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Alex Salmond commits Scotland to Europe

By Elizabeth Rigby in London and Mure Dickie in Edinburgh



Alex Salmond will seek to place his nation “at the heart of the European project” on Monday in a speech aimed at countering claims that independence would threaten Scotland’s membership of the EU.

Scotland’s first minister, will tell [the College of Europe in Bruges](#): “Our huge energy reserves, our economic and financial contribution, our fishing grounds, our academic, cultural and social links, and our commitment to the founding values of the European ideal place us at the very heart of the EU.”

UK pro-union parties have raised doubts about the terms on which an independent Scotland could secure EU membership, seizing on comments from José Manuel Barroso, European Commission president, who said accession would be “difficult, if not impossible”.

The Scottish government has been forced to concede membership would not be automatic, but maintains it could be achieved by its proposed independence day of March 24, 2016.

Seeking to keep the pressure on Mr Salmond, William Hague, UK foreign secretary, highlighted questions about the timing of EU membership and its impact on pension funding. An independent Scotland would lose the UK’s EU budget rebate, he said.

The UK government is also preparing to mount its biggest assault on the Scottish government’s fiscal case for independence. The Treasury plans to publish a fiscal analysis to “start busting the myths around Scottish independence”.

The high risk move comes as polls suggest nationalist support is growing. It risks entrenching perceptions the referendum “No” campaign is too negative.

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