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## **Scottish Independence Vote in 2014 and its Nationalist Dimension**

### **Szkockie referendum niepodległościowe w 2014 roku i ich nacjonalistyczny wymiar**

#### **Summary:**

The article concerns one of the most important referenda in the history of the United Kingdom – a vote on Scotland’s independence to be held at the end of the 2014, following the Scottish National Party’s (SNP’s) victory in the Scottish elections in 2011. The referendum may become decisive to the future of the Kingdom and its likely break-up; likewise it may trigger a serious debate on Scotland’s political and legal status in the British national power structures.

Above all, the article aims at analysing the issue of Scottish nationalism and the chances of nationalist movement on the political scene. The reforms conducted so far, i.e. the enlargement of Scottish autonomy, including the re-establishing of Parliament in Holyrood in 1999, have not satisfied the Scottish electorate’s aspirations. The article attempts to answer whether the SNP’s popularity is due to Scots’ being tired of the traditional political power structures and their dependence on Westminster, or whether it is an authentic sign of maturity and conviction that Scotland may gain economically and politically becoming independent of Westminster.

#### **Streszczenie:**

Artykuł dotyczy jednego z najważniejszych referendów w historii Zjednoczonego Królestwa – głosowania nad niepodległością Szkocji, które odbędzie się w 2014 r., które jest wynikiem wygranych przez Szkocką Partię Narodową (SNP) wyborów do Parlamentu w Edynburgu w 2011 r. Referendum może przesądzić o początku rozpadu Zjednoczonego Królestwa, może jednak zapoczątkować merytoryczną debatę na temat statusu prawnopolitycznego Szkocji w brytyjskich strukturach władzy.

Przed wszystkim jednak artykuł porusza problem natury szkockiego nacjonalizmu oraz dalszych szans ruchu nacjonalistycznego na scenie politycznej. Dotychczasowe reformy zwiększające zakres autonomii Szkocji, w tym ustanowienie parlamentu w Edynburgu w 1999 r., nie zadowolili szkockiego elektoratu. Artykuł stara się odpowiedzieć na pytanie czy zwycięstwo partii narodowej wynika ze zmęczenia Szkotów tradycyjnymi rozwiązaniami politycznymi i zbyt dużą zależnością Edynburga od Westminsteru, czy też rzeczywistym krystalizowaniem się poglądów Szkotów i przekonaniem, iż ich kraj może zyskać gospodarczo i politycznie, pozostając niezależnym od władz Westminsteru.

**Key words:** Scotland, independence referendum 2014, nationalism

**Słowa kluczowe:** Szkocja, referendum niepodległości 2014, nacjonalizm

When on July 1, 1999, the Scottish Parliament, adjourned on March 15, 1707, was finally reconvened, re-instituting the ancient Scottish assembly, an autonomous Scotland was gained. The event opened a range of speculations concerning new opportunities and developments. Several years later, with a deal setting out the terms for the Scottish independence referendum, struck in Edinburgh October 15, 2012, new ones arose. Was the decision on the vote a continuation of Scotland's thorough political overhaul; a fundamental change,<sup>1</sup> an outcome of skilful leadership and effective campaign<sup>2</sup> or a manifestation of the politics of identity recreated for the troubled civil society.<sup>3</sup>

### **The 2011 Scottish Parliament Elections**

The fixed date of the referendum indicates that there is going back. The face of Scottish politics has undergone an utter transformation in recent times and it has to be reflected in new social and political solutions. The Scottish society, which once would uniformly favour Labour, turned its support for Scottish National Party (SNP). The SNP's emphatic victory in the 2011 Scottish parliament elections was of watershed proportions. The party won 45.4 per cent of the constituency vote, which gave it 53 seats (out of 69), and 44 per cent of the regional list vote -16 seats (out of 56). The traditional Scotland's leader - Labour, gained just 31.7 per cent in constituency vote (15 seats) and 26.3 per cent in the regional one (22 seats). All this after four-year minority government led by the SNP following their one seat victory over Labour in 2007. The 2011 elections, dubbed a landslide victory, resulted in an SNP majority with an impressive number of 69 seats to Labour's 37 in the 129-member Scottish Parliament.<sup>4</sup>

The SNP won the support of all social groups and ages with the biggest gains among the younger generations. Besides, they marginalised Conservatives and Lib Dem, who won 15 and 2 seats in the constituency vote, as well as 22 and 3 in the regional lists respectively.<sup>5</sup> As Hassan underlines, the extent of the SNP's appeal created a strikingly different Scottish political environment. The Scottish Labour took the place formerly occupied by the conservatives, while Lib Dems moved more to the margins. The only conciliation for the los-

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<sup>1</sup> T. Gallagher, *Labour and the Scottish National Party: The Triumph of Continuity in a Changing Scotland*,

"The Political Quarterly", 2009, 80/4, 533-544.

<sup>2</sup> M.S. Leith, M. Steven, *Party over Policy? Scottish Nationalism and the Politics of Independence*,

"The Political Quarterly", 2010, 81/2, pp. 263-269;

<sup>3</sup> A. Mycock, *SNP, Identity and Citizenship: Re-Imagining State and Nation*, "National Identities", 2012, 14/1, pp. 53-69.

<sup>4</sup> SPICe Briefing, *Elections 2011*, Edinburgh, Scottish Parliament, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> *Summary of Seats by Party*, [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Electionresults/2011%20election/1\\_Summary\\_of\\_Seats.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Electionresults/2011%20election/1_Summary_of_Seats.pdf)

ing parties was the low turnout at the elections – just 50.4 per cent of the turnout; which represents just 22.9 per cent of the electorate.<sup>6</sup> This allows for some speculations whether the results speak for an authentic Scotland or not. Still, the figures came as a shock to many, including the nationalists. The adopted additional member system set up in Scotland was to prevent any one party from achieving the kind of majority won by the SNP and getting overall majority and with it a mandate to hold a referendum on independence.<sup>7</sup>

The scale of the Scottish nationalists success exceeded any expectations. Johann Lamont, the Scottish Labour leader confessed that they underestimated the way how 'the SNP were positioning themselves, being both left, right and centre'.<sup>8</sup> The commentators attribute the SNP's victory to Alex Salmond's skilful leadership and the party's professional campaign. Salmond became the main figure in the new establishment in Scotland and his charismatic message proved to be appealing to the Scottish electorate, which as Cowley emphasises, 'had grown weary of Labour's client state'.<sup>9</sup> Others point at a shockingly amateurish Labour campaign, the disarray of this party, plummeting membership figures and factional disputes which had made the party functioning ineffective and unfocused long before the 2011 elections were held.<sup>10</sup> There were also those in Westminster who assumed the victory was accidental, as Scotland had always been overwhelming Labour. They regard the defeat was accidental and imply that Labour's amateurish campaign resulted in the SNP just borrowing their voters for that particular election to Holyrood.<sup>11</sup>

The primacy of British politics lies in the terms imposed on the Scottish Parliament so that the vote is constitutionally legal. As the Scots do not have the power to unilaterally secede from the Union, David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, and Alex Salmond, the First Minister of Scotland, signed a deal which makes both parliament committed to respect of the referendum. The terms enclosed in the so called 'Edinburg Agreement', are tough. The vote will include one simple and straightforward 'Yes' / 'No' question on Scotland leaving the United Kingdom. The other option, previously hinted by Salmond, the so called "devo-max", giving Scots full fiscal powers, was excluded. Under the terms of the deal, 16 and 17-year-olds will take part in the ballot, which has to be held before the end of 2014. Furthermore, the agreement provides for a statutory or-

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<sup>6</sup> G. Hassan, *Anatomy of the Scottish Revolution: The Potential of Postnationalist Scotland and the Future of the United Kingdom*, "The Political Quarterly", 1911, 82/3, p. 365.

<sup>7</sup> D. McCrone, *Scotland Out of the Union? The Rise and Rise of the Nationalist Agenda*, "The Political Quarterly", 2012, 83/1, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> J. Cowley, *Mr Scotland, Chauvinism and SNP's big-tent Nationalism*, "The New Statesman", Jan. 30, 2012, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> T. Gallagher, *Labour and the Scottish...*, p. 533.

<sup>11</sup> P. Kelnner, *What Salmond will do next*, "Prospect", June, 2011, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk>

der protecting the Scottish Parliament from a legal challenge and covers other issues such as campaign broadcast and financing requirements.<sup>12</sup>

Important questions can be asked about why Scotland has changed so dramatically in the last several years and what the impending vote practically means for Scottish politics. To what extent will the prospective home rule affect Scottish society, its identity and, above all, the politics of nationalism and unionism. Further dilemmas concern the likely consequences of the Union's break-up and the way Scottish and British politics will evolve in the aftermath of the referendum. Will either of the outcomes serve as a climax of SNP's positive appeal to its electorate or a catalyst for a far more reaching constitutional change in the Union.

### **Nationalist Dimension of Political Choices**

The SNP's success and the prospective referendum on independence appears to be "the greatest challenge to the British state since Ireland was partitioned in 1921". Its result, be it positive or negative for Scots, will affect the whole of the United Kingdom<sup>13</sup>. However, any attempt at explaining why they committed themselves to risk such a far-reaching measure has to be carefully qualified. The emergence of the SNP and Scottish nationalism over the last forty years might be due to the decline of Scottish Labour and its inability to deliver real reforms. It might as well stand for searching for some new identity other than the conservative one, whose position had become marginal. This in turn might indicate Scotland turning both anti-Tory but also anti-Labour. Scots are said to have become a community that sees itself not only centre-left, but one that wants to be perceived as distinctive from the rest of the United Kingdom and primarily England. The latest surveys imply that a majority of Scots are still for the continuation of the Union<sup>14</sup>, but the way they publicly articulate their desires seems to cause trouble. It all points to some deep crisis of Scottish unionism, where a wider historical contexts needs to be stressed.

One could take Harvie's perspective, who emphasises that future nations were shaped long ago. The intricacies of current politics reflect all divisive issues of the three-century long unionism. They must have influenced the ideas of distinct identities and nationalist feelings among the subordinated na-

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<sup>12</sup> 'Signed, seal and delivered: The main points of the referendum agreement', *The Scotsman*, Oct. 16, 2012, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/top-stories/signed-sealed-and-delivered-the-main-points-of-the-referendum-agreement-1-2577467>

<sup>13</sup> D. D. McCrone, *Scotland Out of the Union? The Rise and Rise of the Nationalist Agenda*, "The Political Quarterly", 2012, 83/1, p. 69.

<sup>14</sup> Only 30% of those polled in October 2012, wishing to take part in the 2014 referendum, agree that Scotland should become independent, which is 5% less than in June 2012. *Ipsos.Mori Opinion Poll*, October, 2012, <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3058/Support-for-independence-continues-to-fall-as-Labour-narrows-gap-with-SNP.aspx>

tions in the Kingdom. By suppressing and compromising with the Scots or Irish elites in the past, British monarchs allowed for developing a smaller-scale nationalities. Such cultures, frequently called the "historic" nationalities, developed and survived often preserving nationalism as a dormant force<sup>15</sup>.

The British state began in 1707, when Acts of Union between England and Scotland, formerly passed by the Parliament in England and then the Parliament of Scotland, put into effect the terms of the Treaty of Union, creating Great Britain. When the Acts were adopted, they declared preservation of the most essential Scottish institutions: its Presbyterian church, judiciary system, educational system or Scottish private law, 'significant foci for national pride.'<sup>16</sup> The Treaty left Scots in charge of 'low politics' and preserved the matters of state for Westminster. This *mariage de raison*, suited both sides and, as Colley, Davis, or Macinnes, point out, forged the British identity together sufficiently to subsume national differences. The common experience of Protestantism, war and empire bolted Britain together<sup>17</sup>.

Scots used the Union and empire as a springboard for social advance. At the same time, they consciously finessed their nationalism to suit their requirements. This helped them keep their own resilient identity, which maintained traditional components of culture. They turned their attention to the wider world, which brought intellectual benefits, and scientific accomplishments, characterised as Scottish Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. It was Scotland's elite who invented the term 'civil society', which sustained dominant political and economic groups. The elite's uniqueness lied in the power of keeping the civil society divorced from parliamentary nationalism and their own group divided between two loyalties. Scots were both cosmopolitan and enlightened, and, given a chance, authoritarian, capable of exploiting lands bigger than their own country. Back home, they would be sensitive about their community, resisting the encroachments of the English ruling class<sup>18</sup>.

In the nineteenth century Scotland seemed generally well-integrated into the national politics. Scots' 'political birth' and the road to freedom started with the reform act of 1832 and assimilation to the English franchise. Practically, it meant subordination of the remaining Scottish political institutions to British representative governments but it did not arouse any nationalist sentiments<sup>19</sup>. Only after the Scottish Office, a department of the UK government got established in 1885, a wider form of administrative power guaranteed that the preoccupations of Scottish politicians were confined more and

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<sup>15</sup> Ch. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism*, London 2004, p. 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> A. Lyon, *Constitutional History of the United Kingdom*, London 2003, p. 427.

<sup>17</sup> L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, New Haven 1992; N. Davis, *The Isles. A History*, London 2000, pp. 523-528; A.I. Macinnes, *Union and Empire. The Making of the United Kingdom in 1707*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 30-33.

<sup>18</sup> Ch. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism...*, p. 6-8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18,

more to their own country. Scots were in the position to control the rate of their integration in Britain and, to some extent, remain free from southern interference. Paradoxically, this weakened political nationalism, and helped preserve identity stemming directly from the "Scottishness", which the Union guaranteed<sup>20</sup>.

Scottish nationalistic tendencies thus remained weak in comparison to the ones observable in Ireland but the example of Irish nationalism led to the creation of a Scottish Home Rule Association in 1885. It soon introduced a number of Bills for the creation of a Scottish Parliament before 1914; however no serious attempts were made to implement new ideas.<sup>21</sup> The first nationalist organisation, the Scottish National Party, which would take the issue of independence seriously, formally came into existence in 1934. It absorbed the National Party of Scotland, an independent movement, which inaugurated in 1928. Due to the absence of an effective nationalist tradition, comparable to the Irish one, the movement exerted a strong appeal among Scots. In its first 1935 elections, the SNP polled an average of 16 per cent of local support. Soon John MacCormick, the former secretary of Independent Labour Party, helped to make nationalism an alternative policy to socialism in planning Scotland's future<sup>22</sup>.

It was only after World War II though that the balance between the Scottish national organisations and the traditional parties changed. The attractiveness of Britain declined with the Empire's disintegration, decrease of the economic power and political elite's malaise. The post-war realities challenged Britain's economy that would fluctuate from year to year, from one election to another, searching for continuities and re-establishing traditional governance patterns. The 1945-79 time was also about the changing nature of British society, about new opportunities and expectations. It stood for mobility and prospects for working-class people but also decreasing possibilities of the British interventionist state<sup>23</sup>.

The rise of the SNP and Scottish nationalism from the 1960s onwards is thus directly related to the changing nature of post-war Scottish society and the long-term decline of Britain. Nationalism was seen as an alternative; as a moderniser, not a particularist reaction. For Scottish intelligentsia it was a way out from being side-lined by class politics<sup>24</sup>. The Scottish society, like is the rest of the United Kingdom, became more open and filled with opportunity. At the same time a slow shift towards the politics involving identity was noticeable. A number of groups began to become less Labour-inclined and more likely to

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35

<sup>21</sup> A. Lyon, *Constitutional History of the United Kingdom*, London 2003, p. 428.

<sup>22</sup> Ch. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism...*, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Ch. Harvie, *Scotland. A Short History*, Oxford 2002, pp. 169-205.

<sup>24</sup> Ch. Harvie. *Scotland and Nationalism...*, pp. 5-6.

support the SNP. It concerned especially the younger voters, living in the post-war new towns and discontented with the existing political system<sup>25</sup>. Scottish political nationalism slowly superseded the former romantic 'tradition' identified with clan tartans, bagpipe music and sentimentalising of the past.

From 1979 onward, the primary narrative of Scottish politics advanced how distinctive and different Scotland was. Three elements figured as most significant: Scots' consciousness, economic change favouring the south and the condition of political system. Not all Scottish unionism's problems were down to Mrs Thatcher's period and her tough economic policies. Scotland was already facing crisis and uncertainty in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Scottish Tories declined, and a distinct Scottish politics, divergent to the English one, emerged<sup>26</sup>. Further social and intellectual developments took place in the 1980s and 1990s but they went unnoticed by every conservative government Secretary of State. As McCrone argues, Scotland was becoming nationalistic because of its political life. It was a community undergoing an unrelenting change<sup>27</sup>.

What seems to have influenced Scottish nationalism and the SNP revival most was the decline of British governance system, aided by the condition of the unitary state and its economy. In many respects, Scottish nationalism may be interpreted as an attempt to find security and certainty in the world, which Britain could no longer guarantee. Brand would even argue that Scottish nationalism was a profound search for something that would maintain the post-war managed society and welfare state. With the British state looking shaky, many Scots felt the best way was to develop a Scottish version of their state<sup>28</sup>.

This new vision was offered by a broadly constituted Scottish Constitutional Convention convened in 1989. Surprisingly, the SNP declined to take part in the debates, as they did not want to resolve any devolutionary solutions that envisaged Scotland remaining in the United Kingdom. The party desired independent Scotland, outside the Kingdom but remaining in the European Union. The Convention adopted a *Claim of Right for Scotland* which declared that they acknowledge the sovereign right for the Scottish people to determine the form of Government best suited to their needs. As MacCormick suggests, this was 'a bold, categorical, and even revolutionary' statement of intent, which soon turned out to be just a mere piece of rhetoric. In 1995 the Convention agreed on the scheme of devolution, which they published in the document *Scotland's Parliament: Scotland's Right*<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> J. Brand, *The Nationalist Movement in Scotland*, London 1978, pp.144-168.

<sup>26</sup> G. Hassan, *Anatomy of the Scottish Revolution...*, p. 366.

<sup>27</sup> D. McCrone, *Understanding Scotland*, London 1992, p. 35-42.

<sup>28</sup> R. Finlay, *Modern Scotland, 1914-2000*, London 2004.

<sup>29</sup> N. MacCormick, *Sovereignty or subsidiary? Some comments on Scottish devolution*, in: A. Tomkins (ed.), *Devolution and the British Constitution*, 1998, p. 5.

### Devolution: The Unfinished Business

The present espousal of patriotic politics and the desire to create an independent Scotland postulated by the SNP is due to the decline of Labour, which could not deliver satisfactory political reforms after it came to power in 1997. It is also due to the demise of "Labour Scotland", the society which the party presided over and dominated for several decades. The story of that demise goes back to the pre-devolution time. In the post war period, the Labour dominance in Scotland was built upon free pillars: provision of council housing, popularising trade unionism and governance in local government. All of these helped Labour win the support of the Scottish electorate until 1979, when each fell. Most council houses went private, trade union membership retreated and the electoral system to the local government undermined one-party hold over Scottish constituencies<sup>30</sup>. When the three pillars of Labour's dominance were removed, the party was left exposed and open to challenge. The omnipotent one-party state, which it had built for years, became an insignificant entity, with few members, an insufficient resources, incapable of making any satisfactory Scottish policy<sup>31</sup>.

What saved Labour in Scotland throughout the unpopular period of Thatcherite policies in the 1980s and 1990s was that Scots were prepared to believe that the party would stand up for their rights. The Conservatives showed little regard for Scottish economic priorities as there were too few Scots to matter. British governments were returned overwhelmingly on English votes and any policy of autonomy was resisted on their part. Consequently, Scots who, predominantly voted in favour of opposition parties, mainly Labour, felt that the country was submerged and their interests ignored. They saw themselves governed by governments they did not vote for, which they regarded as 'the democratic deficit'.<sup>32</sup> By choosing Labour, they seemed to best protect Scotland from conservative policies. Support for that party grew and in 1997 the conservatives Scottish MPs were wiped out altogether<sup>33</sup>.

The period 1992-7 proved crucial for the growth of Scottish national feelings and expectations. Conservatives won again but the promised home rule settlement never took place. Autonomy remained a constant theme in the Scottish political debate but it was not top of the voters' list of priorities. Instead Westminster made union into an icon but this 'behavioural framework of Britishness', which before had been taken for granted, shifted to the margin<sup>34</sup>. The election of Tony Blair's Labour Party in 1997 appeared as a chance

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<sup>30</sup> G. Hassan, D. Fraser, *The Political Guide to Modern Scotland*, London 2001, p.13.

<sup>31</sup> G. Hassan, *Anatomy of the Scottish Revolution...*, s 371.

<sup>32</sup> D. McCrone, *Understanding Scotland...*, p. 74.

<sup>33</sup> *British Electoral Facts, 1832-2006*, C. Rallings and M. Thrasher (eds.), Aldershot, UK 2007, p. 54.

<sup>34</sup> Ch. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism...*, p. 193.

to change this. His electoral manifesto contained a commitment to create Scottish parliament 'firmly based on the agreement reached in the Scottish constitutional Convention'<sup>35</sup>. The Labour's eagerness to reform the state appeared a chance to preserve one-party environment in Scotland. In fact it was enacted to stall the SNP's power<sup>36</sup>.

In the 1997 referendum, in a turnout of 60.4 per cent, 74,3 per cent of Scots agreed that there should be a Scottish parliament, and 63.5 that it should have tax-varying powers devolved.<sup>37</sup> The Scotland Act of 1998, which re-instituted the ancient Scottish Assembly, provided for the retention of full sovereignty with Westminster and thus the preservation of a unitary state. Westminster preserved its authority over its northern country but empowered Scots to make primary legislation in several areas of domestic policy, itself becoming merely a supervising legislative body<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, Westminster's respect and acceptance for the autonomy of the elected devolved institution in Scotland acted as an constraint on any oppressive legislation against its constituent members. The recognition of Scots' rights became a convention; consequently, an integral feature of the British Constitution<sup>39</sup>.

The devolution process seemed justified as it made the governance process more responsive to the wishes of the people of Scotland. At first, Scottish devolution was relatively untroubled in comparison to what happened in Wales or Northern Ireland. However, the devolved Parliament soon proved underpowered. It was ignored both by Scots and by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's governments. The limits of the British system overhaul became embarrassingly apparent. New Labour's reform was finally buried by Gordon Brown, whose *laissez-faire* policies favoured England's economy. The process failed as it attempted to reconcile two seemingly conflicting principles: to reserve sovereignty of the British Parliament in the unitary state and to grant autonomy to its constituent countries. What the process established in practice was a quasi-federal state with one supreme and omnipotent Parliament in Westminster.<sup>40</sup> Robertson's prophecy that 'devolution [would] kill the Scottish National Party stone dead'<sup>41</sup> would never come true. Instead, it precipitated Labour's demise. In the last 2011 election Labour's result turned out to be the worst since 1931

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<sup>35</sup> *Because Britain Deserves Better*, The 1997 Labour Party Manifesto, p. 33.

<sup>36</sup> T. Gallagher, *Labour and the Scottish...*, p. 534.

<sup>37</sup> C. Turpin, C. Tomkins, *British Government and the Constitution*, Cambridge 2007, p. 190.

<sup>38</sup> V. Bogdanor, *Devolution and the British Constitution*, in: D. Butler, et al. (eds.) *The Law, Politics and the Constitution*, Oxford 1999, pp. 61-62.

<sup>39</sup> C. Turpin, C. Tomkins, *British Government...*, p. 75.

<sup>40</sup> Ch. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism...*, p. 217.

<sup>41</sup> A. Cochrane, *Looking to a New Political Alignment*, in: W. Jamieson (ed.), *Scotland's Ten Tomorrow*, London 2006, p. 113.

first-past-the-post and 1918 popular vote<sup>42</sup>.

Furthermore, devolution soon brought to the fore a number of anomalies; a legacy of partly-resolved constitutional issues. The Barnett formula, which allowed English domestic policy indirectly affect the budgets of the devolved institutions, was still in operation. The West Lothian Question, a privilege allowing the overrepresentation of Scottish MPs to preserve an overrepresentation in Westminster and to oversee public policy that did not directly affect their constituencies, was likewise in force. Devolution remained 'an unfinished business' and the price the United Kingdom paid for ignoring its deepest problems was the growing antagonism between Westminster with Edinburgh<sup>43</sup>.

What the British politicians did not fully appreciate was the trend towards a new pattern of governance visible in the whole Celtic fringe and new regional aspirations of those populating the 'periphery' of the Kingdom. What also passed unnoticed was another period of Scottish enlightenment, already visible in the 1980s<sup>44</sup>. Unfortunately, the Scottish aspirations coincided with the British state decline and economic authority migrating to Europe or global markets. Consequently, the 1997-ongoing devolution had little chance of advancement. As Hroch emphasises, the time was ripe for the Scottish nationalist movement to take-off. It happened because cultural and political movements fused.<sup>45</sup>

### Future of Scottish Politics

How Scotland is perceived presently is influenced by a number of factors, however Scottish nationalism, associated with the SNP policies seems dominant. Whether the new developments are interpreted as an inclination towards 'separatism' shaped by simple-minded romanticism or an old-fashioned nation of nationalism is not relevant in the context of the impending vote. What counts, in Gallagher's perception, is that the new version of post-industrial and arguably post-2000 Scotland seems to be a natural political choice for a majority of Scots. They see their country ready to experience a fundamental change, perhaps even one involving an end of three-century union state<sup>46</sup>. As Nairn puts it, 'it is more like seizing the chance - and making sure it is not the last one'<sup>47</sup>, which may indicate that the direction of Scottish politics and the society's desires point towards further evolution of their coun-

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<sup>42</sup> *British Electoral Facts, 1832-2006...*, p. 59.

<sup>43</sup> J. Mitchell, *Devolution's Unfinished Business*, "The Political Quarterly", 2006, 77/4, pp. 470-2.

<sup>44</sup> Ch. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism...*, p. 193.

<sup>45</sup> Qtd. in Ch. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism...*, p. 231.

<sup>46</sup> T. Gallagher, *Labour and the Scottish...*, p. 533.

<sup>47</sup> T. Nairn, *Globalisation and democracy: the new deal*,

[http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/globalisation/institutions\\_government/nationalism\\_the\\_new\\_deal](http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/globalisation/institutions_government/nationalism_the_new_deal)

try as a distinct political community.

In this context, the SNP and wider Scottish nationalist movement are not, despite the stereotypes, traditional or old-fashioned. Instead the SNP may be seen as post-nationalists who understand that a politics of nationhood should embrace shared sovereignty as well as alliances with the present and future allies. Scottish statehood has after all a wide unionist dimension: a social union of the United Kingdom, but also political co-operation at the European level. However, as the writings of main nationalist and senior thinkers of the post-war era and the SNP, among them Neil MacCormick and MacAskill's, suggest the present leaders and the party's members show a relaxed attitude to what independence and statehood are.<sup>48</sup> This might indicate a discontent between support for the nationalist cause and support for the nationalist organisation. Besides, as Leith and Steward stress, the SNP had lacked a consistent and solid policy long before the 2011 elections. It rather took advantage of short-term political opportunities capitalising both on Labour and Conservatives misfortune.<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, the British officials' stance towards a likely break-up does not help either. What is revealing is that British political class do not respond appropriately some open signals of the SNP's inaptitude to handle the victory. This is in part because the politics of the British state is still conducted by a doctrinal group for which unionism, one which is a nationalism itself, is too significant to consider other political solutions. A sizeable part of the British political class are, despite devolution and recent reforms, captured by the outdated notions of unionism. They seem obsessed with the version of the partly democratic British system, the notion of parliamentary sovereignty as well as about Europe and its unnecessary encroachments into Westminster politics<sup>50</sup>.

All this makes that much of the British commentary on Scotland in the United Kingdom is arrogant and ill-informed. Scotland's 'passionate nationalism' is, for instance, seen, as something "fed on the national myth of historical exploitation- built on the reality of North Sea oil appropriation, the Highland Clearances, the evils empire and so on"<sup>51</sup>. Even some known British academics, like Vernon Bogdanor or Robert Hazell, members of the Constitution Unit, do not take Scottish aspirations seriously. They postulate two Scottish independence referendums; one pre- and one post-negotiation<sup>52</sup>. What seems most striking is that British politicians are accused of being ill-prepared to deal with the consequences of Scotland's secession from Britain. A parliamentary inquiry is to be carried out into the British government not making any contingency plans

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<sup>48</sup> D. Hassan, *Anatomy of the Scottish Revolution...*, pp. 374-375.

<sup>49</sup> M.S. Leith, M. Steven, *Party of Policy?...*, pp. 263-264.

<sup>50</sup> G. Hassan, *Anatomy of the Scottish Revolution...*, p.375.

<sup>51</sup> J. McTernan, *Remember Bannockburn, I'd rather not, thanks*, "The Scotsman", Jun. 25, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> G. Hassan, *Anatomy of the Scottish Revolution...*, p.375.

for a likely break-up. No-one has taken any decisions concerning, for example, nuclear weapons, which Scots want to be removed from their territory<sup>53</sup>.

Besides, some BBC programmes and comments, instead of being informative, are bias. Caricatures and simplistic assumptions are now commonplace in how Scotland is shown in the British media. They concentrate on the mismatch between the lives of English and Scottish taxpayers, which is caused by higher government spending *per capita* in the north. They portray Scotland as the land of subsidy culture with its Barnett Formula and a bloated public sector<sup>54</sup>. Another archetype, i.e. the West Lothian Question and Scottish MPs voting on non-Scottish matters, leads some to call for abolishing the existing asymmetry and restructuring the parliamentary procedure in Westminster<sup>55</sup>. Without doubt Scotland is on a political and constitutional journey, whether one sees it as powered by Scottish nationalism, post-nationalism and other factors. However, Scottish nationalism and unionism must not be seen as binary opposites as in the case of Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles. Instead, the notions of independence, identity or grievances cross sect and fertilise one another, making the Scottish issue much uncertain<sup>56</sup>. Irrespective of the referendum's outcome, Scotland will have to conduct its politics of unionism and nationalism in whatever its constitutional status becomes at the end of 2014<sup>57</sup>.

The prospects for full independence do not seem much likely though. John Kay, Salmond's key advisor and economist, criticises the economics of independence. In his understanding 'the gain in sovereignty [is] limited by the realities of globalisation.'<sup>58</sup> Scotland has already shifted from the early politics, which characterised the devolution era, to a maturing one, where gains and losses have to be carefully assessed.<sup>59</sup> Another subtle analysis, prepared by Frederick Halliday, an academic, points to power politics, accidents, wars or state crises, rather than 'any fundamental principles, when trying to make sense of small nations' ambitions for independence.'<sup>60</sup> Postcolonial disintegration, by which some nation states emerged, does not really refer to places such as Scotland, Catalonia or the Basque Country. The reason why these nations do not in their majority favour independence is because their major goals, including democratic rights and economic prosperity, are more likely, in the eyes of ma-

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<sup>53</sup> J. Allarddyce, *British government ignores possible split*, "The Times", Dec. 29, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> G. Hassan, *Anatomy of the Scottish Revolution...*, p.374.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 375.

<sup>57</sup> E. Barnes, *Scottish independence: "An historic day" as referendum deal is Signed*, "The Scotsman", Oct. 16, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> J. Kay, *Breaking Up the Union May Have Greater Financial Impact than the SNP Wants*, "Scotland on Sunday", May 29, 2011; *The Economy, Stupid*, "The Economist", Jun. 30, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> J. Kay, *Time for Scotland to move from infancy*, "The Financial Times", May 4, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> F. Halliday, *Political Journeys: The Open Democracy Essays*, London 2011, p. 239.

majority of their citizens, to be better realised by remaining part of larger entities. The same may eventually happen to Scotland.<sup>61</sup>

Scottish politics, nationalism and the SNP are thus not about ridiculous stereotypes, isolationism and taking Scotland from the United Kingdom. As Cowley concludes, it is more about identity and who is Scottish. There is no politics there actually. Moreover, most Scots remain sceptical of full independence prospects. Likewise Salmond, realising little chances of success, shifted his position over the 2014 referendum. He became more flexible and pragmatic, carefully changing his opinions on the EU or the Euro. He even tried to explore the possibilities of a third way between the *status quo* and independence, between "a straight yes and no"<sup>62</sup>. The October Holyrood Agreement over the independence terms eliminated extra options.

Meanwhile, the support for Scottish independence plummeted to the lowest level since devolution in 1999 and the creation of the Holyrood Parliament in 1999. Only 23% of those asked by the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey in January 2013 said they favoured full independence. Voters appear to have become concerned about the prospect of leaving the United Kingdom and their economic status. The UK ministers attribute the poll's results to Salmond's insufficient arguments for Scotland's leaving the Kingdom<sup>63</sup>. Douglas Taylor, BBC Scotland editor, seems most ironic. Measuring the public mood the independence vote result might, in his opinion, depend on 'the price of the third generation iPad.' As one poll indicates, if the process makes Scots £500 better off, 65% of them will vote for it. However, if it makes them as much worse off, only 21%. That little seems to be enough to swing the referendum's outcome<sup>64</sup>. The 'Yes' campaigner will need to show effort to convince a much wider section of the public that independence might bring positive benefits, especially for Scotland's economy.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, pp. 239-243.

<sup>62</sup> J. Cowley, *Mr Scotland, Chauvinism and SNP's Big-Tent Nationalism*, "The New Statesman", Jan. 30, 2012, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> L. McIntish, *Support for Leaving UK Collapses to Just 23%*, "The Times", Jan. 24, 2013.

<sup>64</sup>D. Fraser, *Scottish Independence: Braveheart or iPad?*, Oct.15, 2012, [http:// www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-19955302](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-19955302)

## Conclusions

Judging on the recent press releases and opinion polls results, it seems reasonable to argue that the problem of the future of the United Kingdom does not come from the SNP and Scottish nationalism. It rather stems from Scotland's complicated relations within the United Kingdom, the imbalance created by the devolution process and mutual biases and prejudices between the English and the Scottish that have intensified in the recent times. The SNP' victory in the 2011 Scottish elections might be more about the demise of the British political parties and their regional branches than about genuine nationalist feelings among the Scots.

The outcome of proposed referendum on Scottish independence and the future of the United Kingdom is far from certain though. Regardless of the vote's result the nature of the present disjuncture will have to be adequately understood and addressed. The statehood issue will have to be re-negotiated if the Scotland is to feel legitimate and find its own place in the British multi-state. The next year's 'Yes'/'No' campaigns cannot turn into a rhetoric of bigoted prejudice if the year 2014 is to pave a new way for a partnership in the Isles and if the "British" nations are to pose a challenge to other European states in future.

As for the referendum itself, it might help the British and European politicians reconsider regionalism policies in Europe. It might spark a renaissance of new projects similar to the ones incorporated in the Maastricht Treaty, whose doctrine of "subsidiarity", enabled many sub-national institutions, be it the devolved countries' assemblies or regional organisations, to find some formal acknowledgement.