

The Scotland Effect

Introduction



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The Scottish Executive has published a paper entitled "Scotland's Future, A National Conversation" and has encouraged people to contribute to a "conversation" on various points raised in that document. A section on the Scottish Executive website for people to post their views was set up as well as a section dedicated to some specific policy issues and inviting comments from the public. The specific policy issues relate to those covered in the paper. There is a limitation of website contribution postings of 500 words. This is of course a practical imposition to help users digest posts. On the other hand, on such important issues, we feel that it is important to provide inputs of a more detailed nature as a contribution to these efforts. We have therefore decided to publish some documents covering the issues raised but to also introduce some additional policy issues which, it would seem, any comprehensive review of constitution needs to address.

The Scotland Effect

We have chosen the name "The Scotland Effect" for this series because in marked contrast to two efforts concerning two other important issues concerning constitutional change related to the European Union and Britain, at least Scotland has set an example by promoting public discussion and debate through their "conversation". It is already apparent that this will lead to many issues being raised to the surface which have lain for too long out of sight and therefore not considered in full by the public. Therefore, this Scottish initiative will end up influencing other work on constitution both at the UK and European levels, thus "The Scotland Effect".

A significant opportunity

The British Strategic Review does not promote or represent any specific political party viewpoint. On the other hand the BSR welcomes this initiative of the Scottish Executive to advance this topic because it is an opportunity to give a more widespread exposure to several important advances in strategic analysis related to the theory and practice of representation, constitution and constitutional economics. These fields have advanced significantly during the last twenty five years but have seldom been provided with platforms nor been called upon to demonstrate the many possibilities which exist for improving participatory democracy.

Our approach

Therefore the BSR approach to this issue is not to set out to secure a preconceived policy position but rather to present a conventional decision analysis of each issue. In this way we hope to help broaden the range of consideration so as to make sure that all reasonable options on any question are considered. This means from the outset that there is a need to balance the discussion in terms of reviewing the full range of devolutionary settlements. It is also necessary to assess the full implications of these not only for Scotland but also for all of the people living on these Isles.

Freedom, it is so important

Constitution often seems to be a simple issue and is sometimes summarised in terms of specific states such as unionism, federalism or independence. But at all times, in terms of the satisfaction of the people of a country, it is of utmost importance that the different aspects of constitution uphold consistently some essential issues. Good governance reflects the preferences of the people. Preferences are best arrived at on an individual basis with freedom of access to relevant information, open questions, honest answers, reflection, analysis and conclusions leading to the expression, under no forces of coercion, of a preference. In other words there is a need for people to be free to define their preferences and government by reflecting preferences upholds that freedom. It is therefore of fundamental importance to remain vigilant of any constitutional propositions which undermine this basic imperative. Therefore, the simple declaration of support for unionism, federalism or independence says nothing about how, under such schemes, individual freedoms will be upheld. In order to secure and defend individual freedoms many aspects of constitution need to be in place. To maintain a level of relevant coherence between the papers we will present, each will contain a review of the impact of any options presented on individual freedom by measuring the degree to which decisions would uphold the preferences of the electorate.

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