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Scottish Independence: The Way to Go?

Abstract:

Since its 2007 general election victory, Scotland's SNP (the Scottish National Party) has been promoting the broadening of devolution for Scotland and, since its re-election in 2011, it has been taking steps toward holding a full independence referendum, which is planned for 2014. In October 2012, Scotland was granted the constitutional power to hold such a referendum, however, the issue of an independent Scotland poses a number of important questions, many of them yet to be fully answered. This article looks at the issue of Scottish devolution and subsequently Scottish independence, and discusses the particular problems connected with the notion of an independent Scotland.

Keywords: Devolution, the United Kingdom, Scotland, Devolved Institutions, Independence, Referendum, the Scottish National Party.

1. Introduction

Since the victory of Scotland's SNP (the Scottish National Party) in the 2011 Scottish general elections, the notion of a fully independent Scotland has very much become a fixture of the political scene across the United Kingdom. As of October 2012, Scotland has been granted the constitutional power by the British government in Westminster to

hold a legal referendum on the topic of Scottish independence, providing it is held before the end of 2014. Independence itself poses a number of important questions, many of them yet to be fully answered. These include the question of whether an independent Scotland would accede to the European Union automatically; whether it would become a member of NATO and what would be its currency – the pound, the Euro, or another, new, currency? The aim of this short article is to briefly discuss the process of devolution within the United Kingdom that has brought us to the current state of affairs, to analyse the issues which have arisen in connection with Scottish independence, to discuss the various campaigns which are being run, both for and against, an independent Scotland and, finally, to outline what independence for Scotland might mean to the UK and especially to its devolved regions.

In the second section of this article, the historical background of devolution (in connection with nationalism and regionalism) will be briefly introduced, and the historical development in the matter of devolution, which led to the current state of affairs, will be outlined. In the following part, the two newly established autonomous Scottish institutions (The Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government) and their competencies will be briefly introduced. In the fourth section, the SNP's strive for devolution and subsequently also independence will be analysed. Special attention will be paid to some of the rather controversial issues that are currently being discussed in the Scottish Parliament as well as in the Scottish media (for example the planned independence referendum and the membership of an independent Scotland in international organisations). In the fifth part of the article, the main Scottish pro- and anti- independence campaigns will be introduced. The last part of the article will then focus on some of the possible future scenarios for the UK.

As far as the bibliography used for the research necessary for the completion of this article is concerned, the first, theoretical, part of the text is mostly based on peer-reviewed articles and academic literature, whereas the second part mostly uses primary sources, reports and newspaper articles on the particular current issues connected with Scottish independence (this is due to the fact that the issue is currently being very frequently discussed in both the Scottish and British media but, to the present day, there is not much academic literature focusing on Scottish independence as such).

2. Historical overview

Firstly, to be able to analyse the issue of Scottish devolution and independence, it is necessary to briefly introduce the concepts of regionalism and decentralisation in general. In the case of the UK, regionalism and decentralisation (or, in particular, devolution) are closely interconnected. This is due to the rather remarkable regional differences between the English, the Scottish, the Welsh, and the Northern Irish.

According to Archie Brown (1998, 216), it is generally accepted that nations (the Scottish in our case) living in their historic homelands have a right to self-rule if a majority of their citizens want it. For a long time, however, the idea of British regionalism was only confined to a small number of geographers, planners and political scientists and it was not placed upon the agenda of British politics until the late 1970s (Bogdanor 1977, 157). Nevertheless, socially, culturally, and to some extent also politically, regional distinctions in the particular parts of the United Kingdom were always something fairly obvious (but yet disputable).

According to Harry Lazer (1977, 50), even though the Celtic background of the Scottish (and also the Welsh) people was recognised and well-known, the prevailing view was that the Scottish and the Welsh were rather 'picturesque cousins' of the English, blending their family differences with their unified British nationality and culture. On the other hand, though, some authors, for example Arthur Aughey, state that the perception of the Scottish as blood-brothers by the English was by no means reciprocal, and that there was never really any common sense of 'Britishness' among the 'British' (Aughey 2001, 65–66). Most authors, therefore, agree that the relationship between 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' as well as between nationhood and statehood has always been a rather complicated one (Aughey 2001, 67). However, despite the fairly obvious and generally accepted differences between the Scottish, the Welsh and the English, the United Kingdom had been for a long time consistently held up as a unitary structure with a high degree of centralisation. Nonetheless, in the concerned regions of the country, there have always existed nationalist minorities rebelling against such a setting, although it is important to mention that in the eyes of the English, Scottish and Welsh nationalisms were nothing more than 'romantic distractions from the real business of modern government' and nationalism, which feeds off cultural differences had, according to the Conservative British narratives, no right to exist in a modern society which, conversely, erodes those differences (Aughey 2001, 105). Those narratives were, however, later proven to be rather wrong. For a long time, it seemed that only a few people were committed to nationalism enough to vote for a nationalist party. As a result the SNP were, until 1970, significantly unrepresented in the Parliament (Lazer 1977, 50). However, there was a significant breakthrough in nationalist tendencies in the 1970s, which resulted in the SNP winning 7 seats in the Parliament in the general elections in February 1974.¹ It meant that, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, the winning party (the Labour Party) did not receive a majority of seats in the House of Commons, which meant that the balance of power in the Parliament was held by the minor parties, specifically by the SNP and also by the Welsh

1) *The Guardian: Elections Past, 2011* (<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/electionspast/page/0,,1450592,00.html>, 25 November 2012).

nationalist party Plaid Cymru (Lazer 1977, 52). The Scottish and Welsh pressure for reform together with the success of the nationalist parties in the elections led to the introduction of a White Paper (Hardill, Graham and Kofman 2001, 167) entitled 'Democracy and Devolution: Proposals for Scotland and Wales' (Lazer 1977, 51), which proposed assemblies for Scotland and Wales, without financial autonomy or control over economic and industrial policy (Cornford 1975, 105). In the following elections in October 1974, the nationalist parties were even more successful with the SNP found itself winning another four seats in the Parliament. The election of, overall, 14 nationalist MPs from both Scotland and Wales put pressure on the Government and subsequently led to the introduction of the combined Scotland and Wales Bill in November 1976² – the process of devolution was now impendent.

By 1977, Labour did not have a majority in the central British Parliament at all and it was, therefore, necessary to take the nationalist tendencies into consideration and potentially bring devolution onto the political agenda. In November 1977, the separate 'Bills for Scotland and Wales' proposing referendums in Scotland and Wales to 'ascertain the wishes of the populations on issues of independence', were introduced.³ However, due to a rather controversial amendment⁴, 40% of the eligible electorate would have to vote 'yes' for the 'Scotland and Wales Acts' to be passed and for devolution to be put forward.⁵

The first referendum on devolution took place on 1 March, 1979 and in Scotland, 52 percent of the voters voted 'yes' and 48 percent voted 'no' – however, those 52 percent only formed 32.9 percent of the eligible electorate. On the basis of those results, the Acts were repealed and the issue of devolution was, in spite of some of the home rule politicians, academics and activists' Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, not to be further discussed or put into action for almost another 10 years.⁶

However, the situation changed significantly in the course of the early 1990s, and the idea of self-government in the regions was no longer seen as a nostalgic remnant of the past, but rather as a central element in political, economic and social moder-

nisation (Elcock and Keating 1998, 3). This can be explained by a number of aspects. Firstly, the rise of multinational corporations, mobility of capital, and the imperative of competition, together with the rise of neo-liberal ideology, have undermined the sense of nation-state, and contributed to its crisis. Secondly, states' capacities for territorial management were weakened by increasing European integration. Finally, the remarkable regional differences within the United Kingdom had an impact on the party system in the state with the Conservatives significantly falling back in Scotland and Wales. By 1997, the Conservative Party had lost all its seats in Scotland and Wales, which, of course, strengthened the decentralist credentials of the Labour Party and subsequently led to Labour renewing its commitment to devolution (Elcock and Keating 1998, 4–5).

The general election and the Labour victory in May, 1997, put the issue of devolution at the centre of political debate (this was despite the fact that the leader of the Labour Party and the Prime Minister at the time, Tony Blair, later admitted that Scottish devolution was a 'dangerous game', which he never particularly favoured but saw as 'inevitable' for the prevention of the potential dissolution of the union between England and Scotland) (Johnson 2010). Shortly after the election, the Labour government issued the 'White Paper on Scotland' proposing the reservation of specific powers to Westminster and leaving the soon-to-be-established Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh with a general competence over all other matters. The devolution referendums then took place on 11 September 1997. In Scotland, there were two referendum questions asked – the first one was concerned with the support for the principle of a Scottish Parliament, and the second one was on the power to vary taxes (Elcock and Keating 1998, 7). This time, 74.3 percent and 63.5 percent of the Scots voted respectively in favour of the proposed aspects. The referendum turnout was 60 percent. The result, therefore, passed both simple and complex electoral tests and was considered decisive.⁷

The 'White Papers' formed the basis of the devolution legislation, which entered into law with the 'Scotland Act 1998', which was passed by the Parliament in the course of 1998. As a result of the referendum, the Scottish Parliament (which currently meets in Holyrood, Edinburgh) of 129 members and the Scottish Executive of ministers were established in 1999 (the Scottish Executive was, in 2007, renamed to the Scottish Government, the current First Minister is Alex Salmond of the SNP) (Keating 1998, 226–229). The first elections to the newly established Scottish Parliament were held on 6 May, 1999 (Bulmer et al. 2002, 11).

Under the „Scotland Act of 1998“, the Scottish Parliament can make both primary and secondary legislation in areas that are not reserved for Westminster. Those reserved areas are specified in the Act; everything else is in the competence of the Scot-

2) BBC: *Welsh Referendum: The Politics of Devolution – Party Policy* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/devolution/wales/briefing/partypolicy.shtml>, 25 November 2012).

3) *Parliamentary Information List: Bills on devolution in Wales* (www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN04753.pdf, 25 November 2012).

4) *The 40% rule or the Cunningham Amendment*.

5) BBC: *Scottish Referendum: The 1979 Referendums* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/devolution/scotland/briefing/79referendums.shtml>, 25 November 2012).

6) BBC: *Scottish Referendum: The Devolution Debate This Century* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/devolution/scotland/briefing/c20scot.shtml>, 25 November 2012).

7) BBC: *Scottish Referendum: Scotland Decided* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/devolution/scotland/briefing/scotbrief2.shtml>, 25 November 2012).

tish Parliament. Some of the reserved areas are, for example, defence and national security, fiscal, economy and monetary system, social security, foreign affairs, and employment. Devolved subjects include, for instance, health, local government, education, tourism, the environment, or law and home affairs. The Parliament does, however, also debate on the reserved matters. Nevertheless, the original level of devolution set in 1997 has been significantly broadened in the years since.

In 2005, the responsibility of Scotland's railways, previously held by the Department of Transport, was taken over by the Scottish Executive. According to the Scottish First Minister at the time, Jack McConnell, this was „*the most significant devolution of new powers to Scottish ministers since 1999*.”⁸

In December, 2007, the Scottish Parliament passed a motion on the establishment of the so-called Calman Commission.⁹ The commission, also referred to as the Commission on Scottish Devolution, began work in April, 2008, and it is supposed to review the provision of the „Scotland Act 1998” in light of experience, and to recommend any changes to the present constitutional arrangement, which would enable the Scottish Parliament to better serve the people of Scotland and to continue to secure Scotland's position within the United Kingdom.¹⁰

In the course of 2008, an agreement was reached which transferred responsibilities for all planning and nature conservation matters at sea up to 200 miles from the Scottish coast to the Scottish Government. This change had a significant impact on the offshore industry, wind and wave power, and to a lesser extent also on fishing. According to the Environment Secretary, Richard Lochhead, this was excellent news for Scotland and its economy, in that it allows Scotland to safeguard its seas. Oil and gas licensing and permitting did, however, remain reserved matters; fishing quotas also remained within the competency of the European Union.¹¹

In February, 2010, Alex Salmond outlined plans for a draft Referendum Bill on transferring powers to the Scottish Parliament to enable full independence.¹² The referendum proposed in the bill was to take place by the following election in 2011, and it was supposed to ask two questions: the first on more powers for the Scottish Parlia-

ment, and the second on the concept of independence for Scotland. However, a decisive „yes” for independence vote in the referendum would not automatically mean that Scotland would become independent – as Alex Salmond said: „*The Scottish Parliament does not have the authority to declare Scotland an independent country. A ‚yes’ vote in the referendum would mark the start of talks with the UK government*” (Black 2009). Nonetheless, in 2011, it was announced that, due to the insufficient support of the opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament, the bill would not be put to a vote, and it was subsequently withdrawn by the Scottish Government.¹³

Prior to the 2011 election, the SNP published its election manifesto, which contained a vow to bring forward an independence referendum (Stuart 2011). In May, 2011, the SNP won a majority in the Scottish Parliament and, therefore, acquired enough votes to hold an independence referendum. In January, 2012, Alex Salmond outlined a timetable for the independence referendum and stated that it should be held in autumn 2014 (this year is said to have been chosen because of the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn¹⁴). However, the central British Government suggested that a referendum conducted by the Scottish Parliament would be illegal and potentially struck down by the courts. Subsequently the UK Government proposed a „Section 30 order”, which would require approval from both Westminster and Holyrood for the Scottish Government to be able to deliver the vote (Clegg 2012). The SNP also proposed a third option – so-called „devolution max” (often also referred to as „devo max”) – which would offer Scotland more control over its governance, including areas such as taxation, in case the option of full independence does not have a decisive support. However, opponents claim that „devo max” would give the Scottish Government a chance to change the constitution even if it loses the vote on leaving the Union, and could also eventually create two different and competing tax regimes within the United Kingdom.¹⁵

3. Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government

The Scottish Parliament was established in 1999 and it comprises 129 members, referred to as the Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and elected for four years,

8) BBC: *Executive in £325m rail takeover* (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/4185185.stm, 20 October 2012).

9) *The chairman of the commission is Sir Kenneth Calman.*

10) *Commission on Scottish Devolution*, <http://www.commissiononscottishdevolution.org.uk>, 20 October 2012.

11) BBC: *Scotland handed sea planning role* (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/north_east/7752324.stm, 20 October 2012).

12) *Draft Referendum Bill*, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2010/02/11161034>, 20 October 2012.

13) BBC: *Scottish independence plan 'an election issue'* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-11196967>, 20 October 2012).

14) *In 1314, the Scottish defeated the English at Bannockburn. It was one of the most significant victories in the First War of Scottish Independence.*

15) BBC: *Scottish independence: Voters need 'straight choice'* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17064847>, 20 October 2012).

who meet in Holyrood in Edinburgh. The Scottish Parliament has the power to make laws on a range of issues known as the „devolved matters“. However, the „devolved“ matters are not listed in the „Scotland Act 1998“ and, therefore, any matter, which is not listed in the „reserved matters“ is considered devolved and the Scottish Parliament can legislate within this area. The Scottish Parliament can, after its responsibilities were broadened in 2005 and then again in 2008, currently make laws in the following areas: Agriculture (including fisheries and forestry), Education, Environment, Health and social services, Housing, Law and order, Local government, Sports, Tourism and economic development, and transport. 'Reserved matters', remaining the responsibility of the Westminster Parliament, are: Broadcasting, Consumer rights, Defence, Energy, Employment, Foreign Policy, Social security, Trade and industry, and the Constitution. At present, the Westminster Parliament is considering a bill containing proposals to extend the powers of the Scottish Parliament to, for example, income tax and borrowing.¹⁶ A similar proposal is also being discussed by the SNP as part of the „devo max“ concept of the planned 2014 independence referendum.

The Scottish Government (until 2007 known as the Scottish Executive), established in 1999 and led by the First Minister (currently Alex Salmond), is the executive arm of the devolved government of Scotland. It is responsible for most of the issues of day-to-day concern to the Scottish people, including, for example, health, education, justice, rural affairs, and transport.¹⁷

4. Independence on the agenda of the SNP

As far back as 1928, the National Party for Scotland (later renamed as the Scottish National Party – SNP), which publicly promotes Scottish independence, was established. In the following decades, the SNP was systematically trying to promote the concept of devolution at the Westminster Parliament. In the late 1980s, during Thatcher's rather anti-devolution government, Scottish nationalists decided to take things into their own hands, set up their own constitutional convention, and published plans for a Scottish Parliament. However, it took another ten years for the SNP to finally achieve its goal and for Scotland to gain a certain level of autonomy.¹⁸

16) *The Scottish Parliament: Devolved and reserved matters explained* (<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/visitandlearn/25488.aspx>, 21 October 2012).

17) *The Scottish Government: The Scottish Government* (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About>, 21 October 2012).

18) *The Independent: Scottish Nationalism Timeline* (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/scottish-nationalism-2193230.html>, 21 October 2012).

Following the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the extent of powers devolved to Scotland was systematically broadened and, as was already mentioned in this article, in 2011, after winning the general election, the SNP outlined a timetable for independence with an independence referendum planned for autumn 2014. However, there are still many problems the SNP will have to deal with in connection with independence. Firstly, there still remains a disagreement between the Scottish and the British Government on how many questions should be asked in the referendum, and on whether 16 and 17 year old Scottish citizens should be allowed to vote. Secondly, according to the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, the two parties also do not agree on the timing of the planned referendum (Moore claims that the referendum should be held as soon as possible, the SNP, however, insist on the referendum taking place in 2014 – this is due to the fact that, according to Alex Salmond, it is the „biggest decision Scotland has to make for 300 years“ and everything has to be properly debated and settled before the referendum can be held).¹⁹ Furthermore, the Scottish Affairs Select Committee²⁰ has recently asked the SNP for details needed on issues such as bank regulation, pension payments and the national currency.²¹ Other questions, which still remain to be solved, are, for instance, the currency an independent Scotland would have, whether Scotland would take on a share of the UK's national debt, whether there would be a separate Scottish military established, what would happen to Scotland's membership in international organisations, and whether there would be border controls between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom (Black 2012). As far as the public support for independence in Scotland is concerned, the estimates currently vary between 28 and 38 percent in favour of independence. According to an Ipsos MORI²² opinion poll carried out in January 2012, four out of ten Scots at that time agreed that Scotland should be an independent country.²³

Moreover, another issue that has to be considered is the SNP's proposal to provide the referendum voters with a third option – the so-called „devo max“, offering Scotland more extensive control over its governance (in areas such as taxation), which the opponents of the referendum disagree with as it, by extending the powers of the Scottish Parliament even in case the concept of full independence is not supported by

19) BBC: *Scottish independence: 'Modest progress' at Moore Salmond talks* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-17003842>, 21 October 2012).

20) *A select committee of the House of Commons of the British Parliament.*

21) BBC: *Scottish independence: MPs in 'unanswered questions' call* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-17034508>, 21 October 2012).

22) *A leading market research company in the UK.*

23) *Scottish Independence Poll*, <http://www.slideshare.net/IpsosMORI/independence-poll-for-the-times-final-30112>, 21 October 2012.

the majority of the voters, would pretty much ensure some kind of a victory for the SNP. Moreover, there exists another concept – the so-called „devo (devolution) plus“, which is promoted by the three main opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament, and which would provide the devolved institution with new responsibility for welfare benefits (except pensions), control over income and corporation tax, control over the Scottish share of UK borrowing, and with a „geographical“ share of oil revenues.²⁴ Generally, it is possible to say that the idea of full independence for Scotland is currently being very much promoted by the SNP but there still remain some very significant obstacles that have to be resolved for the SNP to be able to hold the planned 2014 referendum.

Following Salmond's original initiative about the possibility of Scottish independence, many doubts and problems have arisen regarding not only the above mentioned issue of Scotland in relation to international organisations, but also regarding the legality of holding the referendum. Initially, Westminster stated that the Scottish Parliament was, under the current devolutionary setup, not authorised to hold such a referendum, however, on the 15th of October, 2012, Alex Salmond and the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, met in Holyrood and signed an agreement that grants Scotland the power to hold the independence referendum, providing it is held before the end of 2014. The so-called Edinburgh Agreement sets out rules for the wording and the financing of the campaign as well as other specifics. Among other things, the agreement states that the referendum has to have a clear legal base, that it must deliver a fair test and decisive expression of the opinion of the Scottish nation and, most importantly, that it will be legislated entirely by the Scottish Parliament, that it will ask a single yes/no question, which rules out the possibility of „devo max“, and it also makes, as suggested by the SNP, Scottish citizens aged 16 and 17 eligible to vote.²⁵ The Edinburgh Agreement, signed by David Cameron, Alex Salmond, the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, and the Deputy First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon,²⁶ is a landmark moment in the campaign for independence as it grants legitimacy to the referendum.

Prior to the Edinburgh Agreement, David Cameron repeatedly stated that he is not against the idea of an independent Scotland but finds Salmond's approach rather misguided and confusing, saying in his speech at the Scottish Conservative Party

Conference in March 2012: „At the last election, Alex Salmond asked for a mandate for a vote on independence. He won that election. He got the mandate. I offered him his referendum [...] and now he won't take it. What on earth is going on? First he wanted a referendum in 2010 – now they say they need 1000 days. First he said they wanted one question – now he's flirting with two. Now he's talking about Devo-Max, or Devo-Plus. Soon it'll be Devo: the sequel. I tell you: it might say Braveheart on the box but the movie you're watching is more like Chicken Run. Seriously: what is he waiting for“ (Cameron 2012)? From what Cameron said, we can draw the conclusion that the Prime Minister has always thought that Salmond's independence argument is quite inconsistent and incoherent and that the proposal of the „devo max“ option was very much a „get out“ clause in the event that Scotland did not vote for full independence, ensuring the SNP and the independence movement remains relevant regardless of what the Scottish public says. Nonetheless, judging by the outcomes of the Edinburgh Agreement and what it sets – that the referendum will ask only one question and that the „devo max“ option will not appear in the referendum – it is fair to say that the central government very much got their way.

As was already mentioned, another important and rather controversial issue is Scotland's role and membership in international organisations, especially in the EU and in NATO. The SNP has long held opposition to an independent Scotland belonging to NATO, however, during their party conference in October 2012, the party members voted (the vote was 426 for and 332 against) through a resolution that states that an SNP government of an independent Scotland will maintain its NATO membership providing the country does not have to host any nuclear weapons and NATO continues to respect the right of its members to only participate in UN sanctioned military operations.²⁷ Nonetheless, the question of an independent Scotland's membership in NATO is by no means this straightforward as Scotland (the Faslane naval base in particular) is the home of the UK's Trident nuclear missiles and the above described SNP resolution makes the issue of removing Trident „non-negotiable“ and thus creates a prospect of unilateral nuclear disarmament of the UK, which, at the moment, does not have an alternative base for Trident (Carrell 2012b).

Moreover, the SNP resolution did not only cause a lot of uproar on the political scene of the UK as a whole but also within the SNP itself. Subsequently to the vote, two SNP MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament), John Finnie and Jean Urquhart, resigned. Their resignations essentially mark the first major revolt against Alex Salmond's leadership since 2007, which illustrates the extent of the controversy over the SNP's new pro-NATO policy (Carrell 2012c). Due to the Scottish Green Party (which has recently officially claimed to support the concept of Scottish independence)

24) BBC: *Scottish independence: Devo Plus gains support from three MSPs* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-17182913>, 23 October 2012).

25) *The Guardian: The Scottish independence referendum agreement* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/oct/15/scottish-independence-referendum-agreement>, 26 October 2012).

26) *The Guardian: The Scottish independence referendum agreement* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/oct/15/scottish-independence-referendum-agreement>, 26 October 2012).

27) BBC: *SNP members vote to ditch the party's anti-NATO policy* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-19993694>, 28 October 2012).

always having been opposed to NATO, this anti-NATO approach is also supported by the Green MSPs, Patrick Harvie and Alison Johnstone,²⁸ which potentially causes even more disruption to the unanimity of the bodies that generally back the idea of an independent Scotland.

As was already mentioned above, the Scottish Green Party has recently shown official support of the Yes Scotland campaign and the idea of Scottish independence in general as one of the key objectives of the party is decentralisation and local decision-making (rather than nationalism).²⁹ Support of the independence referendum has also been officially claimed by the Scottish Socialist Party³⁰ and by Tommy Sheridan's Solidarity Party.³¹ None of those parties are, however, represented in the Scottish Parliament. In terms of parties that are represented in the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Conservative Party are significantly pro-Unionist³², the Scottish Labour Party openly support the Better Together anti-independence campaign³³ and the Scottish Liberal Democrats do not support an independent Scotland but have recently proposed plans for a more powerful Scottish Parliament (in other words, for a further broadening of the competencies of Holyrood).³⁴

The issue of an independent Scotland and its membership in the EU is perhaps even more controversial. Originally, the SNP was very much promoting the option of an independent Scotland joining the EU automatically and without having to apply, although they initially said that they would not reveal the evidence for this conviction until 2013. However, in October 2012, despite claiming his statement had been backed up by his legal officers, Alex Salmond was accused of misleading Scottish voters in terms of Scotland's automatic membership in the EU and he was subsequently forced to re-

veal that no specific legal advice regarding the issue had been provided to him by Scottish law officers (Carrell 2012a). Furthermore, there exist certain concerns about the Scottish case potentially having an impact on the wider dynamic of other independence campaigns within Europe, from the Basques and the Catalonians in Spain to, for example, the Flanders region in Belgium, and set a precedent of seceded regions of EU member-states automatically becoming members of the EU themselves. Spanish foreign minister, José Manuel García-Margallo has recently claimed that in case Scotland does go independent, it will have to „join the queue“, win the support of all 27 member states and then negotiate as a regular, new EU member state. Even though García-Margallo did not specifically say this, it is very likely that if an independent Scotland applies to accede to the EU, Spain might block its membership as the Spanish right-wing government is currently fighting a battle to prevent Catalonia from calling its own independence referendum. Nonetheless, the spokeswoman of the Scottish Government stated that García-Margallo's claim was wrong and said that as an equal successor state, Scotland would inherit the same international treaty rights and obligations as the rest of the UK (Tremlett 2012). This is, however, very much in contrast with what has the president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, recently indicated: that an independent Scotland would have to re-apply for its EU membership and also to negotiate its suggested opt-out from the single currency, which was another feature of an independent Scotland's EU membership that Alex Salmond allegedly claimed to be certain (Johnson 2012). It is, therefore, fair to say that the issue of Scotland's membership in the EU in the case of its independence is rather complicated and that, at the present moment, a definite answer to it is still very much up in the air.

Moreover, following Salmond's accusations, David Cameron declared that the SNP's case for Scottish independence is „falling apart“ and stated that the affair goes to show to what extent the arguments of the SNP collapse upon scrutiny. According to Alistair Darling, Alex Salmond and the SNP now have to deal with a significant credibility problem (Johnson, 2012), which is fairly likely to have an impact on the public support for independence. According to the available sources, public opinion regarding Scottish independence has not significantly changed in the course of the year 2012 and in September, 32% of Scots supported independence and 42% wanted the Holyrood Parliament to make „all“ decisions (or, in other words, showed support for the „devomax“ option)³⁵ and as, at the present moment, newer opinion poll results are not yet available, we can only speculate whether Alex Salmond's behaviour has really had any significant impact on public opinion toward independence.

28) *Scottish Greens: Scottish Greens back Yes Scotland but say No to NATO* (<http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/news/show/6727/scottish-greens-back-yes-scotland-but-say-no-to-nato>, 23 October 2012).

29) *Scottish Greens: Independence Debate* (<http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/news/show/6017/independence-debate>, 27 November 2012).

30) *Scottish Socialist Party: About the Scottish Socialist Party* (http://www.scottishsocialistparty.org/new_stories/furniture/aboutthessp.html, 27 November 2012).

31) *Solidarity: Solidarity Supports Fight Against Austerity* (<http://www.new.solidarityscotland.org/home-mainmenu-1.html>, 27 November 2012).

32) *BBC: Tory conference: Scottish leader Ruth Davidson in pro-UK rallying call* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-19868470>, 27 November 2012).

33) *Scottish Labour: Manifesto* (<http://www.scottishlabour.org.uk/manifesto>, 27 November 2012).

34) *BBC: Lib Dems to unveil 'Home Rule' plan* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-19957358>, 27 November 2012).

35) *BBC: Scottish independence: Survey suggests 32% back going-it-alone* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-19622617>, 23 October 2012).

A certain amount of controversy also surrounds the issue of an independent Scotland's potential currency. As was already mentioned in this article, there are several possibilities as to what currency would an independent Scotland use. In January 2012, Alex Salmond claimed that if Scotland votes for and subsequently gains independence, the SNP will intend to keep the pound sterling and remain a part of the „sterling area“, either through a currency union or simply by adopting the pound sterling. According to the Scottish First Minister, a currency union would very likely not have to deal with any of the problems the Eurozone suffers from, due to the fact that Scottish economy closely resembles that of the UK. However, following Salmond's claims, it was reported that in the case Scotland becomes independent and wants to adopt the pound sterling, the UK Government would, at a minimum, require extensive powers of oversight over an independent Scotland's budget as one of the conditions of a currency union, which might imply that an independent Scotland would not, in fact, be completely independent of the UK (Trench 2012). Regarding this issue, George Osborne (the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom) stated that the central British government might not support an independent Scotland in keeping the pound. Due to the Eurozone crisis and the lessons learned from it, Osborne claimed that a currency union would only be possible if there was a full political union, which is, by definition, incompatible with the concept of Scottish independence. Osborne had previously indicated that, alternatively, Scotland could join the Euro or even establish its own currency. Nonetheless, it is argued that the main reason why George Osborne repeatedly stated that a currency union without a full fiscal and political union is highly unlikely is to undermine Salmond's entire independence argument and especially his claims that an independent Scotland would be able to keep the pound sterling (Wright 2012).

5. Main Independence Related Campaigns

As an independent Scotland is an issue that raises many different opinions, there have developed several movements regarding the issue, both for and against full independence. It is fair to say that the most significant pro-independence campaign is the Yes Scotland campaign, which officially begun in May 2012. With the aim of a referendum held in autumn 2014, the Yes Scotland campaign seeks one million people to declare that they will vote yes, the idea being that if successful, those one million declarations will contribute to the victory of the Yes Scotland vote in the independence referendum. The campaign is often referred to as the „biggest community based campaign in Scotland's history“ and its primary aim is to build a support base for independence in the country. Even though the Yes Scotland campaign was initially launched by the SNP, it is now supported by other smaller parties as well as businesses and individuals, including some high profile ones such as actors Sean Connery, Alan Cumming (who has even

moved to Scotland permanently to be able to vote in the referendum) and Brian Cox.³⁶ Recently, the members of the Scottish Green Party have also voted to participate in Yes Scotland and to support the campaign for the independence referendum.³⁷

According to Blair Jenkins, the chief executive of Yes Scotland, one of the key ideas of the campaign is inclusivity, in that „it comprises people of many political shades and none, united in their belief that independence is the best for Scotland and the Scottish people.“³⁸ Presumably, this means that the campaign brings together the disparate groups who, even though unanimous as far as an independent Scotland is concerned, might differ in their attitudes to unionism, nationalism and also to the role of an independent Scotland in international organisations, such as NATO, the EU and so on.

The main anti-independence campaign is the Better Together campaign, which was launched in June 2012 and is headed by the former Labour chancellor Alistair Darling. The Better Together campaign promotes the view that Scotland is better and stronger as a part of the United Kingdom and comprises, in a way similar to the Yes Scotland campaign, of people from various parties and organisations.³⁹ According to Alistair Darling, independence would be a „one-way ticket“ for Scotland and the best option for Scotland would be having a strong parliament in Holyrood but, at the same time, keeping its secure place within the union.⁴⁰ However, compared to the Yes Scotland campaign, the Better Together campaign has, at the moment, a significantly lower profile and thus far has not build up the momentum or the amount of media coverage enjoyed by the Yes Scotland campaign.

6. What Does the Future Hold?

As far as independence of the regions of the United Kingdom on the whole is concerned, it is fair to say that the future development very much depends on the progressi-

³⁶ BBC: *Scottish independence: One million Scots urged to sign ‚yes‘ declaration* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-18204781>, 23 October 2012).

³⁷ *Scottish Greens: Scottish Greens back Yes Scotland but say No to NATO* (<http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/news/show/6727/scottish-greens-back-yes-scotland-but-say-no-to-nato>, 23 October 2012).

³⁸ *Yes: Yes Scotland welcomes SNP support for inclusive independence campaign* (http://www.yesscotland.net/yes_scotland_welcomes_snp_support_for_inclusive_independence_campaign, 23 October 2012).

³⁹ *Better Together: About*, <http://bettertogether.net/pages/about>, 28 October 2012.

⁴⁰ BBC: *Scottish independence: Alistair Darling warns of ‚no way back‘* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-18572750>, 28 October 2012).

on of the concept of independence for Scotland in the upcoming years. It is conceivable (and generally accepted) that, if Scotland in 2014 votes for independence, the nationalist movements in both Wales and Northern Ireland might strengthen, and that there might have to be a fundamental rethink of the nature of the relationship between the remaining members of the union, as the unity of the country might be, to some extent, disrupted (Watt 2012). Plaid Cymru have already become more vocal about the possibility of Welsh independence, however, some of the (both former and current) Welsh representatives have raised considerable concerns regarding Scottish independence and the fact that, if Scotland votes for independence, Wales might find itself in a rather difficult position and its efforts for a higher level of autonomy might go unheard (Davies 2012).

So far, we can only speculate about what the future holds for the constitutional setup of the United Kingdom. It is fair to say that the future development of the country (in terms of its decentralisation and unity) very much depends on what happens in Scotland. With the concept of full independence to Scotland being very strongly promoted by the SNP, there exists a possibility that in 2014, when the SNP plans to hold the Scottish independence referendum, Scotland will vote for independence and then, subsequently, secede from the union. This would, besides all the changes it would bring to the constitutional framework of Scotland itself, also certainly require certain alterations for the union as a whole. Scotland's possible secession from the union might conceivably mean, as was already mentioned, a significant strengthening of the nationalist tendencies in both Wales and Northern Ireland. On the other hand, though, the regions might turn toward a path entirely different from the Scottish one, and consider their future presence in the union vital for both their well-being as well as the well-being of the United Kingdom. In this case, there would certainly have to be some changes made to the current setup, to ensure the stability of the union without Scotland.

In case Scotland does not vote for independence in 2014, it will probably strive for at least some enhancement of the powers of the Scottish Parliament (as was already mentioned in this article, the SNP proposed the concept of so-called "devomax" which would, in case the concept of full independence is not sufficiently supported in the referendum, provide Scotland with a higher level of autonomy).⁴¹ If those requirements are fulfilled, it is possible that Wales and Northern Ireland might also express a desire for some further extensions of devolution. On the basis of the precedent events, with the level of devolution being systematically broadened in all three regions, it is fair to say that, unless something entirely unexpected, something that would lead to devolution being suspended or even totally stopped, happens, devolution will supposedly

⁴¹ BBC: *Scottish independence: voters need 'straight choice'* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17064847>, 20 October 2012).

keep going forward and then the question we need to ask ourselves is whether the eventuality of full independence is not just the natural course of things and the logical conclusion of the devolution process? Nevertheless, we cannot predict the future and we will probably not be able to provide a clearer picture of what is going to happen until we know the results of the 2014 independence referendum in Scotland.

7. Conclusion

The issue of Scottish independence is not only exceptionally important for the future of the United Kingdom, but it also has repercussions for the role the UK plays both in Europe and in international politics, as it might set a precedent for other secessionist nations in the world (for example Flanders in Belgium, Catalonia in Spain and even Quebec in Canada). In this article, the process of devolution to Scotland and the proposal for Scottish independence were analysed. Special attention was paid to a number of issues, including the legality of the 2014 independence referendum proposed by the Scottish National Party and the issue of an independent Scotland's membership in international organisation, NATO and the EU in particular, that have arisen from the ongoing discussions and developments in the matter. The Yes Scotland pro-independence campaign as well as the Better Together anti-independence campaign, which are currently being widely promoted in Scotland, were also introduced and discussed. Moreover, the article also provided a brief insight into what might happen within the UK in the case that Scotland does (or does not) vote for independence in the 2014 independence referendum.

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Summary

Since the victory of the Scottish National Party (the SNP) in the 2011 Scottish general elections, the notion of a fully independent Scotland has become a fixture of the political scene across the United Kingdom. In October 2012, Scotland was granted the constitutional power to hold a legal independence referendum and have its people decide which direction the country will take in the future. However, independence itself poses a number of very important issues, such as an independent Scotland's currency and its membership in international organisations. The objective of this short article is to briefly discuss the process of devolution in the United Kingdom (with a particular focus on Scotland) in the period from the 1970s to the present, to introduce the notion of full independence for Scotland, which is very much being promoted by the current SNP government, to analyse the issues which have arisen in connection with Scottish independence, to discuss the ongoing pro- and anti-independence campaigns, and, finally, to provide an outline of what an independent Scotland might mean for the future development of the United Kingdom and all of its regions.

In the first, theoretical, part of the article the historical development of the process of devolution in the United Kingdom is introduced. The author particularly focuses on devolution to Scotland and discusses the particular events that led to the first (unsuccessful) devolution referendum in 1979 and especially to the second (successful) devolution referendum in 1997. The following establishment of the autonomous Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government as well as their functioning and the devolved matters the newly establis-

hed bodies can legislate on are briefly outlined. In the second part of the article, the author is concerned with Scottish independence and various other issues connected with the matter, such as the debates on the legality of the proposed 2014 independence referendum (and the so-called Edinburgh Agreement from October 2012, which, among other things, sets out the rules for the wording of the referendum as well as for the financing of the main pro-independence campaign), the membership of an independent Scotland in international organisations (the EU and NATO in particular), and also the currency an independent Scotland would use. In this part of the article, the main pro-independence campaign, Yes Scotland, and the main anti-independence campaign, Better Together, are also introduced. In the final part of the article, the author attempts to provide an outline of what would Scottish independence mean for the United Kingdom both in terms of its internal development (with regards to its other devolved regions, Wales and Northern Ireland) and internationally.