

Could Scotland quickly rejoin the EU?

*In a joint report with **Brexit Facts4EU**, **CIB** examines the issue of whether Scotland could quickly rejoin the EU in the event of an independence vote. Not only do EU rules make quick Scottish entry impossible, an independent Scotland in the EU would be forced to erect a hard border with England and impose devastating austerity on the Scottish people. This piece is an expanded analysis based on a three-part series of articles published by **Brexit Facts4EU** which can be read [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).*

Last week German MEP David McAllister – the chairman of the EU Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee and an ally of Chancellor Merkel – gave an interview to a major German news organisation, which was reported as suggesting that an independent Scotland could “quickly” rejoin the EU.

Born in Berlin to a Glaswegian father, McAllister is half-German and half-Scottish and holds both German and British nationalities. As always in these cases, it is worth reading what exactly was said, since nowhere did Herr McAllister suggest that Scotland could join the EU quickly:

Interviewer: *“Could Scotland become a member of the EU again very quickly after a referendum on independence?”*

Herr McAllister: *“That is currently a theoretical question. The first requirement for this would be that Scotland become an independent state. Since the EU legal system is part of the United Kingdom in Scotland, an admission procedure would probably be shorter than for a country that has to gradually move closer to the EU in legal, economic and political terms.”*

McAllister's words have clearly been misrepresented, but unfortunately sometimes myths have more staying power than facts. The policy of Scotland rejoining the EU is an integral part of the SNP's campaign for an independent Scotland. And so it is worth looking at the reality of what this would actually entail.

It is understandable that the SNP believes the prospect of renewed EU membership could boost the popularity of the independence cause. In the 2016 EU referendum, Scotland voted by 62% to 38% to remain in the EU: the highest percentage of any of the 12 regions designated by the Electoral Commission in its official results. It was even higher than the London region, which polled 59.9% for Remain.

But the reality is it would take many years for an independent Scotland to join the EU; it would certainly not take place "quickly", by anyone's standards.

Secessionism and vetoes

It took the EU's 28th member state (Croatia) 12 years to join the EU. Croatia signed the initial 'Stabilisation and Association Agreement' with the EU on 29 October 2001. It then took 12 years of negotiations and dramatic and forced changes in the country's public finances before it was finally able to join the EU on 1 July 2013.

Before an independent Scotland could engage in any substantive talks with the EU, all 27 existing member states would have to approve. This is one of the areas of EU policy where **each member state still has an absolute veto**. If just one of the member states objected to the idea, the EU Council (of the leaders of all member states) would instruct the EU Commission (responsible for EU enlargement) either not to proceed, or only to hold informal talks. Currently the EU Council is holding up discussions with some of the countries which are

already on the official list.

One of the big issues for Scotland is that some EU member countries have ongoing problems with their own secessionist movements. The most obvious example is Spain and its Catalan separatist movement. Generally unreported in the British media, this is still a burning issue in the Iberian peninsula. There are numerous other secessionist movements across the EU, and none of the governments of the member states involved wish to give hope to the proponents of these causes.

Unprecedented austerity

Even if an independent Scotland were somehow to navigate the objections of other member states, there are some basic criteria for EU membership that, as things stand, Scotland is not even close to fulfilling.

The EU's Stability and Growth Pact would have enormous ramifications for Scottish government spending. EU law states that:

"Member States are expected to co-ordinate their economic policies and are subject to the Stability and Growth Pact on fiscal surveillance. New Member States are also committed to complying with the criteria laid down in the Treaty in order to be able to adopt the euro in due course after accession."

Protocol 12 of the TFEU (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) stipulates that member states' "planned or actual government deficit" must not exceed 3% of GDP. Scotland ran a deficit of £12.6 billion in 2018-19 – **an enormous 7% of GDP**. For the UK government, its deficit of £23.5 billion represented just 1.1% of GDP. In short, for Scotland to meet the EU's membership criteria it would have to make savage cuts

in public expenditure, inflicting an unprecedented level of austerity on its own people.

Adoption of the euro – something that is mandatory for new member states – would require Scotland to first establish both its own currency and its own Central Bank. The SNP has accepted the need for an independent Scotland to establish its own currency – unavoidable after the UK government ruled out the SNP's proposal in the 2014 independence referendum to share the pound in a currency union. But this would not take place immediately: the SNP is now proposing a 'transition period' during which it would keep the pound.

A hard border

Scotland's border with England would create further substantial difficulties. As a new member state it would be expected to join the Schengen Area. This would scupper any prospects of a 'common travel area' between Scotland and the rest of Britain similar to that which exists between the UK and the Republic of Ireland (which, like the UK, opted out of Schengen).

It would automatically create the need for a physical border to process individuals travelling between England and Scotland. Moreover, Scotland's membership of the EU's single market and customs union would require border infrastructure. Unlike with Ireland, there is no threat of terrorism that could justify 'alternative arrangements'.

In terms of trade, the EU market is insignificant for the Scottish economy. The rest of the UK is by far the biggest export market for Scotland: 60.1% of Scottish exports go to the rest of the UK. The rest of the world is the second-largest export market, with 21.6%. The EU27 countries trail in last place, taking just 18.3% of Scotland's exports. If the 'future relationship' between the UK and the EU does result in

a free-trade agreement, this need not be a problem. But if it does not, a Scotland inside the EU would be unable to conclude a free-trade agreement with its largest trading partner by far. And even an FTA does not remove the need for border checks and infrastructure.

Sovereignty?

True, Brexit was never about trade or economics. It was always about freedom, democracy and sovereignty – something the Remain campaign never understood. When it comes to Scottish independence, for many Scottish people the issues are not economic, just as they were not for Brexiteers in the EU referendum. But there is one crucial difference: why would pro-independence Scots wish to gain independence from the rest of the UK, only to cede this very same independence to the unelected bureaucrats of Brussels?

It is often claimed that Brexit makes an independent Scotland more likely, due to the large proportion of Scots who wished to remain in the EU. But if anything, the combination of a non-EU UK with an EU-based Scotland offers the worst of all worlds for the Scots: a hard border plus potential loss of free trade with the UK; devastating austerity; and a change of currency not once but twice – the second of which would lumber the Scottish economy with a highly unsuitable monetary policy which could condemn it to years of low growth or even prolonged recession.

Provided the population is furnished with these simple facts rather than allowed to be bombarded with pro-EU propaganda, Brexit must surely be the nail in the coffin for Scottish independence.