

# A veneer of democracy

Ukip member and would-be leader, **Nikki Sinclair** talks to **Francesca Ross** about money, EU membership and Margaret Thatcher

**N**ewly-elected Ukip MEP Nikki Sinclair has a mission. Primarily she is here to “get rid of the EU, and make myself redundant”. She tells us it was a difficult decision for her to become an MEP. Although she has been involved in Ukip for 15 years, and voted for the party to send representatives to Brussels in 1998, she “wouldn’t necessarily have wanted to come here”.

However, now she is here she has big plans. She has just announced her intention to run as party leader, following Nigel Farage’s announcement that he will step aside to run as a member of the British parliament. “My platform is to stick

to the party principles,” she says. “If you had to label me then it would be ‘old Ukip’”. Sinclair explains, “That doesn’t mean I am backward looking. I’m actually very forward looking as I have been in the party for a long time and I respect the traditions of the party yet I understand we have to move forward.”

Party principles, for her, include the idea that MEPs would not come to Brussels and take excessive salaries, she says. “Now, I’m not going to go poor,” she adds. “But I have decided to donate one third of my salary to the national campaign next year, and to the party youth movement.” So why become leader? Perhaps a clue lies in the similar ambitions of her political heroine, Margaret Thatcher. “I met her a year ago,” Sinclair →



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recalls, "and I told her I was going to be a candidate for Ukip. She said 'good for you, good for you and never give up'. I would like to think that probably she secretly votes for Ukip."

So has spending three months at the coalface of EU politics changed her opinions? Apparently not. "My first impressions of the work done in Brussels is that it is very bureaucratic, nonsensical and very difficult to follow. You have to have a bureaucratic mind to even come close to understanding it," she says. The west Midlands deputy continues, "The voting, the committees, the amount of information is very difficult to take on board. I don't think MEPs actually have much influence in the decision making process, a lot of horse trading goes on behind the scenes anyway to create a veneer of democracy. You can maybe have a minute here or a minute there but it's just ignored."

The UK should therefore leave as soon as possible, argues Sinclair. "It's not what we signed up for in the first place. It doesn't have the majority will of the country and in fact a BBC poll earlier this year said 55 per cent of people wanted to leave the EU," she says. Asked whether it is slightly ironic that, to make an impact on European politics, her party has to actively engage with the process it claims to loathe she says, "I don't think there has been a week gone by when I have been in Strasbourg or Brussels when I haven't thought, 'What am I doing here?'"

Her concerns over Brussels, her position and the EU's influence are manifold. "The EU has an anthem, two parliaments, its own police force and is on its way to having its own army and a president – those are the trappings of state aren't they? To have pan-European political parties [the idea of which she says is growing in support] for me seems to be putting the icing on top of the cake."

So, what happens next? She has a policy platform and a plan but seems to be almost a begrudging candidate. She explains, "The Ukip leadership election concerns me a little. I don't think this is a good time as we have an external election to fight within the next eight months and we should not be wasting time and resources on other things."

Once forms are released she will have 21 days to get the requisite 50 nominations from members, and this election will be key for many reasons. She explains, "In our constitution, if the election falls within one year of a national election it is possible to postpone appointment for a year – so really this leader could take us as far as the next EU election. So it's important that we have a debate on the future of the party."



The future according to Nikki Sinclair? "If I was elected Ukip leader and we had this conversation in 12 months time I would hope to have achieved a decent showing in the general election. You would be speaking to me in Westminster where I was leading a team of MPs."

As a final swipe, she says, "Ukip's role in the parliament should be to report and be accountable back to the British public on the European parliament and the laws they make that have an adverse effect on our country. We are the only party that adheres to that mandate." That's fighting talk. You almost feel Maggie herself would approve. ★