

Scotland in the UK, Scotland in the EU, Scotland in the World: Past, Present and Future

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To understand Scotland in Europe we have to know about four things that I shall discuss in turn.

- 1) Scotland's history of relations with England and with the rest of Europe.
- 2) the modern structures of representation and government in the UK, Scotland and Europe
- 3) Scotland's modern domestic political and economic structures.
- 4) how it resembles or is different from other distinctive regions in Europe and how this influences its status and future in Europe.

Through all this it is worth remembering four further points:

- 1) depending on the context, Scottish people can be either Scottish, British, European - or all three
- 2) Scotland has since 1999 had its own Parliament, but power is only devolved from the UK government and Scotland is not an independent state, though some would like it to be.
- 3) the EU is a relatively new supra-national entity, but it is made up of much longer-standing nation states
- 4) nation states are themselves composed of regions ('sub-states') that have still older roots and which possess identities that are at least as strong. Scotland within the UK is one of these regions.

SCOTLAND, ENGLAND AND EUROPE

Scotland and England are part of a geographical entity called 'Great Britain' and a political union called the 'United Kingdom', but they are not the same. They share a language, a monarch (since 1603), and a parliament (since 1707), and they went through shared experiences of empire and industrial revolution. Beyond that, they are quite different. Scotland's government, religion, law, education, social relationships, population mobility, and culture are all distinct, not only from England, but also from the other component parts of the UK: Wales and Northern Ireland.

England's population is principally Anglo-Saxon in its racial origins, whereas the people of Scotland mix Anglo-Saxon with Celtic and Norse blood.

Scots have been good Europeans for at least the last 500 years, exchanging people, ideas and economic resources. While rich in natural resources, Scotland lacked both a skilled labour force and access to capital, meaning that for centuries it was a poor country. For that reason there was extensive temporary and permanent migration to the Continent. Most of it was by young men who went to university, to trade or to fight.

The most important historic contacts are with France, the Netherlands and all the Baltic states, notably Poland, Sweden and Russia.

Relations with England were ambivalent: the Scots were always proud to be independent, but the English disliked the idea of having a separate state right next to them. Nevertheless Scots recognised the cultural dominance, military power and economic success of their nearest neighbour. In 1707 they voluntarily gave up their separate Parliament and became part of the United Kingdom.

The main attraction of Union was economic and Scots participated eagerly in free trade with England and with the colonies that England possessed in North America and the Caribbean.

As part of the United Kingdom and the British empire, Scotland became much wealthier and more important. Scots helped to make and administer the British empire in India and indeed around the world from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. In 1914 the British empire encompassed a

quarter of the world's population and many thought it was really a Scottish empire.

Thus Scottish people helped to change economic and social life around the globe. For example, in the nineteenth century Scots like Thomas Glover helped to revolutionise the economy of Japan.

This change in focus to global empire and trade did not mean forgetting about Europe, but the spectacular expansion of Atlantic and later world trade rendered Europe much less important to Scotland than it had been before 1700.

This changing economic focus had political and cultural implications.

Scotland became part of an imperial project that required the Scots to be both Scottish and British. That dual identity contained tensions and inconsistencies over issues like language and religion as well as economic life and political priorities, which have lasted for three centuries. Indeed, differences and debates within the UK continue today, when the EU has reappeared as an important focus of legislation, economic opportunity and perhaps even of identity.

REPRESENTATION AND GOVERNMENT IN BRITAIN, SCOTLAND AND EUROPE

British Parliament

- 1) sits in London (often called 'Westminster')
- 2) two chambers: a House of Commons containing elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and a House of Lords
- 3) 'first past the post' or 'winner takes all' method of election of MPs
- 4) 644 MPs of whom 59 (9.2%) sit for Scottish constituencies
- 5) Deals with all matters except those devolved to the Scottish Parliament or to the Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies.
- 6) English MPs cannot decide on matters affecting only Scotland, but Scottish MPs can play a role in determining policies for England.

Scottish Parliament (1999)

- 1) Sits in Edinburgh (often called 'Holyrood')
- 2) A single debating chamber of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)
- 3) 129 MSPs, made up of 73 constituency MSPs and 56 regional MSPs
- 4) elected by proportional representation
- 5) 'devolved matters' on which it can make laws = economy, environment, education, healthcare, housing, transport and police
- 6) 'reserved matters' which it can debate, but not legislate = defence or any aspect of foreign policy, including formal relationships with the EU

Scottish Executive (1999)

- 1) the government for devolved matters in Scotland
- 2) makes policy on devolved matters and introduces new bills to the Scottish Parliament
- 3) runs other public bodies and decides on public spending on devolved matters in Scotland
- 4) accountable to the Parliament and to the people of Scotland
- 5) 'First Minister' is the head of the Scottish Executive and is chosen by the Scottish Parliament; he or she appoints ministers who govern

Scottish Local Government

- 1) 1,222 elected representatives in 32 local authorities
- 2) 'Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' or COSLA gives them a corporate voice.
- 3) In addition there are distinctive institutions of civil society offering channels for representation and participation in political as well as social and cultural processes: most important are the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Trades Unions Congress and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations.

European Union

- 1) origins in economic co-operation (European Coal and Steel Community, 1951) enshrined in the title European Economic Community (EEC, 1957-92)
- 2) 'community' is still mainly economic (including Monetary Union - the euro), but it is also developing common foreign policies and (through the European Court) justice policies.
- 3) UK joined the EEC in 1973
- 4) European Parliament (1979) contains 732 representatives or 'Members of the European Parliament' (MEPs) of which the UK has 78 and Scotland has 7 of these
- 5) Elected by proportional representation
- 6) 'Council of the European Union' represents individual member states at Ministerial level
- 7) 'European Commission': the 'civil service' of the EU
- 8) EU collectively is usually called 'Brussels' because its base is in Belgium's capital
- 9) NATO (1949) partly overlaps with the EU, but is a wholly separate defence organisation, which also includes the US.

SCOTLAND'S DOMESTIC POLITICS

British political parties

- 1) **Labour**: a left-leaning party, favouring state intervention and (traditionally) manual labour; broadly favourable towards Europe
- 2) **Conservative**: right-wing; 'Euro-sceptic'
- 3) **Liberal Democrats**: centrist, borrowing from what they see as the best of Labour and Conservative; of the three major parties they are the most pro-Europe

As we shall see shortly, these parties make up the bulk of Britain's democratically elected national, regional and local government. All are explicitly dedicated to maintaining the United Kingdom.

In Scotland there is also a party that is quite similar to Labour, but which in addition seeks to promote a nationalist or separatist cause: the **Scottish National Party** or 'SNP'. Their stance is the most politically interesting and has the most radical implications for Europe. I shall talk about it quite a lot in the final sections of my paper.

Table: Members of the British and Scottish Parliaments:

Party	British Parliament		Scottish Parliament	
	N	%	N	%
Labour	354	54.9	46	35.6
Conservatives	196	30.4	17	13.2
Liberal Democrats	63	9.8	16	12.4
Scottish National	7	1.1	47	36.4
Others	24	3.7	3	2.3
Total	644	99.9	129	99.9

The table shows that political influence of the four main parties varies according to the representative institution to which they are elected. This has important implications for Scotland's relationships with the EU.

How Scots vote for the British parliament tells us most about how they see themselves in the United Kingdom. Among 59 Scottish MPs at Westminster 38 are Labour, 12 Liberal Democrat, 7 SNP and just 1 is Conservative.

Today less than two-fifths of voters support independence and pro-Union parties are numerically ascendant at Westminster and at Holyrood.

More than this it is clear that some voters for the Scottish National Party would prefer devolved to independent government. Scots are far from united in their attitudes towards Union or independence. There is also a wide spectrum of views about the EU.

Yet independence is not a dead issue. Scottish devolution was promoted by the Labour government from 1997 in the hope of weakening the Nationalists. This proved to be a mistake, for they have in fact become stronger.

The SNP is the largest single party in Scotland in 2008 with 47 of 129 MSPs (members of the Scottish parliament) and there is an SNP 'First Minister', Alex Salmond (the title of 'Prime Minister' is reserved for the United Kingdom Parliament).

The SNP and the EU

The SNP wants full Scottish independence from the rest of the UK, but what is its attitude to the EU?

The SNP's position is primarily about control of economic resources, just as it was when the party first became important on the political stage in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Then the issue was oil, which was starting to be extracted from the North Sea in large quantities.

Oil is still a political issue within the UK, but the main concern now in relations with Europe is fishing. The SNP refuses to support the EU constitution because it will entrench Brussels' control of the 'Common Fisheries Policy' (CFP). Control of fishing up to 200 miles from Scotland is devolved to the Scottish government, but it can only plan fishing policy up to 12 miles from the coast and it is still subject to Brussels.

The SNP believes the CFP is destroying the Scottish fishing industry: behind the rhetoric of conservation it allows extensive fishing in Scottish waters and tremendous waste because much of what is caught is discarded. 70% of the UK's fishing takes place from Scottish ports and the SNP argues that UK policy on fishing in the EU largely ignores its importance to both Scotland and Britain.

Within the last month the EU has effectively admitted that the CFP does not work.

This sort of complaint is far from unique. No member of the EU is entirely happy about the way the EU works and many people see it as at best remote and irrelevant, at worst interfering in their lives and needlessly complicating them.

All political parties use European policy as a way to gain advantage for themselves in national, regional and local political contests. For example, the Labour party argues that the SNP's stance on fishing, which goes directly against EU policy, will leave Scotland not only isolated within Europe, but also isolated from Europe. The EU is important in practical legislative and other terms, but it is also a weapon in struggles to secure strategic advantage in member states' internal politics.

HOW DOES SCOTLAND INTERACT WITH THE EU AND WHAT DOES SCOTLAND GETS FROM THE EU?

There is no question that for 300 years Scotland has derived enormous benefit from Union with England.

It still does.

For the last 100 years UK government spending in Scotland has consistently been 20% higher per capita than it is in England. Part of the reason is because Scotland has always been less prosperous than England, unemployment has been higher, and social problems like bad health have been more widely and deeply felt.

Scotland has higher levels of public spending than the rest of the UK, sustained by inputs from the UK government. Perhaps for this reason, Scotland's people remain stronger supporters of extensive government intervention than the English.

Scotland also needs the rest of the UK economically, for it is the destination of 60% of all Scottish exports.

However, the rest of the UK would remain just as important if Scotland became a member state of the EU. Thus there is a sense that Scotland could do just as well and have more independence from England by becoming a member state of the EU, not a subordinate part of the UK.

So what is the Scottish Parliament's policy on the EU?

- 1) the Parliament acknowledges the many benefits that the European Union has delivered for Europe and for Scotland
- 2) welcomes the establishment of the Convention on the Future of Europe as an open and innovative means of addressing the issues now facing the European Union
- 3) believes that, in light of experience, the European Union needs to become more effective, efficient, easier to understand, democratic, transparent and accountable
- 4) recognises the role that units below Member State Administrations (called 'sub-states' or 'constitutional regions') can play in realising these objectives
- 5) welcomes the Scottish Executive's engagement with Scottish civil society to stimulate discussion and to seek views on the Future of Europe

- 6) calls on the Executive to press the Convention to bring forward proposals for strengthening the profile of the 'Subsidiarity Principle' in the EU treaties, adopting a new mechanism for enforcing it which allows for full sub-state involvement in policy development, generating greater transparency in European decision-making and introducing financial impact assessments for legislative proposals.

What difference does the strategy make in practice?

I'd like to illustrate by focusing on labour mobility, institutional links associated with lobbying, and (where it is possible to assess these) tangible economic benefits.

Labour mobility

Practical examples of links with Europe can be found in labour mobility.

Most other EU members still impose restrictions and quotas on foreign workers where Britain gives unrestricted rights to seek work. Carrying on a tradition that lasted from the Middle Ages through the Second World War, the most prominent current immigrants in Scotland are eastern or 'new' Europeans.

Scotland may complain about immigration and 'asylum seekers' (which EU citizens are not), but it badly needs just these people to fill the sorts of manual vacancies left by the falling birth-rates and changing work preferences of indigenous Scots: both the demand for and supply of labour are strongest in support services such as nursing and office cleaning.

Scots are less obvious migrants in Europe, partly because for many (and most Anglo-Saxons) their only language is English.

However, the most numerous 'foreigners' in Scotland are not from the Continent. Currently one person in twelve living in Scotland was born in England and in the most densely settled parts of the Central Lowlands the proportion is as high as one in five. Links with England remain strong.

Movements of people also foster intellectual links between Scotland and Europe.

Scotland's private law and its separate legal system was preserved in 1707: when the UK joined the EU in 1973 separate legislation was needed for Scotland. Scottish law is a mixed system strongly influenced by the Roman or 'civil law' tradition that covers much of western Europe. Roman Law bases decision making more firmly on principles than does the isolated English 'common law' tradition, where precedent is all-important. Scottish university law schools - especially Edinburgh - attract large number of EU students.

These are examples of human links with Europe, but what institutional bridges exist to bring Scotland into Europe and the EU into Scotland?

Institutional bridges with the EU

All Scotland's formal relations with the EU have to be mediated through the London government, for it is the UK which is a member state.

Because of the political distancing from the EU, Scotland's approach to it and its policies has been piecemeal. This is mostly about lobbying, not policy, because EU policy is formally 'reserved', but there are many informal ways that Scots try to ensure that the EU takes account of their concerns and awards them a share of its budgets for specific projects.

Coming out of long-established traditions of civil society that sought to fill the space between citizen and state, these efforts parallel but do not displace UK governmental channels.

The longest-established EU body in Scotland is the **Office of the European Commission**, which was set up in Edinburgh in 1975. Much of what it does is promote cultural exchange, as do national institutes of which those of France and Italy in Edinburgh are the most active.

Established in 1992 as part of Scottish Enterprise, **Scotland Europa** has a distinguished history as a provider of information for businesses, public bodies and voluntary institutions, and an important avenue for all these interests to access the European policy machinery.

One of the significant extensions to Scotland's EU capabilities has been the addition of the **Scottish Executive EU office** (SEEU) in 1999. Its purpose centres on the provision of access to EU information and contacts. The SEEU, based in Brussels, supports the EU-related work of the Executive and helps increase Scotland's influence in the EU. While foreign policy is a reserved matter, the Scottish Executive has been actively involved in EU policy areas that deal with some aspects of devolved governance (i.e. agriculture, fisheries, environment, justice, and structural funds).

SEEU is one of 268 regional offices based in Brussels, so there is much competition for EU money and influence.

Another office belongs to **Highlands and Islands Enterprise**, a UK government agency that seeks to promote the interests of this part of Scotland by investing in a variety of schemes with a budget of approximately £375 million for the period between 2007 and 2010. As a

primarily rural area, the Highlands and Islands region may be eligible for funds under a variety of EU development schemes. Scottish 'crofters' - a class of small farmers unique in modern Britain - are among those who have benefited from the EU's 'Common Agricultural Policy' (CAP) that dates from the origins of the community and was designed primarily to protect farmers in France: farmers still comprise 40% of the French population and are a powerful political lobby.

Economic benefits: pluses and minuses

Between 2000 and 2006 EU Structural and Cohesion Funds have provided over £1.1 billion of support for Scotland, boosting economic growth and improving productivity while reducing economic and social disparities. As a less-developed region the Highlands and Islands of Scotland have done particularly well from EU infrastructure spending (notably on communications) and from the CAP.

However, Scotland is not France. The Highlands and Islands contain less than 10% of Scotland's population. Like the Japanese, Scottish people are mainly city dwellers, living in the Central Lowlands. Glasgow is by far Scotland's biggest city (650,000 people), but the political and cultural capital is Edinburgh (450,000). Farmers make up 1% of Scotland's 5 million inhabitants (Scots are roughly 9% of the UK population). Map of population density.

All over the Highlands and Islands EU money paid for better roads and the EU flag can be found on road signs in the most isolated areas, adorning beautifully smooth pavement on which automobiles seldom pass.

Part of the reason the Highlands and Islands has done so well is that it had a regional development body from 1965, the Highlands and Islands Development Board (now Highlands and Islands Enterprise). There is no comparable lobby for any other Scottish region.

So it is that the main economic centres of Scotland have received much less direct EU funding. Major cities like Aberdeen have not done well from the EU and its road and rail links remain poor. This comes from under-investment in the 1980s and 1990s, at the very time when oil was making Aberdeen (and the UK) rich. Aberdeen lost government spending and regional aid, much of it from the European Union, which went instead to central Scotland and the Highlands respectively.

With nearby Peterhead and Fraserburgh, it is Britain's most important fishing port and also feels it has lost out to the CFP.

Politicians sought to create jobs lost through the collapse of heavy industry by luring foreign investment into the central Lowlands with the promise of subsidies and infrastructure. And they sought out what money was provided by the EU for its own internal political reasons

(supporting underdeveloped agricultural regions), while Scotland's other economic and social needs went unmet.

Thus the money that Scotland gets from the EU is strictly hypothecated.

Even the Highlands and Islands has now become what the EU terms a 'phasing out region' in terms of convergence policy, thanks to the advent of so many new and even less developed regions, suggesting that inflows of funds will be reduced.

The divergence of Scottish and EU economic interests can also be seen in their approaches to fostering prosperity. The EU economic agenda is laid down in the 'Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs' of 2005 (not to be confused with the Lisbon treaty). It focuses on two areas: Research and Development investment and the employment rate. The EU's strategy emphasizes the 'quality' of growth, whereas the parallel document from the Scottish government ('Economic Strategy' [November 2007]) is concerned with pursuing absolute growth (including demographic growth, for Scotland's population is falling).

The stress on economic and population growth stems from the SNP's desire to increase and demonstrate the 'dynamism' of Scottish society, whereas the EU strategy aims to address the challenges for mature economies of dealing with globalisation and the ever quickening pace of competition.

Scotland is trying to reconnect with the economic successes of the past. Despite its relatively small size, it is faced with a large divergence of economic fortunes within its territory, not unlike the EU. The success of the Scottish financial sector is set against entrenched unemployment and poverty (and low life expectancy) in many deprived areas across the country. The solution will require as much social as economic 'engineering' to reduce inequality and raise overall prosperity.

Despite differences in detail, given the problems it faces and the political leanings of its electorate, Scotland is more 'European' in accepting the interventionist policies of the EU than is the laissez faire approach that UK Governments (both Conservative and New Labour) tend to favour.

'SCOTLAND IN EUROPE': SCOTLAND AS A EUROPEAN REGION

The SNP's nationalist vision of 'Scotland in Europe'

We saw earlier the ambivalent attitude of the SNP to the EU's fishing policy, but how does it see Scotland's place in Europe?

Scotland is presently a politically subordinate region similar to many others in Europe, including the Basque country, Catalonia and Flanders. Each has separatist lobbies of differing political characters and enjoying widely varying degrees of support.

Participation in the EU has enhanced the pre-existing sense that Scots have both of being different from England and of being more amenable to the European project than their English neighbours. Nationalists have seized on the idea of Scotland's history in Europe - a sort of European vocation - as a way of counteracting the idea that independence from the UK might lead to isolation or poverty.

Europe stands at the centre of SNP plans to seek independence for Scotland within the EU, summed up by the slogan 'Scotland in Europe'. It is a shrewd phrase, painting a picture of Scotland separating itself from England and bravely stepping out into the wider world, while still guided and protected by the reassuring hand of 27 European countries.

As citizens of the EU, the SNP say, the people of a newly independent Scotland could continue to live and work wherever they wanted in the European Union; external security and trading options would also be provided.

At the same time many things need not change were Scotland to become independent, including trade with the rest of the UK, provided it retained uninterrupted membership of the EU.

Nationalists want to be different and they like to think that an independent Scotland can forge institutions and relationships, which reflect their national spirit. They point to the examples of Denmark and Ireland (member states of the EU) and of Norway and Iceland (not members of the EU) who have successfully done just that.

Scotland's need for the EU

There is no serious chance that Scotland could be like Iceland and Norway.

Instead, an independent Scotland would have to join the EU both because of the importance of the rest of the UK to its exports and because much of the massive inward investment by countries like Japan and the US is predicated on having access to the world's largest trading bloc.

Mitsubishi Electric, Oki Data, Fujitsu and Shinetsu Semiconductors are prominent among 100 Japanese companies that have invested in the last 20 years - though only 40 are presently investors in Scotland.

In terms of employment secured, Scotland has attracted more Foreign Direct Investment than the UK as a whole over the last decade.

Native manufactures too rely on membership. Scotch whisky production accounts for just 2% of Scottish employment, but it is her most valuable single export and ranks fifth among UK export-earning manufactures.

The largest category of exports, electrical and instrument engineering, comprises 30% of all Scottish exports.

As a high-wage developed economy, Scotland does best in high value-added sectors. Its most dynamic business, financial services (employing 20% of the labour force), also relies on being part of the EU: Edinburgh is Europe's sixth largest financial centre.

About a half of all Scotland's non-UK exports go to EU countries and a further 10% to non-EU European countries. 30% of non-UK imports come from Asia and 30% from the EU.

The rest of the UK is Scotland's main trading partner, but the EU is of considerable significance. So in what capacity would an independent Scotland join the EU?

Scotland in the EU

We saw earlier that the Scottish Government enthusiastically endorses the principle of 'subsidiarity'.

Introduced into the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 and in force since 1993, subsidiarity means that matters ought to be handled by the smallest (or lowest) competent authority. In other words, central authority should have a subsidiary function, with most decisions taken closest to where they are implemented among Europe's citizens. The EU should only intervene if it can do something member states cannot.

Implementation is indeed largely devolved and 65% of EU legislation is implemented by local and regional authorities.

Devolution of power has occurred in Scotland and in other parts of Europe. As decision making moves upwards to Brussels and downwards to regions, some are hoping that it will be sucked away from national parliaments in the middle, turning the EU into a sort of United States of Europe with a lot of autonomous mini-regions.

That may once have been the federalists' dream after the Second World War: a Europe that has banished nations, and therefore nationalism, and therefore the dreadful conflicts to which nationalism has historically given rise.

The SNP proffers a modern, inclusive version of nationalism, mercifully removed from the destructive separatism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The problem with subsidiarity right now is that decision making in the EU is at least one step removed from any Scottish political institution, meaning that Scottish concerns are often diluted or ignored completely. 80% of all national legislation is directly or indirectly influenced by decisions made at the EU level, but Scotland's ability to influence policy making is severely limited.

There is a new EU body called the 'Committee of the Regions' that represents regional and local authorities. It has 317 members. The UK has 24 members, who are usually local councillors. Scotland has 4 of these representatives.

The Committee of the Regions is advisory: for most purposes the lowest unit the EU recognises is the member state.

Efforts by Catalonia, Scotland, Flanders and the German Länder (federated states that make up the German Republic) to have a bigger role for regions written into the draft of the new EU constitution were rebuffed by the convention on the future of Europe, partly thanks to pressure from Spain and France.

Member states like the UK are the real players in the European game. Thus Scotland would have to become a member state.

Hypothetically, becoming a member state would allow Scotland to join the Euro zone (decoupling its monetary policy from the region with which it is economically most integrated, the rest of the UK), leading to lower interest rates (assuming interest-rate differentials between the UK and the euro-zone persisted) and thus making Scotland more attractive for investors. This would certainly be the most significant (and radical) step an SNP government could take in order to drive a political and economic wedge between Scotland and the rest of the UK, thus making a powerful point about Scottish independence.

Scottish membership and the EU's internal politics

So Scotland has to be in the EU, but it also has to join as a full member state.

The problem with this is that EU lawyers say Scotland would have to apply as a new member rather than carrying over a residual membership from being a former part of the UK. It is highly unlikely that countries like France, whose constitution now has a requirement to vote on all future EU applications, would tolerate such a development: France has successfully resisted vigorous attempts by Bretons and Corsicans for autonomy. The Spanish government too does not want to accept Scotland, both for fear of encouraging its own separatists and because Spain's fishing industry does well from the CFP.

As one EU diplomat puts it: 'If your sole question is, would you like to have Scotland in the EU, everyone would say yes. But it's not as simple as that.'

Regional movements across Europe often point to the EU as a trans-national safeguard, allowing them more easily to dispense with their nation-state affiliation.

This is an interesting aspiration, but it defies reality. The internal politics of the EU as a whole make it unlikely that the EU as a whole (or most constituent parts) will support moves leading to any disintegration of member states.

The EU is deeply concerned about any process that upsets its own delicate institutional balance, to say nothing of the effects of fragmentation making it even harder to gain a consensus for a new EU constitution.

Scottish membership and Scotland's internal politics

The SNP's vision of 'Scotland in Europe' is also complicated by internal political divisions within Scotland.

In Scotland - and in Belgium, Catalonia and the Basque country too - there is a strong separatist movement, but the majority of voters prefer to stay within a common state, albeit with varying degrees of autonomy. Were any of these regions to achieve full independence, this would create yet another unhappy minority within their borders.

A hard look at the position of all the regions with separatist aspirations suggests that even if some grievances have a historical basis, under present circumstances these regions enjoy considerable privileges. Because of that and because of three centuries of participation in a British rather than European project, Scotland's nationalists lack the political momentum or the popular legitimacy to realise their ambitions in the foreseeable future.

More than this, it is hard to see what would be different about 'Scotland in Europe' because Scotland is already a liberal, democratic and cosmopolitan state. This indeed helps to explain why both Scots and English like the idea of Europe, but dislike its practice, because it seems to diverge not only from the values of pluralistic democracy but also from the ideals of subsidiarity.

I believe it also explains the Irish rejection of the Lisbon treaty at a referendum in June 2008, a result which shows widespread discontent with the EU - this from a member state which has consistently embraced the EU and has done extremely well from it.

Like the Irish and the English, not all Scots want to be part of the EU, however strong the economic imperative might be.

CONCLUSION: 'BETTER A SMALL VOICE THAN NO VOICE AT ALL'?

All Scotland's representative political institutions favour participation, consultation, subsidiarity and consensus, not only in what they do in Scotland, but also in promoting greater knowledge of and engagement with the EU.

However, devolution of government in 1999 has not empowered Scotland within the EU. Scotland's influence on EU policy-making remains patchy and its ability to attract funding is the same. Nor is there any reason why this should change without significant alterations both in Scotland's status within Britain and (more importantly) in the attitudes of existing member states (including the UK) to the empowerment of subsidiary territorial units.

The debate about Scotland in Europe remains fundamentally about competing perceptions of whether Scotland should remain part of the United Kingdom and about conflicting ideas over the integrity of nation states across the Continent of Europe.

My personal opinion is that the Scottish commitment to Europe expressed by the SNP is an unconvincing attempt to be different, appealing to emotion more than to logic in the pursuit of separatism.

In a recent opinion poll just 12% of Scots described themselves as European - exactly the same share as for Britain as a whole.

More, I think it doubtful that, as a small member state, Scotland would have as much influence as it has (or does not have) within the UK. Competing for EU funding equal to what it gets from the UK government would be difficult, if not impossible, and it could not be used for the same purposes.

My belief is that Scots can best serve their own interests and those of the EU by continuing to follow their present path: being both Scottish and European, but perhaps most of all by remaining British.