



Fallout From Scottish Vote: European Separatist Movements Surge

In reporting on the Scottish vote for independence last week, the Associated Press [noted](#) that, despite the failure, the vote “sets up a whole new political dynamic in the kingdom.” This has turned out to be a breathtaking understatement. The day after the election results were announced, Scotland’s First Minister, Alex Salmond, said he would not accept his party’s nomination for leader in November and that he would quit his role as the First Minister as soon as a successor could be nominated. Said Salmond: “I believe that in this new exciting situation, redolent with possibility, Party, Parliament and country could benefit from new leadership.”



England’s Prime Minister David Cameron, no doubt delighted that Salmond’s departure meant that this was one less thing for him to worry about, wished him well:

While we disagree profoundly about his goal of a separated Scotland and many other things, I respect and admire his huge contribution to politics and public life.

Cameron has many other things to worry about, however. He promised, in print, that he and his coalition of the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats would immediately create a cabinet committee to study exactly how much power to devolve to Scotland. He also made life more difficult for himself on Friday by announcing a move to create a new federal political structure with more powers also devolving to Wales and Northern Ireland. He declared,

Just as the people of Scotland will have more power over their affairs, so it follows that the people of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland must have a bigger say over theirs...

The rights of these voters need to be respected, preserved and enhanced.

This is an obvious political move to appease members of his Conservative Party from those provinces, especially as he faces a general election next May. Having just dodged one bullet, he is now working to avoid another. He has already promised a referendum over whether the United Kingdom should leave the European Union, and this move should strengthen his hand considerably.

Missing from any public conversation, however, is the so-called Barnett “formula,” which was adopted as an expedient move in the late 1970s to resolve temporarily how the revenue pie should be divvied up among England, Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. The formula is simple on the surface: Changes in public spending are applied in proportion to each country’s current population. The formula was named for Joel Barnett, who suggested it while he was chief secretary to the Treasury in the U.K. But it was to be temporary only. In 2004, Barnett said: “It was never meant to last this long, but it has gone



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on September 22, 2014

on and on and it has become increasingly unfair to the regions of England. I didn't create this formula to give Scotland an advantage over the rest of the country when it comes to public funding."

The problem with the Barnett formula is that it takes no account of different needs or costs in each country. It does not consider the different amounts of taxes each country pays into England's treasury. But despite years of criticism, no one seems to know how to fix it or replace it. So it simply isn't part of the conversation.

But most of all, missing from the conversation is the impact that the Scottish referendum is having on other simmering secessionist movements. For instance, Spain's Catalan separatists are holding a vote for independence on November 9, and observers are predicting an overwhelming result in favor of separation. At present, polls show that voters will support independence by at least 2 to 1. What makes that vote interesting is that Spain's Constitutional Court has accepted the idea that Catalonia is a "nation," but has declared that the term "nation" is only historical and cultural — without legal weight — and that Spain is the only country recognized in Catalonia

Then there's the Flemish movement in Belgium, which has roots all the way back to 1788. In last May's election, Flemish separatist parties increased their influence so much that Belgium has been forced into talks with them to resolve the situation. In the next elections, Flemish separatists will have the opportunity to express their views on whatever agreement is made.

There's the separatist movement in Basque Country, Spain, which had operated its own police corps and managed its own public finances without much interference from either Spain or France. However, that interference and meddling by both the Spanish government and its regional deputy governors has increased greatly recently, stoking the ire of separatists there. At the moment, nearly 60 percent of those polled support a referendum for independence — which, if held, would pass handily.

There's the island of Sardinia, off the coast of Italy, where three separatist political parties have been gaining significant influence and whose leaders are demanding the right to self-determination by either asking for more autonomy from Italy or complete independence. At present about 40 percent of the local population favors independence.

Taken altogether, then, the fallout from the Scottish vote last week has surprised many. Salmond will remain active in politics in Scotland, while Cameron will have his hands full placating the various competing interests he's trying to appease in advance of general elections next spring. Separatist movements in Europe are no doubt noting and taking great encouragement from last week's vote, while voices for greater centralization by the European Union remain muted.

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