefing, whilst deliberately concise, covers a significant raft of issues and questions:

1. The Economy
2. The Labour market
3. Cost of living
4. Pensions and pension transfers
5. The Constitution.

We also raised more general issues concerning the approach to involving older people in debate and providing clear and relevant information. I believe that all of our concerns remain relevant and in need of response.

At a meeting with your colleague Sandra White MSP in the summer, we gave her a copy of this Briefing, which she kindly said was very useful and just the kind of concise material, which MSPs found helpful. Sandra suggested that it would be useful to pass this paper on to yourself for possible consideration by the Europe Committee.

Given the current unclear situation regarding the UK Government’s stance on “Brexit” I felt it might be timely to offer the Paper for your consideration now.

Also it would be very helpful if you can provide any up-to-date information on the matters detailed in the Paper, which I can share with the SSA membership.

Discussion paper

This brief discussion paper is aimed at engaging older people, politicians, NGOs and other interested parties in the debate on the forthcoming EU Referendum. Our major concern is that older people’s interests in the EU Referendum and a possible Brexit have not been directly addressed as yet. We suggest that unless the older people’s dimension is highlighted there is every chance that the views of well resourced business interests, senior politicians and powerful lobby groups will have a disproportionate impact on the debate and the eventual result of the Referendum.

Given that older people are more likely to vote and could therefore be a decisive constituency it is vital that they are given due attention. We therefore request that all parties, irrespective of their position on the EU, take account of older peoples

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1 Scottish Seniors Alliance gratefully acknowledges the input to this paper from Professor John Bachtler, Director of the European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde
interests and:

1. Give significant priority to demonstrating the pros and cons of EU membership for older people in the immediate and longer-term future.
2. Ensure that older people’s views are canvassed and responded to.
3. Produce information materials targeted at older people; ensure that material is concise and clearly written; includes relevant illustrative examples; provides references to specific EU strategies for older people; and disseminate those materials by all available channels of communication.

Obviously many of the implications of the EU referendum, whichever way it goes, will apply to the whole population. However we are concerned that some aspects have particular concern for older people.

Our key question is: will continued membership of the EU be a better option for sustainable ageing than Brexit?

The Economy

Older people have vital interests in the capacity of the economy to sustain pensions, provide an affordable standard of living in later life and underpin the costs of care and health services. In presenting their case for in/out, advocates must address these issues not only in the respect of current needs, but in anticipation of larger numbers of older people living longer in the coming decades.

In/Out scenarios need to include economic growth projections against current and future demographic trends. For example how will specific economic arguments for or against continued EU membership impact older people’s incomes and social supports?

The Labour Market

Migration and immigration are headline issues in politics at present. Given an ageing population the UK needs a population of younger people to pay for future pensions and also to join the specialist labour forces of health and social care. Migration is one possible way to meet these needs so a key issue is to align the management of EU migration with the needs of an ageing population.

What are the pros and cons of maintaining, or withdrawing from, the current freedom of labour movement arrangements in relation to overall economic activity and the prospects for specific occupations like health and social care provision?

It would be useful for In/Out proposals on freedom of movement to provide realistic examples of how their specific claims address demographic realities, including the staffing and quality of the care industry workforce.

Cost of Living

One motivation for the single market is to facilitate trade and keep prices down. How has the single market benefited older people?

If there is a vote to leave the EU would the costs of trade and the price of goods and
services become more expensive? If so how might the impact on older people be offset?

The answers to these questions are critical for people on low incomes and this includes many older people.

**Pensions & Pension Transfers**

Are UK state pensions likely to be improved by remaining within the EU or would Brexit be a better option?

Would the pensions triple lock be more or less likely to be maintained beyond the 2020 general election in the event of an In or an Out result?

How might Brexit effect the position of older people living in other EU countries?

**Constitution**

It has been suggested that if Scotland votes to stay in the EU, and the rest of the UK votes to leave, this could generate demands for a second Independence Referendum. If this scenario came to pass how could an independence referendum be agreed between the Scottish and UK governments? If a second independence referendum did not take place how would a devolved Scotland relate to the EU from within a non-EU economic area and labour market?