

Harpenden Society European Parliament Election Hustings



This is a record of comments captured from the candidates in the hustings for the European Parliament elections, held on 14 May 2019. The comments were captured by a team of members of Harpenden 4 Europe each assigned a candidate to track.

The format of the event was an opening statement of 4 minutes from each of the candidates, then questions, then a closing statement of 3 minutes from each of the candidates. The questions were partly pre-submitted and partly from the floor. Each question was posed to three of the candidates selected by the Chair, broadly one Brexiteer, one Remainer and one other.

The nine candidates were

- Alvin Shum, Labour
- Paul Hearn, Brexit Party
- Catherine Rowett, Green Party
- Geoffrey van Orden, Conservative
- Charles Vickers, English Democrats
- Barbara Gibson, Liberal Democrats
- Emma Taylor, Change UK
- Stuart Agnew, UKIP
- Attila Csordas, Independent

Alvin Shum, Labour

No4 on Labour list so admitted himself that he is very unlikely to be elected. Said he has most difficult job today to explain labour policy on Brexit. Most of his statements appeared to be personal rather than party policy. He wants to end negotiations and end Brexit by having a PV as there is no majority in Parliament for either side, so the only way to break impasse is PV with Remain option.

His motivation is a vision for UK and Europe based on protecting workers rights and fighting inequality eg LGBT and women's rights plus climate change (CC) all of which is enhanced by working with other countries. Labour party declared CC emergency, other parties on this platform don't believe in CC. Overall, he has a positive vision of Europe to work together on these issues.

Clear that he personally supports a second referendum and is frustrated by the party position. Says that local elections show clear dissatisfaction with Tory policy on ending austerity. Cites EU structural funding in eastern region to help mitigate these effects.

Sees peace in an increasingly fractious world as the leading benefit of the EU

Fully backs extending vote to younger people, giving 16-17 yo the vote. He is from a generation that was promised positive future but it has not come to pass because of austerity

We face two possible futures - one that is positive about Europe and conquering inequalities versus one with a lack of vision. Please vote and encourage your family and friends to vote on 23rd May.

Paul Hearn, Brexit Party

Brexit isn't happening according to the wishes of the 2016 referendum and we should leave immediately, under WTO trade rules and then negotiate better deals. He voted to remain in the EU in 2016 and gave 3 reasons why he has changed his mind:

- We have a parliamentary democracy and that should be honoured by both parliamentarians as well as the general public
- There are HUGE opportunities for trade outside the EU. (He mentioned the USA and received catcalls for his statement.) He insisted that the 17 current deals already signed were indicative of what could be achieved.
- The EU has changed - it is struggling economically (he cited Germany in particular), has high youth unemployment and has got more 'centrist' in its politics.

He recognised the 'bad blood' between the UK and the EU but insisted that we should leave and then rebuild the relationship.

He is against a PV for 4 reasons:

- It will take a long time to organise
- What is the question/s that will be asked
- We will end up with more confusion
- It will not solve the problem of a divided country

On climate change, he said that there were 'conflicting opinions' on climate change (to mild uproar in the hall) and insisted that dealing with it would take time. He said he was not complacent but doing it quickly/badly would be worse. He said that the UK was doing a lot anyway (reducing CO2 emissions by 25% since 2008 but was insistent that the economy of the country was more important).

He agreed that language and behaviour in politics at the moment was unacceptable, that politicians in particular had coarsened debate. We need new politics, new politicians!

He admires the young but does not believe they have enough knowledge or understanding as 16/17 year olds to be allowed to vote. As a father and grandfather, everything he does is for the younger generations, on climate change, defence of the realm, law and order, education and maintaining the fabric of society.

He said that divisions and inequality in the UK were an important issue. He says we should leave the EU and move on, then address the issue of overpaid CEOs and wants them to be held accountable when they fail.

Democracy means that we should respect the referendum result and leave immediately . We shouldn't be afraid of WTO, it will only be for a short while, the majority of our trade is under these rules anyway with a mean tax of 2.8%, but not cars! He claimed we would 'flip deals' with Norway, Switzerland etc by simply taking our EU deal and making them bilateral.

He is not against immigration per se but we need to have a policy of choosing those we want (like Australia), targeting scientists for example.

Catherine Rowett, Green Party

Catherine was originally a Liberal but moved to the Green Party because it put the emphasis on the planet and environment where it needed to be. The Green Party is the party of real change and has always been on the right side of history. They address not just climate change but also all of the causes that made people want to leave the EU. She feels she has lost her country and that this is a really crucial moment when we only have 5 years to change everything.

The Greens are for a second referendum and Caroline Lucas has shown leadership on this. Shae said the presentation of both the Remain and Leave cases at the 2016 referendum were totally ambiguous and says that it is quite probably most Leave voters were hoping for a different outcome from that which is on offer.

The Greens favour extending the vote to 16/17 year olds who, they say, have a better view of what's wrong with the world than the older generation. One of the reasons she is for a second referendum is that it will enfranchise the younger people who missed voting in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Inequality and division is greater in the UK than in other European countries and is the cause of much of the disaffection that created a demand for Leave. European citizens working in the UK are wrongly denied full political participation. Freedom of movement is very important to retain.

Geoffrey can Orden, Conservative

Geoffrey said that as a Conservative he had the most difficult task of the evening as he was aware of discontent and anger against his party and he fully understood this. The last thing the Conservatives want is further EU elections. He wanted to leave the EU on March 29th and was disappointed that the decision of the electorate was not carried out. However, the relationship between the EU and the UK is complex and intimate and it is difficult to extricate ourselves from it.

He wants the UK to have control of its borders and laws and the right to trade freely round the world whilst creating frictionless trade with the EU with the minimum of disruption. He also wants cohesion and unity across the UK.

The House of Commons has voted on a series of options and could not agree except on one issue which was to foolishly reject 'no deal'. Geoffrey believes that this option needs to be on the negotiating table.

He is against a second referendum. We had already had a vote and a second referendum is only wanted by those who want to remain.

Asked why would a committed Conservative consider voting for the party when it has failed to deliver Brexit, he said that the two major parties were divided on Brexit. We need to bring people together. The government wants an orderly Brexit but also recognises that the people want a serious relationship with Europe. We need a deal and he is sure that we will get it.

He said that the Conservatives are a reasonable and polite party who take a moderate view and that the language of political debate was being coarsened by the media more than by politicians.

The framework for our future relationship with the EU has been laid down. Many of the proposed arrangements go beyond WTO rules. He is confident of getting a very good deal with countries outside the EU and draft contingency deals are in place.

He was not in favour of votes for 16/17 year olds, because they are still at school, they are not in work, not tax payers and don't have enough experience to vote.

If elected, he would continue to work on defence and foreign affairs committees. He would fight for NATO and against the formation of a European army. He has tried to reform the EU but the EU was not interested. Issues are decided by the Commission and all the parliament can do is make amendments.

Brexit is going to happen so the question is how do we seize the advantages and mitigate the disadvantages. If you want a sensible Brexit deal vote Conservative.

Barbara Gibson, Liberal Democrats

She's a county councillor - joined up in order to try to make a difference at whatever level she can. She hears so many people who are fed up with Brexit, embarrassed at the state of the country, and who feel that Westminster is not listening, except to extremists. She wants to try to help prevent us from making the biggest mistake in our country's recent history. She's fighting for our rights as Europeans, for example Freedom of Movement. It's too important to give up - we all need to fight.

The People need to make the decision via a People's Vote where they can either accept or reject the deal on offer.

She agrees that Brexit has made politics more coarse and ugly - Brexit is obscene. It could irreparably change the culture of the UK - we can fight that by sending the message that this isn't British culture or values.

Commenting on a questioner's report of a bank taking steps to move money and jobs to Frankfurt, she agreed that Brexit is already damaging jobs, businesses and GDP. This is not project fear, it is happening.

Commenting on science and research, she said that academics generally voted to remain and want to stay. They won't be on an equal footing as we will lose the best academics to the European institutions.

Liberal Democrats will combat any inequality, including the wealth divide (although not specific about how), as well as LGBTQ - championing same sex marriages, fighting to recognise transgender on passports. They would give the vote to 16/17 year olds.

This is war and we need to fight together for openness, tolerance, equality. Need to take back country from extremists. Unite and support the Liberal Democrats, who are the key party in the region to beat populism, racism and fear, and beat Brexit.

Emma Taylor, Change UK

Emma is a professional scientist and engineer and talks about being a carer for her grandmother. She wants her extended family to grow up in security. Being in the EU makes us richer, stronger and more protected. Change UK have the courage to say what is best for the UK. They are open and optimistic. We have clear and present challenges, both in Brexit and in climate change. We need to remain in the EU, remain prosperous, remain healthy, avoid climate change and remain strong in the world.

We need a second referendum. It will help to reunite the country. As an engineer she believes in practicalities: with a PV things can be made real.

Asked why the Remain parties hadn't agreed to a common position, she said Change UK was a new party which was not yet properly formed at the time of the discussion. But also, how would you feel if you only had one choice for Remain? – Change UK is different from the other parties.

If elected she will promote the benefits of the EU by communicating with clarity and honesty. She will seek to reform the EU with particular focus on industry and research.

She dismisses the suggestion that Gatt article 24 WTO rules would be adequate in the immediate aftermath of a No Deal Brexit, she asks why lower ourselves to WTO rules when there is so much better available? We will be in a strong position for trade if we remain in the EU.

She says the most important benefit of the EU is peace.

Emma had only recently decided to stand. There needs to be a change. Politics is broken. As an engineer she acts on evidence and facts. It is the EU standards and expertise that help to keep our infrastructure in good order. We need a swift end to the Brexit mess. We, the people, need the final say through a PV. She will campaign to Remain.

Stuart Agnew, UKIP

He began with a summary of his own background as a farmer. He went into some detail about having attended a protest at Rothamsted Research Centre, where he said that the protesters were foreigners smoking marijuana. He said he has a 91 per cent attendance record at the European Parliament and he is "often" the only one who replies to letters from his constituents, who he tries to protect from the EU. When MEPs were consulted about the UK's request for an extension to Article 50 he refused to support this when even Nigel Farage was in favour.

When asked about a second referendum he said this was just "a stunt". It had been used to get Ireland and Norway to change their minds in the past and should not be used here. He said we should never have another referendum.

On the subject of trade with the EU he proposed Article 24 of GATT which he claimed would give the UK a 10 year period to finalise trade deals. He thinks this the way forward.

Asked about what he would do if elected he said he had already been active on the Agriculture Committee of the EU because of his farming background. He would want to see a debate on the farmers' land struggle in South Africa. He would have been interested in the Environmental Committee, but a lot of other MEPs wanted to be on that Committee too, so he had not served on it.

He was very critical of the EU's trade arrangements. He talked about an Italian company which was being preferred over a British company and suggested that stringent requirements were unnecessarily imposed with which the British company could not afford to comply. This resulted in the British company losing out. He also said that the EU were getting even more determined to become a united body with an EU army and that the UK should have no part of it.

Charles Vickers, English Democrats

He said that they are campaigning for a devolved English Parliament and that their manifesto has been 17 years in the making including producing an English Bill of Rights. Their stance is based on promoting English cultural Identity and values but racial origins are irrelevant to them. He mentioned that a past alliance with UKIP had been a disaster for them and that at the subsequent elections they had been in his words "trounced" by them in consequence. He put forward the idea that as UK law was supreme, as demonstrated in Gina Miller's case, we had already in fact left the EU! They are now supporting a very expensive High Court action to prove this.

The Lisbon Treaty clearly states that in the case of a country leaving the EU, the law of that country applies and is paramount. Thus in their view all arguments about Brexit are redundant as we have already left. This is why they are currently battling through the High Court and will go to the Supreme Court (if they can raise the funds he said).

He was very dismissive of accounts of banks moving money to Frankfurt and named them as being part of "Project Fear".

The future relationship with Europe post-Brexit will not be a good one for some time as the departure has been so badly handled. He said that trade will continue for up to 10 years under current trade agreements before WTO rules are applied, which will be long enough for individual agreements to be negotiated. Relationships will then improve.

English Common Law is based on "Reasonableness ". This is the principle his party follows.

Unemployment is very high among young people in most EU states , in France you are unlikely to get a job till you are 30 so all is not better there and most of their economies are weak so we are better off without them as we are a "Great Country". The EU was an American inspired postwar invention, a product of the Marshall Plan and the need to have a stable bloc of European nations linked together by the EU. To this end, behind the scenes, huge sums were being spent by US organisations like the CIA to further the introduction and growth of the EU. We never signed up to such a Union.

Attila Csordas, Independent

He is the Hungarian CEO/founder of Age Curve. He is a biologist doing research into Longevity in Cambridge. Noting that improvements in life expectancy in the UK have suddenly started to fall, he is interested, and invited us all to be interested, in research on longevity. There is a large amount of money given a year for Longevity Research from the EU, which is in jeopardy.

He is an example of the sort of expert we have attracted from Europe and who has settled here with his family. When he was not talking about longevity he appeared to support many of the ideas put forward by the parties supporting a People's Vote and Remain