European and External Relations Committee

The EU referendum and its implications for Scotland

Written submission from MB and GP

The Perspective of Two Citizens

In response to the European and External Relations Committee’s call for evidence on the above subject, we would like to provide our views based on our personal experiences of what the European Union means and has meant to us, addressing what we feel should be priorities to ensure Scotland maintains its relationship with the EU as mandated by the recent vote in the Scottish Parliament, as well as covering our hopes for the future of Scotland in Europe.

Our Story

Our names are MB and GP and we are European citizens resident in Scotland. MB grew up in Italy and is an Italian citizen, while GP grew up in Scotland and is a British citizen. We first met in 2001, when we were still at school, through shared musical interests. Our relationship grew over the long geographical distance separating our childhood homes by Lake Maggiore and Loch Ness, and this was greatly facilitated by the ease of movement between our two countries, in terms of visa-free travel rights and ever closer travel links, but also by our shared notion of EU citizenship. We each learnt the other’s language, and we now constantly switch between Italian and English. GP went to study languages at the University of Edinburgh, and the undergraduate programme required a year spent in the relevant countries for language acquisition, so he was able to exercise his treaty freedoms by moving to Italy in 2004 and working as an English teacher in a secondary school. We lived together during that year, and when GP returned to Edinburgh in 2005, MB followed that same year to exercise the same treaty freedoms. She quickly found employment in a call centre, where she was able to use her multilingual skills, and then later moved to a job in university administration. While in full-time employment, she took evening classes to enable her to pursue higher education, and then transitioned to full-time degree study at the University of Edinburgh. After graduation, she immediately found employment again in an administrative role. We were married in 2013 and are writing this from our home in Edinburgh.

Importance of Citizenship in Promoting Equality and Strengthening Contribution, Commitment and Attachment

It is evident from our story that our shared EU citizenship, with its associated rights and freedoms, has provided a solid basis for equality and mutual empowerment in our relationship. The fact that each of us is entitled to treatment in the other partner’s state of origin on the same basis as citizens of that state, in the vast majority of areas, has allowed us to live and work in each other’s country while never really feeling like aliens and also while recognising that these rights are held by each of us independently of the citizenship held by the other partner from birth. Any erosion of this situation would feel like introducing an unfair imbalance that has never been there before. The political application of these shared rights has probably felt strongest for us when GP was able to vote in local elections while resident in Italy,
and when MB has been able to vote in local, Scottish, and European elections while resident in Scotland, as well as in the referendum on Scottish independence. This opportunity for political participation has a major impact on enabling EU citizens to develop a stronger attachment and commitment to their country of residence, strengthening their contribution to society even further.

**Impact of the UK’s EU Referendum Result on Personal, Social and Professional Lives**

When the result of the referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU was announced on the morning of 24 June 2016, we felt a great sense of sadness, because we know how much we have benefited from our common European citizenship and find it distressing to imagine these citizenship rights taken away from anybody now or in the future. Since that reaction, the greatest words of reassurance have consistently come from the First Minister and other members of the Scottish Government, recognising Scotland as the home of EU citizens, valuing the contribution of EU citizens, and reminding us that EU citizens remain welcome here.

These are feelings we share with many friends and colleagues in Scotland from a great variety of international backgrounds, and indeed there is also a major impact on our broader social and professional lives. We both work at the University of Edinburgh, where MB is a secretary in the School of Education and GP is a lecturer in European languages. Our circle of friends and closest colleagues includes citizens of almost every EU member state, and many other countries besides. We also work with students from across the world, and GP frequently collaborates with researchers based in other European countries: this includes as part of a current Horizon 2020 bid proposal. Among our social and professional networks, there is a deep feeling of great anxiety and uncertainty about what the future may hold in store.

We feel a strong commitment and attachment to Scottish society, and we consider Scotland our home. While we have no desire or intention to leave Scotland voluntarily, we are very concerned that some of our friends and colleagues may be forced to leave their homes against their will, by feeling less welcome, or by difficult economic circumstances and diminished employment opportunities. If any number of EU citizens were to leave Scotland, this would be to the great detriment of Scottish cultural, social, and economic life. Although we feel the prospect of mass deportation to be highly unlikely, the fact that it appears to become a possibility at all for individual cases of EU citizens currently entitled to the full exercise of their treaty freedoms in the UK is deeply worrying and unsettling.

**Maintaining Scotland’s Relationship with the EU**

We feel that Scotland’s geographical position clearly demonstrates the need for close engagement with our neighbours across Europe, and there are many benefits to be had from a co-ordinated approach to cross-border issues by the independent states that make up our common European home. Furthermore, it is an immense responsibility we hold to continue to maintain and to further the great progress made in European co-operation. Future generations would find it hard to forgive if the European project were torn apart by short-termism with no regard for the broader historical perspective. The interdependence built into the EU model of co-operation has made it a practical impossibility for large-scale wars to be fought between
member states, with the result that some take peace for granted in spite of the long history of conflict in our continent.

In seeking to maintain Scotland’s relationship with the EU, it is important to remember the origins and founding principles of modern European co-operation as set out in the Ventotene Manifesto, written by political prisoners of the Fascist regime in Italy and spread by the Italian Resistance during the Second World War. Fundamental to this text were progressive notions of liberty and citizenship that have been promoted furthest by the EU.

**Options and Priorities**

The distinctly different result of the EU referendum in Scotland creates an opportunity to make Scotland more European, overcoming the insular mentality promoted by many in the Leave campaign. We are pleased to see the Scottish Government exploring all possible options to protect Scotland’s place in the EU, building bridges with other countries in Europe, and seeking expert advice in these matters. In doing so, we feel there are some clear priorities to be addressed in relation to citizenship:

- **Priority 1**

  It is our opinion that nothing short of continued full membership of the EU would be a fully acceptable alternative, whether this can be achieved within the UK or with Scotland as an independent state. As an Italian citizen, MB would strongly encourage any positive efforts by the Italian government to support Scotland’s continued membership of the EU. We both support Scottish independence but, irrespective of Scotland’s constitutional framework, EU membership must be a paramount priority.

- **Priority 2**

  Although membership of the European Economic Area (short of full EU membership) would also guarantee the continued freedom of movement of persons—which we feel to be the most important of the treaty freedoms—we believe there is no substitute for the incomparably empowering concept of EU citizenship. However, if EU membership possibilities have been exhausted, EEA membership would be a second-best option.

- **Priority 3**

  If the UK (with or without Scotland) were to leave the EU, we feel it is vital for rights previously acquired by citizens of member states to be protected. Furthermore, provisions should be made to ensure that EU citizens are not treated as foreign citizens, in a similar way to the protections already in place for Irish citizens through section 2 of the Ireland Act 1949, which declared that ‘the Republic of Ireland is not a foreign country for the purposes of any law in force in any part of the United Kingdom’. In addition to rights of movement, employment and settlement, it is also important to promote the continued right of EU citizens to participation in political life, with rights to vote and stand for election at least to the same degree as at present.
• Priority 4

Beyond the obvious and quite immediate complications for EU citizens resident in Scotland, in the event of the UK’s potential withdrawal from the EU, we also feel it is important to safeguard the EU citizenship of British citizens, especially those resident in Scotland, which voted to remain in the EU. This could notionally be achieved through the creation of a separate category of British citizenship specific to Scotland. It would be a great shame to see the people of Scotland and the rest of the UK deprived of the fullest opportunities to travel, broaden their minds through study, find a job or the love of their life in the EU.

We are grateful for this opportunity to share our views on this matter.