

Scottish Independence Referendum – Scotland – a presence among equals



by **Alyn Smith SNP MEP**

Recently people took to social media in large numbers to express why they are voting for Independence on 18 September in the #YesBecause campaign. There was a great response to the campaign with people from all over Scotland and all ages and backgrounds expressing the variety of reasons behind wanting Scotland to become independent be it for reasons of social justice, to make sure we get rid of nuclear bombs from our soil or to make us more prosperous amongst many other good arguments for giving our country the normal powers of independence.

For me one of the best reasons for independence is to end the isolationism of the Union. It has always been a frustration of mine that Scotland needs to deal with much of the rest of the World through the 'middle man' of London. This ranges from Westminster's priorities (that do not always match our own) when taking decisions that affect us all in Brussels to starting immoral and illegal wars. I want to see Scotland take its place as a full member of the international community rather than forced to be a by-stander when decisions that impact on us are taken. In other words I want Scotland to be normal just like the 200 other independent countries around the world.

Just think of the benefits if Edinburgh was to become a capital city in its own right. We would see an immediate benefit in terms of the capital's economy through increased investment as nations started increasing their presence in

Scotland rather than winding it down. In fact just a couple of years ago our close neighbour Norway even closed its consulate in Edinburgh, more could follow with a 'No' vote. The opening of a network of embassies and offices would offer huge investment and jobs opportunities for Scotland.

Capitals of similar sized countries to Scotland such as Dublin, Copenhagen and Oslo bring in the equivalent of hundreds of millions of pounds worth of investment not to mention thousands of jobs for locally employed staff. So an international network of embassies would deliver a diplomacy bonus. A recent study for Ernst and Young showed that international and diplomatic activity in Vienna (the capital of Austria, similar in size to Scotland) boosted the economy of the country by a billion euros a year and accounted for 10,000 jobs. All of these are the economic benefits not to mention the benefits of better transport links, cultural benefits and simply the benefit of international recognition.

Scotland is similar in size and outlook to many of our neighbours and other countries. In fact in population terms Scotland could be described as a Goldilocks country, not too big and not too small just about right. Scotland would be a medium sized country in the European and broader international context. If you look at a list of all the countries in the world Scotland sits about bang in the middle just above Norway and just below Singapore. That is not a bad place to be. So not only do we seek the normal powers of Independence but we fit the very definition of a normal Independent country in terms of our size as well.

As an independent country we can carve out our own niche globally. If Scotland votes for Independence on 18 September, we do so better placed than any other that has become independent before in terms of Government preparation, a healthy debate before and financially. We are also better placed in terms of our international standing with our partners in the Commonwealth, as an integral part of the

European Union and a supportive diaspora spread across the World.

Scotland can also be a hub for peace-building in the world given our relatively neutral status and one that comes with a minimum of historic baggage (rightly or wrongly). This is an area that Norway and Denmark have successfully developed and many believe that it is a niche that Scotland can and should be filling.

I want to see Scotland standing tall in the world as a force for good as well as a constructive partner in the international community. This is more important than ever given the increasingly isolationist posturing of the Westminster political parties and the dangers posed by the rise of UKIP and senior Conservatives openly arguing for a withdrawal from the European Union. A Scotland that is no better or worse than any other country, but one that is an equal.

Alyn Smith MEP is Scotland's only full representative on the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee