



ALASTAIR STEWART

Post-independence UK would hold all cards over Scotland

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Scottish nationalists hail Catalonia as a comrade-in-arms trying to throw off the shackles of a unitary state. But what comes next? Independence is always the bridesmaid, never the bride.

'North' Macedonia is the ugly reality of what awaits. It has been blocked from Nato and cut off from EU membership by its larger neighbours since having to strike out on its own after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991.

My Macedonian father-in-law and grandfather-in-law have explained at length the reality of economic and political pressures from next-door countries who deny their existence. Greek governments profoundly contest the use of 'Macedonia' (also the name of a Greek region). Bulgaria does not recognize the Macedonian language, which it views as a dialect of Bulgarian.

Historian Sir Tom Devine observed England is an elephant - it sneezes and Scotland jumps. The idea that a 313-year old union would dissolve in good faith with no regional grievances or realpolitik is nonsense.

Macedonian prime minister Zoran Zaev's administration has made kowtowing the new norm. The horridly ironic Friendship Treaty was signed with Bulgaria in 2017. Yet Bulgaria continues to veto Macedonia's accession to the EU, ridicules the Macedonian language and refutes the presence of a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria.

The SNP promise that an independent Scotland would be "a good global citizen". It's impossible to make goodwill a foreign policy. England/rUK would have a moral duty to get the most advantageous deal for itself. Westminster will hold the cards on currency, the military, infrastructure, trade and the national debt.

The 2019 Prespa Agreement assuaged Greece enough to lift its veto of Macedonia's Nato and EU membership. But the cost — mandated revisions to Macedonian schoolbooks and Greek-Macedonian commissions to determine historical 'facts' — was too high. Promoting contentious history (whatever that means) is now an offence.

Adopting the prefix of 'North' was the humiliating dealbreaker (you might ask where 'South Macedonia' is). Suzerainty is the reality for 2 million people surrounded by economically stronger and massively more populous neighbours.

If Brexit is any indication, Downing Street will wax lyrical about a smooth transition but fire out ultimatums to a 'free' Scotland at every turn. The SNP are positively naive to presume the battle is over with a simple 'yes' vote.

"Macedonia for the Macedonians" proclaimed Gladstone. In a hostile world, the realities for small countries like Macedonia mean ghastly compromises. Or worse - selling your national identity in the name of that old cliché, 'peace.'

Churchill said: "The Balkans produces more history than it can consume." Scots would do well to look at Macedonia and think hard. Our future is in their past for all to see.

Alastair Stewart is a public affairs consultant and columnist

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