

**Mr Jüri Ratas**  
Prime Minister of Estonia  
Stenbock House  
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TBC 2017

## **"Brexit" and the European Medical Profession**

### **Dear Prime Minister**

We are writing to you on behalf of the Estonian and British medical professions, ahead of Estonia's assumption of the Presidency of the Council of the EU (European Union) – July/December 2017 - and as a result of the UK Prime Minister's invocation of Article 50 on March 29<sup>th</sup> this year,

The UK's impending departure from the EU will have profound repercussions for the European medical profession and its ongoing ability to provide high quality healthcare across the continent. Whilst "Brexit" will fundamentally alter both the UK and the EU, it must not be permitted to threaten our nations' health.

Our medical workforces have become increasingly integrated and interdependent – over 30,000, registered doctors in the UK gained their primary qualification in another EEA (European Economic Area) state<sup>i</sup> - with such free movement playing a crucial role in both doctors' professional development and in meeting varying medical workforce requirements across both Estonia and the UK.

"Brexit" may slow but will not reverse such pan-European professional migration. Nor must it be allowed to threaten the progress of attendant patient safety measures like the alert mechanism – an early warning system which advises all European regulators when a doctor is

banned or their ability to practice restricted – or ongoing efforts to ensure that minimum standards in medical education and training are met.

Comparable levels of pan-European professional migration also exist in the medical research and innovation sector with 15% of all academic staff at UK universities originating from other EU member states<sup>ii</sup>. The importance of pan-European collaboration to this sector, and to our respective economies, is axiomatic and requires no further elucidation.

With medical research becoming increasingly international in focus and integral to tackling the main current and future societal challenges, it is imperative that solutions are found to secure researcher mobility and the provision of clear long-term frameworks in a post-Brexit EU.

Such challenges will be amplified in Northern Ireland, given its unique situation of sharing a land border – the EU’s future external frontier - with the Republic of Ireland. We are particularly concerned with the challenges that colleagues will face with regards to cross border health services as many doctors, particularly those working in areas bordering the Republic of Ireland, deliver healthcare on an all island basis.

We have already raised these concerns with the EU institutions, with the support of our joint membership of pan-European medical associations like the CPME (Standing Committee of European Doctors), and welcome Michel Barnier’s recognition of the European “nurses and doctors who contribute to the quality of healthcare in the United Kingdom<sup>iii</sup>” and the need for their status to be resolved as a priority.

The Council’s recognition “of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland” and “that flexible and imaginative solutions will be required” is also to be welcomed.

Recent discussions between the UK government and the EU have indicated that the “Brexit” negotiations may be carried out in a robust manner, albeit between longstanding allies.

As your government prepares to assume the Presidency of the Council of the EU, we would ask for your support in ensuring that the principle of medical neutrality in times of conflict - a guiding principle of our civilisation – continues to be applied during negotiations to ensure that “Brexit” does not result in any collateral damage to our patients’ health.

We hope that this letter is helpful in preparing for the assumption of the Presidency and would be willing to meet with you to help further your understanding of “Brexit’s” profound implications for the health of our nations.

Yours sincerely

Dr Lembi Aug, President, Estonian Medical Association

Dr Mark Porter, Chair of Council, BMA

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/register/search\\_stats.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/register/search_stats.asp)

<sup>ii</sup> [Academies publish joint statement on research & innovation after the EU referendum](#), 19 July 2016

<sup>iii</sup> Speech by Michel Barnier, Chief Negotiator for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom, at the plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions, 22 March 2017