



The Scottish Referendum Lessons for the EU and the UK

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INTRODUCTION

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18 September 45 per cent of Scots voted for independence and 55 per cent said “NO”. Scotland remains in the United Kingdom but the Scottish referendum reveals an important truth: about half of Scotland's inhabitants question the sense of remaining in a union with England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They seek home rule but wish to remain part of the European Union.

At the same time, scepticism about deeper integration of the continent is rising among many Europeans – for example, a referendum is to be held in 2017 to decide about Britain's continued membership in the European Union. Such scepticism undeniably weakens Brussels' efforts to further the European project. The European Community as a whole should therefore consider reassessing the political and social processes that are taking place in the United Kingdom and draw appropriate lessons from them.

THE SCOTTISH REFERENDUM

LESSONS FOR THE EU AND THE UK

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An in-depth analysis of the Scottish example can give all Europeans knowledge that could stimulate a repair process: perhaps the United Kingdom (with or without Scotland) will evolve a fuller form of federalism and a balance between the British union's component parts, and the European Union will find a golden mean between maintaining its members' integrity and building a wider continental identity.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

In 1707, Queen Anne united the kingdoms of England and Scotland into the Kingdom of Great Britain, under one parliament and a government in London (Ireland was added to this community in 1801). For 100 years before this, the two countries were united through a personal union, i.e., through the person of the monarch, similarly to the case of Poland and Lithuania during the Jagiellonian period (until the Union of Lublin in 1569, which introduced common institutions). The English and Scots were close on account of geography (they lived on the same island), but the Scots never wished to be subordinate to anyone. For this reason, England, which had very early on formed a single kingdom (in 927), and which had united with Wales (formal union in 1536), continually had to wage war against Scotland. The symbol of Scotland's struggle for freedom is their national

hero William Wallace (depicted in the film *Braveheart*), who was drawn and quartered in 1305 at the Tower of London.

The Scots and English became ultimately united thanks to money (the English paid off Scotland's colonial debts) and pragmatism: the desire for peace on the island, a common Protestant monarch and greater prospects for action beyond the island as a community. In the modern period, the United Kingdom, ruled also by Scots, became the world's most powerful empire, over which "the sun didn't set." Along with the slow decline of the British Empire, of which the Scots were also the creators and beneficiaries, the paths of the two nations began to diverge.

A GREATER OR LESSER BRITAIN?

Scots rested the sense of patriotism on "Britishness," i.e., the notion that symbolised the fulfilment of national interests as part of a greater community. The energy of the Scots, English, Irish and Welsh enabled the island union to form an empire which, at the beginning of the 20th century, ruled over one fifth of the world's population, from New Zealand, through India and Africa, to North America. The concept of the so-called *Greater Britain* made it possible for the empire's subjects, irrespective of place of residence, to enjoy a sense of equality



and loyalty towards the home country, united through the person of the monarch and the achievements of the United Kingdom. The dominions and the Crown were subject to the same law, standards, model of education and lifestyle of the elites. In the early 20th century, London considered setting up a union parliament in which all territories would be represented and given a role in government.

The two world wars interrupted those plans. The price the United Kingdom paid for victory in the Second World War was the weakening followed by the breakup of its empire, and this brought Britain closer to the European continent. Instead of joining the main current of European integration, which sought to build compromises and form a balance between member states, Great Britain kept its distance, counting on a return to its former splendour without Europe. As the members of the communities, followed by the European Union, grew more cohesive and numerous, the United Kingdom showed less and less enthusiasm for anything else than a common market. Still, it continued to work hard on closer relations with its former colony and the world's most powerful player today – the United States.

At the same time, globalisation brought worse living conditions and the threat of unemployment to the inhabitants of the industrialised regions of southern Scotland and northern

England, as industrial production was massively shifted to other continents with lower labour costs. This led to greater expectations from the state and an ever greater cleavage between the north of Great Britain and its more affluent south. Discontent was directed first and foremost against London as the country's political, economic and cultural centre, where the greatest share of attention, funds and the country's development potential are concentrated. In fact, the capital could be a distinct part of the United Kingdom, considering that it produces a fifth of the kingdom's GDP and is home to 13 per cent of the British population (about 8.4 million). The enrichment of the London metropolis and the disconnection of the Tory Party – which has been in power for most of the last 50 years – from the problems of real people living beyond London has led voters in northern England to opt for the Labour Party, while in Scotland they turned first to the Labour party, and then to the Scottish National Party (SNP).

The state's "Britishness" has suffered considerably from London's dominance and from growing disproportions between the ever more affluent south and increasingly poor north. For some citizens, it has ceased to provide the sense that they can fulfil their individual aspirations and nurture their national distinctiveness as part of the United Kingdom. For some Scots, this "no-longer-so-great" Britain



Tapestry depicting the signing of the Union between Scotland and England in 1707 – exhibition at the Parliament in Edinburgh presenting the history of Scottish bravery, culture and customs.

// Family, friendship, history and cultural ties between Scotland and the other parts of the British Isles are very valuable. England, Wales and Northern Ireland will always be our family, friends and closest neighbours. But when Scotland becomes an independent country, those will be the relations of equal partners. //

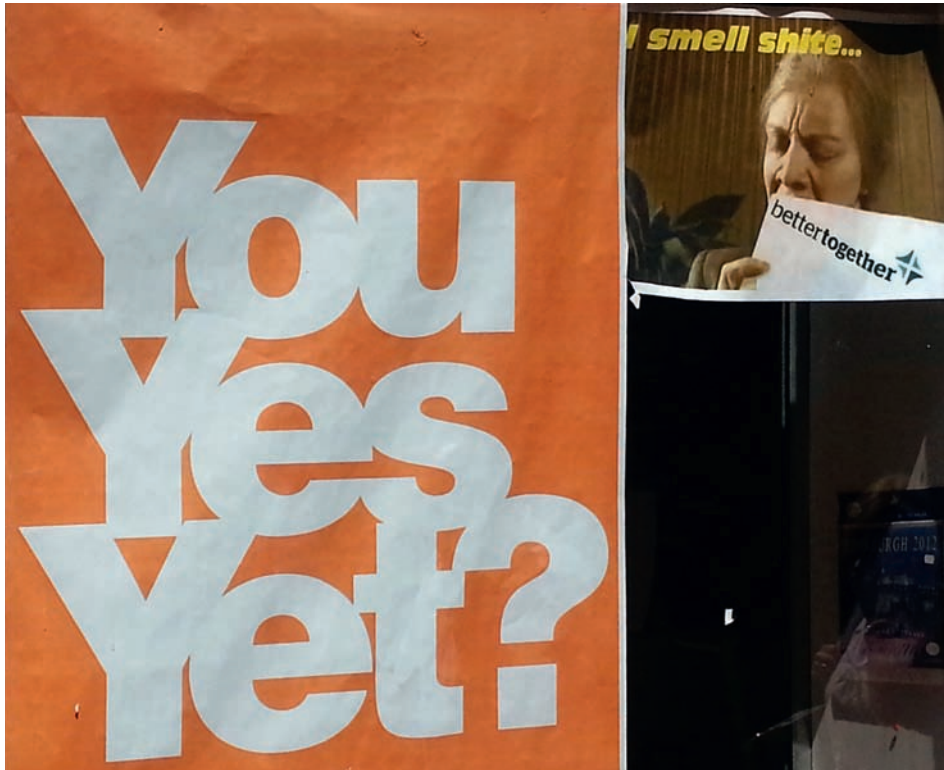
Alex Salmond, head minister of Scotland and leader of the Scottish National Party

has become a pseudo-community, a state dominated by the English, for whom they have never felt very warmly to begin with. Even though Scotland now has 59 seats out of a total of 650 in the lower chamber of the British parliament (Westminster) – accordingly to its population (5.3 million Scots out of a total of 63.1 million Britons), a sense of alienation has grown among the Scots. At the same time, Scottish values and expectations with regard to the state have evolved in a different direction than in England. Instead of a free market, privatisation, the force of capital and acceptance for deep social differences, the Scots began to prefer the welfare state model, a strongly nationalised economy and a socialist equalisation of society. Scots were continually outvoted in Westminster and found no acceptance for postulates that could move the country in their preferred direction, because even the Labour Party, in power from 1997 to 2009 (and run by Scots), followed a model of social and economic development closer to policies of previous governments (the

so-called New Labour). After several decades, it turned out that Scots are mentally closer to the Scandinavians than to their neighbours to the south. Norway, affluent and in possession of rich oil fields (like Scotland), slowly became a point of reference for the Scots.

WHAT DO THE SCOTS WANT?

In 1970, the Scottish National Party didn't have a single seat in the British parliament, today it holds 59. Moreover, in the 2011 elections to the Scottish parliament (which was established in 1999), it crushed its rivals, thanks to which it could form an autonomous government in Scotland and push for a referendum. In the country's 32 council areas, the Conservatives have only one deputy, which means that the present Conservative-Liberal government of the United Kingdom doesn't have the support of the Scottish electorate. The situation would be no different had the Labour Party won the elections – even though Labour has won 39 out of the 59 Scottish seats in the House of



Commons, in the Scottish parliament they won only 37 out of 129 seats.

Scots are no longer satisfied with their own parliament and its extensive prerogatives. Among other things, they wish to determine their own taxes and social insurance contributions, decide about expenditures and economic development, social policy, the labour market, health insurance and foreign affairs. They are against financing nuclear armaments and support environment-related expenditures. To pay for the welfare state they expect to use the proceeds from the sale of oil, whose deposits lie under Scottish territorial waters. They accuse London of excessive privileges, of distributing wealth and resources in a way that is unfair to

Supporters of Scottish independence were not mincing words: the statement 'I smell shite' reflects their attitude to the "Better Together" campaign conducted by the British Government.



other parts of the United Kingdom, of domination and arrogance.

LESSONS FOR THE UK

According to Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron, who is himself of Scottish descent – as are his two predecessors Gordon Brown and Tony Blair – “If Scotland leaves, it will be forever.” **During the referendum campaign, the prime minister stressed that a referendum is not like general elections, which give voters an opportunity to change their minds every five years, but is a decision for centuries.** Faced with the threat of the breakup of the 307 year-old union, the government and the opposition created a common front of Conservatives, Labour, Liberals, and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) as part of the *Better Together* campaign.

British celebrities, headed by England's football star David Beckham, also joined the struggle for the country's unity. Scottish opinion makers were divided on the issue: J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter saga, among other people, strongly advocated remaining in the United Kingdom and supported the ‘No’ campaign financially. Sean Connery, the most famous James Bond actor held the opposite view. The United Kingdom's 88-year old monarch has shown restraint and a neutral stance, but during her last visit to her Scottish

residence in Belmoral, she expressed the hope that her subjects would “think very carefully about the future.”

Once the referendum is over, British politicians will have to redefine the vision of the United Kingdom's future and reassess the reasons why its component parts should indeed remain together in the new century. If the secessionists won, Scotland would become an independent country in 2016 and would immediately begin negotiations for EU membership (which could be difficult if they run into opposition from London and perhaps also Spain and Belgium). In addition, the Scots would want to retain the same monarchy (something London will not oppose, as Queen Elisabeth II is a descendent of the Scottish Stuart dynasty on her mother's side) and the pound, because they feel they have the same right to it as the rest of the United Kingdom (but this will rather not be possible). **London should not feel triumphant if the Scots' ultimately decided to remain in the United Kingdom, as the situation will continue to be tense.**

An additional challenge for the British Government is the European referendum scheduled by the Conservatives for 2017, should they win in the upcoming parliamentary elections. **If the ‘YES for independence’ camp won in Scotland, and ‘NO for EU**



The Scots decided to remain part of the United Kingdom, however, London should not feel triumphant, as tensions will remain.



membership' won in the rest of Britain, the United Kingdom of England, Wales and Northern Ireland would be leaving the EU, while Scotland would be joining it. Leaving the EU will threaten Great Britain's position as a world financial centre and will affect its trade with the continent (50 per cent of Britain's trade at present, against only 8 per cent for the rest of the EU). This will significantly undermine the international prestige of the United Kingdom.

Nonetheless, both referendums could be treated as an opportunity to heal the internal situation in the state, which is in need of constitutional reforms and balancing the inequalities. If Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland have their internal parliaments,

Scots are no longer satisfied with a parliament with wide prerogatives. They wish to decide about all their country's affairs themselves.



a separate assembly should be considered for England, whose affairs presently absorb all British MPs and Lords. Westminster would then become a place to debate matters pertinent to the entire kingdom, and Great Britain would turn to a truly federal state which could think of introducing a constitution guaranteeing equal rights and equal representation for all its citizens. An independent Scotland is to have such a constitution.

LESSONS FOR THE EU

The situation in the British Isles is drawing the international attention of secessionists from many continents (from Quebec in Canada, Texas in the United States, Taiwan, etc.). It is also giving cause for reflection in Brussels and in other EU capitals. The Scottish referendum could open up a ‘separatist Pandora’s box’ in Europe (and not only there): the Basques, Catalans, Flemish, Corsicans, inhabitants of South Tyrol – and perhaps even the Bavarians and the Italians from the so-called Padania – are all waiting in line and have sent observers to the Scottish referendum. If EU-member states are subject to dismemberment, the process of European integration will come to a standstill for many years. In turn, the British EU-membership referendum, which is to take place in three years, will set a precedent, because no EU member state has yet tried to leave the

continental community. **The European Union may have a great future in store in the global world of global and multi-dimensional interdependence if it remains integrated, strong, and provides its citizens with an attractive vision of future development, but it could also be facing a collapse. For this reason, it should think preventively in time.**

The reason for the Scottish frustrations, which have been growing for several decades, is that the Scots feel increasingly ill-at-ease in a changed United Kingdom – a state at a crossroads between sentiments rooted in past imperial greatness and the desire to play a key role within the British Commonwealth of Nations on the one hand, and Europe, whose culture, civilisation and geopolitical identity it shares, on the other. The United Kingdom is united only outwardly. In reality, it is dominated by the English perspective on the world and by English standards, which a large number of Scots do not share. In sports, the English and Scots have long had separate national teams. **If the European Union does not give all its members a sense of fulfilment within a wider community and in the name of a greater ideal, it will be facing the same tensions which the once-great Britain is now experiencing. •**

Photos: Małgorzata Bonikowska

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**18 September
referendum results**

Scots voted:

45% – YES

55% – NO

Arguments for independence

Fragments of the brochure “The future of Scotland,” drawn up by supporters of secession from the United Kingdom.

Independence means that the future of Scotland will rest in our own hands. Decisions about Scotland, which are presently made in London, will be made by elected representatives of the people of Scotland in a Scottish parliament.

A vote for independence will be the clearest declaration of faith in ourselves and in the abilities of our nation. Independence will free energies, efforts and ambitions, capable to bring our hopes and expectations to life and to transform our country. Independence is not an end in itself. The main aim of independence is to improve the quality of life for the people of Scotland. Only the Scottish parliament and government will always put the interests of the people of Scotland first. A look at the decentralisation of power after 1999 bears this out. It was a favorable process for Scotland, but in areas which remain in the hands of London, the costs for many families and communities in Scotland are high.

Democracy, prosperity and justice are fundamental arguments for independence.

Independence means that we, the inhabitants of Scotland, will take responsibility for our future in our own hands. It will also give us powers in the area of the economy and social policy that each country needs to build a more prosperous and just society.

Most importantly, these principles function harmoniously. After the transfer of powers from London to Scotland, we will increase the probability that the policies pursued will be consistent with the views of the inhabitants of Scotland and that they will fill the gap between the rich and poor, and give them greater opportunities regardless of their origin. We are in a position to build a more just society. By so doing, we will ensure greater prosperity for our country, because we know that countries that are most equal and cohesive become the most successful ones. United by a sense of community of interests, they make full use of the talents of all.



YES for independence: 45 per cent of Scottish society questions the sense of the union with England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and express this in various ways.

British politicians will have to redefine the vision of the United Kingdom's future and reassess the reasons why its component parts should indeed remain together in the new century.

CSM is an independent, non-government analytical centre established in 1996 and dealing with Polish foreign policy and the most important issues of international politics. CSM is active in research, education and publishing, organises conferences and meetings, and participates in international projects in collaboration with similar institutions in many countries. CSM creates a forum for debate and exchange of ideas in matters of international politics, relations between states and challenges in the global world. CSM's activities are addressed above all to local-government officials and to entrepreneurs, as well as to officials of the central administration, politicians, diplomats, political scientists and the media. In 2009, CSM was recognised as one of the best think-tanks in East-Central Europe in the study "The Leading Public Policy Research Organisations in the World" conducted by the University of Pennsylvania.

