

PRESS/MEDIA RELEASE



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Post-Conference update:

Where Now for Remain? The Grassroots for Europe Conference 2020

Central Hall Westminster, Saturday January 25th

As Brexit looms, Pro-EU activists say: Remain isn't going away!

Saturday January 25th 2020, on the weekend before Brexit, saw an extraordinary and vibrant gathering of pro-EU campaigners at Central Hall, Westminster, proving that the passion and spirit of the millions who marched to Parliament against Brexit is still around. The event, organized by Grassroots for Europe, was titled “Where now for Remain?” One message was clear from the 450 local activists, representing over 200 groups, who travelled from across the UK and beyond to take part: Remain isn't going away!

Grassroots for Europe media comms lead Colin Gordon (Oxford for Europe) said, “the level of reaction to our press release about this event from EU and world media was so massive that we had to ration the press passes. Especially from EU27 countries we met with warm, sympathetic interest in the continuing strength of UK public resistance to Brexit. The German TV channel ZDF interviewed our delegates and speakers for an upcoming news feature. The Spanish paper *El Mundo* reported Sunday: 'The last Europeans in the United Kingdom are refusing to throw in the towel.' Other major papers covering us include *Le Monde*, *Asahi Shimbun* and *Suddeutsche Zeitung*.”

Also at the meeting were the singer, artist and writer, “EUSuperGirl” Madeleine Kay whose film *The Future is Europe* had its premiere screening over lunch, veteran filmmaker David Nicholas Wilkins, producer and director of the acclaimed documentary *Postcards from the 48%*, and Richard Corbett MEP, outgoing leader of the Labour Party in Brussels. Panel chairs and speakers included AC Grayling, Polly Toynbee, Naomi Smith, Stephen Bray, Ros Taylor, Denis MacShane, Stephen Dorrell, Irina von Wiese MEP, Henry Stannard, Mike Galsworthy, Emmy van Deurzen and Hugo Dixon. Best for Britain and European Movement co-sponsored the event.

Sue Wilson of Remain in Spain, representing UK citizens living in Europe, said: “The conference was a great opportunity to bring the issues faced by British citizens in the EU, as a result of Brexit, to a wider audience. We have been largely overlooked by the government and the media. When we are portrayed, it’s as golf playing, gin-drinking, pensioner expats living on the costas, when only 20% of the Brits living in Europe are retirees. We are not expats – we are immigrants – no different from the EU citizens that have made their homes in the UK. We can’t stop Brexit, but we must fight for the least damaging Brexit, to protect as many of our rights as possible. We have been told too often that we made our choice and we must live with the consequences. The same could be said of those that voted leave. They would do well to remember that the rights the Brits in Europe stand to lose, they do too. This isn’t about the rights of one million Brits in Europe, it’s about the rights of all British citizens – all 65 million of them.”

Elena Remigi of the *In Limbo* project, said: “It was a real pleasure for me to be at this meeting with all the grassroots groups. Over the past three and a half years, *In Limbo* worked together with many wonderful pro-EU groups and we would like to see this collaboration strengthen. The *In Limbo* project is about the human cost of Brexit for the 5 million, their families and all the British living in the UK in limbo, and I think it is very important for us all to continue sharing these stories and fight for a better Britain.”

Richard Wilson (Leeds for Europe), national chair of the movement, said in his opening comments: “We in the Grassroots for Europe network decided almost immediately after the General Election that we needed to do something like this – primarily as a regrouping

exercise for activists in shell shock after the sudden, shattering end of our long and exhausting struggle to prevent Brexit from going ahead. It has disappointed all of us that the lunacy of Brexit has not become obvious to enough of our fellow countryfolk by now, but are going to keep up the fight in the years ahead so we can turn this around in the shortest time possible. It is not farfetched to look forward to a time in a few years when the Brexit misadventure is seen in the same way as the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is viewed by most people now. Let's stay positive - let's look forward to the Saturday in the not too distant future when we sit here again, to celebrate our re-joining of the European Union – Breunion!”

Journalist, political economist and academic Will Hutton delivered a passionate and keynote speech. Hutton said “Remainers aren’t going to vanish on 31 January. We fight on, sure of our cause”, adding: “Britain is the victim of a coup by right wing empty-heads who reframed reality to suit personal ambition and ideological zealotry. However despite their posturing, Britain remains an European country with an European vocation the majority of whose electorate is in favour of Remaining.

The task for us committed Europeans is forensically to expose all the many ways the truths about Brexit are coming home to roost, to find ways of working as closely as possible with our EU friends, sometimes in new bespoke structures, and to prepare the ground for an eventual formal reassociation with Europe.

The EU is about to become very popular in Britain – Remainers and mainland Europeans should turn a reverse that nobody wanted into an opportunity for renewal of the European project.”

The former Conservative MP Dominic Grieve received huge standing ovations before and after a speech in which he urged pro-EU campaigners to continue their fight and predicted that public opinion will in time swing back to embrace long-held British and European values of openness, cooperation, democracy and the rule of law.

In a recorded message, **Gina Miller** called on pro-EU campaigners to maintain vigilant scrutiny of future government actions:

“My message to you today – be proud of your passion and patriotism, be positive about your desire to contribute to a more equitable, honest and safe society – be strong in your love for your country and stay committed to resisting those who seek to silence us.

“We will leave the European Union in 7 days time time but we will NOT leave our commitment to speak out to defend our country against those who are seeking to use our island as a laboratory for their ideology.

Our country will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything. Despite the brutality and abuse I and my family have had to experience over the last three years, I will be watching patiently, dissecting the detail and remaining ready to defend and fight for the ethics, values and principles that safeguard our society should they be under threat.

I know you will too.”

Activists from all over the UK and beyond left the event energised and enthused. Organizers are drafting a communiqué of key tasks, goals and demands, as the pro-EU movement renews and reorganizes for a new phase of of campaigning. Following presentations of in-depth research and survey analysis of Remain's messaging challenges, a strong consensus emerged around a series of major workstreams:

- **exposing in forensic detail the lies and truth of Brexit as these finally emerge through the coming negotiations;**
- **exposing – while seeking to mitigate - the damage of Brexit to our regions, communities and industries;**
- **Supporting and fighting alongside millions of people living in UK and EU whose lives have been damaged and threatened by Brexit;**
- **working to restore truth and fairness in our politics and institutions, resisting the Brexiter assault on our democracy and rule of law;**

- **steadily and consistently making the public case for a closer relationship with the EU, while developing new partnerships with our European neighbours to reaffirm the values and interests we share.**

Media contacts.

Grassroots for Europe (GfE) was formed in September 2018 by activists from pro-EU campaign groups located across various parts of the UK.

The GfE network, which now numbers more than 220 local groups, has until now remained largely informal, reacting rapidly to emerging developments, and creatively supportive of its member groups.

Particularly successful interventions have included our joint communications to the EU Council and Parliament. Letters co-signed by well in excess of 100 individual groups have been sent to Donald Tusk and Members of the European Parliament. GfE delegations to Brussels have met with senior EU parliamentarians such as Danuta Huebner, Philippe Lamberts and Seb Dance.

Media contacts.

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