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Scottish International Initiatives: Internationalism, the Scottish Parliament and the SNP

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Abstract

The presence of a Scottish Parliament has recently altered the way in which Scotland deals with the outside world. Greater formal representation in the European Union, and an informal presence in Brussels, ensures, in the eyes of many, a greater Scottish voice in European policy. And yet, even in the absence of a parliament Scotland has long exerted a presence on the international stage, from its earlier allegiance with France and participation in the British empire to its efforts to find trading partners. This paper examines the historical approach to international participation in Scotland and Scottish nationalism before examining how the presence of a Scottish Parliament changes the way in which Scotland conducts its international affairs. It ends with an analysis of the Scottish National Party's approach to international relations, comparing recent international initiatives of the Parliament with those proposed by the pro-independence SNP. The analysis shows that Scotland's relations with the European Union are coloured by Scottish political attitudes, the current manifestation of nationalism and a perceptions of the nation's history of internationalism.

Introduction

In 1707 Scottish political elites negotiated a settlement that would bring to an end the existence of separate parliaments in Scotland and England. The result was a new Parliament that marked Scotland's integration into Great Deprived of sovereignty, the Scottish political system, such as Britain. developed as a conglomerate of Westminster constituency existed, representatives and later, an administrative bureaucracy that implemented the policy choices of Westminster. Scotland lacks the trappings of a sovereign state, and is thus unable to conduct its international affairs in the same venues and same manner as other sovereign states. Scotland is not itself a member of the United Nations, of NATO, the G-7 or the European Union nor does it possess diplomatic representation abroad. Even after the establishment of a Scottish Parliament, foreign affairs remain a reserved matter for Westminster. At the same time, Scotland possesses its own representatives in diverse organisations, remains an active partner within British European activities, contains its own political -if not diplomatic -

representation in Brussels, sends regiments within the British military abroad and sends national teams to compete in sports events such as World Cup Soccer, and the Commonwealth Games. As a result, Scotland exists as a half-way house, between a sovereign state and a region, operating as a stateless nation (Keating 1996) characterised more by informal influence that official representation. Its present position, itself the result of eighteenth-century 'inter-national' negotiation among Scottish and English elites, affects the options available to Scotland's political classes in the international arena. This paper examines the historical approach to international relations within Scottish nationalism before turning to the influence of Europe, and a Scottish Parliament, on Scotland's international initiatives. The paper ends with an examination of the potential international activities of an independent Scotland.

Before an examination is possible it is necessary to clarify some of the terms used throughout this paper. One of the most troublesome terms involves the nature of international relations for the activities are often not among nations but among states. This misnomer greatly complicates the analysis of foreign affairs. In Scotland's case, however, the term inter-national, 'among nations', is much more appropriate. For although a textbook understanding of international relations would suggest that Scotland, lacking a State as it does, is incapable of undertaking international initiatives, a literal understanding of the term inter-national is appropriate. For this reason, the term 'inter-national', complete with hyphen, refers not just to relations among or involving States, but those involving composite nations or regions as well.

In addition, the absence of a sovereign State structure in Scotland suggests that the notions of realpolitik, or Morgenthau's characterisation of the world's political structure, is a theoretical concept with little to add. That said, party documents from the 1980s suggest that safety rather than the promotion of peace occupied the minds of Scottish politicians (SNP 1983, SNP 1987). Calls for greater Scottish international activity whether under the auspices of British involvement or as a region of Europe have been overwhelmingly concerned with the promotion of international co-operation and development. Lacking a State structure as it does, Scotland's political actors are absolved of whatever complications or implications that might otherwise affect a sovereign state. Thus, it is not just that Scotland exists as a nation within a State, but also that the absence of a State structure accords it a certain freedom as far as international initiatives are concerned.¹ Michael Keating argues, for example, that the lack of a written constitution in Britain has allowed Scotland to establish a presence in Europe beyond other devolved regions let alone participating units of unitary States like France (Keating 1999). One could argue that what it lacks in sovereignty, it makes up for in its ability to select issues of interest. This affects the political system of Scotland rather than the Scots themselves, who as British subjects, are still affected by the UK's international behaviour. This leads to a second issue of definitions, which

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¹ Such an analysis is consistent with analyses of domestic political development within Scotland. According to Paterson, incorporation in the union afforded Scottish civil society a measure of autonomy that it would not have enjoyed had it retained a sovereign State structure (Paterson 1994).

involves the differences between Scotland and Britain, Scottish nationalism and the SNP, the Parliament and Scots themselves.

While it is correct to speak of Scotland as a stateless nation, it is worth noting that Scotland and its residents remain within the UK and as such are as affected or as bound by the UK's international activities as those in London or Essex or Yorkshire. Similarly, when speaking of Scotland's international initiatives it is essential to distinguish between proposals of Scots who are acting within a larger British movement, proposals put forward by the Scottish Parliament, and proposals favoured by the Scottish National Party. For the most part, this paper examines the influence of a Scottish Parliament on the ability of the nation to undertake inter-national activities. These initiatives are compared in the last section to the diverse proposals put forward by the four main parties in Scotland: Labour, their coalition partners the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives and lastly, the SNP. But first, the paper examines the extent of 'internationalism' within Scotland, and traditional approaches to inter-national activity throughout Scotland's history.

Scotland and Internationalism

Measures of internationalism and international activity may be found in diverse statistics. Although international initiatives stem from institutional action, a brief look at the population and economy of Scotland provides an additional way of evaluating the degree to which the nation has contact with the rest of the world. Within a Canadian context for example, levels of multiculturalism are often used as proxies for the 'internationalism' of the country. With an ethnic minority population of approximately one percent of the Scottish population, compared to six percent in Great Britain, Scotland could be mistaken for a relatively homogeneous or parochial nation. Moreover, references to cultural communities within Scotland include discussions of the Catholic population in the southwest or the Gaelic population in the highlands rather than references to immigrants in the 'central belt' of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Although the first elections for the Scottish Parliament managed to bring in an acceptable number of women representatives, not one member of Scotland's ethnic minority communities was elected. Less than ten candidates from ethnic minority communities, mostly in the central belt, stood for election. Trade provides another proxy measure of internationalism. Sixty-one percent of Scotland's exports are to rest of the European Union, with most heading to France, Italy and Germany. In addition, Scotland provides labour and finished goods for a European market producing 65% of Europe's banking machines, 51% of electronic notebooks and 35% of PCs.

History, Nationalism and Contact with the outside world

Academic literature and political documents make much of the international spirit of Scots, and the tradition of openness throughout Scotland's history. The Auld Alliance with France and trade with the Netherlands characterised

Scotland's pre-union approach to international relations². Although efforts to create a Scottish empire failed miserably with the Darien scheme on an isthmus in Panama post-1707 Scots became active participants within the British empire. Scottish Prime Ministers, Governors General and Viceroys held power not in Scotland, but oceans away in Canada, Australia and India.³ Efforts to re-establish a Stuart on the throne, in 1715 and again in 1745 further demonstrate a continued if minority interest in inter-national activity. Thus, Scotland has enjoyed the disadvantages of English imperial attention and post-union, has shared in the economic and political advantages as an imperial partner.⁴ Contact with the outside world, as facilitated by participation in the empire, brought increased trade and economic benefit to Scotland. Intellectually, the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment demonstrated that Scottish thinkers such as David Hume and Adam Smith were able to draw on and influence continental thought.⁵ For political parties, this history has provided Scotland with a reputation for internationalism and openness.

The Scottish National Party, in particular, relies on what it takes to be a Scottish tradition of internationalism and uses it as a critique for the existing constitutional settlement. "Isolationism is alien to the Scottish spirit" proclaimed former SNP leader Alex Salmond in a recent speech (Salmond 1995). Relying on a comparison with other nations, the SNP argues that given Scotland's economic strength, its history of international involvement and stage of political development, independence is not only possible but appropriate (SNP 1997a). If Singapore and Malaysia, Kiribati and Tuvalu, Rhodesia and Nyasaland can successfully achieve independence, surely Scotland is capable of the same (SNP 1997a). Thus, awareness of Scotland's distinctiveness within an international context has become a pillar of nationalist rhetoric.

A second critique of the present system stems from international stature of Britain. The changing fortunes of the larger Nation State provide, in the case of Scottish nationalists, an impetus for departure unheralded in more prosperous times. The consequences for political confidence of declining international weight, and difficulties with larger economic partners suggest that the benefits of tying national destiny to a declining hegemonic power resemble an offer of diminishing returns rather than the promise of security predicted by the architects of the 1707 Treaty of Union. Most often, this argument surfaces as a marriage analogy. The once fruitful partnership of Scotland and England/Wales is no longer advantageous to either partner (Brown, McCrone and Paterson 1998). Or, according to former SNP leader Alex Salmond:

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² Former First Minister Donald Dewar recently claimed in speech that throughout the seventeenth century Scottish soldiers made up seven percent of the Dutch army (Dewar 1999).

³ Canada's first two prime ministers, John A. Macdonald and Alexander Mackenzie were both Scots. At present there are approximately 25 million individuals with Scottish ancestry in the United States and Canada (Dewar 1999, Statistics Canada 1999)

⁴ In addition to military campaigns within its borders in 1715 and 1745 and the subsequent proscription of markers of highland life between 1746 and 1752, the persistent if not malicious anglicisation of Scotland can be directly attributable to the union (Lynch 1992).

⁵ It should be noted, however that the influence of Smith and Hume reached its height much later because of the radicalism of their ideas at the time (Brown, McCrone and Paterson 1998)

100 years ago we were amongst the most prosperous nations of the world, a powerhouse of industry, providing manufacturing muscle at the centre of a major empire. Now we often appear to be a social and economic backwater, perched on the fringes of a third rate, badly focuses and perpetually wrong footed power (Salmond 1995)

If the first critique relies on international comparisons and the second critique points to Britain's declining international stature, a third critique relies on international developments that remove much of the risk from Scottish The 1970s discovery of oil in the north sea proved to independence. nationalists that Scotland's independence from the rest of the UK would be The SNP's 'It's Scotland's Oil' campaign was economically possible. designed to encourage hesitant Scots that the sale of oil on international markets facilitated independence. Much has been made of the oil revenue gained by the Westminster government. The strengthening of the European Union, throughout the 1980s and 1990s has further made the notion of independence less extreme. Thus, Scotland not only has the resources to sustain a sovereign state, but also enters into a ready-made system of obligations and funding to which it has already been contributing and to which it has already been aligning its legislation. A more complete examination of the relationship between Scotland and the European Union appears in the next section.

Scotland and Europe

Originally established in 1951 under the Treaty of Paris as the European Coal and Steel Community the then-six-member organisation has expanded to include 15 countries. In 1957 the Treaty of Rome provided for structural funds that would aid regional development, strengthening economic if not social cohesion within Europe. The United Kingdom joined in 1973, the same year as Ireland and Denmark. The history of the European Union has been marked by a series of treaty reviews that each sought to extent the influence of the organisation. The 1987 Single European Act, the 1992 Treaty of the European Union, or Maastricht Treaty and the more recent Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 have paved the way for a single economic market and single currency in less than fifteen years.

At present British voters sent 87 representatives to the 626-member European Parliament. This additional outlet for political expression hazards a potential loss of confidence or satisfaction with political representation. Where the European Parliament provides an obvious benefit is in the political

⁶ The original six included Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. These have been joined by Denmark, Ireland and the UK (1973) Greece (1981) Portugal and Spain (1986) East Germany (1990) Austria, Finland and Sweden (1995).

⁷ Whether the locus of democracy matters less than its mere existence, is worthy of greater discussion. Social capital literature, for example, would argue that the nature of democratic interaction matters more than the presence of opportunity. Chapter five deals with issues of democratic representation, civic engagement and resultant satisfaction with the polity.

weight enjoyed by different political parties. Until the 1999 European elections, all British MEPs were elected on the basis of large regional constituencies. As of 1999, the eight Scottish MEPs are elected on a nation-wide system of proportional representation. The result was 3 Labour MEPs, two MEPs each for the SNP and Conservative Party and one Liberal Democrat MEP. For the past two European elections the Scottish electorate has returned two SNP MEPs among the eight sent to Brussels. Comparatively, under ten percent of the 72 Scottish Westminster MPs are from the SNP. In Scotland, what has traditionally been considered the main stage of political life, Westminster, has witnessed the smallest presence of the nationalist party, effectively shifting the political expression of nationalism to both a higher, European, and lower, local council, stage. This has changed with the election of 35 SNP representatives to the 129-member Scottish Parliament

Table 1: Political Representation in Scotland

Westminster 72 of 659	Scottish Parliament of 129	European Parliament 8 of 626
Labour 55	Labour 55	Labour 3
SNP 6	SNP 35	SNP 2
Conservatives 0	Conservatives 19	Conservative 2
Liberal Democrats 10	Liberal Democrats 17	Liberal Democrats 1
Other 1	Other 3	Other 0

Academic literature suggests that the popularity of the European Union in Scotland, in contrast to the division that exists within England, stems in part from the social values espoused by European legislation (Brown, McCrone and Paterson 1998). Scottish 'myths' of egalitarianism and community, whether accurate representations of actual practices or merely hollow yet powerful markers of identity find their reflection in European social legislation. The Social Chapter, which promised more generous pensions, working standards and wages than those available in Britain, was hailed by political parties that claim to espouse social democratic values (SNP 1992). An additional sense of distance between Scotland and the rest of Britain stems from the portrayal of Britain, as a whole, as an 'awkward and reluctant partner' (George 1998) in the European Union, unsure of the degree to which it wants to be integrated within the EU. While 'Euro-sceptics' exist in Scotland, whether because of the powers of the devolved parliament or an inattentive media they appear much less plentiful.

Further Scottish support stems from the principle of subsidiarity, included in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Arguing that policy decisions should be taken at the lowest possible level, the principle of subsidiarity allows Scottish nationalists to support the European Union without fear that it represents an additional layer of bureaucracy or centralised control wrenched away from Scots. Support for subsidiarity coincides with the changed view of the Scottish National Party to the European Union. In its 1983 election manifesto the party claimed it would support a referendum on an independent Scotland's

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⁸ Wales and Northern Ireland also operate national-list electoral systems.

role in Europe, but that it would not encourage Scottish membership. According to the party, the EEC's "centralist thinking from Brussels is as ill-suited for Scotland as that from London" (SNP 1983). Instead, the party wanted a trade association with the rest of the EEC. By 1987, the party had amended its views, arguing that it would recommend joining the EEC, again by referendum, providing that an independent Scotland would get special guarantees for Scottish interests in agriculture, industry, fishing, oil and steel (SNP 1987). By the 1992 general election, the party was so convinced of the benefits of European membership that it entitled the manifesto *Independence in Europe: Make It Happen Now* (SNP 1992). The principle of subsidiarity also ensured that the newly established Scottish Parliament would retain jurisdiction over a wide range of policy areas. In addition, this means that there is a considerable degree of overlap between the areas of jurisdiction of the Scottish and European Parliaments. The following section examines the impact of a Scottish Parliament on Scotland's international initiatives.

Scottish Parliament

The election of a Labour government in May 1997 paved the way for a devolution referendum in September 1997. The two question referendum allowed Scots to determine whether they would like a Parliament, and whether they would like that Parliament to have tax-varying powers. voted yes to both questions, by 74 and 64 percent respectively. In May 1999, two years after the general election, Scots voted in the first parliamentary elections in almost 300 years. The result was a two-party coalition government, run by Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The results of the election are contained in table one of the paper. Although the establishment of the Scottish Parliament affords Scots a measure of self-government over an extensive list of policy areas, most issues related to international affairs remain under the jurisdiction of Westminster. This is not to say that the Scottish Parliament has no role in international affairs, but rather than its role is subject to goodwill and scrutiny from London and Brussels as much as it ever was. Although Scotland has not gained any formal representation with devolution, it has been granted observer status by the Westminster government. In addition, the Parliament contains within its structures a capacity to react to European legislation in a way that was not possible before devolution. This is of particular importance to Westminster, for if a devolved parliament is found in breech of EU legislation, the member state, in this case Britain, would be held accountable (Lazarowicz 1998b). developments accompanying devolution allow for a measure of additional influence. An analysis of the structures of the Parliament and other recent changes demonstrates the extent to which Scotland can manage its own international affairs.

In an effort to provide the members of the Scottish Parliament with guidance in establishing their standing orders and procedures, the Labour government in Westminster established a Consultative Steering Group (CSG) that would provide recommendations on best practice and institutional design. The result of the CSG's deliberations was a 176-page report in which the group emphasised the importance of four key principles: power-sharing,

accountability, access and participation, and equal opportunities. These four principles were intended to guide the creation of standing orders that governed the legislative process, the role of the presiding officer, committee structure, plenary debates, and the use of information technology. While the CSG report was designed to recommend rather than draft the standing orders of the Scottish Parliament, the group also suggested a list of nine committees. In addition to committees for standards, procedures, audit and finance the CSG also recommended an all-party business committee to prepare the programme and daily order of the Parliament an equal opportunities committee to ensure that the policies of the Parliament fulfil the principle of equal opportunities and a Europe committee to sift relevant EU documents on behalf of the Parliament. In the CSG's view, the European Committee would be the point of contact with political systems outside Scotland. It would examine the paperwork issued by Brussels and pass it on to relevant committees to ensure that Scottish legislation complies with European law.

Accepting the advice of the CSG report, the current standing orders of the Scottish Parliament have provided for a European committee. Chaired by Labour MSP Hugh Henry the 13-member committee has a remit to consider and report on: proposals for European Communities legislation, the implementation of EC legislation, and any EC or EU issue. The European Parliament creates two types of legislation: regulations, which take direct effect and require no state action, and directives, which establish the aims of the EC and requires states and regions to adapt their legislation to comply with the directives. For the most part, directives cover areas of jurisdiction currently under the control of a devolved Scottish Parliament. The committee deals with approximately 1200 documents per year that come from the EC. In addition to the European Committee the Parliament also houses two crossparty groups related to international affairs. These groups provide an opportunity for all MSPs who share an interest to meet. Non-MSPs may also be members of cross-party groups. The Cross-Party Group on Human Rights aims to promote human rights issues within the Scottish Parliament. The Cross-Party Group on International Development aims to co-ordinate the efforts of MSPs and Scottish organisations on international aid and development issues, raise awareness, promote discussion, engage 'minority residents' in Scotland and facilitate regular visits to Scotland by representations of aid agencies.

Although the standing orders of the Parliament may suggest a limited capacity for international engagement, the establishment of the Parliament has encouraged an adapted approach to international affairs. This involves a larger Scottish presence in Europe, concordats with Westminster on European matters

Scottish Executive office in Brussels has four staff who monitor the activities of the European Union, report back to the Executive, lobby, liaise and gather intelligence. Scottish civil servants remain part of a unified British civil service that serves Whitehall and British representation in Europe in addition to the Scotland Office and the Scottish Executive.

Recognising the complications that could arise from the presence of two parties in office in London and Edinburgh, and aware of the demands of sharing essential information within the UK, the executives have drawn up concordats to govern the behaviour of civil servants and executive members. The more than 30 documents, which are non-legally binding, together offer guidance for behaviour. The over-arching Memorandum of Understanding, released in October 1999 accompanies a series of smaller documents released November to December 1999, which cover such issues as cultural and sport, environment and transport, fisheries education, health and safety, trade and industry. The two executives have also signed a concordat on European Structural Funds.

The Belfast Agreement included the provision for the establishment of a British-Irish Council, or council of the isles, which would include government representatives of the UK, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Channel Islands and the Isle of Mann. The council will discuss issues of concern to governments in the UK and Ireland without having any specific responsibility to legislate.

International Initiatives of the SNP

Because it calls for the withdrawal of Scotland from the UK the Scotlish National Party has developed a comprehensive vision of what Scotland's international initiatives. Because the three other parties support the present constitutional settlement none have developed a vision of Scotland's international behaviour beyond that which is possible as a nation within the UK. Thus it is not necessarily the case that Scottish parties disagree on the international activities of Scotland, but rather that only the SNP has outlined its proposals. For the other three parties international affairs remain a concern of Westminster rather than Holyrood. A brief examination of the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative views allows for a comparison with the international initiatives of the SNP.

Although Labour party documents make little mention of either the European Union or international relations, Labour politicians have contributed to the debate on Europe. In his 1999 Sunday Times Lecture to the Labour Party Conference Labour MSP and MP John McAllion argued that the principle of subsidiarity, entrenched within the EU, did much to foster devolution in Scotland (McAllion 1999). Former First Minister Donald Dewar further elaborated on the impact of devolution on Scotland's capacity for external relations. Arguing that devolution allows a once-silenced Scotland to return to the 'European mainstream' Dewar claims the existence of a Parliament will give Scotland a representative voice (Dewar 1999a, Dewar 1999b). He further claims that Scottish interests are sufficiently similar to British interests that Scotland would be wise to remain as a nation within a strong state rather than as a small independent state in Europe (Dewar 1999a). Dewar likens the SNP view, that an independent Scotland would immediately gain official representation if not clout, to the 'tyranny of the tiny' (Dewar 1999a). The Liberal Democrats agree. As long-standing proponents of a federal UK the LibDems claim Scotland's interests are best represented within UK delegations to the Council of Ministers (Scottish Liberal Democrats 1999). The Conservative party presents a similar view of Scotland's position, but supplements its analysis with a slightly different evaluation of the role of international affairs. In its 1992 manifesto the party claimed a "government's duties are clear: to protect Britain in a dangerous world" (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association 1992). Such a view stands apart from the evaluations presented by other parties. Strength for Scotland is guaranteed in position of the UK within the European Union, in the amount of money that can be spent on defence within Scotland and on the benefits of NATO membership (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association 1997). It is in this characterisation of the present situation that the Conservative party distances itself from the proposals of the SNP.

The most consistent and distinguishing international initiative of the SNP The party has long argued for the concerns its view of nuclear power. removal of nuclear weapons from Scottish soil and waters and has promoted the idea of a non-proliferation treaty. It is worth noting that support for nuclear disarmament does not suggest an abandonment of defence. manifesto contains a section entitled "A Safe Scotland in a Peaceful World" in which the party argues for strengthening conventional forces to protect oil and fishing resources. The party maintains, however, that it would not bring an independent Scotland into NATO as long as the organisation "uses Scotland as a front-line nuclear base" (SNP 1983). The commitment to nuclear disarmament, and the view that NATO membership is inconsistent with such a commitment, features in each of the party manifestos and documents dealing with international affairs throughout the 1980s and 1990s (SNP 1987, SNP 1992, SNP 1997, SNP 1999, SNP Research Department 1995, Salmond 1995). As the 1992 manifesto states:

membership of a nuclear weapons based alliance system is inconsistent with the SNP non-nuclear defence policy. As long as NATO strategy remains based on nuclear deterrence the SNP will negotiate to disengage from the NATO Command structure in a manner which does not destabilise the defence interests either of Scotland or of Europe (SNP 1992)

In its place, the party proposes to invest the 1.5 billion spent on Trident on education and housing, to increase the size of the convention army but without conscription and to participate fully in other organisations such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the European Union. Scotland's international relations, the party argues, should be characterised by "cooperation and friendliness" (SNP 1987).

SNP documents also point to two other proposals which distinguish the party from its competitors. Before devolution the party argued for the creation of an Association of the States of the British Isles which would foster cooperation in areas of mutual interest much like the Nordic Council (SNP 1983, SNP 1987). The party would also increase the share of GDP to third world aid to 0.7 %, rather than the 0.3-0.4 percent currently spent by the UK government. Other

proposals have included the establishment of economic sanctions against South Africa (SNP 1987). An independent Scotland, in the eyes of the SNP, would cease to be "the invisible nation of Europe" (Harvie 1998) would immediately acquire eight more seats in the European Parliament, would assume its role -and a veto - as members of the European Commission and Council of Europe, would re-negotiate the Common Fisheries Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy (SNP 1997b) and would assume full diplomatic relations with all states, targeting diplomatic representation "to provide the most effective promotion of Scottish business and Scottish interests" (SNP 1997a). Its most recent outline of international proposals includes support for the establishment of a Scottish-European Assembly to act as a forum for MSP, MEPs and members of the committee of regions, confirmed support for the British-Irish Council (SNP 1999).

Conclusion

The previous analysis demonstrates that the new Scottish Parliament, while stopping short of providing formal representation for Scotland in the European Union and other international bodies, does allow for a distinctly Scottish interaction with EU legislation.

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