

Soros pledges of a further £100,000 to fight Brexit

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George Soros has defied critics of his six-figure donation to the pro-European Union campaign group Best for Britain by pledging an additional £100,000 to support efforts to fight Brexit.

The billionaire investor's Open Society Foundations are set to match a crowd-funding campaign in support of the group in the wake of attacks on Soros. Best for Britain has already raised more than £50,000 since his support was revealed last Wednesday.

Soros, who has given much of his personal wealth to OSF, said his money was directly linked to the campaign against him in the right-wing press; where a Daily Telegraph article accused him of a secret plot to stop Brexit and described him as "a rich gambler... accused of meddling in nation's affairs".

"I am happy to take the fight to those who have tried to use a smear campaign - not arguments - to prop up their failing case," Soros told the Guardian.

Soros, a former refugee from communist Hungary



George Soros speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January

PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON DAWSON/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

language used in attacks on Soros echoes the antisemitic campaign against him by nationalist groups and governments in countries such as Hungary and Russia, where OSF have supported civil society groups.

Soros's foundations have also given cash to a variety of anti-Brexit groups, including £182,000 to the European Movement UK and £35,000 to Scientists for EU. The OSF said they had also given the Conservative think-tank Bright Blue £86,000 to campaign for the protection of rights currently enshrined in European law.

The additional £100,000 for Best for Britain will bring OSF's total funding for pro-European campaigns and organisations to more than £800,000. OSF's president, Patrick Gaspard, said the funds were for "British groups striving to ensure that this crucial debate is not shut down" and that no cash had gone to parliamentarians.

Best for Britain, which advocates remaining in the EU rather than fighting for a soft Brexit, received £400,000 after the June election. It has previously crowd-funded a similar amount to launch a tactical voting campaign to support pro-European politicians from a variety of parties.

The campaign is chaired by Mark Malloch-Brown, a former UK government minister and deputy UN secretary general. It was co-founded by Gina Miller, who took the UK government to court over the triggering of the article 50 process to leave the EU. Miller has since said she is no longer part of the organisation, which she has accused of being undemocratic.

Soros wrote an article for the Mail on Sunday in which he voiced dismay at the "toxic attacks" on him and his foundation over the past week.

The 87-year-old said it was crucial to attempt to change people's minds about leaving the EU. A mere reversal of the 52:48 majority for Brexit would not be enough to settle the issue, he said. "The majority for staying would have to be significantly larger to convince Europe that Britain's attitude towards Europe has fundamentally changed and its decision deserves to be taken seriously."

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Soros pledges extra £100,000 for Brexit fight after 'smears'

who made more than \$1bn betting against sterling on Black Wednesday in 1992, has said leaving the EU would be a tragic mistake that would weaken Britain's influence.

Best for Britain's chief executive, Eloise Todd, said the extra funds were a rebuff to those who said Soros's funding for the campaign was anti-democratic. "We live in a democracy, and the right to freedom of speech is precious. Elements of the rightwing press don't seem to agree," Todd said.

"The UK's future with the EU is not a done deal, there is still a vote to come and people across the country deserve to know the truth about the options on the table, one of which is staying and leading in the EU. George Soros and his foundation are kindly offering to help match-fund to give Best for Britain more support so we can make sure this message gets out: the biggest decision on Brexit is yet to come."

More than 1,300 people have donated to Best for Britain's GoFundMe page since Soros's donations were first publicised in a Telegraph article co-authored by the prime minister's former chief of staff, Nick Timothy.

The donations were also criticised in the Daily Mail, which called it "tainted money." Some have said the

Who is George Soros?

● George Soros was born in Budapest in 1930. He is 87.

● He survived Nazi-occupied Hungary, came to the UK as a Jewish refugee in 1947, and later settled in the US, where he made his fortune on Wall Street.

● He is sometimes referred to as the man who broke the Bank of England after reportedly making a \$1bn profit betting against sterling on 16 September 1992, when John Major's government withdrew from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.

● His human rights organisation, Open Society Foundations (OSF), is the third largest charitable foundation in the world, behind the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust. His lifetime giving stands at \$32bn.

● He has long campaigned for democracy, human rights and open borders in the former eastern bloc.

● In the US, his support for gay and lesbian rights and campaigning to reduce police violence has made him a target for rightwing attacks, further fuelled by his support for Hillary Clinton's campaign and a \$10m donation to combat hate crime after Trump won.

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