



Molly Scott Cato
MEP for South West England and Gibraltar
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz
Brussels

1st November 2017

Dear Sue Mountstevens,

There have been a growing number of reports about apparent illegal spending in the lead up to the 2016 EU referendum. The most recent of these has resulted in the Electoral Commission launching an investigation into whether ex-UKIP donor Arron Banks broke donation rules during the EU referendum [1]. While some of this relates to allegations of foreign influence, and as such may sit outside of your jurisdiction, there has recently been developments suggesting that Bristol may have been a key geographical location in these alleged offences both in terms of Mr Banks residence, where the business 'Better for the Country Ltd (BFTC)' is registered, but also in terms of where some of the offences are alleged to have occurred.

If these are shown to be true then this is of course deeply worrying for our democracy, and has obvious legal consequences.

On the 30th August the former Leave.EU spokesman Andy Wigmore tweeted that "we had our own bots in Bristol and we used AI to target specific groups". I insert a 'print screen' jpeg of the tweet below for your reference.



In light of this, and in the context of wider accusations of illegal funding of 'twitter bots' during the referendum campaign [2], I write now to ask if you have already conducted any enquiry into these allegations. If so, what the outcomes were, and if not, if you will now consider launching a formal investigation.

It strikes me that this tweet provides a strong geographical link to the Bristol area and as a result falls within your remit to be exploring the following questions:

- 1) Who paid for the bots? Did Leave.EU? If so was it declared in their spending return to the Electoral Commission?

- 2) How did they select their "targets"? Did they use people's political opinions, also known as "sensitive data" in UK law, and if so, from where did they obtain this?
- 3) As you can see from the screen shot below "how we use your information" section, Elizabeth Bilney, the CEO of Leave.EU specifically states that they may pass information on to other leave campaigns. Did they do this in such a way that avoided "coordinating" – another offence under UK law?

How we use your information. The information you provide will be used by Better for the country Ltd for the purposes of keeping you updated about our campaigns. The Data Controller for this information is Elizabeth Bilney. This information will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) by the company's staff and may be passed to any of the other EU Referendum 'Leave' campaigns. If you do not want the information you give to us to be passed to other 'Leave' campaign organisations, or for us to contact you, please indicate: I would not like to receive more information from Better for the Country Ltd, I would not like to receive more information from other 'Leave' campaign organisations. If you have any questions about how your information will be processed or about your rights under the DPA, please contact:
Elizabeth Bilney at Better for the Country Ltd, Lysander House, Catbrain Lane, Cribbs Causeway, Bristol BS10 7TQ.

- 4) Was a list of these bots produced so that basic electoral standards such as ensuring imprints on materials were upheld?

Equally, in light of today's breaking news that the Electoral Commission is launching an investigation into where there were "reasonable grounds" to believe offences had been committed, I am also seeking guidance as to whether this will also be investigated by Avon and Somerset police? As I am sure you are aware, and can see from the above, the company 'Better for the Country Ltd (BFTC)' is registered in Bristol and made donations totalling £2.3m to campaigners ahead of the referendum, while Mr Banks, a resident of the region, also gave Leave.EU loans totalling £6m. The questions here include:

1. Whether BFTC was the "true source of donations made to referendum campaigners in its name, or if it was acting as an agent"?
2. Whether recipients of the donations were given the required information about the donor?
3. What steps the recipients took to verify BFTC's "identity and permissibility"?
4. Whether or not Mr Banks was the "true source" of loans reported in his name?
5. Whether the recipients of the loans acted within the rules?
6. Whether any individual "facilitated a transaction with a non-qualifying person"?

There are many issues here that suggest breaches of law. Your assistance in seeking further clarity, so that the right and proper course of action on this matter can be pursued, would be greatly appreciated. The foundations of our democracy depend on the law being effectively upheld.

Yours sincerely,



Molly Scott Cato MEP

[1]http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-41829107?ns_mchannel=social&ns_campaign=bbc_breaking&ns_source=twitter&ns_linkname=news_central

[2]<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/david-jones-pro-brexit-ukip-twitter-account-russia-fake-bot-troll-trump-disinformation-followers-a7920181.html>