

Open letter to the European Commission President Juncker and the Commissioner for Research & Innovation Moedas

19 July 2016, Amsterdam

In order to tackle the persistent perceptions of democratic deficit and unaccountability, Europe needs to commit itself to evidence-based policy-making, using social and opinion research as a central driver for policy development and implementation.

ESOMAR, with the support of 8 associations, is calling upon the establishment of a fully cross-party expert group composed of academics, experts from research and civil society organisations, and representatives of the EU institutions, to look at the causes of the outcome of the UK referendum on leaving the EU and lasting solutions to address it from a citizen-centric approach.

The past couple of weeks, should have provided us with a moment of calm reflection on the implications of the outcome of the UK referendum on leaving the EU, but if anything, the reverse has been true, as the impact on both sides becomes more evident, and the implications become far greater than were ever envisaged:

- While it is reasonable to allow the UK some time to reflect upon how best to progress the outcome of the referendum, the current uncertainty that is evident from the UK has created a corresponding uncertainty within the EU. As a result, most efforts now appear to be either on trying to accelerate the process (EU), or delaying the process (UK), rather than a more collaborative approach to determining the best way forward for both parties.
- It has also become clear that the financial “benefits” as well as the “reduction” in immigration promised by the Leave campaign, is unlikely to be feasible, and that a realistic explanation of what will (and won't) be possible under any new status MUST be communicated to the electorates.
- There remains a very valid challenge from the people and governments of Scotland, Gibraltar & Northern Ireland – all of whom have devolved governments - as to why they should support a decision which is in direct opposition to the majority wish democratically recorded in their respective regions?

Were people and governments aware of the degree of political chaos that would ensue? Probably not.

There is a growing belief that the electorate were not sufficiently aware of these (complex) ramifications, or the magnitude of their choice. At the time of the vote, it is also being suggested that the referendum “morph-ed” into an anti-immigration vote rather than a more balanced assessment of whether people wanted to stay in the EU or leave it.

There now exists significant political uncertainty as neither the UK government nor the opposition party appear to have a plan to address it with a common view, which will further delay any clarification of next steps.

The EU's position is easier to understand; the UK decision is clear to them, and the EU wishes to prevent a further spread of uncertainty, which is both the financial

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markets' single biggest enemy, as well as the "tremor" that now rocks other key, founding members of the EU.

Clearly, from a social and opinion research experts' point of view, the UK political fraternities were guilty of substantially underestimating the strength of emotion/opinion of the electorate, which further suggests a lack of understanding on the politicians' part of their constituents' wishes (and fears). Furthermore, the respective campaigns did not make the political implications sufficiently clear to counteract the more emotive arguments which also indicate a real lack of understanding of how to communicate with their constituencies..

Research is the starting point to resolving Europe's challenges with a citizen-centric approach.

Research, be it traditional survey research or social media listening, commercial or non-commercial, has the capacity to separate what is important to British and EU citizens from what is important to politicians, policymakers, Brexit negotiators, NGOs, CSOs and special interest groups. Sometimes research can confirm the importance of certain issues. At other times, it provides early signals of the emergence of new concerns. Techniques tried and tested in testing communications, uncover which parts of messaging are clearly understood. In each instance, they provide detail and nuance that no other reporting tool can match.

The split of the referendum between younger and older voters provides a crucial insight into the generational divide between remain and leave voters, and also provides an early warning of the complexity that any subsequent negotiation MUST take into account – if the UK state (and indeed the EU) is to have a committed succession legacy.

So, where to now?

To support and guide any upcoming negotiation and decision-making process, it is now more critical than ever before to conduct extensive research into the will, and aspirations of the electorate. A true and comprehensive understanding of both party's wishes would now be invaluable to organisations on both sides of the Channel, as it would provide evidence-based guidance to all of those who have the responsibility of building the new political architecture within the context of Britain's referendum's result. It will also uncover how to better communicate with the constituency(ies) including messaging about complex and long-term issues that can be designed to meet the different segments.

For these reasons, ESOMAR is calling the European institutions to take these following steps:

1. Establish a fully cross-party and multi-disciplinary expert group composed of academics, experts from research and civil society organisations and representatives of the EU institutions to consider the implications of the referendum.
2. Issue a call for tender to conduct comprehensive and wide-ranging social research by researchers that abide to the principles of accepted codes of conduct governing market, opinion, and social research.
3. Work with the expert group to evaluate and build possible strategies to follow through on the referendum, and even, to formulate possible negotiation strategies (for both sides).

Research has always been the cornerstone of informed decisions, why not now?

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Founded in 1948, ESOMAR gathers nearly 5000 professionals and over 300 companies worldwide providing or commissioning research, including public and academic bodies. For further information on ESOMAR and its activities, contact Kim Smouter, Government Affairs Manager.

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On behalf of ESOMAR, Finn Raben



Founded in 1947, WAPOR is the leading international association in the field of public opinion research with approximately 500 members in more than 60 countries. For further information on WAPOR and its activities, contact Renae Reis, Executive Coordinator.

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SYNTEC Etudes

SYNTEC Etudes is the professional organization representing the market and opinion polls research companies in France. SYNTEC Etudes gathers together more than 60 companies, with different size and expertise, working in all the sectors of the French and international economy and representing more than half of the sector's turnout and personnel. For further information on SYNTEC Etudes and its activities, contact Luc Laurentin, President of SYNTEC Etudes.

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SUPPORTING ASSOCIATIONS:

CEV – European Volunteer Centre



“CEV has for many years promoted the need for comparative volunteering data to be collected in Europe in order for evidence based policies to be developed, and has benefited hugely from the assistance of ESOMAR concerning data and evidence on the impact of volunteering in Europe. CEV is pleased to support this initiative to gather better evidence about the reasons for the UK referendum outcomes and use that as the basis for future decisions on the development of the EU project”

ECAS – European Citizen Action Service



EFC – European Foundation Centre



“The EFC is convinced that there is urgent and serious need to gather better intelligence on the underlying causes for the UK referendum outcomes and to interrogate this as a basis for future decisions on the development of the European project. The EFC therefore supports ESOMAR’s request for a wide-ranging EU expert Group to be established as soon as possible”

ENNA – European Network of National Civil Society Associations



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FEDRA – Federation of Regional Growth Actors in Europe



VoteWatch Europe

