



Supporters of Scottish independence at a rally in The Hague. Below, Colin MacPherson of Germans for Scottish Independence

Crowds hit The Hague to rally for Scottish indy

Berlin march set for September as Germany follows the Netherlands

BY NAN SPOWART

A RALLY in support of Scottish independence is planned in Berlin after a successful march in the Netherlands on Saturday.

An estimated 300 people turned out at The Hague for the first international march and rally in support of Scottish independence.

The event was organised by the Netherlands for Scottish Independence Group with members of the Germans for Scottish Independence group travelling hundreds of miles to take part.

Scottish speakers and musicians invited to attend included James Scott of the Scottish Resistance, SNP and CND member Gwen Sinclair, SNP member Gregg Brain and musicians Kevin Gore, Bobby Nicholson and Amanda Brown.

"For a first-time event in a country that does not have as much invested in the situation it was a great turnout," said Brain, who estimated that around 300 people took part.

"There were speakers from Germany, speakers from Holland and speakers from Scotland and someone from Australia too."

Raimond Dijkstra, who founded the Netherlands for Scottish Independence Group, is also a member of the SNP and attended his first conference last year.

He said he started the group a year ago to "mobilise" Scots living in the Netherlands as well as Dutch citizens.

Marco Görlach of the Germans for Scottish Independence Group rallied support in Germany for the Netherlands march and the group is now planning a rally in Berlin in September.

"Germans for Scottish Independence were proud to join the march organised in the Hague by our friends in the Netherlands," said Scot Colin MacPherson, a member of the group.

"Our members come from all walks of life, Scots and Germans living in Germany, Scots and Germans living in Scotland.

"For most of us it was the first chance to actually take part in an independence rally and one of the biggest impressions was coming together with like-minded people from so many different countries.

"For us Brexit makes independence a European issue.



We want to help make this into a European debate

"We want to play our part in talking Scotland up and raising awareness of Independence amongst politicians and the general public.

"Today was the first step – on September 2 we plan to take the next step when we hold our own rally in Berlin."

MacPherson added: "In 2014, especially outside Scotland, we merely expressed our opinion.

"Now we are getting directly involved. One of the most important ways in which we can make a difference is in raising awareness of the Yes movement in Germany and on the continent in general.

"Indeed Alyn Smith begged us all not to let Scotland down in his emotional speech to the European Parliament in June 2016.

"We want to do more than just discuss in our own private circles of friends, we want to make this a European debate."

"To this end we have started providing regular updates on events in Scotland for our members in German.

"We are also pointing people to online articles in English as well as sending a delegation to the first notable demonstration for Scottish Independence on the European mainland.

"It will be a long and hard struggle, but we are determined to play whatever part we can."

Macron and Le Pen go to second round in French vote

BY GEORGE GAYNOR

CENTRIST candidate Emmanuel Macron and far-right populist Marine Le Pen have advanced to the French presidential run-off vote, marking a dramatic shift in the country's political system.

For the first time in modern French history, no mainstream party candidate will advance to the final vote, and a showdown is now set over France's participation in the European Union.

Macron's optimistic vision of a tolerant France with open borders and Le Pen's darker, inward-looking platform calling for closed borders, tougher security, less immigration and dropping the shared euro currency to return to the franc will go head-to-head.

After the results became clear French politicians on the left and right immediately urged voters to block Le Pen's path to power in the May 7 vote, saying her virulently nationalist anti-EU and anti-immigration politics would spell disaster for France.

Polls putting the two head-to-head in a run-off have consistently forecast a comfortable win for Macron.

A 39-year-old investment banker, he made the run-off on the back of a grassroots start-up campaign without the backing of a major political party.

Supporters of both candidates erupted into wild cheers at their campaign headquarters when the results of yesterday's ballot emerged.

"We will win!" Le Pen supporters chanted in Henin-Beaumont. They burst into a rendition of the French national anthem, and waved French flags and blue flags with "Marine President" inscribed on them.

But in Paris, protesters angry that Le Pen has advanced into the final vote scuffled with police.

Crowds of young people, some from anarchist and anti-fascist groups, gathered on the Place de la Bastille in eastern Paris as results were coming in from the first round vote.

Police fired tear gas to disperse an increasingly rowdy crowd and riot police surrounded the area.

The absence in the final vote of candidates from either the mainstream left Socialists or the right-wing Republicans party – the two main groups that have governed post-war France – shows a seismic shift in the nation's political landscape, after an unpredictable and tense campaign.

The vote took place amid heightened security in the first election under France's state of emergency, which has been in place since the gun and bomb attacks in Paris in 2015.