

## **Call for papers**

### **The issues raised by the Scottish referendum and its impact on the future of the United Kingdom and Europe**

#### **International Symposium**

**25-26 September 2015**

**CRINI – University of Nantes**

On 18 September 2014, precisely seventeen years after agreeing by a very considerable majority (74.3%) to the British Government's proposal to set up in Edinburgh a Parliament with legislative powers in areas such as education and health care, Scottish voters said 'No' by a majority of 55,3% to the question posed by the Scottish Government, namely "Should Scotland be an independent country?"

Will or can this result put an end once and for all to the debate on Scottish Independence which has become a banner call for the SNP (Scottish National Party), in power in Edinburgh since Spring 2007? Does the victory for the 'No' camp mean that the Scots have now spoken definitively for Scotland remaining inside the United Kingdom, as was claimed by the leaders of the Labour Party, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, who campaigned together to preserve the Union?

Nothing is less certain, as is shown by the number of new members signed up by the three Scottish parties in favour of independence, in the days following the referendum.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties not only promised to introduce legislation at Westminster to increase the powers of the Edinburgh Parliament if the Scots decided to remain inside the Union, but they have even committed themselves to a precise timetable, with the presentation of their proposals planned for January 2015.

In these circumstances, if there is no doubt about the 'No' to independence vote expressed on 18 September by the Scots, the referendum result can also be interpreted as consent given to the promises to increase the powers of the Scottish Parliament, made by those who defended the Union.

Besides, the British Prime Minister has himself recognised in his official statement on the referendum result, made on 19 September: «Scotland voted for a stronger Scottish Parliament backed by the strength and security of the United Kingdom ». Consequently David Cameron announced straightaway the setting up of an independent commission to make proposals designed to implement the commitments made to the Scottish voters during the campaign. At

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<sup>1</sup> In the space of a fortnight the SNP and the Scottish Greens saw their parties treble in size, reaching 75,000 members for the former and 8,000 members for the latter. The Scottish Socialist Party also registered, though to a lesser degree, an increase in its membership.

the same time, however, concerned about, among other things, the need to satisfy the urgent demands expressed by English Conservative MP's to get the Government to limit voting rights only to MP's for English constituencies for bills applicable only to England ('English votes for English laws'), the Prime Minister added: « Just as the people of Scotland will have more power over their affairs, so it follows that the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland must have a bigger say over theirs ».

It appears that the forthcoming proposals on the extension of powers for the Scottish Parliament are now to be considered as part of a more ambitious plan concerning the governance of the four nations which make up the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the Prime Minister intends to introduce these reform plans at the same time in all parts of the country. Nevertheless, as much on the question of English votes for English laws as on the timetable for reforms, neither the Labour Party nor the Liberal Democrats are in agreement with what is proposed by the Conservatives.

Since the implementation of devolution plans for Scotland and Wales at the end of the 1990's, whichever the party in power in London, the question of the extension of powers transferred to the Welsh Assembly or the Scottish Parliament has regularly come to the fore in the political debate in Britain, in the first case, at the beginning of the 2000's and in the second, with the coming to power of the SNP in 2007. In all, four independent commissions, three in Wales (Richard, Holtham and Silk) and one in Scotland (Calman), were set up between 2002 and 2011, two laws were passed, giving more powers to the Welsh Assembly (Government of Wales Act 2006) and to the Scottish Parliament (Scotland Act 2012), and a bill (Wales Bill) is in the process of being examined in Westminster.

Is the political debate going to be dominated in the second half of the 2010's by the reform of the British constitution and the governance of the four nations of the United Kingdom? Looking forward to the Spring 2015 UK General Election and in the context of the surge in support for the anti-European populist party, UKip, another issue will surely take centre stage in the public debate in Britain – the United Kingdom's place in the European Union. Whatever the result of the General Election, whether British voters are to be consulted or not on the future of the UK within the EU, the question is bound to raise serious political frictions between the nations considered to be 'europhile' (Scotland and Wales) and England, considered to be more ambiguous about its European identity.

Furthermore, the Scottish referendum has been followed with great attention throughout the European Union, where there is a real fear of demands for popular consultations of a similar type spreading to other regions and nations. As a result, European leaders expressed their relief the day after the referendum, at the outcome of a vote which could eventually be the first signs of a future reconfiguration of the European Union. In this connection, the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schultz, was not only pleased for the United Kingdom and Europe with the 'No' to independence Scottish vote, but he also underlined the exemplary nature the Scottish experience could, in his opinion, provide for the European Union. "If in Scotland it is possible to achieve a reasonable level of self-determination in the fields of culture and the economy [...] while remaining part of the United Kingdom, then that could

serve as a model satisfactory to other regions ». <sup>2</sup> Could the result of the Scottish referendum incite other regions or nations in Europe, such as Catalonia, the Basque Country or Flanders, to be satisfied with a limited degree of autonomy within existing states?

Possible topics may include:

- Intergovernmental relations within the United Kingdom: representativity and political legitimacy of the UK institutional framework, new sharing of powers between the different levels of governance;
- 15 years of asymmetric devolution: the impact of the example of Scotland on the rest of the United Kingdom – the emergence of the “English question”; will Wales follow this example?
- National identities in question: British identity; Scottish, Welsh and English identities;
- Scottish, Welsh and English nationalism in the face of the European Union;
- The question of British territorial integrity as seen from a European perspective;
- The impact of the Scottish vote on nationalist movements in the European Union;

Papers may be presented in English or in French.

Please send a 500 word abstract of your proposal to Annie Thiec (annie.thiec@univ-nantes.fr) or Paul Lees (paul.lees@univ-nantes.fr) **by 28 February 2015**.

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<sup>2</sup> *Le Point*, 19 September 2014.