

Scotland on the brink of a new independence referendum

February 14th, 2017. This is the date I write these few lines. By the time you read it, a lot of information and events will have caused a lot of ink to flow. But what we can already be sure of is that hard Brexit means hard Brexit – i.e. not only the UK leaving the European Union but also leaving the single European market – and that the new Iron Lady, Theresa May, is to trigger article 50 of the EU Lisbon Treaty by March 31st. Hence the Scots fear of eventually losing their rights and protection of European citizenship; hence the more than ever necessity to campaign for Scotland's independence as the only mean to remain in the EU, as it was the claimant expressed by the Scottish people at the Brexit referendum.

Indeed, this 14th February, St Valentine's Day, was the opportunity for best-selling author, Sara Sheridan, to proclaim her love to Europe (“‘Dear Europe ...’ A Love Letter from Scotland on Valentine's Day”, *The National*, February 14th 2017), surely as a spokesperson of many Scots. And it's not just a humorous ‘We sent you our whisky in exchange for your wine’; links between Scotland and Europe are much deeper than that, as recall Europe's chief Brexit negotiator, Guy Verhofstadt, on the same February 14th: ‘Scotland has shaped European civilisation through iconic figures such as David Hume, Alexander Fleming and Adam Smith’. Hence the same European technocrat admitting publicly that ‘we need the Scottish people ... we cannot afford to lose that’.

As well, by the same time, on February 8th, a new poll (BMG for *The Herald*) shows that Scotland's independence is still and more than ever topical. 49% of the Scots would vote for independence, against 45% a month before: enough to stimulate the ‘Yes’ campaigners to go back to work at the ground level; enough also for the Prime Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, to switch from fear of hard Brexit to more positive thinking and acting about Scotland's future.

Just because the Scottish Tories can't anymore wave their arms convincingly about an empty ‘better together’ concept only within the UK but without Europe; because they can't utter such nonsense as independence meaning no economic relationship

and no free trade between Scotland and England anymore, as their leader, Ruth Davidson did suggest these days, a new 'fear' campaign would not have any hold over the electorate.

And just because The Scottish Labour are ambiguous about Brexit when at Westminster; because their idea, Gordon Brown's as well as Kezia Dugdale's, of a Federal constitution will not come into being, just because they are not in power, time has come again to organize a new independence referendum.

By the time this lines are published, this referendum could be announced by the Scottish Government, with or without Theresa May's consent. However, Nicola Sturgeon and her friends must be very cautious. Scotland can't afford a 'no' answer a second time. Indeed, one will have to prove, or at least put the people at ease with the fact that independence will have no negative direct impact on people lives, that the eldest will still draw their pension, that the question of the Scottish currency will be solved, that Scotland will still benefit from a partnership with the EU. The challenge is indeed independence within a 'better together' Europe.

Pierre Delignière.