

European Union Referendum Debate – Dundee 25 May 2016

26/05/2016 - Issues of sovereignty, security, economics and trade topped the agenda at a European Union referendum debate held at Dundee University last night. Proponents of both the Remain and Leave positions in the referendum put forward their case, with migration, identity and the nature of the European project also featuring in the discussion between panel members and the audience.

The debate was organised by the European Movement in Scotland, and chaired by the CSPP's Professor Richard Kerley. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) foundation sponsored.

Opening the case for remaining was Gordon MacIntyre-Kemp, founder and chief executive of Business for Scotland. Basing his case on trade and prosperity, he argued that Scotland's current trade relations with the rest of the EU were favourable, and that the country received around £20 in economic benefit for every £1 it puts in, providing revenue for the Scottish Government and public services. The business figure added that while leaving the EU would not end trade with other EU countries, no other feasible alternative – including the Norway, Swiss or Canada options – would guarantee as good access to the single market with any increase in sovereignty.

Mr MacIntyre-Kemp also argued that the economic case for leaving the EU was often based on the hope of improving productivity due to reduced EU regulation. He claimed that in practice this would involve a UK government reducing certain worker rights and health & safety regulations currently protected in EU legislation.

Following this, Jon Stanley put forward his case for leaving the EU. Jon is director of Prospect Scotland, a Eurosceptic and libertarian cross-party organisation. Jon said that his argument was based on Scotland and the rest of the UK having the self-belief to be able to govern their affairs better outside of the EU. Jon pointed to numerous examples of countries which are successful traders and are not members of the EU, and criticised EU policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy, which he said were not about social justice, as they subsidise land ownership.

The pro-leave campaigner, who is also a junior doctor, questioned that a post-Brexit UK would be less progressive on human and social rights than the EU is currently. Later in the debate, he also suggested that Scotland could have a greater say in areas like fishing policy if the UK was not part of the EU.

Other members of the panel also made interventions. Mr Hans Hartwig Blomeier, Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung London office, said that it was in the interests of the UK, Germany and the rest of the EU to have the UK in the driving seat of EU decision-making. He observed that if the EU were to move to a "multi-tier" structure, the participation of the UK would be key to making this work.

Meanwhile, Professor Christian Kaunert, Jean Monnet Professor in EU Justice and Home Affairs at Dundee University, stated that the EU is an international organisation, and should not be treated as a state in itself. He also countered the notion that the EU reduces freedoms, instead arguing that the EU has given citizens freedoms they did not previously have.

Following this, audience members asked questions about the future of freedom of movement if the UK were to leave the EU; the issue of sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected world; whether Scotland would be better off independent and in the EU, or outside the EU but part of the UK; the future direction of the EU; security and terrorism; and whether human rights would be better protected in the UK if it was not a member of the EU.

At the end of the debate, Professor Richard Kerley thanked the panel and all audience members for attending, before further conversation took place during an informal drinks reception.

Link to article on CSPP website:

http://www.cspp.org.uk/sovereignty_and_economics_top_agenda_at_eu_referendum_debate_chaired_by_cspp