CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS INQUIRY
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Scotland’s current political situation (how I see it):

A Brexit (and Independence much more) will influence and disrupt many external relations Scotland has at the moment. Scotland will lose much of its EU influence and will no longer have any direct EU internal contacts in many EU institutions.

Added to that Brexit has seriously damaged the image, the standing and branding of the UK, many EU people are telling me daily. Many EU continents suddenly and surprisingly confirm their UK views have changed and now express their antipathy against anything political British. Many, many of them do NOT understand why the UK has chosen to leave the EU.

You would imagine this sudden change could and would affect Scotland but the opposite seems to be the new future reality. Scotland’s clear EU Ref vote for Europe, the standing- in of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government for “their” EU nationals have been widely reported, recognised and discussed on the continent. Scotland is now more and more seen to be very different to the “rUK”. Scotland is seen to be much closer to Europe and the EU than the rUK.

The latest announcement for another Independence Ref in Scotland has been widely reported and recognised AND very positively discussed.

Many EU nationals on the continent are now asking (not only me) why Scotland still remains in “this chaotic UK” (often heard quote).

Current “Scotland External” situation:

What is on offer?

The Scottish hubs, Scottish Development Agency, VisitScotland, Scotland House, Scottish Enterprise, Scotland Europa and I guess much more. It’s certainly good to have all that but where to start and who is responsible for what?

Having spoken to many company owners e.g. in the wealthy Black Forest part of Germany’s region (Land) Baden-Württemberg (the GREEN PM of this region has a Scottish family part) – dominated by companies like Mercedes, Bosch, Porsch, Siemns BUT also by many family- owned smaller companies who are nearly all world-market leaders in their many IT, automotive and science and research business niches - the reaction on Scotland always is: who does what? Who is responsible for what when these companies want to invest in Scotland, who deals with it??

Scotland’s offers for help and advice at the moment are a wee bit too much confusing they say. They are not well promoted and coordinated e.g in Germany.
Germans know when FM Nicola Sturgeon visits Berlin but they know much less about Scotland´s external offerings in many fields.

Where is that ONE “Scottish Center of Excellence” many business people could and would like to contact searching for help and advice??

Idea: Scotland’s representatives obviously need to and have to visit future customers more often in their companies and not to wait until they react. After Brexit Scotland urgently needs to much more and intensively inform future partners what is on offer in a much more coordinated and promoted way, across all business regions.

One current example:

Germany has a SDA office in Düsseldorf, Scotland has the Scottish Hub in Berlin (does anyone in Scotland really think it was a good decision to install that Hub within the British Embassy, many Germans are asking?), but who does what?? Whom to contact to get basic and investment influencing information??

You may understand Germany´s confusion: When SDA Düsseldorf was advertising and looking for representatives in a new Berne /Switzerland office, many learned their duty, the job ad explained, was also to deal with Germany.

Against this backdrop the question stays and remains who does what when it comes to Scotland and where is that ONE contact point dealing with “my” questions many may have wanting to invest. That for many seems to be a very important and external and internal Scottish coordination – and new strategy ?? - question.

The political future

Observing daily the Scotland reporting e.g. in the many German-speaking countries and regions (Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Northern Italy, East Belgium, many parts of The Netherlands, East of France, Germany, South of Denmark, the Baltic States, parts of Hungary......) most of the media in these countries are able and keen to present a current Scotland reporting. Scotland in these media still has that positive, forward-looking and UK-different standing and branding. These media tend to present that very regularly. Many observe closely what Scots are doing knowing many of their country´s companies having their dealings in Scotland and – always remember that – many tens of thousands of visitors from these countries are Scotland´s main EU tourism markets. Many know and enjoy ..Scottish Whisky (as long as it is on normal EU prices and not much more expensive, due to future EU tariffs, after Brexit, affecting jobs and income in very rural places). This over the years has lead to many, many whisky-tastings on offer on the continent, being sold out soon after being advertised! Scotland and branding.

EU people on the continent have been and are informed that 2 parties support a new Indy Ref 2, while many other parties tend to / want to stay in the UK. Many on the continent have already realised how damaging this new “staying” development could be for Scotland in future. Many of them are coming from “federal nations” and know how federalism and devolution works. They know and have observed that the UK’s devolution process after Brexit could (and will) be at risk or even more or less shut
down by London. Many EU nationals and institutions are convinced it will certainly NOT be Scotland dealing with more than 160 WTO states to get new deals in future. It is London which will deal for a (somehow united) UK.

People on the continent fear the UK will do everything in future to promote BRITAIN …but Scotland.

We already see first signs for this trend…..British supermarkets start to promote Scottish produce under the BRITAIN label while interestingly German (!!) supermarkets like ALDI and LIDL are promoting local Scottish produce, also in their continental shops. Both companies are very happy to be recognised as important Scottish Whisky dealers reaching tasting highs in Whisky competitions for their own initiated Whisky creations.

My very personal experience:

the main large weekend market ( marché ) in Strasbourg/ France still offers Scottish salmon (!!) but – as traders tell me - will never be very keen to offer BRITISH salmon. Made / Produced in Scotland is a highly exclusive and respected trading brand which under the BRITAIN label could and will lose its attraction. Another very confusing point for many continental customers raising questions on Scotland´s external and internal future…standing and branding.

Would you really think a certain and large EU country would give up Made in Germany (thank you Britain) to deal under Made in the EU?

Scotland and Europe situation

The SP´s Committee will certainly know that Europe NOT only exits of that still 28, soon 27 member states. There is also a 47 (Council of Europe Strasbourg) and 56 member states (OSCE, Vienna) Europe in “Scotland´s external” world.

While Vienna at the moment and in future will be more or less a playing field for the UK as a member state Strasbourg seems and will be the most influential anchor point for Scotland´s future!!!

As long as the member state UK remains in the European Convention for Human Rights (the Scottish Parliament is based on this convention) and therefore the Council of Europe CoE, Scottish MPs , MSPs and local and regional Scottish councillors will be allowed and happily invited to be active within the different political layers of the Council of Europe. Over the last months we have seen e.g. in the Council of Europe´s “Congress of Local and Regional Authorities” how Scottish MSPs and councillors presented their very Scottish views and that colleagues from all other 46 CoE´s member states listened and applauded.

We have seen discussions where Scottish MSPs like Christine McKelvie or Angela Constance raised their concerns and expressed their SCOTTISH views, welcomed by all other delegates. Strasbourg has experienced speeches of MPs like e.g Tommy Sheppard and Ian Murray in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe PACE They followed Alex Salmond´s speeches, showed large interest in Scotland information stands in front of the Council´s main assembly hall and many very
happily celebrated St Andrew’s Day in Strasbourg, when the UK´s Ambassador to The Council of Europe has been a Scot.

As already mentioned the membership of the Council of Europe will be a future influential contact point for Scotland to remain a member in the Brussels-based and very influential Assembly of European Regions AER, after the UK has left the EU. Scotland only as a CoE member region will still be a member in the AER and will have the possibility to stay in close contact with other European regions in Brussels and certainly Strasbourg.

With Brexit and / or Independence it now seems to be more than time to newly concentrate political Scottish views on and in Strasbourg. Strasbourg is the main seat of the (direct CoE neighbour) European Parliament.

In future Strasbourg could and will be the only direct entry point for Scotland to direct deal(s) with other European regions!!

To coordinate this new work in Strasbourg the SP´s External Relations and Europe committee should start to plan the creation of a new Scotland office in Strasbourg.

We all know Brussels is far off and Scotland House there will not be able to intensively and daily deal with Strasbourg.

A new political strategy on how to be still involved in Europe, after Brexit, might be a good and really very urgent idea.

Conclusions

1. Over the last months EU nationals have realised they are “welcome in Scotland”. But to be open and honest ...that’s it ??
With the tenth of thousands EU nationals living, working and paying taxes in Alba one starts to wonder why there has never ever been any movement to take advantage of their experiences and knowledge. They know they can vote for the Scottish Parliament (like I did!!) but are not somehow included in many political processes and procedures in Scotland.

I would urgently propose a regular conference, a regular task force, a regular “joint venture” bringing Scotland and many of these EU nationals living in Scotland together.

Scotland needs to offer a platform where the exchange of these views could happen and where each side could learn and understand from the other. Scotland will need their/ these “new” views to get in contact with their home nations on the continent. This new and finally working together could and will raise new ideas how to get better relations “to Europe” (which always implicats Scotland is NOT Europe, by the way).
The “Scotland is open, Scotland is now” video clip, run on e.g. You Tube and the ads seen in e.g. French newspapers like Le Monde and many German newspapers have been a large success on the continent. Many people reacted on them, they reached people Scotland’s institutions normally do not expect to reach. It might be an idea to build a new image, a new standing around “publications” like that!

2. A new “after Brexit” external strategy has to be urgently developed and implemented by the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. The existing “External relations” strategy is no longer very current, needs to be updated and does NOT comply with changed demands from and within the business community (not only on the continent). It is NOT very effective to struck relations and future deals. Many Scottish institutions have to change their future approach on new deals and strategies. They need to be more active, be viewable, be present and need to be much more flexible.

I have been intensively involved in talks trying to bring together a Scottish university and a German university group for a joint venture, after Brexit. I have experienced it first hand how difficult it has been to convince Scots and help them to understand continental European thinking and working. That, after Brexit and maybe after Independence, HAS to change!

3. Scottish politicians have to ensure it will be still possible to contact Scotland and its institutions DIRECT and NOT to be forced to first ask a future decision “layer” in London. Federal regions like Scotland’s German partner regions/ states Bavaria and Northrhine - Westphalia (state contracts with Scotland have been signed a long time ago) are used to deal direct with regions and countries to struck and implement deals. This also applies for many other European regions and countries. Theses very independent regions are NOT used to and never will ask anyone in national governments.

Scotland House in Brussels will certainly confirm how central to any EU institutions the Bavarian “little castle” representation in Brussels is located. Be very sure: Bavaria will never ask anyone in Berlin or elsewhere if they want to work for their region and regional institutions and struck and talk about deals.

Many do NOT see at the moment the London-based UK will much invest in further and future devolution. Many experts expect it to more and more a reverse of devolution. This could have disastrous consequences on future direct relations between Scotland (as a UK region) and other very independent countries and regions, even in the EU.

Companies wanting to invest in Scotland want to speak with Scotland and its institutions direct and do not want to be forced to include further more complicated decision makers!
4. With Brexit on Scotland’s doorstep the country has to re-think its standing in Europe. Scotland will be completely out of the EU, many relations there will cease to exist...BUT Scotland will stay in the Council of Europe.

Scotland House in Brussels should in future be by far more active to deal with e.g. European Commission and EU member state affairs (if they still want to deal with a Third Country): Added to that a regular Scotland office should be created in Strasbourg to deal with CoE affairs, with EU Parliament affairs on location (main seat is Strasbourg), on European Court of Human Right matters, would deliver regular information on cross-border relations and developments between German, Swiss and Alsatian/France regions, would be the regions - anchor point, would advertise Scotland much more and help Scottish MPs and MSPs to gain and deliver information and background for their work in and from Strasbourg institutions.

A new Scotland Strasbourg Office would also be very helpful remembering the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission in Strasbourg will certainly be asked by the EU if Scotland would decide to (re-) join the EU, in case of any independence developments. All 27 EU member states are members of the CoE.

For the Scottish media all that would mean to finaly install regular Europe corrs. Scottish viewers, readers and listeners will need first-hand information on how EU and “the very large” Europe really works and functions. There is hope. BBC Scotland’s THE NINE has the first ever Scotland-orientated and Scotland reporting Europe Corr, based in Brussels.

5. The SP’s Committee(s) should urgently initiate a large conference in Edinburgh (Europeans like Auld Reekie) on Scotland’s future external relations. The SP and certainly the Scot Gov should e.g. invite experts, politicians, researchers and “normal” people to discuss and address a new future External relations strategy. It will be strongly needed to deal with “the outside world” after Brexit times and needed much more if Scotland would go for any Independence.

The EICC could be good venue. It’s well – known, Europeans like it there and offers amazing opportunities for workshops, discussions and working-meetings.