



# The Resurrection of Scottish Foreign Policy

by Jacob L. Shapiro - July 15, 2019

## Summary

*In June 2016, a majority of Scots voted to remain in the European Union, while the majority of the United Kingdom as a whole voted to leave. Fearing that Scotland would be forced to leave the EU against its will, Scottish leaders have been finding ways to forge increasingly independent foreign relations. Ultimately, Scotland is worried that its distinctiveness will be erased as the U.K. becomes more internally focused.*

Five days after the U.K.'s surprising vote to leave the European Union, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon traveled to Brussels with hat in hand as the representative of a country that had voted 62 percent to 38 percent to remain in the European Union. Fearing that Scotland would be dragged out of the EU against its will, Sturgeon's mission was to find allies in Brussels who would support Scotland as it sought to stay in the bloc. But she found little sympathy for the cause. The EU was unwilling to open **a Pandora's box of European territorial disputes** by giving Sturgeon any public support. (This remains a touchy subject – Spain sacked one of its consuls in Scotland last month after he wrote in a letter to The National that Spain would not block an independent Scotland's entry into the EU.)

The situation was very different during Sturgeon's most recent visit to Brussels last month. She briefed EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker on her efforts to keep the U.K. in the EU's single market and her plans for a second Scottish independence referendum. She then gave a defiant speech at the European Policy Center, during which she insisted that "Scotland is, always has been, and always will be a European nation." The

EU, frustrated with the British government's inability to follow through on the painstakingly negotiated withdrawal agreement, now appears more willing to offer tacit support for Scotland's European aspirations in the full light of day.

Sturgeon's visit caused a minor political stir at home in the U.K. British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, who is also in the running for prime minister, said his office would no longer supply Sturgeon with official or consular support – a move Sturgeon described as “childish and pathetic.” But Sturgeon has made other moves to try to win support over the past month. A few weeks prior to meeting with Barnier and Juncker, she traveled to Dublin for deliberations with the Irish Taoiseach. In fact, it was during her Dublin trip that her Scottish National Party won half of Scotland's six European Parliament seats. Perhaps most important, the Scottish government published legislation on May 28 that set the rules for any future referendum held by the Scottish Parliament – preparation for another Scottish independence referendum that Sturgeon has suggested may come as soon as next year.

Polls since the 2014 referendum, in which 45 percent of the population voted against independence, have generally shown majority support for remaining in the U.K. And though Brexit failed in Scotland by a larger margin than Scottish independence, by sheer turnout more Scots actually voted against independence in 2014 than voted for remaining in the European Union in 2016. But as the U.K. continues to flirt with a no-deal Brexit, and as Jeremy Hunt and Boris Johnson compete to become next British prime minister, a choice Sturgeon has likened to “being run down by a lorry or a bus,” there are signs of a change in Scottish attitudes. A Sunday Times poll released late June last week found that 53 percent of Scottish voters would prefer independence if Johnson became prime minister. (The poll had a small sample size.) The combination of Scotland's increasingly independent external relations and a potential change in attitudes toward Scottish independence suggest that a force that has laid dormant for 312 years is re-emerging: an independent Scottish foreign policy.

## **An Auld Tradition**

As late as 1700, there was no such thing as the “United Kingdom” or “Great Britain.” By the end of the century, a country called Great Britain ruled the world. Its rise was hardly inevitable. In fact, it would have been impossible if not for the 1707 Acts of Union that joined the parliaments of England and Scotland to form the Parliament of Great Britain.

In its recent history, especially during the wars of the 20th century, Britain's position as an island nation has been a source of strength. The separation between Britain and the European continent

by the English Channel enabled Britain to be **part of Europe but avoid the costs of living on the North European Plain**. With the advent of modern industrial technology, Britain's distance from Europe's interminable wars and its relatively easy access to maritime trade routes made **London the center of gravity not just of Europe but of the world**.

But this wasn't always the case. Before 1707, Britain's geography was not a strength at all; it was England's greatest weakness.



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Until roughly the 16th century, British history was dominated not by British conquests abroad but by invasions of the island by far more powerful entities, including the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons, the Danes, the Vikings and the Normans. The French were very nearly added to that list during the Hundred Years' War. Indeed, in 14th and 15th century Europe, either Hapsburg Spain or France seemed destined to become Europe's dominant empire, and Britain seemed destined to become at best a province and at worst a fief of one European heavyweight or another, just as it had been so many times in the past. Hapsburg Spain's armies dwarfed England's and had already gobbled up

the most resource-rich colonies. Before the population explosion that accompanied the Industrial Revolution, France had a population at least twice the size of Britain's and possessed valuable colonies, not to mention a wealth of resources compared to cold and dreary Britain.

# Europe in 1500

## LARGEST CITIES

■	> 125,000
▲	100,000 - 125,000
●	50,000 - 100,000
○	25,000 - 50,000
●	< 25,000



*(click to enlarge)*

The primary reason for Britain's weakness, however, was not its inferior resource base. It was that, until the Acts of Union, no single authority controlled the island of Britain. An island nation is powerful only if it is unified under a central authority. When this happens, the unity that comes from the relative homogeneity of island nations can empower them to punch above their weight militarily. (Japan is a good example.) The risks associated with resource poverty are magnified for islands that lack a strong central government. External powers inevitably pit different factions against each other to prevent a unified authority from emerging, and political divisions intensify the risk of invasion, even by sea.

Achieving unity was England's primary imperative once it supplanted the Normans, and in 1284, England even managed to conquer Wales, after which it controlled most of the island, the occasional Welsh rebellion notwithstanding. But there remained a crucial part of Britain that not only resisted what would become England's centurieslong quest for union, but also had strategic imperatives that militated against it. Its survival depended on actively conspiring with English enemies to thwart efforts toward unity. Scotland, even more resource-poor and sparsely populated than England, could not hope to defeat England outright. The only thing it could do was offer its allegiance to English enemies to ensure that England could not marshal the resources necessary to conquer the northern third of Britain.

And offer its allegiance Scotland did. For almost three centuries, from 1295-1560, every Scottish and French ruler save for Louis XI faithfully renewed what became known as the "Auld Alliance." The relationship probably extends back further, but 1295 was the year a treaty was signed cementing the alliance. The impetus for formalizing the relationship was a dynastic crisis in Scotland, where civil war was at least as common as conflict with neighboring England. Alexander III, King of Scots, died in a horse-riding accident in 1286, and his granddaughter Margaret, Maid of Norway, died of illness en route back to Scotland to claim the Scottish crown in 1290. After Margaret's death, there were no direct descendants of Alexander III to claim the throne, and rather than adjudicate more than a dozen claimants, Scottish nobles invited Edward I, King of England, to intervene. They hoped that Edward I's intervention would prevent civil war in Scotland and force him to recognize an independent Scottish kingdom. Edward I had a different idea. He believed he was the rightful ruler of Scotland and, in Scotland's leadership crisis, saw a chance to assert his will.

Edward I's handpicked Scottish king, John Balliol, lasted a mere four years, partly because two years after he sat the Scottish throne in 1292, war broke out between France and England over



competing claims to Aquitaine and Gascony. Edward I called in his bannermen to raise an army to fight France. What he got instead was a Welsh revolt and Scotland's first formal alliance with England's greatest enemy. Scotland had no desire to send its sons to fight an English war with France, and besides, France was offering Scotland an alliance on equal terms while England was attempting to acquire Scotland as a client state. Thus began the Wars of Scottish Independence. King John and Scottish burgesses signed a treaty with France in 1295 by which both sides pledged not to make peace with England and to invade England if it tried to invade either Scotland or France. Scotland quickly set about honoring the terms of its new agreement, attempting to invade England to relieve pressure on French troops in Europe, only for King John's forces to be quickly routed in 1296.

After his defeat, King John abdicated and was briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London until he was allowed to live out his days in exile in France. But though King John was defeated in battle, it was England that lost the war. French victories in Gascony forced Edward I to reach an accommodation with King Philip the Fair of France. Meanwhile, in Scotland, Edward I's brutality gave life to a renewed Scottish resistance. By 1297, he was suing for peace with France while dealing with a Scottish insurrection led by William Wallace. This was the shape of the Scottish-French alliance for the next three centuries. Neither country managed to defeat England, and at various junctures, both broke the terms of the Auld Alliance by agreeing to truces with England or by failing to come to the other's aid. But the mere existence of the Auld Alliance made English victories against both essentially Pyrrhic. England may have been able to subjugate Scotland or defeat France but couldn't do both at the same time. Were it not for the Auld Alliance, England might well have conquered Scotland and even France in the 14th century, paving the way for a different kind of British Empire – an explicitly English one.

Instead, Scotland and France opportunistically renewed and even deepened their alliance whenever a new threat from England emerged. At least three times in the 14th century, Scottish armies were raised with French money to invade England, and while they were summarily defeated, this placed a heavy strain on English efforts against the French. When Anglo-Scottish hostilities resumed in 1385, France sent ships and soldiers to help defend Scotland's independence. Toward the end of the Hundred Years' War, France badly needed reinforcements for its army – and in 1419, a Scottish force of some 6,000 arrived on the Continent and helped ensure a French victory at the Battle of Bauge in 1421. Every French and Scottish monarch, save for one, renewed and deepened the terms of the Auld Alliance, and historian Elizabeth Bonner has insisted that Louis XI's failure to do so was not indicative of a weaker the alliance but a sign that the relationship was so deep that both sides took it for granted.

In the mid-16th century, Henry VIII decided to complete the conquest of Scotland that had eluded his predecessors, but France intervened once again to defend Scotland from what became known as the “Rough Wooing.” Historian Michael Lynch has estimated that between 1548-1550, France invested more in Scotland than the English did, pouring in 2 million livres in 1549 alone. France also sent some 6,000 soldiers to Scotland during this period and maintained five garrisons comprising approximately 400 soldiers once the immediate threat was waylaid. In return, Mary, Queen of Scots, was wedded to the eldest son of King Francis II of France. Had Francis II not died of an ear infection four months into his reign in 1560, Scotland could have been incorporated into France’s growing empire, and considering Mary’s claim to the English throne, France might well have had an even bigger prize in mind. France was ultimately denied these larger trophies, but its intervention essentially upheld Scottish independence.

Ironically, France didn’t profit much from its defense of Scotland. In fact, Mary’s short-lived marriage to Francis II was the high-water mark of the Scottish-French alliance. If not for France’s intervention, the British Empire might have looked very different or even might have not emerged at all. The Auld Alliance, while fondly remembered by both sides, slowly passed from the realm of strategy to nostalgia as Scotland’s interests became better served by improving relations with England. Still, it was France’s support of Scotland over hundreds of years that gave Scottish interests any relevance at all. Scotland entered into its union with England in 1707 not as a client, vassal or plantation but as an equal and independent country.

## The Union Makes Scotland Strong

In the 17th century, as a result of political instability in England, changing demographics in Scotland, and new economic imperatives for both resulting from the Industrial Revolution, England and Scotland started down the path toward the Acts of Union. Scottish foreign policy, once defined by a tight relationship with France and an imperative to thwart English ambitions at any cost, eventually melded with the foreign policy of the emerging British Empire. Scottish identity did not disappear – precisely the opposite. A more unified sense of Scottish identity emerged alongside the many other nationalisms that proliferated throughout Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. But strong as Scottish nationalism was, Scottish pride and faith in the United Kingdom ran deeper. Being British did not mean sacrificing fundamental Scottish interests; it meant fulfilling and elevating them. Scotland was British first and Scottish second, **a condition being questioned more seriously in Scotland today than at any point in the past two centuries.**

Disagreements over the extent of the king’s powers erupted in a series of conflicts in the 1600s that



became known as the English Civil War. Scotland was arguably the fuse that lit the match that ignited the war. Charles I sparked a mini Scottish rebellion when he attempted to enforce a more uniformly episcopal religious system in Scotland, which Scottish religious leaders from Presbyterian and Calvinist denominations resisted. When Charles I's attempts to put down the rebellion were unsuccessful, he demanded money from the English Parliament to raise another English expedition north, but Parliament refused.

The short version of the civil war is that it was a conflict between Royalists (Cavaliers) and Parliamentarians (Roundheads). The Parliamentarians were victorious, and by delegitimizing the principle of a king's divine right to rule and by enhancing the power of Parliament, the English Civil War created the basis for the more inclusive political institutions a united kingdom would require. The 1707 Acts of Union were at their core a merger of two parliaments into a single body – if not for the changes wrought by the English Civil War, it is unlikely Scottish leaders would have accepted union.

Demographics in Scotland were also changing. Charles I's heavy-handed attempt to enforce English religious principles in Scotland was shortsighted considering that England had already made significant progress by supporting Protestantism in Scotland for over a century. One of the key cultural divisions between Scotland and England had been the role of the Catholic Church, which was second only to France as Scotland's closest ally during the Scottish Wars of Independence. In the 16th century, the Scottish Reformation began to reshape the religious landscape in Scotland. England's support of a small but powerful group of Protestants in Scotland during this time arguably did more to bring about union than any English invasion of Scotland ever had. In 1560, the same year the Scottish-French alliance started its decline, the Scottish Parliament approved a Protestant confession of faith and rejected the authority of the Pope. Scotland and England did not have a common religion in 1707 – but by then, Scotland had more in common with England, when it comes to religion, than it did with Catholic France, where a series of religious wars from 1562 to 1598 ended in Catholic victory over and persecution of French Calvinists.

The most important force pushing Scotland and England closer together, however, was not religion but economics. Scotland's economy had suffered greatly during the English Civil War and the War of the Grand Alliance (1688-97), which pitted France against a group of countries that included England, the Dutch Republic and the Holy Roman Empire. (The French military was so powerful at the time that it took a large coalition of countries to contain it.) France had encouraged Scottish supporters of James VII, called Jacobites, to rebel and attack England during the war, but England suppressed the rebellion with relative ease, a sign of the atrophy in Scottish-French relations. Far

more impactful than French support for Jacobites, though, was the decrease in Scottish trade that accompanied these conflicts. Successive crop failures from 1695 to 1698 led to death by starvation for 5 percent of the Scottish population. To add insult to injury, the Scottish government committed between a quarter and half of its national capital in 1698 to a risky venture to establish a Scottish colony on the Isthmus of Panama at the Gulf of Darien, which failed miserably because of inhospitable geography, disease, local resistance and English refusal to offer help. The Scottish economy was sent reeling, and a political crisis ensued.

Even two decades before the economic meltdown, union would have been unimaginable for the Scots. England and Scotland already shared a monarch, and there seemed little justification for sharing much else. In fact, many Scots opposed unity even in 1707 when the Scottish government decided it had little choice but to acquiesce. Martial law had to be temporarily declared in Edinburgh after the Scottish Parliament ratified the deal. The English imperative was to unify the island of Britain; the Scottish imperative to this point had been to maintain independence and, in effect, block the unification of Britain. But independence, it turns out, isn't worth starving to death for.

It wasn't just economic catastrophe, however, that pushed Scotland to unite with England. In the 17th century, Scottish trade patterns were shifting, and by 1707, as much as 50 percent of Scottish exports went to England. As a result, Scotland had proposed various free trade agreements with England in 1640, 1659, 1668, 1670 and 1689. But negotiations stalled because Scotland was not willing to give England what it wanted in return – control of Scottish foreign policy and, by extension, security for a united Britain for the first time in history.

The economic and political crises of the latter half of the 17th century gave Scotland new impetus to compromise. By agreeing to unite, Scotland got what it wanted – namely, guaranteed access to English colonial markets. The union was the largest free trade area in 18th century Europe, which helped elevate England's Industrial Revolution to new heights. Scottish cities, most notably Glasgow, became major centers of industry and commerce. The results were not immediate; while Scottish overseas trade volume increased by 600 percent from 1700 to 1770 according to an estimate by historian Philipp Roessner, Scotland's economy didn't start growing until 1780, when the cotton and textile industry began to develop rapidly. Iron, coal and shipbuilding all followed in quick succession. According to the first Scottish census, Scotland had a population of roughly 1.3 million in 1755. By 1851, the population had more than doubled to 2.9 million.

England, meanwhile, also got what it wanted: Scottish loyalty. For England, the chief benefit of union with Scotland was not economic. It was strategic. England knew that it could not fight potential

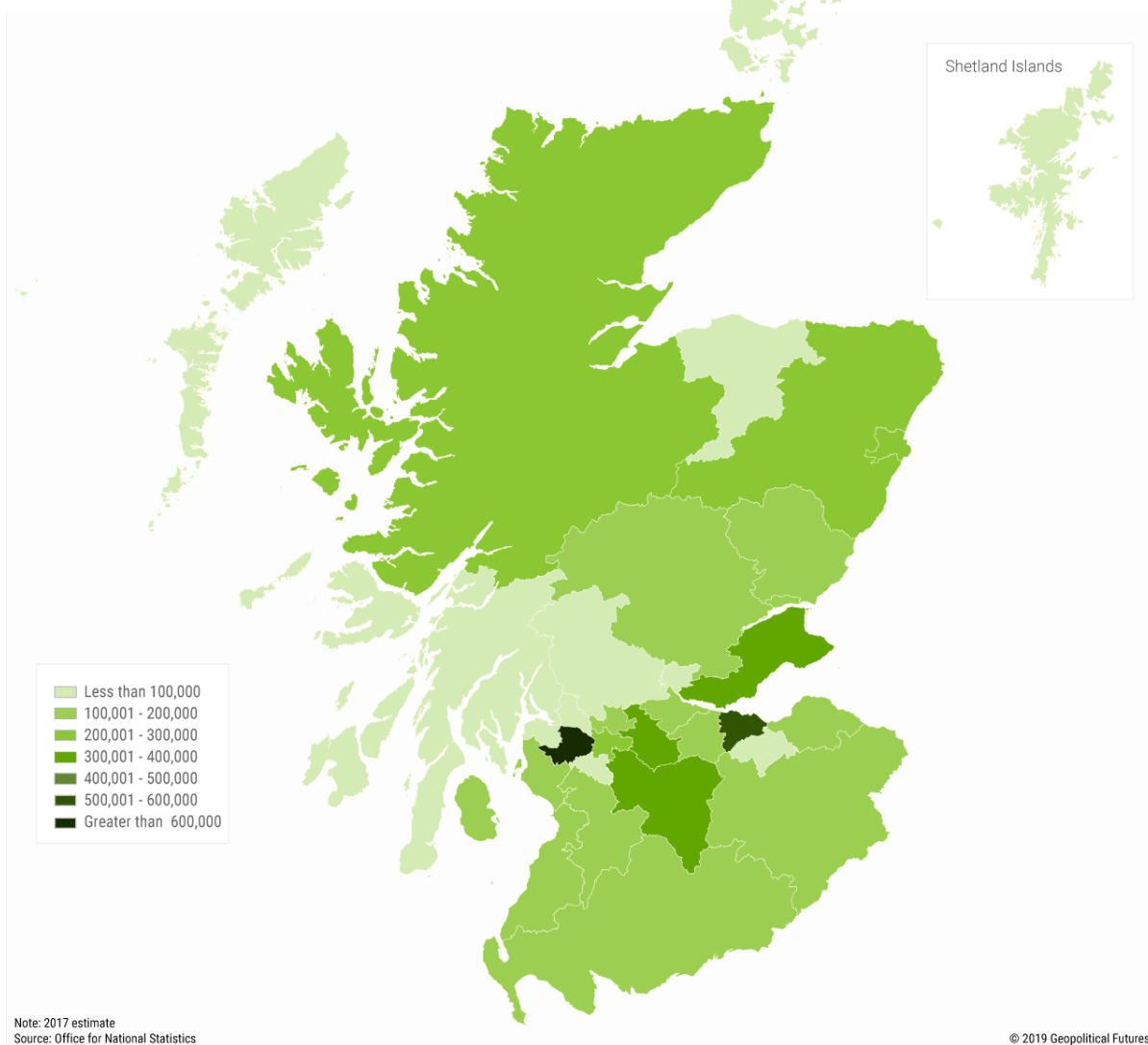
challengers on the Continent if it constantly had to devote time, energy and resources to defending itself from a potential Achilles' heel. The economic benefits of union with Scotland weren't as obvious for England, but the birth of Great Britain allowed England to devote incalculable resources to defense and maintaining order at home for the newly christened British Empire, improving the British navy, and supporting British partners on the Continent to fight France, Prussia, Russia or whatever seemed to be the largest threat of the day. It is not a coincidence that England reached the height of its power through the institution of the British Empire in the two centuries that followed union with Scotland. It is also not a coincidence that, despite occasional unrest and demands for increased autonomy, Scotland became deeply attached to its own understanding of what it meant to be "British." Britain preserved Scottish identity while elevating Scottish power and wealth to unimaginable heights. So long as that was true, Britain was strong.

### **Scotland's Imperatives**

The seeds of the political crisis brewing in the United Kingdom today were sown not by Brexit but by the decline of the British Empire after World War II. Scotland enjoyed certain economic and political advantages as a founding member of the British Empire. Union did not mean the forfeiture of Scottish identity to English power. It was, on the contrary, the preservation of Scottish distinctiveness within a multicultural and global British empire. The slow degradation of the British Empire after 1945 made Britain increasingly less global but magnifying England's own power within the United Kingdom.

England has always had a much larger population than Scotland (13 times larger today). There was always a risk, therefore, that English interests would dominate the British government. Even so, the empire was a de facto limit on English provincialism. So long as English politicians were forced to think in terms of what was best for Britain, and not in terms of what was best for England, Scotland was confident that it would never fall victim to the tyranny of the majority.

## Population Density in Scotland

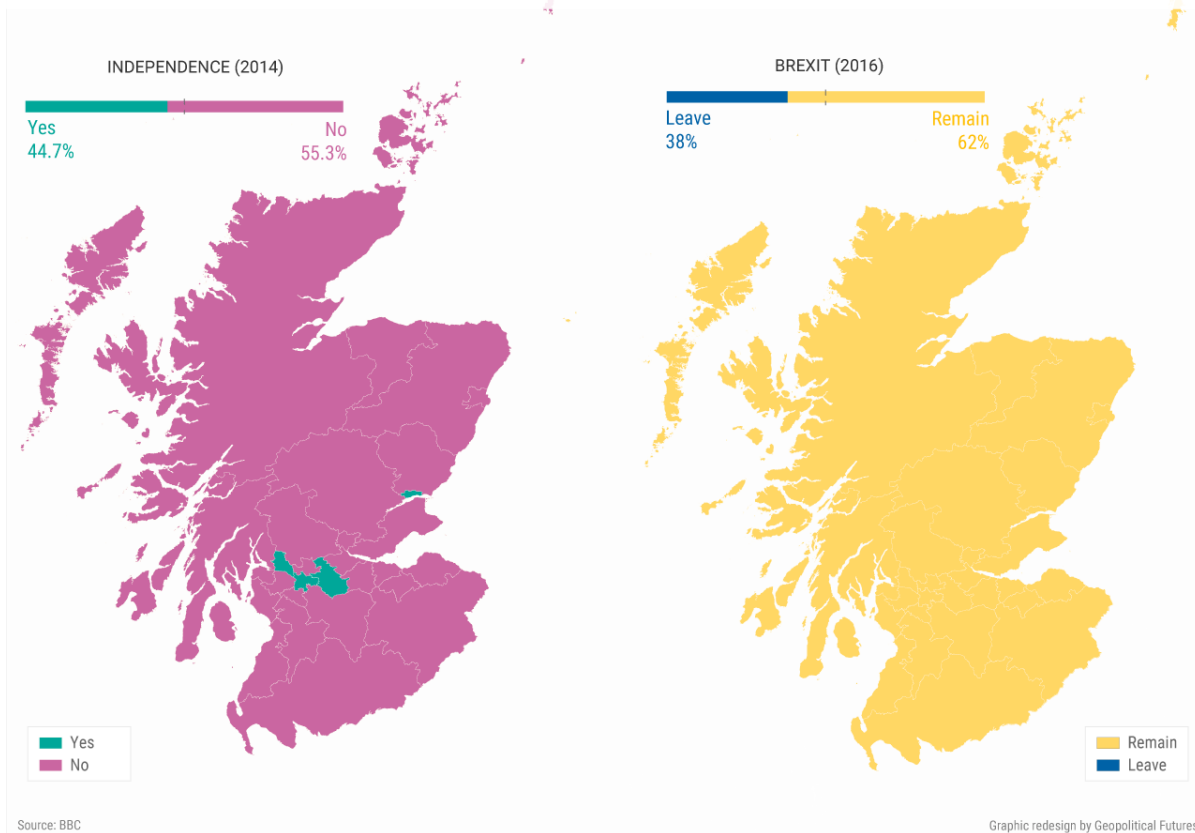


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Shorn of its imperial holdings, however, the United Kingdom's worldview inevitably changed. As its global outlook shrank, Scotland's anxiety about its position within the U.K. increased. In 1988, the Scottish National Party adopted a new policy with a bold new slogan: Independence in Europe. By the end of the 20th century, Scotland demanded and was granted the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament to handle all issues in Scotland not reserved for the British Parliament. In 2014, 55 percent of Scots voted against independence in a referendum that had roughly 85 percent

turnout. Yet 55 percent is hardly a comfortable majority. That 45 percent of Scottish voters would, after 300 years of residing in the United Kingdom, still opt for independence is evidence of a Scottish resilience about the future of its relationship with England and the other constituent countries of the United Kingdom.

## Scotland's Vote on Independence and Brexit



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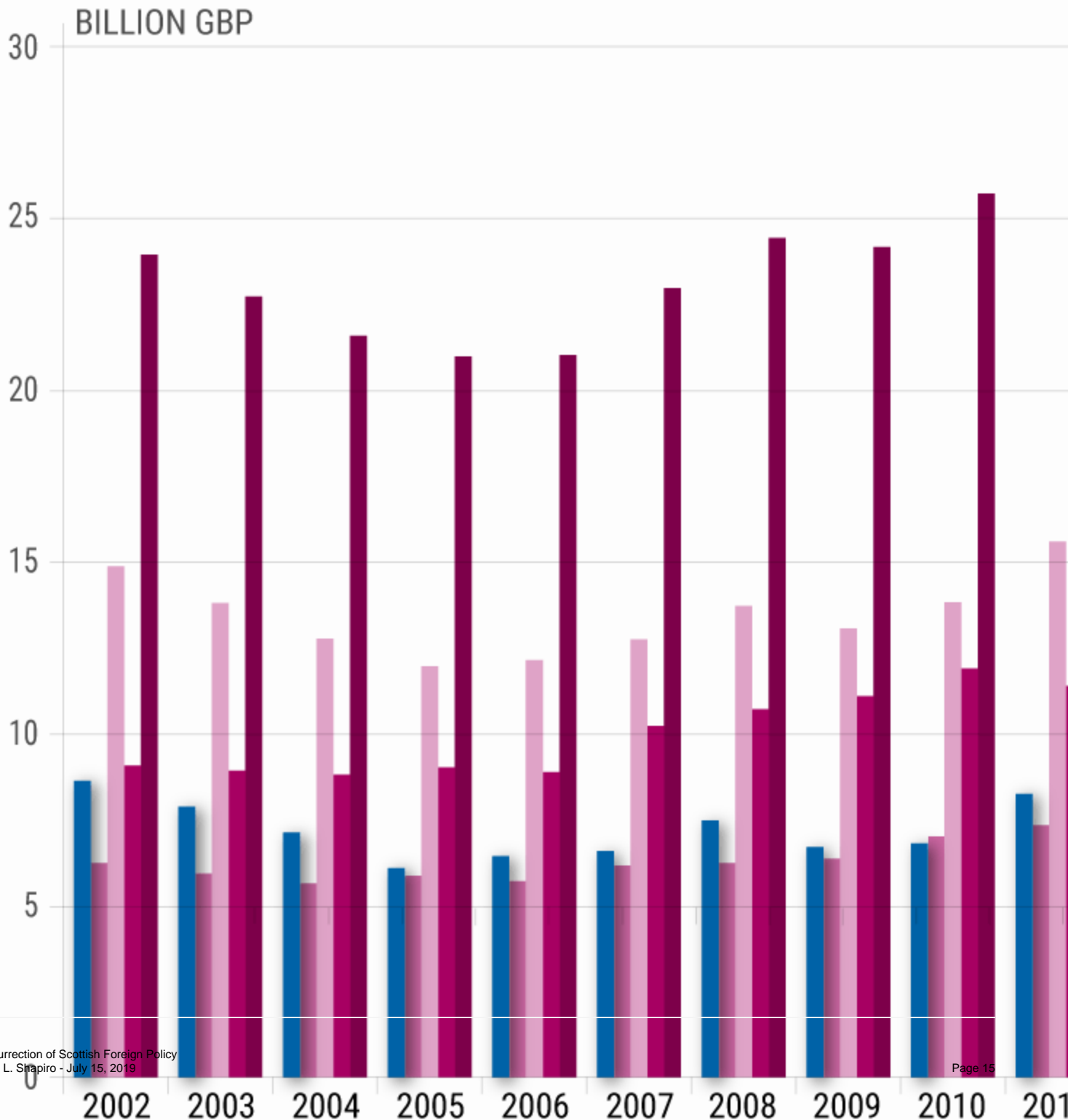
Economically, Scottish independence makes little sense. It's a small country, rich in a few key natural resources like coal and oil, with a disciplined and well-educated population of roughly 5.4 million – less than that of Denmark (5.7 million) and Israel (8.7 million). Indeed, Scotland's economy is more dependent on trade with the United Kingdom than trade with the European Union. According to the latest trade data, 60 percent (48.9 billion pounds, or \$61.3 billion) of Scottish exports were destined for the rest of the U.K. in 2017. Just 18 percent (14.9 billion pounds) of Scottish exports were destined for the European Union. A recent study by the University of Strathclyde found that 560,000 jobs in Scotland are dependent on demand from the rest of the U.K., while only 134,000 are

dependent on exports to the EU and 196,000 on exports to the rest of the world. This is not an insignificant share of the Scottish economy, but the impact of **a no-deal Brexit** would be nowhere near what Scottish politicians would have you think.



# Scotland's Export Partners

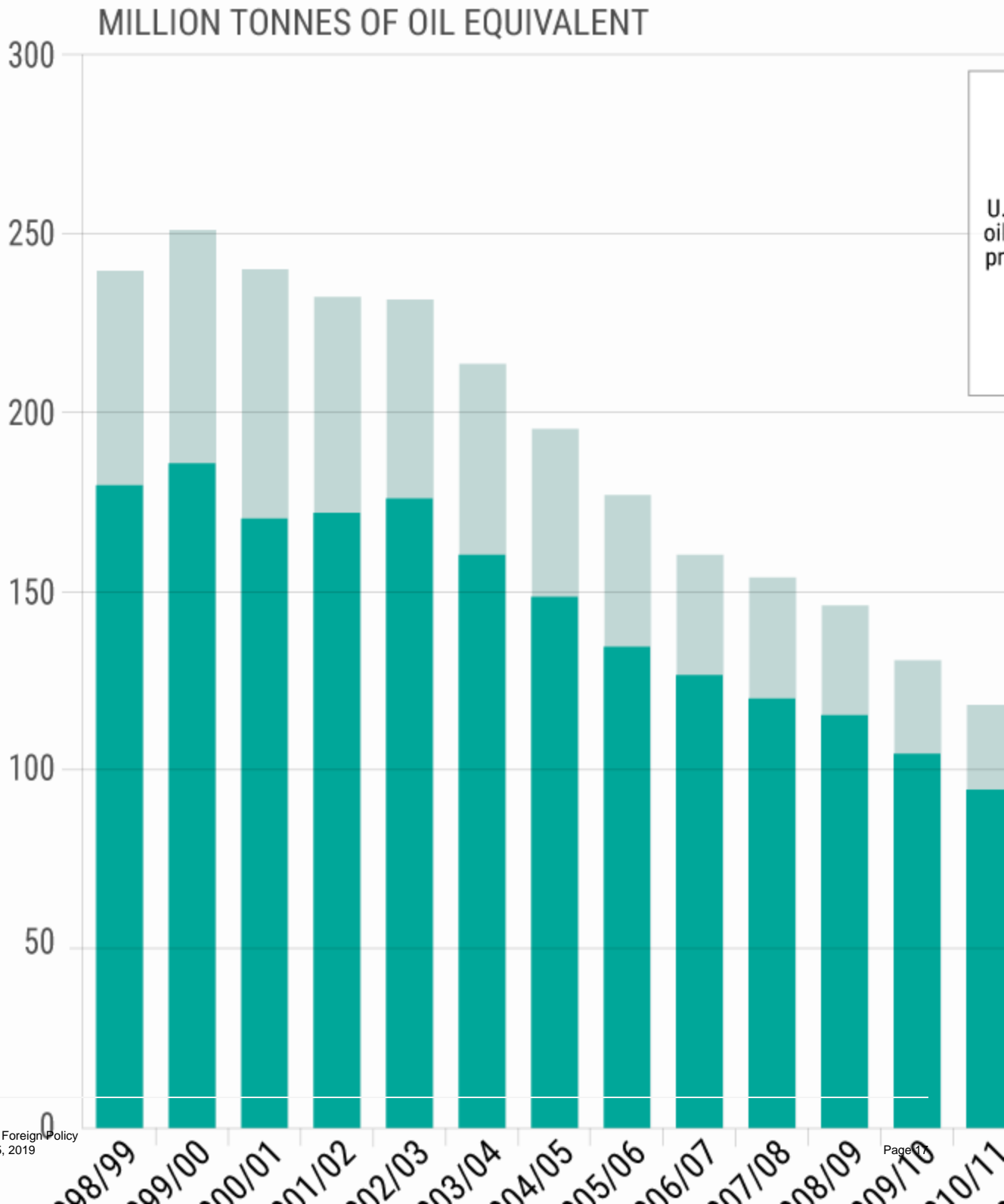
## TOTAL MANUFACTURING



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The heart of Scotland's issue with Brexit is political. Scotland voted 62 percent to 38 percent to remain in the European Union, and in Brexit negotiations, Scottish desires have been expressly ignored. Because of the division in the U.K. over Brexit, Scotland has had to watch the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland play kingmaker and extract more concessions from Prime Minister Theresa May's government during talks with the EU than Scotland could. The U.K.'s membership in the European Union was, in a sense, Scotland's insurance policy on runaway 21st century English provincialism. In the same way that the British Empire was a massive free trade zone that transcend ethnic and national identities by inventing a concept of Britishness, Scotland viewed the European Union as an entity that could enable the United Kingdom to once again be part of something larger than itself, transcending its ethnic and national identities at the altar of an idea of "European-ness."

# Scotland's Oil and Gas Production

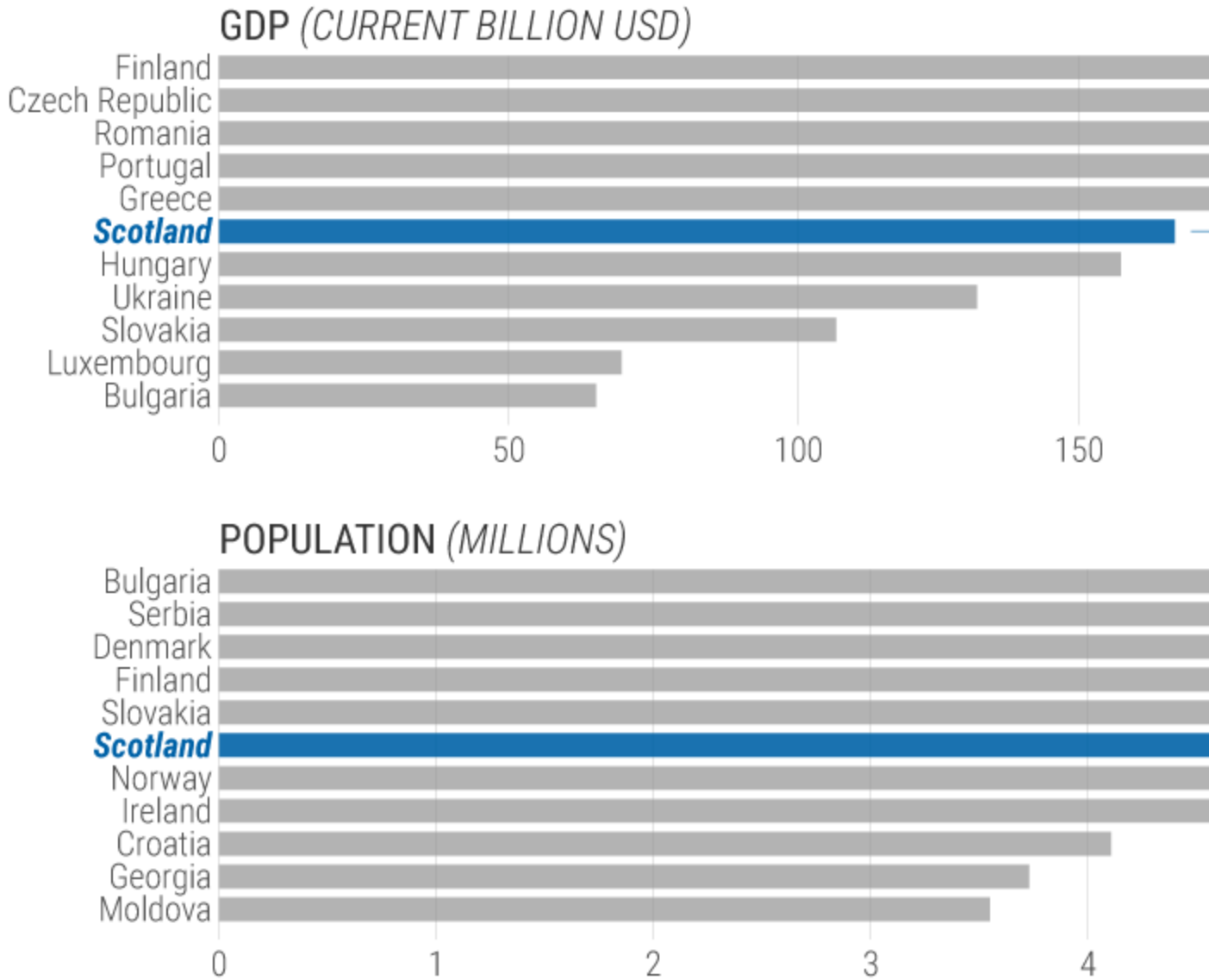


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As a matter of policy, the current Scottish government favors Scottish independence. As a matter of politics, any Scottish government, whether unionist or pro-independence, must ensure Scotland's economic links with the United Kingdom are maintained while preserving Scotland's national identity. From a Scottish perspective, Brexit threatens the latter. **An English decision is being implemented by English politicians for England's benefit**, while Scottish protests fall on deaf ears.

# Scotland's Standing in Europe

*European countries with comparable population and GDP to Scotland, 2018*



**Note:** GDP figure for Scotland is estimated from 2014  
**Source:** Eurostat, World Bank, The Guardian, National Records of Scotland

*(click to enlarge)*

In some limited ways, therefore, the Scottish government is beginning to resemble pre-union Scotland. It's trying to strengthen its relationships with European powers, dangling the possibility that it could influence the rest of the United Kingdom, but only if the EU supports Scotland in more than mere rhetoric. The Scottish government wants public support from EU institutions and is playing up its historical connections to continental Europe just as the potential next U.K. prime minister, Boris Johnson, has gone on record saying he would be willing to take the U.K. out of the EU without a deal. Scotland is sending a clear message to Johnson and any other potential future British prime minister that, should Westminster follow through on Johnson's threat, Scotland will not go along quietly. If the U.K. can leave the European Union, Scotland can leave the British union, too.

Economic interests drove Scotland to seek union with England in 1707. But economic interests are not what's driving Scotland to reconsider its place in the union in 2019; rather, it is the possibility that Scotland might no longer be able to maintain its distinctiveness in a union that prioritizes parochial interests over global concerns. The fact that Scotland, England, Wales and **Northern Ireland** mean different and perhaps irreconcilable things when they speak about what it means to be British has Scotland seriously considering independence in Europe rather than independence in Britain, and has England behaving with utter deafness toward the only country more important to its national security than the United States.

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