

Implementing the withdrawal agreement

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons)

I agree with many of the hon. Lady's points, but is it not vital that we send out the clear reassurance, which the Prime Minister gave at the Dispatch Box to all our NHS and care staff, that they and their families are welcome to stay, that we want them to stay and that their rights are now guaranteed?

Philippa Whitford Shadow SNP Spokesperson (Health)

I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady, but unfortunately it is not enough to come to the Dispatch Box every couple of months with warm words of welcome to EU staff, when in between women who are raising families here, with British partners or partners of EU origin, are being turned down for permanent residency because they have not taken out private comprehensive health insurance. We have had 100 EU nationals sent "prepare to leave" letters. Friends of ours tried to get citizenship for their three children, who were born and grew up in Scotland: the eldest and youngest were given passports; the middle child was refused. I am sorry but the experience of EU nationals on the ground over the past year and a half has been horrendous. If the phase 1 agreement last week is to mean anything, we must incorporate it into the immigration Bill to give them certainty now, instead of telling them they might have to wait another year before they find out what their future will be.

To exercise the right to live anywhere, access to healthcare and social security is crucial. It has made such a difference, not just to EU nationals here, but to our pensioners who have settled in the sunny uplands of the northern Mediterranean. What position will they be in if they cannot access healthcare? We must recognise that freedom of movement was not a one-way street; our young people and professionals have been able to take advantage of it for the past 40 years. We are taking that away from the next generation, which is something that I find terrible.

The Government say, and it is in the phase 1 agreement, that they accept keeping regulations 883 and 987, so let us bring that in. Let us get that down on paper and get it passed, because saying to EU nationals, "You're welcome to stay, but there might be no deal, which means you'll have no legal standing and you won't be able to use the NHS," is no use to anyone.

The other thing that the EU has brought us, as well as rights and opportunities, is co-operation. The agencies of which we are members are probably the prime example of that. Sadly, more than half of the EU agencies do not have a constitutional position for third countries. Twenty-one of them allow participation and 12 of those allow what is called co-operation, which does not involve payment in the way that participation would. It is therefore important that the Government utilise those and keep us in, or as close as possible to, the agencies that were bringing benefit to the UK. It is also important to recognise that this affects all constituent parts of the UK—“all four nations. These decisions cannot be made by delegated legislation, down in an office, with no discussion with Parliament or the devolved nations, which will have to mitigate and face the ramifications.

With an airport and the northern air traffic control in my constituency, naturally I support amendments 245 and 246, on staying in the single European sky agreement, which is the reform of airspace, and the European common aviation agreement, which is what allowed the budget airlines to literally take off and people to travel cheaply. However, the European Aviation Safety Agency is also important, and that is a body of the EU and EFTA. It is important to recognise that there are things we can be in, there are things we cannot be in, and we lose these because we seem to have negotiated with ourselves to move to a hard Brexit instead of a soft Brexit. People here are saying , "Oh yes, this was all aired in the debate." I remember hearing leavers saying, "Of course we won't leave the single market. Don't be ridiculous." Yet that is the plan and that is where we are heading at the moment.

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