



Scots First Minister Alex Salmond, SNP MEP Candidate Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh and SNP President Ian Hudghton (Thierry Monasse)

Senior EEAS diplomat speaks out for the EU and Scotland, others to follow

If Scotland says Yes, so should Barroso and Europe

by Bernard Savage - 29.04.2014 - 16:49

New Europe Editorial Comment: We believe in democracy and that the Scottish people have the right to decide for themselves if they wish to remain in Britain or become independent. This is for them, not Brussels to choose. This is a clear and simple democratic principle that can be understood by one and all.

Or, not quite all. Our Commission President, Jose Manuel Barroso came to a different conclusion when he went on the BBC and announced, without any warning at all that Scotland would find it "impossible" to become a member of the EU.

In this intervention, he made another of his huge blunders. Thankfully he is now completely finished and the next person to sit in his chair will behave with greater intelligence.

Barroso's 'no' to Scotland only succeeded in angering those who saw the advantages of Europe and wanted to remain in this union, even in its present low state.

As the article shows, serious and committed Europeans are getting organised and are speaking out. This is a sign of their sincerity and commitment to Europe as much as their own land. It's also a clear sign of the damage Barroso II has done to Europe and those who believe in it.

About The Author: Bernard Savage is a high-ranking diplomat in the EU's flagship European External Action Service, directing relations between the EU and North Africa. Glaswegian Savage has decided to

speak out against comments by European Commission head Jose Manuel Barroso as a current, active and senior EU official.

Presently based in Brussels after 23 years working for the EU that included negotiating enlargement with powerhouse Poland and serving as ambassador in Sri Lanka, Savage is currently establishing a formal 'EU for Yes' grouping right in the heart of the organisation's Brussels headquarters alongside fellow officials also spurred to action by the negative interventions of Barroso and others.

The CBI's experience this past week on Scottish independence should serve as a timely warning to European Union leaders.

With polls showing that Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne's 'Sermon on the Pound' was dismissed by referendum voters as empty bluff, the U-turn by the British business lobby after declaring its active support for the 'No' campaign ought to serve as a real wake-up call in Brussels.

Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond traveled to EU headquarters on Monday for the first time since the terms for September's referendum were legitimised with UK Prime Minister David Cameron's signature.

Mr Salmond delivered a keynote speech in Bruges, setting out Scotland's place in Europe where famously Margaret Thatcher made a notorious speech back in pre-devolutionary times.

If the EU tries to block Scotland, quite simply there is no EU left, he said, sending a pointed message to European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, who infamously asserted that Scotland would find it practically "impossible" to secure independent membership of the EU following a Yes vote by millions of EU citizens, resident at the time of the referendum.

Mr Barroso, whose remarks to the BBC were seemingly based on no sound legal advice and appear contrary to democratic principles and political logic, avoided meeting with Mr Salmond, Environment Minister Janez Potocnik instead hosting the Scottish leader.

The Bruges date should spur the EU into rapid engagement with the realities of the negotiations it faces with poll after poll showing voters across Scotland ready to back independence.

Eminent figures like David Edwards and Graham Avery have already repeatedly deconstructed the assertion that Scotland would be expelled from the club of EU member states on independence.

They are not alone, and today, even as I pursue my present responsibilities covering diplomatic relations with North Africa for the European External Action Service, I have decided it is time to speak out from within.

I am not alone, with fellow EU and related agency officials also coming forward of their own volition to speak up for Scotland in Brussels.

Artists, teenagers, academics, women and business leaders now shunning the CBI have all formed their own networks arguing for Yes on September 18, and so shall we.

I participated in the negotiations for the accession of 10 incoming EU states which resulted in the first wave of enlargement 10 years ago and have worked for the EU in places such as Mauritania, Lesotho, Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka.

I have worked for the EU for nearly 23 years, which amounts to nearly half of its existence and therefore have some experience of the benefits to be had via a sovereign, democratic and peaceful renewal of politics spreading far beyond Scotland.

It is time to deal openly, sensibly and pragmatically with the issues Scotland's Yes vote would raise.

The EU is a complex web of relations that cannot simply be undone at a stroke - the EU took six years to negotiate the exit of Greenland at their request, whereas Scotland, a vibrant, wealthy future net-contributor, wishes to stay and participate as a constructive partner in the European project.

Scotland's traders and consumers cannot simply be expelled from the Single Market, or the Customs Union, something that would certainly raise issues with the World Trade Organisation.

Our students cannot be told to hang up their books.

Europe's engines cannot spur growth without our energy.

Spain will not vote to remove our fishing grounds from the EU's biggest and best fleet.

There will not be border posts at Carlisle.

The pound will be traded across the border as easily as the euro taking travellers and businesses through France and Germany.

Family members across the EU - not just in Gartcosh or Grimsby - will maintain the easy social union that today's EU freedom of movement and low-cost, high-speed travel have made routine.

Mr Salmond is winning the argument in an initially hesitant Scotland and he will surely persuade Europe of the logic and benefits of the full participation in the EU of one of the continent's oldest nations.

The European Parliament elections of May 22 already look like confirming the momentum that has led dispassionate international intellectuals like Noam Chomsky to declare Scotland in the vanguard of a necessary process of manageable, democratic renewal fit for 21st Century purpose.

When the full negotiations get underway involving Edinburgh, London and Brussels, this will mostly be about practical institutional arrangements not dramatic unrealistic scenarios.

Who knows, perhaps even the CBI might offer a constructive voice by then...