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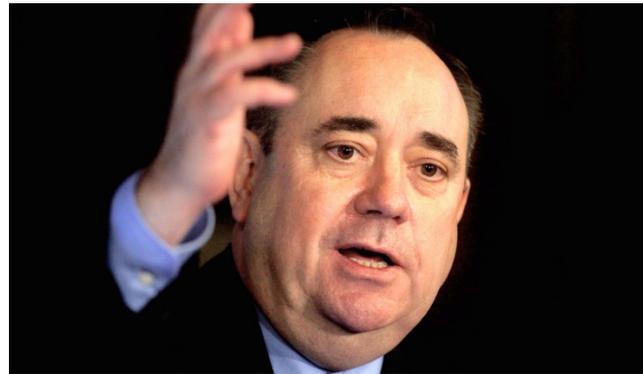
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News

28 April, 14:40

"Scotland is one of the lynchpins of Europe" - Salmond



Rex Features



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Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond, says Scotland remains "at the heart of the European project". The leader of the SNP discussed, in Bruges on Monday, the economic and political value of European integration if Scots decide to go it alone at the referendum on September 14. VoR's Brendan Cole spoke to Panos Koutrakos, professor of European Law at City University.

In February, the European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said it would be "extremely difficult, if not impossible" for Scotland to join - and it would need the approval of all EU member states.

The College of Europe - where Salmond is speaking in Bruges, Belgium on Monday - said "A key element of the proposals put forward by the Scottish Government is that Scotland will remain in the EU and become the 29th Member State. The College of Europe has invited the First Minister of Scotland to discuss Scotland's contribution to the EU and specifically his vision of Europe and the role that Scotland will play in the EU."

In a copy of his speech released to the media ahead of his Bruges speech, Salmond said: "Scotland's vast natural resources and human talent make it one of the lynchpins of the European Union.

"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.

"One of the great issues facing Europe is the question of energy security.

"In this area Scotland is blessed. We have a key role to play in providing energy security for Europe, and in developing the low carbon technologies the world will need for the future.

"Scotland has fully 25 percent of Europe's offshore wind and tidal potential. We have 10 per cent of the EU's wave potential. We have 60 per cent of the EU's oil reserves. But our importance to the European Union stretches further.

"As one of the wealthiest countries, Scotland is a net financial contributor to the EU and will remain so as an independent member.

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"We have more top universities, per head, than any other member of the EU and our academics collaborate with partners across Europe.

"We have one of the largest national shares of Europe's total fishing grounds and 12 national fleets fish in our waters. The EU's fisheries policy would unravel without Scotland.

"Earlier this year the Viviane Reding, vice-president of the European Commission, described two great Scottish judges, Lord Mackenzie-Stuart, and Sir David Edward, as true architects of our Union.

"There are now 160,000 people from other EU states who have chosen to live and work in Scotland.

"Perhaps more than any of this, Scotland shares and promotes the values of solidarity, freedom and democracy that are the heart of the European project."

Salmond played down the likelihood of an independent Scotland being kicked out of the EU, saying that its ongoing membership in the bloc would offer a "no detriment" guarantee to EU commercial interests - including fishing fleets operating in Scottish waters.

"We propose a practical, common sense approach to membership, which means that there is no detriment - none whatsoever - to any other member of the European Union as a result of Scotland's continuing membership," he said.

The three main parties in the British parliament - Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats and the opposition Labour party - are all opposed to Scottish independence.

"Part-and-parcel of Scotland's life"

Panos Koutrakos told VoR: "The striking thing about all this is that independence from Brussels is not really an issue for [the Scottish National Party's] campaign. They do see themselves at the very heart of Europe. The interesting thing is that while there is a referendum about independence from London, in terms of Brussels it appears to be accepted by everybody - even the most nationalist there - that EU membership is part-and-parcel of Scotland's life as an independent state.

"The European institutions are very clear that, if Scotland were to become independent, it would have to apply for membership. There is a procedure set out in the treaty of the EU, article 49. And the interesting thing is that the white paper published by the campaigners for independence is quite vague about this. Their argument of course is that they should not apply for accession. What they [want] is that a treaty revision should take place, which would accommodate being a state within the EU. In legal terms there is a very considerable difference between these two methods.

"Quite apart from the legal problems which the solution advocated by Mr Salmond's party, the political difficulties are that whatever happens it would have to be agreed by each and every [EU] state and once it has been agreed it would have to be ratified by each and every member state."

(VoR)

Brendan Cole

Scotland, Scottish referendum, Alex Salmond, Scottish National Party, Scottish independence, SNP, News

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