

Hague urges Salmond to produce 'plan B' for rapid EU membership

Foreign secretary asks whether EU member states support Scotland's bid to join EU prior to first minister's Bruges speech

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Hague warned that Salmond's belief that EU membership could be agreed in 18 months was 'far from certain'. Photograph: ITAR-TASS/Barcroft Media

[William Hague](#) has pressed [Alex Salmond](#) to confirm whether his bid to quickly join the EU by "common accord" is supported by any EU member state.

The foreign secretary and Salmond exchanged letters on Sunday as the first minister left for Belgium where he hopes to bolster his case to negotiate an independent [Scotland](#)'s continued membership of the EU in the event of a yes vote.

In advance of Salmond's speech to the College of Europe in Bruges, Hague asked whether the first minister had formal agreement from any of the EU's 28 member states for his "unprecedented" plan to join the EU under Article 28, which allows treaty changes to take place by common accord in rare but non-controversial circumstances.

Hague said many EU leaders and institutions, including the outgoing commission president, Jose Manuel Barroso, had insisted Scotland's application could only be agreed under Article 29, the main mechanism for joining the EU.

The foreign secretary warned that Salmond's belief that EU membership could be agreed in 18 months was "far from certain" and asked for the first minister's "plan B" – his alternative proposals in case Scotland failed to win a deal with all 28 member states, some of which will need referendums to agree, before his planned independence day in March 2016. "Scotland's negotiations to join the EU are likely to be complex and long and the outcome would certainly prove less advantageous than the status quo," Hague said.

"People in Scotland deserve to have the available facts ahead of making one of the most important political decisions in the history of our union."

Hague said Scotland would lose the UK's lucrative rebate, worth around £3bn a year to the UK, and end up paying far more per head than at present to the EU, effectively contributing to the UK's rebate after independence. It would also get £188m (€228m) less from EU structural funds by 2020.

He asked Salmond to explain how Scotland would persuade other EU members to agree not to make Scotland join the euro or the Schengen treaty on open borders – treaty requirements every recent new member has had to accept. "The co-operation pointed to by your government in its [independence] white paper as the basis of the way forward is no substitute for the [UK]," Hague said. "The people of Scotland would be swapping the guaranteed negotiating power of one of the EU's most powerful states for the hope of goodwill from 28 others – and with a much higher price tag – a poor substitute indeed."

Salmond accused Hague of hypocrisy: the Tory stance on a European membership referendum and its plummeting position in opinion polls for next month's European elections, put the foreign secretary in a weak position to lecture Scotland, he said.

Pro-independence campaigners believe their cause could be boosted if the anti-EU party Ukip dominates the European elections in English seats because it would highlight a right-ward drift in English politics. Ukip is not expected to win any of Scotland's six EU seats.

Salmond will tell the college that Scotland "shares and promotes the values of solidarity, freedom and democracy that are at the heart of the European project."

He said his speech, which comes on the 25th anniversary of Margaret Thatcher's speech to the College of Europe in Bruges where she resisted greater EU integration, was to "articulate the constructive role an independent Scotland could play in the Europe Union. "This contrasts of course with the renegotiation and in-out referendum favoured by your party, leading to the inevitable conclusion that the real threat to Scotland's position comes from the anti-European streak which now dominates your approach to politics."

Salmond said Scotland's "vast natural resources and human talent make it one of the lynchpins of the [European Union](#)", thanks to its oil and renewable energy, universities and fisheries. He claimed EU fishing policy would "unravel" if Scotland was barred from membership.