

Why I'm re-standing for Chair – Mike Galsworthy

Where are we now?

I first became Chair of EMUK in March 2023 – and after 2.5 years of battling away, things finally seem to be going our way.

Labour came to power in July 2024 and, despite hard red lines on Single Market, Customs Union and free movement, have nevertheless made an issue, in their UK-EU spring summit, of rebuilding with Europe. Primarily on youth mobility, standards alignment and defence – all of which we have consistently pushed for. They even now have decided to start turning on Brexit itself in the lead up to their upcoming budget. The omerta is evaporating. This renewed focus on Brexit will then roll into the 10th anniversary of the Brexit vote next June, where we can bury the reputation of Brexit for good - and use that historical consensus as a firm launchpad to rejoin campaigning. In fact, a new piece in the i Paper is claiming that Labour are considering making the next general election about Brexit.

Labour are likely to be alarmed at the new “green wave” lapping at them as the Green Party, newly led by Zack Polanski gets attention and membership at pace. Zack has stated openly and repeatedly, including to me on his own podcast, that under him the Greens are aiming to rejoin the EU as soon as possible. Lib Dems are also rivalling Labour in the polls, with rejoining the EU as a long-term strategy and currently putting pressure on the government over the Customs Union. Similarly, in Wales, Welsh Labour is falling away rapidly to another “green wave” as the battle becomes one of Plaid Cymru versus Reform. Plaid's resounding victory in Caerphilly indicates that Plaid is in pole position to take the Senedd in the upcoming elections of May 2026. That is hugely significant because Plaid Cymru are passionately pro-EU, advocating rejoining the Single Market and Customs Union as stepping stones to rejoining the EU outright. So even though the Senedd has no direct power on those matters, it would become a very powerful platform of pro-EU advocacy. With the devoutly pro-EU SNP holding a strong lead looking at the next Scottish Parliament election (also in May 2026), that means that caught between the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Government, the English government in Westminster might feel quite isolated on any hesitancy with Europe.

So things are lining up for us. There is a big pro-European conversation coming. It is cross-party and thoroughly representative of all our nations, particularly in our next generations.

So why me, again?

I am saying all of this, as a candidate for the Chair role, because I'm very excited that we now have a rapidly brightening pathway - and I believe I have the energy, vision and wherewithal to guide this organisation of ours to seize these opportunities. I also believe that I have led and facilitated a very solid build so far for EMUK to become a central, respected, unifying, cross-party organisation that can increasingly mobilise our many parts - from our unique deep grassroots structures to our links in the parliament and government. I believe we've got our positioning right at this stage.

I am only part-way through the build I declared in 2023. We need that complete build well in place before the next GE in 2028/9. What I set out in March 2023 was 1) growth of membership, 2) support and build of local branches, 3) a parliamentary network/structure, 4) develop research capacity, 5) get media cut-through, 6) form a business group, and 7) build the youth movement.

Let's deal with all of those parts. With **membership**, on coming in I quickly led a drive to get it from just over 17,000 to over 20,000 and then to 25,000. That was manna for our finances and our ability to build critical mass in the staff team (under our new CEO, Nick Harvey, who we onboarded in late 2023). But that is now just over 26,000 and has growth slowed considerably. A few months ago, we could excuse it as the difficulties of growing membership in a climate of Brexit omerta in the news –

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but in the very recent context above, we no longer can. So we now need to put our muscle behind a new membership drive that gets bolder and more creative in its outreach.

With our **local groups**, I sensed quite a lot of disenchantment in 2023 about “EMHQ” ability to understand and support the local groups and branches of our movement. I believe that has entirely turned around now. With a growth in staff to fill key support roles and a focus on local groups in our culture, the staff team under Emma supporting local groups have been able to really support events, materials, and database integration (including importantly with Wales for Europe (WfE) and European Movement in Scotland (EMiS) – Young European Movement (YEM) is coming next!). The result is that I hear very happy noises from local groups about our focus on supporting them. However, now is the time to GROW our local groups network. As we hit springtime 2026, we need to support active groups with speakers and events to fill their ranks, kindle dormant seeds of groups that want to come back, help establish brand new groups, and reach out to other local organisations to bring cross-fertilisation and diversity into our ranks. With this we also must build this into a new social media growth strategy, focusing on the local, especially now that Facebook is coming back into play in a big way.

On **parliamentary networks**, our cross-party nature is vital to our identity. Immediately after the general election in 2024, I rushed for us to build an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Europe for the new parliament. We did that. We are the secretariat for that APPG and this is absolutely vital for our long-term structure in providing this key research and discussion forum on Europe in parliament. It has also put us into good working relations with the government. Then at our 2024 AGM, we appointed a set of Vice Presidents representing Labour, Conservatives, Lib Dem, Plaid and SNP, a set of Patrons, and Dominic Grieve and Caroline Lucas as new co-Presidents. Then in 2025, we moved our offices to a Westminster address. So between EMUK, WfE, EMiS and the APPG, we are connected strongly in a network of parliamentarians. We do need to make much more of our APPG, including expanding its membership and events, but we have it up and running and its relevance is increasing. This dovetails with us building increased **research** capacity. This is a core capacity not only to servicing the APPG, but also for content on our website & flyers and generating content for media. We have also done extensive polling to inform strategy. You may have seen our reports on small businesses, the environment (led by Caroline Lucas) or ECHR. But we need to ramp up this output.

The increased research capacity then feeds into getting more **media cut-through**. This remains my largest frustration at the moment. Although we have done a lot of deep build, we do need to regularly feature in the media and build EMUK into a household name. Although you see we get regular press coverage, particularly with The Independent, we are not across broadcast like we should be. We need to develop better relations with media outlets and ensure that our increasing research capacity translates into media punch. This is now vital given the conversation is re-opening.

The **business group** is an ambition I talked about when a candidate in 2023. And this year we launched Business with Europe. This is powerful in the context of the economic needs of the country, a parliamentary network with an APPG to talk to, and the local community structures that we have all over the country. I'm excited about how we can develop it in 2026 and 2027.

Lastly, with **youth mobilisation**, Young European Movement has gone from strength to strength and our last step is to consolidate it into our database structures so that we can really ramp up membership. This is very nearly ready and will mark a huge step change.

I hope this all encourages you about where we are going and the scale of what we are building. I am constantly excited about our purpose and our community and I hope you will support me at the helm for another term. The future is looking promising, but we need to seize it. Thank you.