

Independence: Your Choice



The Greens | European Free Alliance
in the European Parliament

Would you believe it? There are a lot of scare stories and myths about independence. Throughout this booklet we will highlight some of the weird and wonderful claims made by opponents of independence. And we will give you our side of the argument and let you be the judge.



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Foreword by Ian Hudghton MEP President of the SNP

In the European Parliament, SNP MEPs work most closely with the European Free Alliance group, including members from Wales, Catalonia, and Flanders. EFA parties want their countries to be normal, to have full recognition and the ability to represent their own interests in the European Union.

With independence - the normal status of nations like Scotland - we would have a full and proper say in international bodies like the EU, with the guaranteed rights, to vote and to veto, that only independent member states are entitled to.

The SNP wants Scotland to have what other countries take for granted – the freedom to decide what kind of society we want to live in and how we want to interact with the world around us. As individuals, we value our own independence. We accept that it is entirely natural to make our own decisions, to earn and spend our own money, and to take responsibility for our own lives. Why should we settle for anything less for our country?

We've seen Scotland grow in stature and recognition around Europe in recent years, thanks to the dynamic approach of an SNP Government, making maximum use of the limited powers available with devolution. Yet we still have fewer MEPs than countries of a similar size and no automatic right to send Ministers to EU Council of Ministers meetings, where so many important decisions are made.

The Council of Ministers is a very important part of the complex decision-making framework in the European Union. With crucially important decisions being taken by MEPs and the 27 governments in the EU, which will shape the future of agriculture and fisheries policies, and with massive opportunities for Scottish jobs in the renewable energy sector, it is vital that Scotland's voice is heard.

Most of us want our communities to have more independence. We want to have a greater say in deciding how our public services should be funded and delivered, we want to participate in decisions which affect the environment around us and we want to contribute more to the communities we live in. That is normal - but it won't happen unless we start by taking control of our country and taking decisions for ourselves.



The European Free Alliance group of MEPs, which includes SNP members Ian Hudghton and Alyn Smith, as well as colleagues from Wales, Catalonia, Flanders and Corsica.

If Scotland was responsible for its own income the economy would grow faster each year. Having full responsibility for Scotland's finances will allow us to protect more of the vital public services we care about. The choice for people is to stick with things as they are, with our Westminster-allocated budget reducing year on year, or we can take responsibility and use that responsibility to create a new, dynamic, Scottish economy. Scotland needs the ability to grow our economy rather than just cut spending.

As a nation, we accept the independence of other countries as normal. We do not think it strange that the people of Norway and Denmark run their own affairs. We would not expect the people of Ireland or Sweden to ask another nation to take decisions for them because they didn't feel up to the job. Why should the people of Scotland be any different?

SNP MEPs will continue to stand up strongly for the interests of Scotland, on the very wide range of issues which the European Parliament has joint responsibility for. But to ensure that Scotland has a voice and vote in the all-important Council of Ministers, we must become a normal, independent, nation again.

Ian Hudghton MEP
Scottish National Party President

Introduction

Independence is about making our country a better place to live, work and bring up a family. It is not an end in itself. It is about having the means to build a more successful country.

It is not a new idea. After all, Scotland used to be an independent country. And today, Scotland is still a distinct community. Together we see ourselves as a nation, and independence is the natural state for nations like ours. And as a community, we care most about our own success – we have the biggest stake in solving the problems we face, or making the most of the opportunities available to us.

As a community and as a nation we are the best people for the job of making our nation the sort of place we want it to be. No one else will care as much about Scotland's future as people living here in Scotland and that, ultimately, is why independence is the right choice.

Over the past decade or so there has been some progress towards independence – most notably the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, following the devolution referendum in 1997. We now take many decisions here at home, but only independence will give us full responsibility for our future success.

Since 2007 when the SNP won the Scottish Parliament election and formed the Scottish Government, interest in independence has increased. The SNP Government started a nationwide consultation on independence called the 'National Conversation', because it's not the SNP's or any other political party's decision to make – it's your choice. That's why we want to let you decide Scotland's future in a democratic referendum.

We also want to give you access to the information you will need to make your decision. People understandably have many questions about independence, such as what it will mean for them and how it will work. This booklet attempts to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about independence and examines some of the scare stories and myths about independence. We believe that if more people have access to the facts about independence, then support for independence will grow. All supporters of independence can do is present the arguments in favour, but it's up to you. Independence is your choice.

Julie Hepburn

Author – Independence: Your Choice

Why independence?

Gaining independence is not only an issue of fairness, of Scotland's democratic right to govern itself. It is also the means by which we improve the lives of every single person living in Scotland. Scotland will be a better place to live if we are responsible for making our own decisions. With independence we will have the ability to solve our own problems and to make the most of any opportunities. For too long, Scotland has been failed by the UK. Independence will give us the ability to build a stronger nation and a better future for us all.

What does independence mean?

Independence is simply the power to make our own decisions, in the same way as other countries do. What the SNP and other supporters of independence are seeking is not some unique or special status for Scotland. All we want is for Scotland to have the same opportunities as other countries.

With independence, we can work together to make Scotland a more ambitious and dynamic country. Alongside our already strong public sector, we could create an environment where our existing and new private industries can grow more easily. And instead of young people having to leave Scotland, they would be able to stay and take advantage of the increased opportunities here.

We could address the priorities of people in Scotland, from better state pensions to universal free childcare. Scotland could lead the world in areas like renewable energy and tackling climate change, and play our part in creating a more peaceful and stable world. Independence will allow us to make Scotland a better place to live.

Independence will also improve the relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK. It will create a new partnership of equals – a social union to replace the current political union. As members of the EU there will continue to be open borders, shared rights, free trade and extensive cooperation.

The big difference will be that instead of only deciding some issues here in Scotland, independence will allow us to take decisions on ALL the major issues affecting our nation. That is the reality of independence in this interdependent world.

Why independence?

Completing the powers of the Scottish Parliament

A Scottish Parliament has been a step in the right direction, but devolution is no substitute for full independence. We can't do all we need to do within the limits of the current Scottish Parliament.

Under the system of devolution, the Scottish Parliament is responsible for areas like health, education, justice and local government.

However, so many of the things we want to achieve for Scotland are still decided in London. Unlike devolution, independence would allow us to decide to spend more on higher pensions or better childcare and nothing on nuclear weapons. At the moment those decisions are taken by Ministers in London with different priorities from most people in Scotland.

Independence will also give us responsibility for our relationship with the EU. With independence we can take our place in the community of nations and play a constructive role in the world.

And independence would allow us to do more to create jobs. If Scotland was responsible for its own taxes we could grow our economy a lot faster and protect the vital public services we care about.

At the moment, it is Westminster which decides the overall budget of the Scottish Parliament, and ultimately determines how much money there is to spend on things like schools and hospitals.

At the moment, the Scottish Parliament can only treat the symptoms of any economic and social problems. We need the full powers of independence.

Why independence?

Protection from spending cuts

An academic study in 2010¹ showed that if Scotland was responsible for its own taxes the economy would grow faster each year. This would allow us to reduce by half the scale of spending cuts. It will not solve the problem completely but it will make it more manageable. It will allow us to protect even more of the vital public services we care about.

The choice for people is to stick with things as they are, with our allocated budget reducing year on year, or we can take responsibility and use that responsibility to create a new, dynamic Scottish economy. Scotland needs the ability to grow our economy rather than just cut spending. We need responsibility for both sides of the balance sheet, otherwise we face a dismal decade of cuts.

With independence we can begin to do something positive and effective: we can take the tools we need and we can make Scotland better.

(1) Scotland: A New Fiscal Settlement by Professor Andrew Hughes Hallett, Department of Economics and School of Public Policy University of St Andrews and George Mason University and Professor Drew Scott, School of Law University of Edinburgh, 3 June 2010.

Scotland in Europe and the world

Independence is about building new relationships with the rest of the UK, Europe and the world. Independence will have benefits for us beyond our borders, because the world we live in is defined by how we all cooperate as individuals, nations and organisations. We live in an interdependent world, and independence will allow us to determine how we engage with the rest of the world.

Scotland is already part of the EU and would remain so after independence. Scottish independence would simply create two new member states in place of the UK – Scotland and the remaining parts of the UK.

Will Scotland get a better deal out of the EU with independence?

Yes, because with independence Scotland will become a full member state of the EU. At the moment, the EU treats Scotland as a region of the UK and this gives us less influence than we need to protect our interests. Many devolved areas like agriculture and fishing are subject to EU agreements in which Scotland has no direct say.

As a full member state, Scotland will finally have a voice at the top table in Europe. Scottish Ministers will be able to represent our interests in the Council of Ministers. We could also elect more MEPs to the European Parliament. At present Scotland has six MEPs, but independent countries of a similar size to Scotland have thirteen. Scotland would also take its turn at the six month presidency of the EU.

An independent Scottish Government will be able to prioritise areas that are currently neglected by the UK Government's representatives in the EU, such as the Scottish fishing industry.

Scotland in Europe and the world

Will independence give us more influence in Europe than we get as part of the UK?

In many cases the UK doesn't actually use its influence in Europe to benefit Scotland. We will have a lot more influence if we can speak up for ourselves in the EU, rather than hope someone else will do it for us.

Isn't independence in Europe just exchanging one union for another?

The EU is a forum for independent countries to work together on a number of shared interests, which is completely different from Scotland's position in the UK state. Independence in Europe isn't about giving powers away to Brussels, it is about giving Scotland a say in Brussels and making the EU work better for Scotland. An independent Scotland will be able to help shape the future of the EU and its policies.

How will our relationship with England, Wales and Northern Ireland change?

Ending our political union will not end the social union and friendships that we share with other parts of the UK or our ability to cooperate on any number of shared interests. Independence will improve our relationship with the rest of the UK, because we will finally be engaging as an equal partner.

Would we need passports to visit England, Wales and Northern Ireland?

You wouldn't need a passport to visit the rest of the UK. Customs checks within the EU have largely disappeared, and passport controls have gone on most frontiers. Just as there are no passport checks between the UK and Ireland at the moment, there is no reason why Scotland and England would need to have passport checks between the two countries.

Scotland in Europe and the world

How will Scotland's place in the world change?

With independence Scotland's place in the world will change for the better because we will finally be able to play a full part in the world around us. Scotland will be a member of international bodies like the European Union and United Nations. Many of the challenges facing us today are global problems like climate change, war and poverty and we need to work together with other countries to tackle these, as an equal member of the community of nations.

Devolution doesn't allow Scotland to play its part. The Scottish Government passed world leading climate change legislation in 2009, but we couldn't send an official delegation to the Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen that year where countries from across the world were gathering for important talks. Independence will allow us to play a full role in tackling the world's problems.

With independence we will also have the ability to make our own decisions on defence matters, and Scotland will have the opportunity to support peace-building and peace-keeping internationally.

How would an independent Scotland defend itself?

Scotland already plays a vital role in the UK armed forces, so when Scotland achieves independence our military will be experienced and well equipped. We will inherit our share of UK armed forces assets like military bases and all serving military personnel from Scotland will have the opportunity to transfer to Scotland's armed forces.

As an independent country we won't be paying for Trident, the UK's expensive nuclear weapons system. Nor will we be dragged into costly and misguided wars by another UK Government. We will be able to decide these and other important issues for ourselves.

We can do it!

Some political parties repeatedly claim that somehow we are uniquely incapable of being independent and running our own country. They claim we couldn't afford independence and that Scotland is subsidised by the UK. In the past they said that independence would risk the financial security and prosperity that Scotland enjoys from being part of the UK. Then with this latest recession, opponents of independence started to claim that independence would be too risky now that the UK has run up such huge debt. They claim that Scotland is too rich to choose independence one minute, then too poor for independence the next. So what is the truth?

Can we afford independence?

Of course we can afford to be independent. Scotland already pays its way in the UK. We have as much talent as any nation, and greater resources than most.

Scotland is already more than capable of standing on its own two feet financially. Figures released in 2010 demonstrate that Scotland had a surplus of £1.3 billion in 2008/09, compared to a UK-wide deficit of £48.9 billion². That means in the first year of the global downturn, when the UK as a whole was sliding into debt, Scotland was in the black. We raised more in tax than we spent on public services. Our national accounts are in better shape than those of the UK as a whole. As an independent nation we would be better placed for recovery and growth.

Scotland has massive energy wealth, which if invested properly could make a real difference to our standard of living. With independence we can invest our energy revenues so that the benefits will last forever, just like Norway has done with just its oil and gas.

Scotland has won the natural lottery twice over. Not only do we have oil and gas reserves, we have huge potential in the growing renewable energy sector – as much as a quarter of Europe's offshore tidal and wind resource. This will create jobs and generate wealth for our country well into the future. And as oil and gas declines, renewables will more than fill the gap.

(2) The Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland (GERS) report for 2008/09 was published on 23 June 2010. The GERS figures show a Scottish surplus of £1.3 billion compared to a UK-wide deficit of £48.9 billion.

We can do it!

We also have a highly skilled population, world class universities and a modern, diverse economy which includes sectors like manufacturing, engineering, life sciences, the creative industries, tourism and food and drink (including agriculture, fishing and the lucrative whisky industry). These are solid foundations on which to grow existing and new industries in Scotland, so that we have a stable and prosperous economy.

With independence we could really harness the potential we have in our nation. The real question is can we afford not to be independent?

Is Scotland too small to be independent?

Not at all. Almost half of the independent countries represented in the UN have a population smaller than Scotland's. Being a small country has big benefits in the modern world. Many of the wealthiest countries in the world are the same size or smaller than Scotland.

Could an independent Scotland have bailed out the banks?

If an independent Scotland had faced something like the banking crisis, we would have been able to access an oil fund like that independent Norway established when it first discovered oil.

In 2010 Norway's fund is worth nearly £300billion – much more than the total amount that the UK Government spent on bailing out the banks. Of course Scotland would have the resources to weather these storms.

Looking to the future, with independence we will have the ability to better regulate the banking sector. We've seen what didn't work as part of the UK and an independent Scotland would not make the same mistakes.

How will it impact upon our lives?

In many ways life in an independent Scotland will be very similar to life today, especially in the short term. The biggest benefits will come after a few years as we use the new responsibilities of independence to grow our economy, create jobs and invest in our public services.

I'm not originally from Scotland – will I be able to stay in an independent Scotland?

Yes. The automatic right of citizenship will be extended to everyone living in Scotland. It will also be offered to anyone born in Scotland or with a parent born here. Others will be free to apply.

The SNP has an inclusive approach to citizenship. In the past too many people have left Scotland, and we welcome the contribution of people who choose to make Scotland their home.

As an EU member state, our borders would remain open to EU nationals and we would remain free to move throughout Europe just as today.

Will my taxes go up?

Scotland more than pays its way in the UK, so there is no reason that taxes should be higher in an independent Scotland than they are in the UK.

Instead of leaving it to a government in London to set our tax rates, it will be up to the government here in Scotland to decide levels of taxation. And it will be people in Scotland who decide who forms that government at each election. So the range and level of taxation will be decided by people in Scotland.

What will happen to my state benefits?

Existing benefits would continue to be paid and it would be for future Scottish Governments to propose any improvements. Scotland could, for instance, simplify and improve our benefits system to address problems like the benefits trap.

How will it impact upon our lives?

What will happen to my pension?

State pensions will be protected. We have all paid into the National Insurance Fund and it is one of the UK's assets, so Scotland will be entitled to its share upon independence. The fund has a healthy surplus. An independent Scottish Government will finally have the ability to pay a better state pension and tackle the disgraceful levels of pensioner poverty in Scotland.

Public sector and military pensions will also be protected after independence.

What will happen to my mortgage and bank account?

Your mortgage is with a bank or building society, not with the government. If you already have a mortgage in place then you have an agreement which will continue. Independence will not change that. And if you have a bank account in England, for example, there will be nothing to stop you accessing your money and retaining your account after independence. It is already possible to have bank accounts in other countries.

How will independence help me?

The SNP is determined to build a more successful Scotland now and with independence. Independence will allow us to build a Scotland that reflects your priorities.

Other countries use their independence in different ways to improve the lives of their citizens. Sweden has its enhanced parental rights, including generous maternity and paternity leave; Norway its £300 billion oil fund; Ireland its low corporation tax that has attracted numerous high value headquarters and Denmark has been able to lead the world in onshore wind technology.

With independence, you will decide what kind of country Scotland can be.

Our economy and public services

Independence will allow us to build a stronger economy, so that we have the resources to create a fairer nation and protect and expand public services. Our public services are the foundation of our society. The education of our children, the care of our elderly citizens, our NHS – they are all part of the fabric of our lives.

How will independence affect the NHS, schools and other public services?

Responsibility for these areas has already been transferred to Scotland with devolution. The main difference would be that with independence, we will have the ability to better protect our public services in this era of spending cuts. With independence we will be able to choose to spend money differently. By not spending billions on nuclear weapons we will have more to spend on the things that really matter, like schools and the NHS. And with independence we will have the tools we need to grow the economy faster and generate more money to support our public services.

Will there be fewer jobs with independence?

Opponents of independence claim that it would undermine our economy and put jobs at risk, but the latest recession demonstrates that being part of the UK is the real danger for Scottish jobs. It is very likely that there will be more jobs with independence, because we will finally have the ability to grow our economy. We will be able to generate more job opportunities across Scotland – in the private and public sectors.

What will happen to public sector jobs?

Jobs in government departments like Social Security and the Treasury are mostly based in London. We already pay our share to the UK Government to run these departments. With independence, we can bring our share of these jobs to Scotland and create more opportunities

Our economy and public services

What will happen to jobs that depend on trade with England?

You don't need to share a government with a country to trade with it. After all, Scotland and the UK already trade with many other countries. England will remain a hugely important export market for Scotland and a vital trading partner. Those links can be developed and expanded with independence, to create more jobs.

As a member of the European Union we will also have access to a market of 500 million people – and that means plenty of opportunities for Scotland to trade and do business.

Will large companies want to locate in an independent Scotland?

During the 1997 referendum there were many scare stories about large companies leaving Scotland after devolution. They were just that – scare stories. Now some people are using the same scare stories about independence.

In fact, independence will allow us to make Scotland a more attractive place to do business. With the full set of economic responsibilities we can do more to attract inward investment, and more importantly, develop home-grown businesses.

How will we pay for independence when the oil and gas runs out?

Scotland is not dependent on oil and gas, but it is a huge added bonus. What we should be doing is investing the oil and gas revenues of today in a fund, so that we have a lasting legacy for people in Scotland. Independence will allow Scotland to follow Norway's example. Their oil fund is now worth nearly £300 billion. And we have renewables too, which means we can keep adding to our energy fund even when the oil and gas has run out.

Our economy and public services

How much longer will our oil and gas last?

For over thirty years we have had North Sea oil, and for over thirty years opponents of independence have been saying it's about to run out. There is still plenty of oil and gas under the North Sea, and there are new discoveries all the time. The oil industry says there is another thirty years of oil and gas under the North Sea.

And of course even as oil and gas declines, offshore renewables will increase, giving Scotland an ongoing energy windfall. With independence this windfall will be invested for the benefit of people in Scotland.

How will it work?

Independence for Scotland will mean a simple transfer of responsibilities from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament. Instead of the UK Government making certain decisions on our behalf, these decisions will be taken by a Scottish Government elected by people in Scotland. Independence will give us the opportunity to govern better and do many things differently, but we will also experience a great deal of continuity. If something works well at the moment, there will be no need to change it just because we are independent. Independence is about allowing us to do things differently if we want to.

What new responsibilities would an independent Scotland have?

The following would be the main functions which would transfer from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament:

Treasury, Social Security and Pensions, Defence, EU and Foreign Affairs, Energy, Transport Regulation, Broadcasting, Employment, and Trade and Industry.

How will an independent Scotland be governed?

The institutions we all recognise, such as our local councils, would also exist in an independent Scotland. The Scottish Parliament would continue in its current form and there would be a Scottish Government much as today, only with additional responsibilities. We would also have a written constitution, unlike the UK, to guarantee important rights for people in Scotland. It will be a transparent contract between the people of Scotland and our government.

With independence all decisions about how Scotland is governed will rest with people in Scotland. You will determine the form of government.

How will it work?

Will an independent Scotland be run by the SNP?

Following independence, elections will be held in the same way as they are now for the Scottish Parliament. That means you will decide who runs Scotland. It might be the SNP or it might be another party.

Will the tax system change?

With independence the Scottish Parliament will have responsibility for raising and spending all taxes in Scotland. Existing tax rates will remain in force unless and until they are changed by a future Scottish Government, just as they can be changed by the UK Government at the moment.

Will the Queen still be head of state?

There is no reason that we couldn't share a monarch with the rest of the UK if that is what people in Scotland want after independence. After all, the Queen is head of state in Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Ultimately it is for people in Scotland to decide.

What will happen to the BBC?

The existing assets, staff and expertise of BBC Scotland would be used as the basis of a Scottish national broadcaster. An independent Scotland will still be able to enjoy programmes made by the BBC and other UK broadcasters, along with those of other broadcasters across the world, by entering into cooperation with them and buying in programmes, just as UK broadcasters do at the moment with many quality programmes from America and elsewhere.

Gaining independence

Independence will only happen when people in Scotland vote for it. That is why independence is your choice.

When will people in Scotland get an opportunity to vote for independence?

In 2007, the SNP Government started a National Conversation on independence, asking people for their views on independence and the process of holding a referendum to determine Scotland's future.

Following the National Conversation the Scottish Government published its proposals for a referendum. However, the other parties in the Scottish Parliament don't want a referendum for Scotland.

We think people in Scotland should decide our nation's future in a democratic referendum, but opponents of independence don't want to give you that opportunity.

What happens if people in Scotland vote 'yes' to independence in a referendum?

There would be negotiations between the Scottish and UK Governments. Negotiations will entitle Scotland to a share of the UK's assets. It would be for the Scottish and UK Parliaments to act on the expressed will of the Scottish people.

While negotiations are underway, the Scottish Parliament and Government will continue to govern in devolved matters. Following the necessary transfers of responsibility from Westminster, Scotland would become an independent nation and we could then begin the job of delivering the better country we all know Scotland can be.

Independence is enjoyed by nations around the world. That same independence can be enjoyed by Scotland too, with the benefits felt by each and every one of us.

What do you think?

We asked people to tell us why they support independence, and here are some of their reasons:

- Higher levels of economic growth
- Eradicating child poverty
- Delivering universal free childcare
- Eradicating pensioner poverty
- Increasing life expectancy
- Delivering a Scottish high-speed rail network
- Becoming Europe's green energy powerhouse
- Growing Scotland's engineering and manufacturing industries
- Delivering a carbon neutral Scotland
- Making Scotland an international centre for science and innovation
- Contributing to international peace-keeping and peace-building

What do you think? What are your goals and ambitions for Scotland? How do you want Scotland to be viewed in the world? Are you happy that Scotland is the home of the UK's nuclear weapons arsenal? Scotland as an independent country would be able to make different choices about our place in the world and our economic development at home. Together we can make Scotland a better place by choosing independence.

More information

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