

From the Chairman
The Rt Hon Lord Patten of Barnes CH

William Cash MP
Chairman
European Scrutiny Committee
House of Commons
7 Millbank
London
SW1P 3JA

14 November 2013

Dear Bill,

I write in response to your latest letter of 6 November in which you repeat your request for me to appear before the EU Scrutiny Committee to give oral evidence, this time coupled with the suggestion of a specially written report setting out, in your words, "the circumstances of (my) refusal to give oral evidence".

I have consulted my colleagues on the BBC Trust and this letter reflects our collective and unanimous view. It is incumbent upon the Trust under the terms of the Royal Charter to stand up for the independence of the BBC and in particular its editorial independence. We are bound to weigh this as of paramount importance when viewed against a request to appear before your Committee which we believe to be inappropriate. Accordingly, I must decline your request.

As part of our role I and my colleagues appear quite properly in front of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and the Public Accounts Committee, and neither attempts to engage with us – as you are proposing to do – on the editorial decisions of the BBC. Since becoming BBC Trust Chairman in May 2011, I myself have appeared before these two committees a total of six times. In this context I should add that, notwithstanding the implication of your letter, I have never sought to argue that my membership of the House of Lords should be a bar to appearing before Select Committees of the House of Commons.

We wonder if you have considered that the result of you asserting your right to call me before your committee on this issue is that BBC Trustees could in future be required to appear before any select committee to discuss the coverage of the BBC in its particular area of responsibility.

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It is not therefore beyond the bounds of possibility to conceive that in quite short order we could be expected to answer to say the Home Affairs Committee on the BBC's coverage of that area, or the Foreign Affairs Committee on international stories. We can't believe that is what was intended when the Royal Charter was drafted and we do not believe that it is consistent with the ideal of an independent Trust protecting the BBC from undue political interference.

We would also point out that the BBC has already appeared in front of your Committee as part of this particular inquiry, with evidence provided by Ric Bailey, Mary Hockaday and Peter Knowles as senior Executives responsible for the areas under review. We have also made – and now repeat – an offer of a briefing from the BBC Trust on our responsibilities for editorial issues, including the handling of editorial complaints. I am copying this letter to Sir Alan Beith MP, Chair of the Liaison Committee, John Whittingdale MP, Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and Andrew Lansley MP, Leader of the House of Commons.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Patten', written in a cursive style.

Lord Patten of Barnes CH
Chairman, BBC Trust