

First Minister sets out referendum process ahead of Brexit trigger



The First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced today at Bute House that the Scottish Government is determined that Scotland will have the choice between what she called a 'hard Brexit' and independence.

What happens now is that Holyrood will ask for approval to discuss with Westminster the terms of a Section 30 order which would enable a second independence referendum. Such a referendum will not take place for up to two years from now.

The First Minister told assembled journalists that the UK Government had not moved even an inch in pursuit of compromise, notwithstanding that Scotland had voted 62% to 38% to remain in Europe.

It is clear that Ms Sturgeon believes there must be clarity on Brexit and its implications for Scotland before any second referendum and that explains the proposed timing.

The First Minister said: "Scotland stands at a hugely important crossroads. On the eve of Article 50 being triggered, not only is there no UK wide agreement on the way ahead – the UK Government has not moved even an inch in pursuit of compromise and agreement.

"All of our efforts at compromise have been met with a brick wall of intransigence.

"UK membership of the single market was ruled out with no

prior consultation with the Scottish Government or with the other devolved administrations, leaving us facing not just Brexit, but a hard Brexit.

“And far from any prospect of significant new powers for the Scottish Parliament, the UK Government is becoming ever more assertive in its intention to muscle in on the powers we already have. The language of partnership has gone, completely.

“I will continue to stand up for Scotland’s interests during the process of Brexit negotiations. But I will take the steps necessary now to make sure that Scotland will have a choice at the end of this process – a choice of whether to follow the UK to a hard Brexit, or to become an independent country able to secure a real partnership of equals with the rest of the UK and our own relationship with Europe.”

The First Minister added: “The Scottish Government’s mandate for offering this choice is beyond doubt. So next week I will seek the approval of the Scottish Parliament to open discussions with the UK Government on the details of a Section 30 order – the procedure that will enable the Scottish Parliament to legislate for an independence referendum.

“The UK Government was clear in 2014 that an independence referendum should be, in their words, ‘made in Scotland, by the people of Scotland’ – that is a principle that should be respected today. The detailed arrangements for a referendum – including its timing – should be for the Scottish Parliament to decide.

“It is important that Scotland is able to exercise the right to choose our own future at a time when the options are clearer than they are now, but before it is too late to decide on our own path. By the time a choice comes to be made, there must be greater clarity about Brexit and its implications for us.

“It is just as important that there is clarity about the implications of independence. And there will be.

“We will be frank about the challenges we face and clear about the opportunities independence will give us to secure our relationship with Europe, build a stronger and more sustainable economy and create a fairer society.

“If I ruled out a referendum, I would be deciding – completely unilaterally – that Scotland will follow the UK to a hard Brexit come-what-may, no matter how damaging to our economy and our society it turns out to be.

“That should not be the decision of just one politician – not even the First Minister. It will be decided by the people of Scotland. It will be Scotland’s choice.”

Image courtesy of The Scottish Government