

Meeting at the office of Emily Thornberry MP with representatives of Islington in Europe at 6pm on Wednesday 27th July

Meeting with Tom Clayton, Sally Broughton-Micova, Linda Clark, Stephen Slater, Anders Lorenzen and Petra Laidlaw.

Emily started by explaining what she thought the Brexit vote told us: that the country is divided; and that it reflected feelings of alienation that have been around since the 1980s, with people in many parts of the country feeling left behind. It was therefore a kick against the system and the Establishment, with many people voting who hadn't voted for decades.

Emily believes the Tories have led us into this situation and then left us with no Plan B for what would happen in the event of a Leave vote. She believes it is incumbent on the Opposition to help shape a plan for our continuing relationship with the EU, and also that there needs to be a further injection of democracy into what that eventual plan looks like.

As time goes on, she argued that it will become increasingly clear as to what the options are, and that very few of them are workable or palatable, e.g. Do we become a tax haven like Singapore? That's not acceptable. Do we remain in the single market, but at the price of continued free movement of labour. That wouldn't be acceptable for Leave voters. But she said one thing was clear: the Tories do not have a mandate to do whatever they want.

On the issue of proposals for a second referendum, Emily said the democratic decision of the British people couldn't be ignored. And while she believes, as stated, that there needs to be a further injection of democracy into the process of deciding the plan for our future relationship with the EU, she did not believe re-running the referendum was possible.

Emily said she understood the very strong views of many of her constituents who want to see the referendum result overturned, but as well as representing her constituents, she had a duty as a shadow minister to accept the verdict from the country as a whole. If a referendum is held, she does not believe it is possible to walk away from the result.

She explained what she was currently focusing on in her new role: first, internal work to audit the impact of Brexit on each area of government business and formulate individual plans in each area; and second, outward-facing work meeting MEPs, diplomatic experts and European representatives to build relationships and discuss the way forward.

She is determined that Labour should be consulted on the government's negotiating plan, and that the values, needs and rights of the communities that Labour MPs serve should be reflected in that plan, and protected in any negotiation. She said Labour must work in good faith to get the best possible deal.

She feared that as people's attention moved on to other things, there was a danger that a group of hard core Brexiteers in the government would take control of the process, and push for an immediate, go-it-alone Brexit with nothing resolved about our future relationship with the EU. For that reason, she said the UK must postpone triggering Article 50 until the plan for the future is clear.

She was adamant that European citizens currently living in the UK should not be treated like bargaining chips in the negotiations, and she said Labour would continue to press Theresa May to make that commitment.

In terms of how campaigners could best support the Opposition's efforts, Emily said what would help most is for people to point out where the Tories are being inconsistent in what they are saying now compared to what they said during the campaign, highlight their broken promises, and highlight the increasingly-worrying effects of Brexit on the economy, and urge immediate action to spread wealth and service sector jobs around the country.

She thanked the members of Islington in Europe for meeting her, and said she would happily consider meeting and speaking to a larger group of members in the coming weeks and months.