

Ideology and Rationality: The Europeanisation of the Scottish National Party

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Abstract

This paper deals with the impact of Europeanisation on a regionalist party actor: the Scottish National Party (SNP). It investigates how the party reacted to the UK's membership of the European Union and how it adapted its strategy in pursuing its aim of Scottish self-government. The paper does so on the basis of a comparison over time between the periods 1974-1979 and 1988-1997, during which the party played a crucial role in the politics of Scottish self-government. Each of the two periods culminated in a referendum: in 1979 Scottish self-government was rejected whereas in 1997 it was endorsed. Between the dates of the two referendums the SNP radically changed its perception of the EU and its strategic use of 'Europe' for its political ends. In the first period, the SNP was deeply hostile to the EU and portrayed EU membership as an additional obstacle to the achievement of self-government while in the second period it adopted a very positive attitude towards the EU and recentred its strategy around the objective of achieving 'Independence in Europe'. The party thus underwent a process of Europeanisation from hostility to enthusiasm towards the EU. The paper explains this adaptation and accounts for the consequences that the latter had on the politics of self-government in Scotland. It argues that the party's reaction to Europeanisation can be understood as the result of a complex interaction between ideological beliefs and rational strategic calculations.

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Introduction

The study of Europeanisation has primarily been concerned with changes in public policies and, to a lesser extent, the institutional structures of the member states of the European Union. In the latter case, substantial attention has been paid to the impact of Europeanisation on the vertical distribution of power and demands for regional self-government¹. However, this literature has mainly focused on 'structures' as opposed to 'agency' and this is true for the sub-section of it devoted to the study of the Europeanisation of the demands for self-government. This paper intends to contribute to filling this gap in the literature by analysing the Europeanisation of a regional actor, the Scottish National Party [SNP]. On the basis of a comparative analysis between the period 1974-79 and 1988-97, the paper seeks to assess to what extent and how has the SNP undergone a process of Europeanisation between the two points in time. The paper is organised in four main sections. The first section presents the theoretical and methodological framework on which the research reported in this paper is based. Section 2 and 3 analyse for the two periods, respectively, how the party perceived and reacted to the strategic environment produced by the UK's membership of the European Union and by the developments within the latter. Section 4 explains why the party's perception and strategic use of the European dimension changed radically between the two periods. The final section summarises the argument and points to the implications of this study for the wider study of Europeanisation.

1 Theoretical and methodological framework

The theoretical literature on political parties has identified three main models of party strategies: the 'vote-seeking' party, the 'office-seeking' party and the 'policy-seeking' party. Each of these models focuses on one objective parties are supposed to pursue. However, parties have long been recognised as pursuing multiple objectives at the same time as well as different objectives at different points in time. Moreover, it is worth remembering that votes have no intrinsic value for parties, which seek them only as an instrument towards achieving office benefits or policy influence. On this basis, following Strøm, I assume that parties, led by party leaders, are motivated by both office benefits and policy influence.

¹ See review of the literature in Dardanelli (2002: 31-5). For an up-to-date general discussion of Europeanisation, see Börzel and Risse (2003).

Though office benefits and policy influence are of course connected, as policy is best influenced by office holders, there is tension between the two, especially in the long-term as office incumbency tends to have electoral costs. Parties thus face a double trade-offs: between office benefits and policy influence, on the one hand, and between the short-term and the long-term, on the other hand². These trade offs define the specific mix of objectives that parties pursue at any given time. In turn, though, parties' strategies directed at achieving a given mix of objectives is affected, as Strøm shows, by two set of factors: the organisational properties of the party and institutional environment in which the party operates. The latter, in particular, provides incentives and opportunities for strategic action as well as placing constraints on it.

Strøm's general framework for conceptualising party strategies can usefully be adopted to theorise on the impact of Europeanisation on regionalist and secessionist parties. From this perspective, regionalist and secessionist parties are both motivated by the conquest of political office at state, regional or local level and by the pursuit of their central policy objective, namely regional self-government or independence. It seems reasonable to assume that these parties value policy influence more than office benefits, especially under two circumstances. First, if a regional level of government is either inexistent or weak so that the only significant office is at state level, which is difficult for them to conquer. This is likely to be reinforced, second, in the phase of initial rise of the party when the prospect of gaining office are slim and party leaders tend to be highly ideologically-driven, i.e. policy-motivated. It can thus be said that regionalist and secessionist parties are primarily motivated by the desire to gain devolved and/or independent self-government for their regions³. They pursue this primary objective within the strategic environment defined by the institutional rules and structures of a given state, with their pattern of incentives, opportunities and constraints⁴. In this context, a process of Europeanisation can be conceptualised as a change in the state's institutional rules and structures brought about by membership of the EU and the development of integration. From a regionalist or secessionist party's perspective, Europeanisation is thus a process which alters the pattern of incentives, opportunities and constraints the party faces in the pursuit of its primary objective of devolution or independence. I draw a distinction between incentives and opportunities in the following

² See Strøm (1990); Strøm and Müller (1999).

³ I use the term 'devolved self-government' and 'devolution' to refer to regional autonomy within the framework of the existing state and the terms 'independent self-government' and 'independence' to refer to secession.

⁴ The organisational factors affecting party strategies are not analysed in detail here as the focus of the paper is on the transformation of the institutional environment.

terms: incentives are structural influences that both facilitate actors' agency and modify their preferences while opportunities facilitate agency but do not modify their preferences.

It is worth stressing that the party will act on its *perceptions* of how Europeanisation affects its strategic environment rather than on the basis of an 'objective' reality and that perceptions will be shaped by, among others, two key factors. First, by the amount of information about Europeanisation available at a given point in time; amount which is likely to increase over time. Secondly, and most importantly, they will be shaped by the ideological preferences of the actors concerned. Parties will thus choose strategies on the basis of rational decisions 'bounded' by availability of information and ideological preferences⁵.

On the basis of this theoretical framework, the paper analyses how the SNP perceived membership of the EU and the process of integration as affecting its strategic environment and what strategies the party adopted to exploit this new environment in the two periods 1974-'79 and in the period 1988-97. In particular, whether the party perceived the EU as mainly providing incentives/opportunities for self-government as opposed to placing constraints and what aspects of the EU dimension the party exploited to increase support for itself and for its policy of Scottish independence. This analysis is performed through qualitative content analysis of four types of primary sources - election manifestoes, party publications, speeches and memoirs of party leaders and semi-structured interviews with party leaders⁶ - as well as drawing from the secondary literature.

2 Hostility and Neglect: 1974-'79

The period considered here is the one between the general election of October 1974 and the referendum on 1 March 1979. In this period, Scottish self-government – as a result of the Labour government's policy – became for the first time a salient political issue at the UK level and was put for the first time to the test of Scotland's public opinion. In the referendum, the proposals contained in the Scotland Act 1978 failed to attract enough support to warrant the establishment of a Scottish Assembly. The challenge presented by the SNP's rise had been the driving force behind the Labour government's policy and the party played a prominent role in this period⁷.

⁵ For a fuller discussion of the application of the assumptions of 'bounded rationality' to the topic dealt with in this paper, see Dardanelli (2002: 52-4)

⁶ Interviews were transcribed and analysed as written text, taking into account their semi-structured nature.

⁷ For an introduction to the politics of devolution in the UK and to the SNP, see Bogdanor (1999) for the former and Newell (1998) for the latter.

2.1 Self-government policy

Scotland's constitutional status has always lain at the core of the SNP's policies, for the party's *raison d'être* is to acquire sovereign statehood for Scotland or, as the party's constitution puts it, "the restoration of Scottish National Sovereignty"⁸. In the 1970s, this goal was defined as independence under the British Crown and within the Commonwealth but, as discussed below, outside the European Union⁹. Traditionally, the party intended to pursue this goal by gaining the majority of the Scottish seats in the House of Commons and, on that basis, claim a popular mandate for negotiating Scotland's secession from the UK.

This policy of independence for Scotland rested on three conceptual points. First, the party asserted the status of Scotland as a nation and the consequent inalienable right to self-determination. The right to self-determination of nations is the central tenet of all nationalist ideologies. The assertion of Scotland's nationhood naturally implied that the United Kingdom was conceptualised as a pluri-national state rather than a nation-state. In other words, the UK was a partnership between the Scottish and the English nations rather than a fusion of them to create a British nation. Second, the party believed that the union with England had overall been negative for Scotland, despite some political and economic gains, primarily because it threatened the survival of Scotland as a distinctive nation. Being ten times smaller than England in population terms, Scotland was increasingly at risk of being 'absorbed' into its larger neighbour. Third, the party was convinced that with the end of the British Empire and the discovery of oil in the Scottish section of the North Sea, it was no longer in the economic interest of the Scottish nation to belong to the United Kingdom.

If the party had a clear objective and solid (at least in its own eyes) reasons to pursue it, the central problem was to go through the steps described above and, in particular, gain a majority of Scottish seats. This appeared indeed very difficult for the party to achieve. Even after the electoral triumph in the October 1974 general election, the party still controlled only 11 out of 72 seats. In this context, the emergence of the Labour party's policy to establish a Scottish Assembly created an acute strategic dilemma¹⁰. On the one hand, an assembly could be seen as providing an excellent opportunity for the party. In a purely Scottish electoral competition – such as the one for a devolved assembly – the likelihood of the party gaining a majority of seats was arguably higher than in a UK-wide competition such as for a general election. Moreover, once having obtained control of a Scottish Assembly, the party

⁸ see Bennie et al. (1997: 81-2).

⁹ A small minority on the left of the party was in favour of a republican Scotland but this never became the mainstream opinion in the party.

¹⁰ On the SNP policy towards devolution in the 1970s, see Levy (1986) and Kauppi (1982).

would have been in a position to claim an even stronger popular mandate for seeking secession from the UK. On the other hand, with popular support for independence still very low, there was a high risk that a devolved assembly would satisfy the Scots' demand for self-government thus depriving the SNP of its key competitive argument and making the prospect of independence an even more distant one. In other words, "that the establishment of a Scottish Assembly might satisfy the electorate sufficiently to postpone the achievement of independence indefinitely"¹¹. In this logic, a preference for the status quo over devolution would have made sense for the party on the ground that the maintenance of the former would have been the best way of fuelling support for independence. The party was split along these two interpretations of the connection between devolution and independence into 'gradualist' and 'fundamentalist' wings. The latter shared the second view of devolution and believed that the party should stick to the traditional policy of gaining a majority of Scottish MPs, while the former had a positive view of devolution and wanted to use an assembly as a stepping stone to secession. They thought that the prospect of the SNP gaining a majority of Scottish seats was, at best, a distant one and anything that could have made Scots more accustomed to the idea of self-government - notably a limited degree of it in the form of devolution - had to be welcomed¹².

Though the conflict between the two tendencies was never entirely solved, the party eventually settled for the gradualist strategy and reached a substantial degree of unity in support of the devolution policy of the Labour government. As the government was by 1978 dependent on the SNP for survival, the latter's support was a crucial one. In that phase, the party line was that, as its parliamentary leader put it, "Scotland must be prepared to build on whatever devolution can be wrung out of this Government"¹³. This policy was maintained up to the referendum campaign in January-February 1979, when the SNP went to great lengths to downplay any connection between devolution and independence and was indeed the only party to campaign unambiguously for a Yes vote.

2.2 Perception and strategic use of the EU

In the 1970s, the SNP had a deeply negative perception of the European Union. The prevailing view was that the EU featured, on a larger scale, the same centralising tendencies, in political and economic terms, of the United Kingdom. Therefore, the process of European

¹¹ Macartney (1981: 18).

¹² On the conflict within the party on devolution before and after the referendum, see Kauppi (1982: 333-4). According to Bogdanor (1977: 173), many in the party viewed devolution more favourably than a hypothetical federalisation of the UK, on the grounds that the former was more compatible with separatist aims.

¹³ Quoted in Mbadinuju (1976: 296).

integration was the continuation of the process of centralisation that had taken place at the British level and, as such, it threatened to inflict further political and economic damage on Scotland¹⁴. In the party's eyes, such nature of European integration explained why the UK-wide parties were in favour of joining the EU. Billy Wolfe, the SNP leader in the 1970s, wrote in 1973 that "it is the aim of the Common Market to establish political domination of the whole of Western Europe and to tolerate no deviation from this line"¹⁵. The SNP thus opposed entry into the EU in 1972 and campaigned for a No vote in the 1975 referendum. During the referendum campaign, the parliamentary leader of the party declared that the EU "represents everything that our party has fought against: centralisation, undemocratic procedures, power politics and a fetish for abolishing cultural differences"¹⁶. The referendum itself was largely seen by the party as a referendum on Scottish sovereignty in the hope that Scotland would vote against the EU while England would vote in favour¹⁷. After the majority of Scots had voted in favour of EU membership the party shifted its position towards acceptance of the reality of membership while keeping a negative attitude to the EU. In October 1978, the then deputy leader Gordon Wilson declared: "a massive re-think by Scots about the EEC may be needed soon. Evidence is growing that the EEC is proving hostile to Scotland's national interests"¹⁸. The official party policy was that the issue of EU membership of an independent Scotland would be decided in a referendum with the SNP recommending withdrawal to the electorate¹⁹.

The SNP's hostility towards the EU in the 1970s was determined by four main factors. First, the SNP objected to Scotland not having been represented in the negotiations before entry and not having been consulted as a nation in the 1975 referendum. Strictly connected with this aspect was the issue of Scotland's representation in the institutions of the EU and the preservation of its 'national' status vis-à-vis its categorisation as a 'region'. Second, as expressed by the then leader, most members of the SNP had a negative opinion of the political characteristics of the EU which was perceived as a centralising, bureaucratic and undemocratic organisation²⁰. Third, the majority in the party had a negative perception of the process of European economic integration, based on free trade and market liberalisation. This was seen as favouring the exploitation of weak, peripheral economy such as Scotland by the dominant capitalist actors based in the core regions of south-east England and the European mainland. Last, but not least, the party was also very critical of core EU policies

¹⁴ See Mitchell (1998: 112-3)

¹⁵ Wolfe (1973: 139)

¹⁶ Quoted in Lynch (1996a: 35).

¹⁷ See Lynch (1996a: 33) and Mitchell (1998: 113).

¹⁸ Scottish National Party archive, Acc 10754/27

¹⁹ Choose Scotland - The Challenge of Independence, p. 11

such as the agriculture and fisheries policies which it perceived to be very damaging to Scottish interest.²¹.

Membership of the EU and the process of European integration were thus perceived as a further threat to the survival of the Scottish nation and to its economic welfare. The EU was perceived as an extension of the UK, sharing the same characteristics of centralisation, capitalism and neglect of the periphery²². From this perspective, membership of the EU was seen as adding an extra hurdle on the path towards achieving national sovereignty. As the process of centralisation on a European scale was perceived to be weakening Scotland even more than the process that had taken place at the UK level²³, secession from the latter but continued membership of the EU would achieve little. What Scotland urgently needed was secession from both the UK *and* the EU and the SNP policy in the 1970s aimed to achieve this double independence.

This perception determined that the European dimension was largely neglected in the SNP's campaign for a Yes vote in the 1979 referendum. In so far as the EU was mentioned, it was for pointing out its negative effects on Scotland. The declarations of three senior figures of the party during the campaign illustrate the point. The deputy-leader and future leader Gordon Wilson, who would be at the forefront of the change of policy on the EU in the 1980s, failed to mention any European dimension in his case for devolution put forward in the last stages of the referendum campaign²⁴. On her part, Winnie Ewing, who would later become a long-serving MEP, declared that a No vote in the referendum would clear the way for "the further takeover of Scottish land by foreigners...and for Brussels to dictate the final ruin of fishing and agriculture"²⁵. In presenting the SNP's candidates for the first European elections in 1979, the party leader Wolfe declared: "whatever opinions we may hold for the EEC, the fact is that decisions are being taken in Brussels which vitally – and often adversely – affect Scotland's interest"²⁶.

In sum, the SNP's negative perception of the EU prevented the party from strategically using the European dimension to allay widespread fears about independence and its connection

²⁰ Wolfe and Wilson, interviews with the author.

²¹ Wilson, interview with the author; see also Lynch (1996a: 30).

²² See press releases by Gordon Wilson, Douglas Henderson, George Reid, Hamish Watt and Winnie Ewing between 21 October 1978 and 28 February 1979 in Scottish National Party Archive, Acc 10754/27

²³ Mitchell (1998: 117)

²⁴ Gordon Wilson, 'Assembly would give better value for taxpayers' money', *The Courier and Advertiser*, 26 February 1979

²⁵ As reported in 'Yes vote would be sign of confidence', *The Scotsman*, 7 February 1979.

²⁶ Quoted in 'SNP name eight for European elections', *The Scotsman*, 19 February 1979.

with devolution. This connection, and the contradictions in the Yes front between the SNP and the Labour party, were ruthlessly exploited by the No front which centred its campaign on the spectre of a break-up of the UK. The strategy spectacularly succeeded in changing the overall tone of the debate on devolution and ultimately turned what was still a 'virtual' majority in favour of the Assembly into a rejection of the Scotland Act 1978²⁷. Such strategic failure cost dearly to the party in both policy and votes terms. Not only did the referendum result push back the prospect of devolution - let alone independence - for a decade but in the subsequent general election, the SNP's vote collapsed from 30.4 to 17.3 per cent and the party lost all but two of its MPs.

3 Enthusiasm and Strategic Exploitation: 1988-'97

The period considered here is the one between the general election of June 1987 and the second referendum on 11 September 1997. I take 1988 as the start point for in this year two crucial events took place: the SNP officially adopted its new policy of 'Independence in Europe' and the Scottish Constitutional Convention was set up. In this period, Scottish self-government returned to centre-stage in British politics and was an important issue in the two general elections of 1992 and 1997. The 1997 referendum saw an emphatic endorsement of devolution and led to the establishment of a Scottish Parliament by 1999. As in the first period, the SNP was a key actor in this phase and crucially contributed to the endorsement of devolution in the referendum.

3.1 Self-government policy

After the 1979 *débâcle* and a subsequent deep crisis²⁸, from 1983 onwards the SNP set out to revise some of the more radical aspects of its platform under the new leaderships of Gordon Wilson and later of Alex Salmond. The general objective of this revision was to moderate the party's stance with the twofold aim of attracting increased electoral support for the party and of increasing support for independence at mass public level beyond a hard core of 'fundamentalists'. In other words, to turn the party and its core policy from 'extreme' to 'mainstream'.

The party did not abandon its central objective of Scotland's independence but it modified the external context and the procedure for achieving it. On the first aspect, the party underwent a radical rethinking of its attitude towards the European Union and of the

²⁷ See wider discussion in Dardanelli (2002: 266-8).

²⁸ On the post-1979 crisis within the party, see Kauppi (1982) and Mitchell (1990b).

relationship between an independent Scotland and the latter. The party changed from hostility towards the EU, expressed as a commitment to withdraw an independent Scotland from the organisation, subject to a referendum vote, to making membership of the EU the cornerstone of its self-government policy. By 1988, this led to the adoption of a policy of 'Independence in Europe' based on secession from the UK but continued membership of the EU as an additional member state. This aspect is analysed in depth in section 3.2 below. As regards the procedure for achieving independence, the party retained the strategy of winning a majority of Scottish seats and on that basis negotiate secession with the UK government but, by the 1997 general election, it abandoned the implicit automatism of this procedure. In the manifesto for the general election of that year, the SNP committed itself to negotiate a secession agreement with the UK government and then submit it to the Scottish electorate in a referendum. Achievement of independence was thus made conditional to popular endorsement in a referendum. Table 1 summarises the changes in the SNP's policy on independence and it indicates that the maintenance of the Commonwealth link was the only element not modified between 1979 and 1997.

Table 1 - Synopsis of SNP constitutional positions

Year	Independence	European Union	Commonwealth
1979	Yes	No, after referendum	Yes
1983	Yes	Yes, after referendum	Yes
1988	Yes	Yes	Yes
1992	Yes	Yes	Yes
1997	Yes, after referendum	Yes	Yes

Source: Party literature

Despite this effort to moderate the image of the party and to increase the appeal of secession the prospect of achieving independence for Scotland from the constitutional status quo remained a distant one. As in the 1970s, the party was thus facing the dilemma of what policy to adopt towards devolution, hence towards its main proponent, the Labour party. On the one hand, the SNP remained suspicious of devolution and of the motivations of the Labour party in pursuing it. The suspicion was reinforced relative to 1979 by the fact that the degree of self-government involved with the parliament proposals of the 1990s was significantly greater than the one entrusted to the 1979 assembly. The more a devolved parliament appeared to have similar powers to an independent parliament, the higher the risk that devolution would actually constitute an obstacle on the road to independence. On the other hand, a devolved parliament was still offering the opportunity to enhance the position of the party and thus potentially to facilitate the acquisition of independence as well as offering the prospect of consolidating the party's position in Scotland.

In this regard, it is possible to distinguish two phases in the SNP's policy. In the first one, between 1988-1992, the party felt that its new 'Independence in Europe' policy would be a vote-winner and expected a breakthrough in the 1992 general election. In this phase, the party maintained a strong opposition to devolution and to the Labour party. The most clear example of this was the refusal to join the Constitutional Convention which was intended to represent the whole spectrum of Scottish society and, in particular, of its demand for self-government²⁹. The party refused to join the Convention for two main reasons. First, because the Convention intended to work on a single proposal for a devolved parliament while the SNP wanted at least a two-option proposal, one of which, naturally, was independence³⁰. Secondly, it viewed the Convention as politically dominated by the Labour party and feared a loss of political visibility for the independence policy and for the party itself resulting from participation. The party had a long-standing reluctance to be involved in broadly-based 'constitutional conventions' on the grounds that "Scottish independence would not be considered and might be attacked within the forum"³¹. After the disappointing performance in the 1992 general election, the party reconsidered its hostility towards devolution and started to move closer to Labour. As in the 1970s, therefore, the 'gradualist' tendencies within the party prevailed and, despite a small crisis when Labour modified its initial position and announced that the devolution proposals would be put to a referendum, the SNP did not reverse its stance. This eventually led to the party playing a major role in the unified Yes-Yes campaign side by side with Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the other pro-devolution pressure groups³². As in 1979, the party played down any reference to independence in its campaign for the 1997 referendum and adopted the same discourse as the devolutionist actors, advocating the establishment of a Scottish parliament as a marked improvement on the status quo and as a first exercise of self-government for the country.

3.2 Perception and strategic use of the EU

The SNP's perception of the European Union in this period was radically different from that of the 1970s. The party moved from being the one most opposed to European integration to being, in certain respects, the one most in favour of it, though some divisions within the party remained³³. As mentioned in the preceding section, the new leadership around Gordon Wilson set out from the early 1980s to change the party's attitude towards membership. By

²⁹ On the Convention, see Kellas (1992), Levy (1992) and Lynch (1996b).

³⁰ Wright, interview with the author; see also Macwhirter (1990: 27-30).

³¹ Bennie et al. (1997: 77); see also Lynch (1996b: 4).

³² On the decision to support devolution, see McCrone and Lewis (1999: 25) and also 'Smart Alex emerges victorious', *The Scotsman*, 29 August 1997 and 'SNP's deft change of tune on devolution', *The Scotsman*, 5 September 1997.

1988, not only had the party fully accepted Scotland's membership of the European Union but it had turned it into the cornerstone of its independence policy. This was based on an overall positive perception of the European Union itself and of its effect on Scotland, though some of the old doubts lingered on. As regards the economic side of integration, the party still harboured some concerns about Scotland's peripherality but overall it clearly perceived that the single market had been positive for Scotland. On the political side, the SNP also maintained reserves about the EU decision-making process and the agricultural and fisheries policies but these were placed within an overall positive framework perceiving the EU as a progressive supra-state political system in which small nations and regions could play a full part. In particular, in this period the SNP was explicitly comparing the European 'union' and the British 'union' and perceived the former as a 'positive alternative' to the latter, on the ground that it had different and more desirable characteristics. Above all, as explained below, in the 1990s the SNP perceived the European Union as a political system facilitating the achievement of the party's goal of Scottish independence whereas in the 1970s the EU was seen as placing additional constraints.

On this positive perception of the EU, the SNP built a new policy of seeking secession from the UK but placing an independent Scotland firmly in the context of EU membership, under the slogan of 'Independence in Europe'³⁴. The 'Independence in Europe' policy was explicitly intended to take advantage of the incentives and opportunities that the EU system was offering in order to increase the appeal of independence – hence of the SNP – at mass public level. In Gordon Wilson's words, "I wanted to make it easier for people to vote for the SNP and for independence [and] I saw Europe as a counterweight to London"³⁵. In the party's discourse, the European Union was portrayed as a confederal union of independent member states and contrasted with a unitary, centralised UK state with the obvious claim that the former was providing a much more favourable framework for Scotland than the latter. In the words of the party's spokesperson, Kevin Pringle, "the whole concept of a small country in Europe has become a powerful argument for us...Europe is a powerful campaigning tool for the SNP"³⁶. More particularly, the SNP claimed that the concept of 'Independence in Europe' would remove the charge of separatism, would eliminate the economic costs of secession and would increase Scotland's influence on policy-making at the Union level.

³³ The attitude towards the EU was one of the internal cleavages in the party between 'gradualists' and 'fundamentalists', see Mitchell (1990b).

³⁴ On the adoption of the 'Independence in Europe' policy, see Macartney (1990) and Lynch (1996a: 37-49).

³⁵ Interview with the author; Cunningham, interview with the author, expressed the same perception of the EU as a facilitator of independence.

³⁶ Interview with the author. See also SNPower for Change, p. 4 and 8-9.

These claims rested on three properties of the EU political system that constituted opportunities and incentives for independence in the eyes of the SNP. At the more general level, the insertion of independence within a process of European integration intended to transcend the nation-states removed the negative connotations of secession, linked to the ideas of separation and isolation. The European framework thus offered the opportunity to reduce the symbolic costs of secession³⁷. The second opportunity offered by the EU was in the economic sphere. Here the key factor was that the existence of a EU-wide customs union and the development of the single market offered the guarantee that an independent Scotland would retain full access to the English market as this would be preserved by EU membership. The potential loss of the English market for companies operating in an independent Scotland had always been the major economic cost of independence and a stumbling block in broadening its appeal beyond the committed hard core. In Gordon Wilson's words at the 1983 conference, this aspect made the new policy a "first class way of pushing the advantages of political independence without any threat of economic dislocation"³⁸. The party was deeply aware that for independence ever to receive majority support, the economic consequences had to be clearly addressed and the party had to be deemed capable of governing the country, as the lessons of the 1979 defeat and of the subsequent decline in support showed³⁹.

Lastly, but most importantly, the party exploited the fact that the institutional structure of the EU was highly favourable to the small countries as it over-represented their interests vis-à-vis the larger member states, to argue that the European union would be a much more favourable political framework for Scotland than the British union. The fact that small countries are on an equal footing with larger ones in terms of presidency of the Council and the right of veto and over-represented in the power of appointing Commissioners, in the voting weights in the Council and in the share of seats in the Parliament was central to this claim. Crucially, the party was able to claim that only member-state status would give Scotland adequate representation at the Union level when the latter was becoming increasingly important with the development of the process of integration and the Conservative party self-inflicted isolation reduced the UK political influence within the Council of Ministers. As the manifesto for the 1994 European election put it, "Scotland needs to change...central to that change is the need for a powerful, direct voice in Europe. An independent Scotland sitting at the top table beside the other nations of Europe will totally

³⁷ On this point see Sillars (1986: 182)

³⁸ Quoted in Lynch (1996a: 38); See, also Sillars (1986: 184-6) and SNPower for Change, p. 6-7.

³⁹ On the need to address the economic aspects of secession and on the abandonment of a 19th century idea of nation-state, see Sillars (1986: 182).

change our situation”⁴⁰. In Pringle’s words, as the Union level acquires more and more policy-making competences, it becomes ever more important for Scotland to “maximise its voice at the European level”⁴¹.

It should come as no surprise that in its pro-EU discourse the party ignored the fact that automatic EU membership for a seceding Scotland was far from assured and that the process of integration itself had the potential to run counter to nationalist aspirations. If, on the one hand, the EU was lowering the economic, political and symbolic costs of secession it was also threatening the very national sovereignty that the party wanted to achieve for Scotland⁴².

Despite the inherent tensions, some would say contradictions, in the SNP’s position, the party strategy was markedly more successful in the 1990s than in the 1970s. In particular, it produced three main effects. First, it shifted the preference distribution at mass public level towards the independence end of the spectrum and threatened to polarise competition between the latter and the status quo leaving the assembly option looking like an ‘empty centre’. This shift forced the Labour party to react and to move closer to the SNP’s position. However, the ‘Independence in Europe’ option also represented a ‘moderation’ or a ‘mainstreaming’ of the SNP’s position which had the overall effect of narrowing the policy distance between the latter and Labour. Second, this *rapprochement* acted as a powerful factor of unity within the pro-self-government front, enabling it - in sharp contrast to the 1979 situation - to present a united face and to campaign jointly for the endorsement of devolution in the referendum⁴³. The appeal of the ‘Independence in Europe’ option - in 1997 the second most popular constitutional preference - and the unitary campaign of the Yes front were the two most important determinant of the referendum result in 1997⁴⁴. Thirdly, by exploiting the opportunities and incentives that the EU context was offering, the party was instrumental in opening a European dimension to the politics of self-government and to force the other parties to compete in that dimension. Given the pattern of association between support for Scottish self-government and support for European integration of the 1990s, the new spatial configuration of party competition on self-government gave a structural advantage to the pro-self-government front. This was because the latter was also supportive of the EU while the

⁴⁰ SNP Power for Change, p. 2

⁴¹ Interview with the author. Wilson and Wolfe, interviews with the author, expressed similar views.

⁴² On the legal problems raised by a seceding Scotland with regard to EU membership, see Lane (1991). For an articulate internal critique of the ‘Independence in Europe’ policy, see Lindsay (1991). Even those in favour of the policy are fully aware of the existence of such a trade-off, Wilson and Cunningham, interviews with the author; see also SNP Power for Change, p. 19 and Lynch (1996a).

⁴³ See McCrone and Lewis (1999: 27).

⁴⁴ See wider discussion in Dardanelli (2002: 273-5).

Conservative party had become an opponent of European integration, a neat reversal of the 1979 situation.

However, it is also important to point out that the SNP's success was more evident in 'policy' terms than in 'votes' terms. As mentioned above, the party's preferred constitutional status for Scotland - 'Independence in Europe' - became the second most popular option, thus producing a radical shift in the preference distribution at mass public level. This, in turn, was crucial in making devolution endorsed in the referendum. On the other hand, the SNP's share of the vote in Scotland or the percentage of voters identifying with the party did not increase in any comparable way. Identification with the SNP only rose from 10 to 18 per cent between 1979 and 1997 while electoral support went from 17 to 22 per cent. If the SNP managed to become the second party in Scotland and thus the effective opposition to Labour, this was due more to the collapse in support for the Conservative party than in any dramatic upsurge in the nationalist vote. Though it is also true that the establishment of a Scottish parliament itself, of course, provided a natural avenue for the further consolidation of the SNP as Scotland's second party. This differential in the party's fortunes between 'policy' and 'votes' has been observed in relation to other cases of prominent regionalist parties and can be conceptualised as an inherent strategic dilemma for parties whose principal *raison d'être* is a change in the constitutional status of their region. Regionalist parties face a very significant risk that mainstream competitors can 'steal' the central point in their platforms and thus make them, to paraphrase Newman, 'win the policy wars but lose the electoral battles'⁴⁵.

4 Explaining the Europeanisation of the SNP

How can this radical shift in attitudes and in strategies be explained? I propose that three main changes played a crucial role. The first change was in the evolution of the EU as a political system, the second one was change within the UK and the third one was change within the party itself.

The EU underwent significant change between 1979 and 1997. First of all, the level of economic integration in the EU's internal market deepened as a result of the single market programme which eliminated most technical barriers to cross-border trade and increased the ease of movement for both capital and labour. A more deeply integrated internal market provided higher guarantees for maintaining cross-border economic activities, which had a

⁴⁵ See Newman (1995); see also de Winter (1998: 238-40).

particular relevance to the scenario in which a border could be established between Scotland and the rest of the UK. In other words, the deepening of economic integration further reduced the economic costs associated with secession. Moreover, negative predictions about the impact of economic integration on Scotland failed to materialise and, as integration deepened, Scotland appeared to profit from the inflow of foreign direct investments, especially from US companies. Far from damaging Scotland, it was increasingly evident that the single market was broadly benefiting it. Kevin Pringle summarises the SNP's turnaround on this point as such: "there are substantial economic benefits for Scotland to gain from membership of Europe"⁴⁶. However, it is worth pointing out that the economic pillars of the 'Independence in Europe' strategy - free trade and the customs union - were already present in 1979.

Second, political integration also widened and deepened considerably, both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, the competences of the EU expanded into policy areas hitherto reserved to the states. Vertically, the reaches of the policy output of the Union penetrated and influenced the political systems of the constituent states to a much greater extent than before, the phenomenon called Europeanisation. This widening and deepening of political integration raised the importance of the EU as a policy-making forum and thus raised the salience of the representation of Scottish interests which has been described above as one of the key incentives the EU was seen to provide Scotland for acquiring self-government. Given the continuing pre-eminence of the Council, such an incentive affected especially the option of independent self-government vis-à-vis devolved self-government. The expectations that regions could play a significant role in EU policy-making quickly died out after the Committee of the Regions had been set up in 1994, thus reinforcing the attractiveness of the 'state' status vis-à-vis a 'region' status for Scotland. Again, like the 'economic pillars' also the political pillars of the SNP's strategy - the confederal nature of the EU and over-representation of small states - did not emerge between the two time points but were already present in 1979.

Thirdly, the European Union developed substantial social and regional policies - symbolised by the Social Charter attached to the Maastricht Treaty and by the structural funds, respectively - which moved the policy output of the Union leftwards and which contributed significantly to dispel the image of the EU as a purely *laissez faire*, capitalist organisation. Scotland became a major beneficiary of the structural funds, especially those targeted to areas in industrial decline, which were just born in the late 1970s but commanded over 30

⁴⁶ Interview with the author.

per cent of the EU budget in the 1990s. For economic and political reasons – Scotland's peripherality and de-industrialisation together with the left-leaning preferences of the SNP's constituency – these policies were popular in the Scottish society as a whole and among nationalists in particular and their prominence could compensate for unpopular aspects of the EU such as the fisheries policy⁴⁷. By becoming a more 'friendly' political system in the eyes of the left-of-centre opinion – which was dominant in Scotland –, the EU altered the relative perception of itself vis-à-vis the UK held in Scotland and offered the opportunity to add a positive external dimension to the demand for regional self-government⁴⁸.

These developments at the EU level took place over the same period in which the UK political system moved in the opposite direction, thus playing into the hands of the SNP. The Thatcher-led Conservative governments moved the policy output of the UK system significantly rightwards by aggressively reforming social, regional and fiscal policies⁴⁹. Furthermore, they also embarked on a process of re-centralisation, marked in particular by the emasculation of local government and explicit opposition to the idea of regional governments. This inevitably affected the nature of the union between Scotland and England as the traditional understanding of the UK as a union-state appeared to be under threat⁵⁰. These two trends had the effect of moving the policy output and the institutional structure of the UK further away from the preferences of the median Scottish voter and thus of making the UK political system appear hostile to Scottish interests. As seen above, the contrast between this perceived 'English'⁵¹ hostility and 'European' friendliness was exploited to the full by the SNP.

Lastly, but most importantly, significant changes took place within the party itself, both in terms of new leaders and of a revised ideological framework. As regards the party's leadership, several figures who had a different attitude towards the EU acceded to influential position within the party. Four of them, in particular, had an important role: Gordon Wilson, Alex Salmond, Winnie Ewing and Jim Sillars. Gordon Wilson became leader in 1979 and, despite having formerly been a sharp critic of the EU, was instrumental in moving the party

⁴⁷ Cunningham, interview with the author, pointed out that the development of a social policy made for the first time the EU relevant for many ordinary working-class Scots. On the ongoing problems with the fisheries policy, see Wright (1996).

⁴⁸ On the hegemony of the left in Scotland, see Miller (1983: 108), Field (1997: 27-63) and Pattie et al. (1999: 138); on the influence of social and regional policies in changing perceptions of the EU, see also Ichijo (1999: 213-5).

⁴⁹ The poll tax was the most extreme example of that trend, for its effect on Scotland see McCrone (1991) and Barker (1992).

⁵⁰ On the changed approach to the British union on the part of the Conservative party, see Mitchell (1990a; 1996) and Seawright (1996).

⁵¹ As the dominant nationality in the UK

towards acceptance of the EU first and towards embracing the policy of 'Independence in Europe' later. He was succeeded in 1990 by Alex Salmond who was an enthusiastic supporter of further integration and of the 'Independence in Europe' policy. Winnie Ewing, perhaps the most charismatic figure in the party and also a former critic of the EU, became MEP for the Highlands and Islands constituency in 1979 and by acting as a senior link between the party and the European institutions did a crucial work in building support for the EU within the SNP. Her influence was greatly enhanced when her constituency achieved the highest eligibility for EU regional funding under the Objective 1 status⁵². Last but by no means least, Jim Sillars, the former Labour MP and most prominent advocate of a European dimension to Scottish self-government, joined the SNP after its Scottish Labour party foundered in the 1979 election and, as explained below, played a crucial role in persuading the party that the European Union framework could be exploited to increase support for independence⁵³. It is important to emphasise that, as mentioned above, both Wilson and Ewing were long-standing prominent members of the party and had shared the anti-EU policy of the 1970s. They gradually changed their positions in the wake of the 1979 referendum *debâcle* and under the influence of the other transformations discussed in this section. Ewing's 'conversion' in particular, seems to indicate that better knowledge of the EU system brought about by 'institutional learning' was a key factor in determining her change in attitudes towards the EU.

On the ideological level, the party underwent a wide-ranging revision in respect of the conception of national sovereignty and the role of government in the economy. National sovereignty ceased to be conceptualised as a monolithic, zero-sum entity and the idea that it could be pooled or vertically segmented without relinquishing it became widely accepted. This was seen as part of the process of 'mainstreaming' the party, which entailed the abandonment of the ideal of building a 19th century nation-state⁵⁴. This move can be seen as part of a wider process defined by Keating as 'de-mystification' of the state⁵⁵. The revision of the party's concept of national sovereignty was instrumental in leading the SNP to abandon its maximalist position of secession from the UK *and* the EU and to reconstruct its constitutional policy around the idea of 'Independence in Europe'. As regards the role of government in the economy, the revision led to the acceptance of a liberal 'economic constitution' in which economic activities are left to market actors and the government's role is confined to regulating the market. Taken together these two aspects of the ideological revision of the 1980s had the effect of dramatically changing the perception of economic

⁵² Wilson and Wolfe, interviews with the author

⁵³ On the role of Ewing and Sillars, see also Lynch (1996: 37-9).

⁵⁴ Cunningham, interview with the author

integration and of the supranational character of the European Union among the nationalist and left-of-centre opinion in Scotland⁵⁶.

In sum, the two decisive factors that changed the SNP's perception of the EU and determined its decision to exploit it strategically, appear to have been the party's ideological revision and the 'systemic shift' of the EU and the UK relative to Scotland that took place from 1979-1988. The first cleared the ideological 'fog' that prevented the party from seeing how the European Union could facilitate their strategies. It thus made visible from the late-1980s onwards what the ideological 'fog' had kept hidden from them in 1979. The second modified the whole institutional context in which the politics of self-government was framed. By bringing the EU system closer to the preferences of the median Scottish voter than the UK's, it made the European 'union' more attractive than the British 'union' with the resulting impact on the attractiveness of the 'Independence in Europe' option.

Conclusions

Four main conclusions emerging from this analysis of the Europeanisation of the Scottish National party seem to have wider relevance for the study of Europeanisation. First, the EU political system possesses properties that have the potential to affect the demand for self-government at the regional level, in other words to Europeanise them. These properties are both static, related to those features of the EU that are relatively fixed, and dynamic, related to those features produced by the process of integration over time. Demands for regional self-government are liable to be Europeanised because these properties of the EU system offer incentives, opportunities and constraints to actors demanding self-government such as the SNP. Incentives, opportunities and constraints alter the benefits/costs balance for the actor and influence its strategic action. On balance incentives and opportunities outweigh constraints thus determining that Europeanisation tends to have a positive effect on regionalist actors, i.e. it tends to strengthen them.

Second, adapting the well-known concept of 'goodness of fit' to the case of regionalist actors⁵⁷, it can be said that the impact of Europeanisation depends on two variables: 'distance from the state' and 'distance from the EU'. By 'distance' I mean the gap between the institutional features and the policy output of the state and the EU, respectively, and the median preferences in the region demanding self-government. The impact of

⁵⁵ This can be seen as part of a wider process of de-mystification of the state, see Keating (1992).

⁵⁶ This change mirrored the wider change in the Left's attitudes towards the European Union across Europe, see Hix (1999) and Ladrech (2000).

⁵⁷ On the concept of 'goodness of fit', see Risse et al. (2001).

Europeanisation can be thus theorised as such: the smaller the distance from Europe and the larger the distance from the state, the higher the incentives and opportunities offered to regionalist actors to exploit the European dimension in their strategies to achieve self-government and thus the stronger the Europeanisation of the latter.

Third, the strategic use of the European dimension takes place within an overall strategic context marked by a double trade-off: between policy and office payoffs and between the short and the longer term⁵⁸. As mentioned above, the policy/office payoffs has been identified to be particularly sharp and potentially fateful for regionalist parties. The SNP appears to be have been reasonably successful so far in managing the trade-off but its 'Independence in Europe' policy is nonetheless a strategic gamble to trade more certain short-term 'office' gain against uncertain long-term 'policy' payoffs. In other words, embracing European integration to facilitate both the electoral success of the party and the accession to independence while betting that the process of integration would not go as far as rendering such independence meaningless.

Lastly, the impact of Europeanisation and thus the degree to which a regionalist party such as the SNP exploits the European dimension, depends on a complex interaction between rational calculations, amount of information and ideological 'filters'. As seen above, the EU offers incentives and opportunities that rational actors can be expected to identify and exploit in order to strengthen their competitive positions in the self-government/status quo policy space. On the other hand, whether these actors actually do identify and exploit them depends crucially on whether they possess enough information to identify them as such and on how their ideological outlook made them perceive the EU system and what the latter offers to them. The SNP provides an almost graphic demonstration that the central elements of its strategy in the 1990s were already present in the 1970s, but were totally neglected in a context of limited knowledge of, and deeply-held hostility towards, the EU.

⁵⁸ These trade-offs are discussed at length in Strøm (1990) and Strøm and Müller (1999).

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