

The NHS is far safer inside the European Union, argues public health expert

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The NHS is far safer inside the European Union, argues a leading public health expert in *The BMJ* today.

Professor Martin McKee at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine argues that the EU's international [trade](#) agreements now protect public services and do not justify the United Kingdom withdrawing from the EU.

In fact, he warns that any threat to the NHS "comes from our own politicians and not from the EU."

Until recently, Professor McKee was one of many in the health community who were seriously concerned about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) - an international trade agreement designed to improve trade between the EU and the United States.

Their main concern was that public services like the NHS would be opened up to competition under TTIP.

This has now changed completely, writes McKee. "The health community, along with others, have made a powerful case for why public services need to be protected. And those negotiating on behalf of the EU have had to listen."

The European Commission's position is now set out publicly, he explains. "And now that we can see the European position, it is apparent

that many of our concerns have been taken on board. There are protections for public services, and specifically health services, but also education, social services, and police services."

Recent leaks have confirmed that the USA is pushing its own interests strongly, but both the European Commission and the president of the European Parliament have made it absolutely clear that unless the Americans accept European protections for health services and public [health](#) there will be no agreement, he adds.

Of course, some governments have opened up healthcare to competition, such as that in England, he writes, "but this is a matter for the governments concerned and the TTIP still protects them from competition from providers outside the EU."

Outside the EU, a much weakened UK would have to negotiate a separate deal with the US, warns McKee.

The question for anyone concerned about the NHS must be who is more likely to protect it—those currently campaigning for Brexit - or a European Parliament that has made clear its commitment to protect public services, he concludes?

More information: Observations: Brexit: the NHS is far safer inside the European Union, www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.i2489

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