

Scotland and a homage to Catalonia

We learn from the voice of Alex Salmond and from briefing to papers that the SNP have altered their approach to the EU. Apparently they will now say that were Scotland to have a formal vote to leave the UK, and were voters to vote to leave, Scotland would apply to join EFTA, not the EU, in the first instance.

This new contortion of policy probably is based on the unpopularity of the EU with a significant part of the SNP's vote, those who also voted to leave the EU. It helps them get round the painful issue of having to join the Euro as a new member of the EU. It avoids too many issues about long delays in joining the EU. The EU has made clear that if a part of an existing member state becomes independent, that new state has to apply to join from outside the EU. Scotland would meet the main requirements to join as it is already part of a member state. However, it would not qualify for a share of the UK's budget rebate, nor automatically achieve opt outs from the common borders and single currency policies.

Scotland would need to establish Euro convergence, which would require a very large contraction in its substantial budget deficit. Outside the UK Scotland would start with larger deficit than the UK's, and would need to cut spending and or raise taxes to get within the Maastricht rules. These are unlikely to be palatable to SNP politicians. They do not like austerity policies, yet these would be serious Euro style austerity policies with considerable bite as the southern members of the Eurozone can testify.

At the same time Catalonia is pressing for her first official independence referendum. She would welcome one chance to be independent of Spain, and is jealous of the democratic approach of the UK in granting such an opportunity to Scotland. Catalonia is more likely to vote to be independent should a meaningful vote be held. Spain has had to accept that Catalonia, like Scotland, would be able to apply for EU membership if out of the Spanish Union, if that was their wish. Whilst the government has not ruled out use of the veto over theoretical Scottish EU membership, it seems likely now that Spain wants to avoid having to wield the veto. Indeed, Spain still prefers the idea of not allowing Catalonia an official referendum, in the hope that this will keep her Union together.

Spain is on the undemocratic end of more than one of these issues of identity. The UK once again did the decent thing over Gibraltar, as over Scotland. It asked Gibraltarians to vote on whether Spain should share sovereignty over the territory. By an overwhelming majority Gibraltar said No. Had it gone the other way the UK would have implemented the people's wishes. Spain's pressing to have some say over Gibraltar's new relationship with the EU on UK exit is not going to change Gibraltar and the UK's approach to sovereignty and identity. Spain's argument that geographical contiguity is sufficient cause to give her sway is not borne out by her actions over Ceuta, nor by general international law. France has no right to the Channel Islands because they are closer to France than the UK. Spain holds on to Ceuta though

it is on the other side of the Med.

The EU has to be careful about these tangled webs of identity. Its policy that states created out of parts of member states have to apply anew from outside makes sense. They also need to help uphold international law over borders and self determination of peoples. After all, the EU prides itself on democracy so it should proceed by referendums on these matters to reflect the wishes of the people affected.