

**Round table with Lord Bridges (DExEU), Ambassador Alison Rose, Emma Gibbons (Pol & Instit Affairs)**

**UKRep/UK Embassy Brussels Wednesday 18 January 2017**

Bishop	Robert
David	Fieldsend
Jan	Hillerman
Rev Ricky	Yates
Rev William	Lister
Andrew	Murray
Eric	Jarman
Pauleen	Bang
Graeme	Lloyd-Roberts
Andrew	Johnson
Audrey	Singh
Ven Richard	Seabrook
John	Mckillop Smith
Orla	Ralph
Roger	King
Rev John	Murray
Rev Debbie	Flach
Ven Meurig	Williams
Rev Brian	Davies

Notes taken by Mrs Helen Innes

Lord Bridges began by saying that Brexit negotiations would be highly complex and that smaller issues must not be forgotten. Ambassador Rose said that Consular sections right across Europe were doing similar cross-checks on issues to ensure that no issue was overlooked. (He had to leave to answer parliamentary questions in the House of Lords during item 1. Thereafter Ambassador Rose led responses on behalf of HM Govt assisted by Emma Gibbons, Deputy Head of Mission at the UK Permanent Representation to the EU)

**1. Pensions & Finance**

**a) There is currently a great deal of cooperation between the pensions administrations of the UK and other EU countries. Is the government expecting that this will continue?**

Lord Bridges spoke of wanting to protect UK nationals, but the details are yet to be negotiated. He talked of the need to manage expectations, rather than raising them and then disappointing.

**b) Currently UK pensions can be received in the UK with annual uplifts for price or wages growth. Will this continue? Will UK public service pensions also receive annual indexation for citizens who choose to live on the continent? Or will pensions be frozen if someone leaves the UK to live in the EU?**

Lord Bridges said that indexation can't be guaranteed at this point, however he was not aware of any plans to freeze pensions. He will get back to us.

Gibraltar: UK pensions are taxed at source although there is no tax on pensions in Gibraltar.

Those working for European agencies: Will the UK pay contributions for those who've worked for European agencies in the past? This is subject to negotiation but has been flagged up.

**c) Will current double taxation treaties remain in place? What about arrangements to be partially taxed in an EU country and partially in the UK?**

Eric Jarman from Stuttgart: in his experience double taxation already seems not to work.

The issue is on their radar. New legislation must be robust and sustainable.

**d) Inheritance legislation reform has recently made things easier for UK citizens who own assets in both the UK and the EU. Will these reforms be sustained post-Brexit?**

This refers to an EU directive on succession. In Belgium you can opt for GB law, though the UK hasn't opted into this legislation itself yet. Will member states still apply this in future?

**e) Will it still be possible to receive interest on investments held in the UK gross of tax if you still live in the EU?**

European churches often have investments in the UK which receive gross income. How will Gift Aid be affected when the relationships change between states?

## **2. Healthcare and Social Security Cover**

**a) There is currently mutual recognition of state national insurance contributions making it possible for affordable health care to be received when UK citizens are resident in another EU country on the same basis as citizens of that country. Will these reciprocal arrangements continue after Brexit, or will UK citizens find themselves having to pay substantial sums for healthcare until they have completed a long period of residence?**

Torrevieja: Deep fear and uncertainty is affecting people's mental health. People are making decisions now based on their possible health in 5-10 years time. Spanish property is priced very low, so people cannot afford to return to the UK. Important that government understands the current effect on people's daily lives.

The Ambassador reassured us that the Prime Minister wants to establish the rights of nationals early in the process, but we must have understanding from our partner countries.

One participant asked if the Vienna Convention applied as they thought being in a country for more than 5 years gives you rights.

When you retire you currently apply for your pension & healthcare via the EU country in which you live. Might this in future require you to make healthcare

contributions from your pension, even though you have paid the full 30 years of NI contributions in the UK? When you return to the UK will we slip back seamlessly into the UK system, or may NHS entitlements be reduced (eg for pre-existing conditions) for those who have lived on the continent for an extended period?

What about mixed nationality marriages? Can the partner/spouse (EU) also return to the UK without conditions? And the rights of the children? The Ambassador reassured us that the PM wants an 'open' country with commitments to people who already reside in the UK.

Ricky Yates – government is driven by the immigration issue - the language of government ministers: 'cards' 'bargaining chips'.

Is it recognised that the better EU citizens are treated in the UK, the better UK citizens will be treated in the EU?

Jan Hillerman: EU nationals living in the UK are only 5% of the population and make a positive fiscal contribution. It is a myth that they are causing economic disadvantage.

Debbie Flach: The British Charitable Fund in Paris speaks of the pensioners they deal with as being distressed. No vote. Pension fell by 20% after Brexit. Heating fuel allowance cancelled for GB nationals abroad. Can't afford to return to the UK even if they were obliged to.

Gibraltar: 10,000 people come from Spain to work every day in banking etc. Spain only opened the border when they joined the EU, and they are now threatening to close it. Feelings between the two countries are not good. Gibraltar is afraid that their interests will be sacrificed in order to get a deal through.

- b) Seconded workers. Deployment of labour between EU countries is facilitated by companies not having to enrol workers in the state security and health insurance systems when sending them to a different country for a limited period – they are allowed to continue paying into their home country scheme. For British companies this is an advantage in both directions, whether posting workers from the UK to the continent or recruiting workers from the continent for short-term assignments in the UK. Will this continue?**

This affects education, the church, multi-nationals. This forms part of the single market directive and needs negotiating. The Ambassador said that there will be restrictions on EU nationals coming to the UK, and therefore vice versa, but we hope it will be 'light-touch'.

- c) What are government intentions for health care arrangements for temporary EU residents such as students and tourists currently covered by the EHIC scheme?** The Govt has ruled out continued membership of the European Economic Area which would have given automatic continuity of reciprocal pensions, social security and healthcare rights.

### **3. Special issues for the recruitment & retention of UK clergy for the Diocese in Europe**

- a) In order to keep out radical imams trained outside Europe, an increasing number of EU countries are placing restrictions on entry for all Ministers of Religion from outside Europe. What assurances can be given that the Church of England in Europe will be able to continue to have properly unrestricted ability to recruit clergy from the UK and deploy them across the continent after Brexit?**

This concerns Movement of Workers legislation. In the past it has already been much harder to set up the employment of ministers of religion from outside Europe. Denmark: courses in language and culture are increasingly required. The Ambassador encouraged us to cultivate good relationships with the state wherever we are. We are often ministering to natives of our countries and not just ex-pats. It is up to us to actively cultivate relationships with people in influence.

- b) What protections will exist for British clergy returning to the UK post Brexit? Will NHS entitlements etc be unchanged?**

Concern was expressed for people entering a new health system with pre-existing conditions, even when their NI contributions have been paid in full. Private medicine is very costly, and insurance becomes hard to get. Will the NHS become very discriminatory?

### **4. Citizenship/identity/voting rights**

- a) Our diocese serves an expatriate community many of whom have been resident in the EU for a long time and who were denied a vote in the Referendum on 23 June, despite the fact that they were some of the most affected. Does the government recognise the injustice of this situation and will the government give voting rights to British citizens living in the EU before the next General election? (as per manifesto)**

Very many other nations allow and indeed require nationals to vote. 'Votes for Life' and the Queen's Speech last year suggested that GB nationals would all be given the vote. This issue has been brought to the fore by Brexit. The Great Repeal Bill which will put European legislation into UK law will undoubtedly be so enormous that it risks reprioritising the Queen's speech. Gibraltar went to the EU Court to get the vote in European elections (for SW MEPs) and this gave them the vote in the Brexit referendum too.

Participants felt that there was some urgency here in case of a new general Election being called. The lack of a vote ties into wider insecurities.

**b) Brexit appears to make life more difficult for those who want to spend a part of their lives away from the UK. Is the government in principle sympathetic and supportive to those pensioners who retire to warmer climes and cheaper housing in the EU, or would it prefer that they all came home?**

Currently there are 2.9million EU nationals in the UK, and 1.2 million British nationals living abroad in the EU.

If people are already living in the UK, then the government wants to guarantee reciprocal rights.

For people needing to make big life decisions in the next 2 years, it will not be clear. The shift is painful for people caught in it.

After that we will have new facts available to help us with our decisions.

Tensions will become very real in countries such as Portugal, Spain and Italy when GB no longer pays NI contributions to cover the cost of medical care for their nationals living there.

Eligibility for nationality in an EU member state might be used as an indicator of guaranteed rights.

Guy Verhofstadt's suggestion for associate citizenship of the EU hasn't progressed.

**Concluding statements**

Further into the process, we could hold another round table to monitor progress on these issues.

Or chaplaincies might approach their own ambassadors to do a similar exercise in their countries, though the value of a multi-country discussion was noted.