



REPORT CGI 2:

SCOTLAND'S SECOND INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM: IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CATALONIA

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Scotland's second independence referendum: implications and opportunities for Catalonia

By Catalonia Global Institute

The Catalonia Global Institute is a center of analysis of international affairs. It has the objective of providing the Catalan society with independent critical thinking in global politics. We believe the Catalan society and its institutions will be better equipped to project their interests in the global sphere if they adopt a renewed vision of Catalonia's position in the world. Our activities are rooted in the idea that the international system is governed primarily by states pursuing their national interest. We defend the right of nations to freely determine their national interests and that Catalonia ought to define its own according to its idiosyncrasy, values and aspirations.

The research for this report includes interviews with four experts on the matter. From the Catalonia Global Institute team we want to thank them for their insightful contributions. The political recommendations and positions adopted by this report are the only responsibility of the Catalonia Global Institute. In no base, the interviewed experts can be made accountable for them, as well as for the interpretation and possible misinterpretation of their words, along with any inaccurate data provided in the report.

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Executive summary.

- In 2014 Scotland's independence would have meant the secession of an EU territory. After Brexit the possibility of Scotland's independence may mean an extension of the EU.
- Scotland has taken a state-like approach to foreign policy, trying to delink their case from that of other stateless nations.
- The contradiction between the UK and the EU will keep growing. That gives a geopolitical advantage to Scotland's secession.
- The EU institutions will strongly maintain that the case of Scotland is not a precedent for Catalonia. EU member states might be concerned that Scottish secession would be used as a precedent for EU self-determination movements.
- Any hypothetical tacit support from Brussels for Scottish independence is unlikely to change Brussels' stance on Catalonia.
- A second Scotland's independence referendum gives an opportunity for Catalonia to put its case on the European political debate and take advantage of the rivalry between the UK and the EU.
- Catalonia should focus on its national interest when asked about Scottish independence. At most, Catalonia can express support Scotland's right to self-determination.
- Catalan leadership ought to lower expectations on how Scotland's independence will change the EU position towards self-determination.
- Catalonia should aim to build synergies with London and take advantage of the triangle between Scotland, the EU, and the UK.



Introduction:

Scotland demands for a second referendum.

The electoral victory of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) on May 6th, 2021, may open the path for a new vote on Scotland's independence. In a post-Brexit context, European leaders and pro-European Union (EU) politicians positively perceive an independent Scotland integrated in the Union. While this solves one issue, collaterally it will create a new scenario of political uncertainty in Europe placing the question of self-determination of national minorities at the forefront of the EU's agenda.

In Catalonia, some political figures perceived the renewed effort for Scotland's independence as an opportunity for pushing forward its own self-determination demands within the EU. However, a realist analysis of the matter and the interests of the involved actors prescribes more moderate expectations. Catalonia's strategy in this scenario should not be based on purely ideological and moral premises. Instead, Catalan institutions and political organisations should focus on Catalonia's national interest and carefully craft a path of action that allows them to take advantage from the triangulation between Scotland, the UK and the EU.

This paper will analyze the future scenario of a hypothetical second independence referendum in Scotland, exploring the interests and possible options for the Scottish government, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Spain and Catalonia.



1. Background.

In 2014, Scotland held an independence referendum. The "Yes" pro-independence option lost with a result of 45% against 55% for "No"¹. In 2016, Brexit put the question of Scottish independence back on the agenda. Scottish voters largely backed the "Remain" option, with 62%. However, as is well-known, in the UK the "Leave" option won. Consequently, Scotland exited the EU along with the rest of the UK despite its pro-remain majority².

On May 6th, 2021, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, Scotland held elections to their Parliament. The SNP almost won an absolute majority, but it fell short by one seat. Nonetheless, Nicola Sturgeon's SNP jointly with the Scottish Greens summed 72 seats out of 128 in favour of a second referendum. Such a result is interpreted as a strong mandate for Nicola Sturgeon to ask the Scottish people again whether they want to remain in the UK³.

A future second referendum would necessarily be different from the first one as circumstances have changed. On the one hand, after Brexit, the outcome of independence for Scottish exports has shifted. In 2014 independence meant exiting the EU single market, even if it would have been provisionally. Nowadays, Scottish independence very likely means returning to the EU. One must bear in mind that just in 2018, Scottish exports to EU countries increased by 4.5% reaching £16.1 billion⁴.

On the other hand, Brexit has brought significant changes in political attitudes in Brussels and in London. The EU mainly has three motivations for sympathizing with Scottish independence. First, the EU would be happy to recover some of the lost territory and population after Brexit.

¹ BBC. "Scotland Decides". September 2014 Available online at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/scotland-decides/results> (Accessed July 13, 2021)

² BBC. "EU Referendum". June 2016. Available online at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results (Accessed July 13, 2021)

³ BBC. "Scottish Parliament election". May 2021. Available online at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c37d28xdn99t/scottish-parliament-election-2021> (Accessed July 13, 2021)

⁴ Scottish Government. "Export Statistics Scotland". The Scottish Parliament, January 2020. Available online at: <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2020/9/14/Scotland-s-exports-2018> (Accessed July 13, 2021)



Second, the EU needs to maintain a strong position to get the UK to stick to the terms of the withdrawal agreement. Third, to some extent, the Union needs to disincentivize potential similar actions. In addition, London negotiated Brexit unilaterally, without taking into account the interests of the regional administrations. This really bothered the Scottish elites⁵. Besides, after Brexit, British identity is being progressively equated with Englishness, provoking a feeling of exclusion in Scotland.⁶

The demand for Scotland's independence is basically argued on administrative and economic policy grounds⁷. To put it in other words, supporters of Scottish independence believe that the country would be better governed if it were an independent State, but do not feel the urge to protect their national identity. Although the Scottish accent still remains and is praised as part of Scotland's identity, Scotland's original languages have almost disappeared, and they are not the pillar of Scottish identity⁸. On the administrative ground, as mentioned above a significant proportion of the Scots feel that London has not respected their will to remain in the EU, nor has it respected its opinion on the negotiation process where Scotland's interests have been ignored. On policy grounds, England and Scotland are profoundly different. While England has predominantly supported pro-market policies, in Scotland, society leans towards support for pro-welfare state policies.

In contrast, Catalonia bases its request for independence on economic, ideological and democratic arguments. However, unlike Scotland, the main urgency for Catalonia's independence is its national survival. For centuries Spain has acted as a predator-state, actively erasing Catalan identity. Furthermore, the drain on Catalonia's economic resources is both spoliation and an efficient praxis of preventing Catalonia from consolidating real autonomous power. On democratic grounds, despite enjoying a pro-independence majority

⁵ Marc Sanjaume. 2021 Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Marc Sanjaume. "*Independència i Progrés*". 2021. Barcelona: Saldonar.

⁸ Nuria Franco. 2021 Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.



within the region⁹, Catalans are always a minority within the Spanish *demos*. Due to the unwillingness of Madrid to accept a self-determination referendum in Catalonia, the will of the Catalan people cannot be implemented. Nonetheless, differently from Spain, the UK always opens up alternative solutions based on the democratic legal flexibility through continued dialogue with Scotland.

2. The likeliness of the Referendum

The bid for a celebration of a second referendum in Scotland is highly probable because the winning party postulated this item in its election manifesto. As mentioned above, the SNP along with the Scottish Greens enjoys a comfortable majority arising from the last parliamentary elections. In regards to the temporal horizon, Sturgeon's party made clear the second referendum, which is expected to be agreed with Westminster, will take place once the Covid-19 crisis is over. At least, those are the terms that both the SNP and the Scottish Greens envisage. The Scottish electorate prefers its government to focus on the management of the post-pandemic recovery in the short term, thus the referendum is likely to be agreed and celebrated in the mid-term.

British PM Boris Johnson is reluctant to allow a second referendum. He qualifies it as "irresponsible and reckless".¹⁰ One might think that Downing Street will refuse to negotiate a second plebiscite on independence. The Scottish pro-independence parties have already stated that this would be undemocratic and unsustainable for the UK government. According to Marc Sanjaume¹¹, if London refuses to pact, the SNP does not have much room for manoeuvre. In order to respond to this scenario, Sturgeon has drafted an independence referendum bill, which in turn would have to be voted on in Holyrood. However, one can expect Sturgeon to try and gather cross-party support from all Scottish political forces. The

⁹ Sam Jones and Stephen Burgen. "Catalonia election: pro-independence parties increase majority". The Guardian, February 2021 Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/14/catalonia-regional-election-covid-voting> (Accessed: July 13,2021)

¹⁰ Hannah Rodger. "Boris Johnson says independence referendum 'reckless' regardless of Holyrood result". The Herald, May 2021. Available online at: <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/19280035.now-not-time-johnson-says-referendum-reckless-regardless-holyrood-result/> (Accessed: July 13, 2021)

¹¹ Marc Sanjaume. 2021 Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.



Scottish government will prefer to bide its time and keep a steady strategy. Along these lines, Judith Steijgeman¹². maintains that there are not many chances for Scotland to push forward a unilateral independence referendum without an agreement with London and broad consensus among Scotland's political parties.

In the unlikely scenario of Holyrood passing the referendum bill without any delegation from Westminster, it would lead to legal and political turmoil. In this instance, there would be two possibilities: to legally appeal the bill or not to do so. Appealing the bill would be a very uncommon practice and would only lead to growing support for independence in Scotland¹³. If it is not appealed, the UK and Scotland would have to resort to an alternative agreement on an independence referendum. In any case, if there is such a radical confrontation, the Scottish pro-independence parties would likely use this refusal to gain a renewed and strengthened mandate¹⁴.

In any event, Scotland is unlikely to follow Catalonia's steps. It must be noted that the reasons for not doing so are not the lack of results of Catalonia's unilateral independence bid, but the cultural and organizational differences in the political arena. Catalonia has a more vibrant grassroots culture than Scotland, which was determinant for the organization of the referendum of 2017. So the Scottish government is unlikely to subvert the UK's legal order to unilaterally hold an independence referendum. On the other hand the UK will tighten the thumbscrews, but it is improbable it will exceed democratic limits by cracking down violently on a non-agreed referendum.

¹² Judith Sijstermans. 2021. Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

¹³ Marc Sanjaume. 2021 Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

¹⁴ Judith Sijstermans. 2021. Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.



3. The second Scottish independence referendum in the international context.

3.1 Scotland's international strategy.

Scotland's para-diplomatic strategy aims to emulate the approach of a sovereign state. As Jamie Maxwell accurately points out "think like a state, act like a state" became the Scottish nationalist motto¹⁵. Scotland focuses on its national interest¹⁶ and it has prioritized its relations with representatives of sovereign nations over non-state entities.

While Catalonia counts on a network of permanent para-diplomatic missions¹⁷ – along with a separate network of trade offices¹⁸ – Scotland has strategically used its Scottish Development International offices, which focus on promoting trade and investment, as a political tool to present Scotland's separate reality. In geopolitical terms, Scotland has aimed to build ties with the Nordic countries – which is important to support the SNP's social model – and with the EU^{19,20}. Scotland has tried to play an autonomous role within international institutions such as the Nordic Council^{21,22}.

¹⁵ Jamie Maxwell, "Scotland's long game". POLITICO Europe, December 2019. Available online at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/scotland-long-game-brexit-general-election-nicola-sturgeon-snp-second-scottish-independence-referendum/>. (Accessed July 13, 2021)

¹⁶ Judith Sijstermans. 2021. Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

¹⁷ Ministry for Foreign Action and Open Government. "Government delegations abroad" 2021 https://exteriors.gencat.cat/en/ambits-dactuacio/afers_exteriors/delegacions_govern/

¹⁸ ACCIÓ, "International Network of Trade and Investment Offices". Catalonia's Agency for Business Competitiveness. 2021. Available online at: <https://www.accio.gencat.cat/en/serveis/oficines-exterior/>. (Accessed: July 13 2021)

¹⁹ Anthony Salamone, "Post-Brexit, Scotland is forging its own foreign policy". Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Available online at: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/post-brexit-scotland-is-forging-its-own-foreign-policy/> (Accessed July 13, 2021)

²⁰ Scottish Government. "Scotland's Place in Europe". December 2016. Available online at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2016/12/scotlands-place-europe/documents/00512073-pdf/00512073-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00512073.pdf> (Accessed: July 13 2021)

²¹ Setephen Gethins, *Nation to Nation. Scotland's Place in the World*. Edinburgh: Luath Press, pp.155-156

²² Scottish Government. "Scotland's International Policy Statements". December 2017. Available online at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/speech-statement/2017/12/scotlands-international-policy-statement-9781788514026/documents/00527947-pdf/00527947-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00527947.pdf>. (Accessed: July 13, 2021)



It is worth noticing that in the document *Scotland's Future* published by the Scottish government in 2013 to detail their plan for independence, Scotland's initial embassies programmed were: "London; Beijing; Berlin; Brasilia; Canberra; Delhi; Dublin; Islamabad; Madrid; Moscow; Paris; Pretoria; Seoul; Tokyo; Warsaw; Washington and in view of the close historical and co-operation ties with Malawi, Lilongwe ²³."

Scottish officials have not been concerned about the possibility of lacking international recognition, as the 2014 referendum was agreed with London, and therefore they did not fear being ostracized by the international community. In the document *Scotland's Future*, it was even argued that part of the current properties of UK diplomatic service would be transferred to an independent Scotland. However, that does not mean that they did not work to reassure international partners about Scotland's international commitment in terms of responsibilities regarding security as a member of NATO or cooperation aid to the developing world. Scottish officials did not focus much on the issue of recognition as they centred their discourse on the advantages of Scotland's independence for future possible partners ²⁴.

An important point to understand about Scotland's strategy is London's seemingly indifferent attitude towards Scotland's para-diplomatic activities. On the one hand, the Scottish side has refrained from pursuing a path that might infuriate the British Government, especially taking into account London's open attitude towards Scotland's demands. On the other hand, British diplomats' agendas are usually quite busy, and their most vital interest overseas remains the UK's international standing. This attitude is consistent with the general opinion of most English citizens regarding the question of Scotland's independence²⁵.

That contrasts with the situation in Catalonia. Since the early stages of the existence of the Catalan Government's foreign representations, the Spanish central government has been

²³ Scottish Government. "Scotland's Future". Scottish Government, 2013. Available online at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-future/> (Accessed: July 13, 2021)

²⁴ Judith Sijstermans. 2021. Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

²⁵ Stephen Mcillkenny. "Poll finds only one fifth of English voters oppose Scottish independence" *The Herald*, May 2021. Available online at: <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/19338566.poll-finds-one-fifth-english-voters-oppose-scottish-independence/> (Accessed: July 13, 2021)



obstructing their activities. Confronting Catalonia's international campaigns for self-determination is the top priority of Spanish diplomacy. Yet it remains to be seen how the aloofness of British diplomats may change given a second referendum or of the unlikely event of a non-agreed independence referendum in Scotland.

3.2 The position of post-Brexit UK.

Regarding the UK-EU relationship, it is likely to get worse before it gets better. No matter how much shared interest and trade may exist between the EU as a whole and the UK, the EU cannot in the short term afford a successful post-Brexit Britain that might question the inevitability of the European project in the eyes of more eurosceptic nations. During the pandemic the rising tensions between the UK and the EU were made evident. British government decisions received constant criticism from EU officials and EU member state's leaders such as Manuel Macron²⁶. Another example is the conflict with AstraZeneca, when EU authorities accused the British company of not complying with the contract, while at the same time it cast doubts on the effectiveness of the vaccine²⁷.

Besides, the Brexit deal left many issues unresolved and several unclear boundaries on significant matters of EU-UK relations: the Northern Ireland border – which has already been used by Brussels to pressure London²⁸; disputes over fishing waters and Exclusive Economic Zones with France²⁹; a free trade agreement whose implementation may raise serious

²⁶ James Crisp. "Emmanuel Macron accuses the UK and US of hoarding Covid vaccines". The Telegraph, 2021. Available online at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/05/07/emmanuel-macron-accuses-uk-us-hoarding-covid-vaccines/>. (Accessed: July 13, 2021)

²⁷ Reuters. "Britain's health minister rebuffs EU criticism on AstraZeneca vaccine exports". Reuters, 2021. Available online at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/britains-health-minister-rebuffs-eu-criticism-astrazeneca-vaccine-exports-2021-03-17/> (Accessed: July 13,2021)

²⁸ James Ward. "Irish PM welcomes Brussels U-turn on bid to override Northern Ireland protocol" Belfast Telegraph, 2021. Available online at: <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/irish-pm-welcomes-brussels-u-turn-on-bid-to-override-northern-ireland-protocol-40029091.html> (Accessed: July 13,2021)

²⁹ Lucy Williamson. "Brexit: Why France is raising the stakes over fishing". BBC, 2020. Available online at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54526145> (Accessed: July 13, 2021)



disputes in the future; and the recurring conflict over Gibraltar³⁰, are some prominent examples.

Nevertheless, for the British side, quarrelling with the EU is not a priority. First, the EU is already struggling with several internal divisions that do not need direct action from London to be triggered. Second, the sphere of influence that the post-Brexit UK envisages lies within the Commonwealth countries and the Indo-Pacific axis as presented in the document *Global Britain in a competitive age*^{31 32}. So, unless provoked, London is unlikely to take action against EU interests³³.

An active role by Brussels in the Scottish secession might change London's view. Despite the UK's apparent indifference towards Scottish independence, the situation may shift if an independent Scotland becomes part of the EU. That would mean that for the first time in its history, England would share a hard border in Great Britain with a polity under a continental umbrella. In geopolitical terms, it would be surrounded by the EU by land and sea. No matter how cordial the UK tries to maintain its relations with the EU, such a scenario may present enough risks to make it undesirable.

It remains to be seen whether EU Member States will be able to hold a coherent common position in case rifts arise in the future regarding the stance to take with respect to the UK. In such a scenario the Commission and the European Parliament could draw Member States to embrace tougher positions in sensitive areas for the UK where these institutions play a more decisive role, such as trade and fishery policies, which might infuriate the UK. Unless the provocation and the potential damage that can be caused to the UK is very serious, London

³⁰Joaquim Dorca. 2021. Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

³¹ Government of the United Kingdom. "Global Britain in a Competitive Age" March 2021. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age-the_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence__Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf (Accessed on July 13, 2021)

³² Policy Exchange. "Making Global Britain Work" July 2019. Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Britain-in-the-World.pdf> (Accessed on July 13, 2021)

³³Joaquim Dorca. 2021. Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.



will refrain from considering attacking fundamental interests of the EU, such as the territorial integrity of its member states.

3.3 What is the EU position on Scotland's 2nd referendum?

As most nation-states, EU member states are suspicious of secessionist movements such as that of Scotland. However, just as any other territorialized institution, the EU is more eager to gain territory than to lose it, and that is why a post-Brexit Scottish secession would be more welcome than a pre-Brexit one. Besides, the independence of Scotland could be used as proof of the failure of Brexit³⁴. Brussels could use such an example as a warning to any other nation that may have eurosceptic temptations that this path leads towards national dissolution.

In this context, there is some sympathy within the EU towards the idea of Scotland's independence, and Scottish nationalists may play their card to secure the EU's endorsement³⁵. Nevertheless, the scenario is still uncertain. The EU's attitude before actual Scottish independence, especially if it is not agreed between London and Edinburgh, may not be as positive as the SNP is implying.

For Brussels, one thing is being critical of the UK, making clear that the UK has lost its rights as an EU member or even getting into agitated legal and rhetorical disputes with London to defend EU interests. Quite another is promoting a secessionist movement to acquire a hard land border with the UK near its core territory. That may turn the quarrels between London and Brussels into a far more serious matter. The European Commission may be tempted to push in favour of punishing the UK as a warning to other potential exiters, even if member states will certainly tend to tread much more carefully on this matter. Given that the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy is reserved to the sole discretion of member states without the interference of other EU institutions, their standpoint will be the most important factor at the end of the day.

³⁴ Marc Sanjaume. 2021 Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

³⁵ Judith Sijstermans. 2021. Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.



Although technically Scotland is no longer an EU territory, clearly open support by relevant EU voices would trigger the debate over the poor handling of stateless nationalities' rights within the EU's own borders. EU member states will be reluctant to accept the EU taking an open position in favour of Scottish independence that may incentivize the re-emergence of pro-independence movements within their own borders³⁶. Indeed, beyond the framework of the EU, Scottish independence would be the first successful peaceful process of secession from a territory of an established liberal democracy³⁷. That is a precedent that EU countries with sensitive internal territorial tensions would prefer to avoid³⁸.

3.4 How has Scotland reacted to the Catalan issue?

The official position of the Scottish government – especially since Nicola Sturgeon took office – has been to elude the Catalan question as much as possible. At the same time, in order to be coherent with its identity as a pro-self-determination party in Scotland, the SNP has expressed solidarity with Catalonia at times when the matter could not be eluded. Sturgeon expressed criticism during the immediate events of the crackdown on the 2017 referendum in Catalonia and the 2019 trials and prison sentences against the Catalan pro-independence leaders; she also supported Catalan exiled minister Clara Ponsatí, resident in Scotland, when she faced an arrest warrant issued by Spanish judiciary.

However, compared with other pro-independence political parties in Europe, the SNP's solidarity with Catalonia has been less intense³⁹. That follows a similar line the SNP takes with other stateless peoples in Europe. Despite the SNP's links with several pro-independence and regional parties in Europe, the Scottish government prefers to take a low profile when addressing other's cases of self-determination.

³⁶ Marc Sanjaume. 2021 Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Judith Sijstermans. 2021. Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

³⁹ Judith Sijstermans and Coree Brown. "Shades of solidarity: Comparing Scottish and Flemish responses to Catalonia" 2021. *Regional & Federal Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13597566.2021.1881064



Besides, due to the EU's position against Catalan self-determination and its backing of Spain's repressive measures, the Scottish government tries to avoid linking its case to the Catalan one. This attitude contrasts with the support expressed by Catalan political parties and civil organisations during Scotland's 2014 referendum and during Brexit.

In this way, after the 2017 referendum, Sturgeon has always taken a clear stance to differentiate the case of Catalonia from Scotland's. Sturgeon has referred to the Catalan unilateral strategy in negative terms on several occasions, pointing out Catalonia as the opposite example of what Scotland aims⁴⁰. No meeting has been held between the Catalan president in exile Carles Puigdemont and Nicola Sturgeon. Not until 2018 did official relations between the Scottish and Catalan governments reassume in a brief meeting between President Torra⁴¹ – at his request – and Sturgeon. There have been meetings recently between President Pere Aragonès and the Scottish First Minister⁴².

3.5 The Spanish factor.

Beyond the strategic and state-like stance of the Scottish government, there is a tactical reason why they are keeping their distance from the Catalan question: Spain Madrid is the elephant in the room when talking about Scotland's hypothetical admission to the EU. No matter how, Scotland will need Spain's approval to become an EU member state. If Scotland is seen as an open promoter of Catalan independence, that may risk infuriating Madrid and make the case for Scotland's independence as a way to return to the EU implausible.

Despite having caused some trouble for the EU's external reputation, Madrid has enjoyed broad support by the EU's political institutions, officials and the leaders of France and Germany in its policy against Catalan secessionism. In this regard, Madrid has accurately read

⁴⁰ Alba Solé. "Sturgeon descarta hacer un referéndum como el de Catalunya" *El Nacional*, January 2021. Available online at: https://www.elnacional.cat/es/politica/sturgeon-descarta-referendum-catalunya_578169_102.html (Accessed: July 13, 2021)

⁴¹ Swissinfo. "Sturgeon abandona los recelos y recibe al líder independentista catalán". Swissinfo, 2018. Available online at: <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/afp/sturgeon-abandona-los-recelos-y-recibe-al-l%C3%ADder-independentista-catal%C3%A1n/44248786> (Accessed: July 13, 2021)

⁴² ACN. "Catalan vice president meets Scottish first minister". *Catalan News*, October 2018. Available online at: <https://www.catalannews.com/politics/item/catalan-vice-president-meets-scottish-first-minister> (Accessed: July 13, 2021)



the situation⁴³. It understands that the EU may have interests in an independent Scotland, and it will avoid being seen as a clear obstacle. Besides, Scottish secession would now take place outside, and not within the EU, which makes the precedent less dangerous both for Spain and other EU member states with potential secessionist threats than it did back in 2014. In this sense, analysts from the Spanish foreign affairs think tank Real Instituto Elcano have stated that as long as the secession process is agreed with London – and thus making sure that the EU would not accept Scotland as a precedent for Catalonia – Madrid would treat Scotland as any other EU candidate state.⁴⁴

4. How may a new referendum on Scotland's independence affect Catalonia?

In Catalonia, leading lights in the pro-independence camp expect a second independence referendum in Scotland to open a window of opportunity for the generalization of the right to self-determination throughout Europe and modify the EU's stance on this issue. Indeed, in their bid to reposition themselves after their mismanagement of 2017 events, both major nationalist parties in Catalonia have claimed to be learning from the SNP. There have been proposals of even trying to synchronize a new independence referendum in Catalonia coinciding with the hypothetical Scottish one⁴⁵. However, as evidenced in this report, the synergies between both contexts are less evident than a superficial analysis might show.

4.1 Is the EU going to change its position towards Catalonia thanks to Scottish independence?

It is evident that the EU will insist on highlighting the differences between the Catalan and the Scottish case – on whatever grounds it finds. The most probable argument is that Scotland's

⁴³ Miguel González. "Madrid: Scotland is not Catalonia and Northern Ireland is not Gibraltar". *El País*, 2017. Available online at: https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2017/03/14/inenglish/1489483201_862875.html (Accessed: July 13, 2021)

⁴⁴ Hans Von de Burchard. "Haste Ye Back! How Scotland could return to the EU". *Politico*, 2021. Available online at: https://www.politico.eu/article/haste-ye-back-how-scotland-could-rejoin-the-european-union/?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1620640558 (Accessed: July 13 2021)

⁴⁵ Xavi Tedó. "La CUP proposa fer coincidir un nou referèndum a Catalunya amb el d'Escòcia". *Ara.cat*, 2021. Available online at: https://www.ara.cat/politica/cup-proposa-coincidir-d-escocia-nou-referendum-catalunya_1_3994854.html (Accessed: July 13, 2021)



secession would be part of the result of an agreed legal referendum, while according to Spanish law such a referendum is illegal. It is unlikely that EU officials and political leaders will go as far as to question the Spanish Constitutional order and demand a change in Spanish law to allow a self-determination referendum.

The Catalans will argue that the EU is following a double standard with Scotland and with Catalonia. That is partially true. On the one hand, the EU will have a hard time arguing the differences between Catalonia and Scotland. In both countries there is a clear democratic mandate for self-determination, and the Spanish attitude towards Catalonia has been far more assimilationist and authoritarian than that maintained by the UK government with Scotland. Nevertheless, the EU is used to denouncing authoritarian practices outside its borders while ignoring them within, maybe with the exception of Poland and Hungary. Even if London does not agree with a second referendum and the EU somehow raises concerns, it will have done more than in the case of Catalonia.

Having said that, and in strictly legalist terms, in case of agreement between London and Scotland the situation would indeed be different. In moral terms, it might be argued that the EU is applying a double standard, although in geopolitical terms this would not be the case. From a realist standpoint the EU would be taking quite a reasonable position: avoiding potentially losing territories, and gaining new ones. Weakening Spain has never been in the interest of core EU countries such as Germany. Madrid elites have complied with Brussels economic demands and have usually followed the line marked by the EU in terms of austerity. Moreover, Spain is the fourth economy in the EU. Its position in the south west Mediterranean is of great geopolitical relevance – as evidenced by the recent crisis in Ceuta⁴⁶ – which makes any interest in destabilization on the part of most other EU member states highly unlikely. On the other hand, with the independence of Scotland, the EU may be weakening the most serious geopolitical challenger it has in Western Europe.

4.2 Will Scotland's second independence referendum help Catalonia?

⁴⁶ David Alvarado. "Apunts per a una renovada política exterior cap al Marroc". Catalonia Global Institute, 2021. Available online at: <https://cataloniaglobal.cat/apunts-per-a-una-renovada-politica-exterior-cap-al-marroc/>. (Accessed: July 13, 2021)



A second vote on Scotland's independence presents an interesting scenario for Catalonia because it would necessarily put the issue of self-determination on the agenda. However, as evidenced in this report there is not much ground to assume that a new bid for Scotland's independence will automatically generate positive outcomes for Catalonia's self-determination or that it could be used as a favourable precedent in the eyes of the EU institutions.

Taking into account the current democratic deficit of EU institutions, the interest of the vast majority of EU member states in keeping Spain as stable as possible, and the fact that Scottish secession would occur outside the EU's borders, it would be very difficult for Catalan nationalists or any other pro-self determination movement to successfully use the Scottish case to generate a useful precedent within the EU.

That will naturally be denounced as an EU double standard by independence supporters, and it may affect the EU's credibility – especially in the eyes of Catalan citizens and of other national minorities. But the costs of outraging minorities – which by definition count less than national majority members – will be less than opening the possibility of dissolution of several EU member states. Nevertheless, it may consolidate the issue of self-determination as a new permanent point in the European integration process debate.

If Scotland becomes an independent state and part of the EU, it may provide a government that is sympathetic to Catalonia's demands. Inertia and the sympathy of Scottish nationalist grassroots may leverage realpolitik incentives, although as seen in this report, the incentives for Edinburgh will be to avoid getting actively involved in the Catalan issue. Besides, once they achieve independence, new nations usually read their interests as members of the community of sovereign states, and not aligned with their former stateless comrades.



4.3 Is the 2nd Referendum going to open opportunities for Catalonia and the UK?

A different scenario might be built through the generation of synergies between Catalonia and post-Brexit UK. There are historical precedents, and involvement of the EU in Scotland's independence may give London some incentives to strike back through Catalonia.

At this time though, beyond the hypothetical political interest, a strong economic relationship between Catalonia and the UK is lacking. Germany, Japan and the US are far more important economic partners. A carefully crafted policy may change this, although the Catalan government has not yet tried to approach London⁴⁷. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that the British media has in general paid more attention to the violation of democratic rights in Catalonia than most of the continental press. In Westminster there is the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Catalonia formed by members of most political groups in Parliament that has scrutinized the situation in Catalonia and has shown support for Catalonia's right to self-determination⁴⁸, to a great extent thanks to the action of one of the most active Catalan diaspora communities in Europe. In a similar vein, the Catalan issue has been present in Westminster Parliamentary sessions more than in any other state parliament in Europe, thanks to frequent interventions by MPs on the matter.

Such a scenario would be one of the most interesting outcomes for Catalonia arising from the triangle between Scotland, the UK and the EU. As stated in this report, London would only be interested in this possibility in case the Scottish question deteriorates to a point of no return in UK-EU relations. However, at the moment, the strategic path of the Catalan self-determination movement and Catalonia's autonomous government distances from being guided by a realist understanding of the international context and the opportunities that may emerge from it. A factor that difficulties a scenario where Catalonia could generate synergies with London. Of course, a change in the predominant political culture of Catalonia may take place in the future, helping to shift the current strategic approach.

⁴⁷ Joaquim Dorca. 2021. Interview on behalf of the Catalonia Global Institute.

⁴⁸ Pau Llosa "El Parlament Britànic tramita la creació d'un grup parlamentari sobre Catalunya". El Món, Març 2017. Available online at: <https://elmon.cat/mon/el-parlament-britanic-tramita-la-creacio-d-un-grup-parlamentari-sobre-catalunya-127145/> (Accessed on July 13 2021)



Recommendations:

What should the Catalan government do in the event of a second referendum on Scotland's independence?

- **Learn from Scotland.** Catalonia should take a state-like approach to foreign policy.
- **Focus on Catalonia's interests.** Stand by our values, but remain neutral on Scottish independence.
- **Do not confront London.** Use the opportunity to build complicities between Catalonia and Britain.
- **Maintain realistic expectations.** Scotland's independence will not change the position of the EU regarding self-determination.
- **Defend Catalonia's rights.** Denounce Brussels' low democratic standards regarding European stateless peoples' right to self-determination.

Learn from Scotland. Catalonia should take a state-like approach to foreign policy.

The Scottish government has taken a cautious and state-like approach regarding the Catalan issue and its foreign policy approach. We recommend that the Catalan government learn from that. Catalonia should focus on defending its national interest and combine the defense of its democratic values with the pursuit of an interest based approach to international relations.

Focus on Catalonia's interest. Stand by our values but remain neutral on Scottish independence.

Most Catalan pro-independence supporters and political forces have a natural sympathy for Scotland's independence. However, as Scotland has done, Catalonia cannot be seen as a promoter of secessionism in other countries and should not limit its options with London actively supporting Scotland's independence.



If asked, Catalan officials should express support for self-determination, but should refrain from taking an open stand in favour of Scottish independence. Catalonia's international strategy should prioritize its national interests over other considerations.

Do not confront London. Use the opportunity to build complicities between Catalonia and Britain.

Suppose Catalonia aims to benefit from the tensions between the UK and the EU. In that case, a solid partisan position against London on the Scottish question will become an obstacle to developing potential links. Besides, if London ends up accepting a second independence referendum in Scotland, it will have shown a precedent of behaviour that Catalonia would like Madrid to learn from.

In the scenario where tensions between the UK and the EU keep growing, London could see Catalonia's self-determination movement as an interesting partner. Therefore, Catalonia ought to take a realist approach to its strategy, using its full economic, cultural, academic and strategic potential to build bridges with the UK. These may bring explicit economic returns and aid to strengthen ties in the event of an independent Catalonia. Besides, a closer relationship with the UK could give Catalan leadership some leverage when presenting its demands in Brussels.

Maintain realistic expectations. Scotland's independence will not change the position of the EU regarding self-determination.

Catalan leadership and public opinion ought to lower its expectations on how Scotland's independence could provoke a change in the EU position towards self-determination. The EU is unlikely to modify its stance on Catalonia's independence despite tacitly supporting Scotland's. Scotland has a favourable geopolitical scenario in its relationship with the EU, while Catalonia does not. The EU would prefer to sacrifice part of its democratic credibility in the short-term to avoid the possibility of multiple internal secessions and the uncertainty and the opposition it would gather from a majority of its member states.



Catalan pro-independence forces should refrain from making this scenario central to their future strategy, both in practical and rhetorical terms.

Defend Catalonia's rights. Denounce Brussels' low democratic standards regarding European stateless peoples' right to self-determination.

The second Scotland referendum will facilitate Catalan self-determination inclusion in the broader European political debate. Even though, as shown earlier, the EU will presumably develop arguments to differentiate the case of Catalonia from the Scottish in legalistic terms, the Catalan pro-independence forces still can denounce an evident application of double standards and contradiction of this attitude with the values the EU supposedly stands for. Catalonia should make clear that if its right to self-determination is not taken into consideration by EU institutions, that will generate costs for the EU's credibility.