

SNP's new separation plans have 'unravelling within 24 hours'

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The SNP's independence plans have "unravelling within 24 hours", the Scottish Conservatives have said today – amid total confusion over the SNP's stance on EU membership.

In interviews this morning, SNP ministers failed to spell out whether an independent Scotland would seek membership of the European Union.

It comes after Nicola Sturgeon was also unable to say whether an independent Scotland would apply for full EU membership in her press conference yesterday.

The Scottish Conservatives said the confusion only serves to underline the "reckless" proposal for a rushed referendum – which would force people to vote on "a pig in a poke".

It comes after senior EU figures made it clear yesterday that an independent Scotland would have to apply to become a member – even if an independence referendum was held before Britain left the EU.

This is also the view of leading experts who have said that an independent Scotland would have to apply as a new country to get into the EU after independence.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The SNP's plans to impose a referendum on independence on Scotland have unravelling within 24 hours.

"Nicola Sturgeon is demanding that people are forced to make another choice on their future in as little as 18 months. And yet faced with reasonable questions about what independence means, she and her ministers cannot answer.

"We know Scotland will leave the EU along with the rest of the United Kingdom in 2019. Yet the SNP can't say whether an independent Scotland would then seek full membership of the EU or not.

"This is the opposite of the informed choice proposed by Nicola Sturgeon. The truth is she wants people to vote blind because she calculates this is the best way to increase support for separation.

"The First Minister is proposing the opposite of a fair, democratic vote – she is demanding that people across Scotland vote on a pig in a poke.

"The SNP is trying to have it both ways.

"It is demanding a referendum because of our decision to leave the European Union. But, in order to keep Leave voters on board, it won't say whether Scotland would seek to get back in."□

Below are transcripts from various SNP ministers on radio this morning:

Studio: You talk about clarity being very clear on that. How would an independent Scotland for example if it were to go that way, continue this relationship with Europe? Because that would surely mean a whole re-negotiation.

Fiona Hyslop MSP: Well, we have already set out a very comprehensive, technically detailed paper, how all of the UK could have a continuing relationship even outside the EU but continuing our relationship with the single market, so that is indeed possible. But in terms of the EU relationship future, much of course will depend on the views and opinions of our colleagues in the capitals and indeed the institutions of Europe. The European institutions are flexible and indeed the single market, the sheer size of that single market, means that a continued relationship is really important. The idea of having your very expensive customs tariffs in relation to our goods and services will be a problem for not just for Scottish business but for UK business. We want to make sure we can continue to trade with the biggest single market in the world and that is very important to us.

Studio: How would you continue that relationship? Presumably, you are imagining doing it, correct me if I am wrong, as an independent Scotland which would, as the rules are at the moment, mean a renegotiation.

Fiona Hyslop MSP: We are in a period of complete and utter renegotiation under Brexit. We do not know the terms of that. You are anticipating that I will know and anticipate what the exact details will be of our independence position, when we have the referendum, now that's sometime off and we want to make sure there's clarity on our independence position and our future relationship with the EU. A lot of it will depend on what state, what will be the state of the transition, if we get a transition from the UK Government in relation to exiting the EU, what will be the position of Scotland at the time the UK leaves? We want to make sure there is a choice before the UK leaves the EU and that is why we have that window of opportunity between autumn 2018 and spring 2019 but this has to be about choice. And that's what we want to offer the people of Scotland. We'll perhaps be the only part of the United Kingdom that can have a choice about whether this hard BREXIT deal is what we want or not

Nicola Sturgeon answer to Brian Taylor yesterday...

Question (non-verbatim) – are you assuming you can continue Scottish membership of the EU? If not, are you saying you'd definitely seek to re-join Scotland to full membership?

Nicola Sturgeon: What I'm saying today very clearly is that for Scotland to be in a position to **negotiate in a timely fashion our own relationship with Europe**, it's important that we indicate that desire and intention, before the UK leaves, or at the very least within a short timeframe after they do so. To leave it any longer than that would make that process more difficult. I do accept that that will be a process of discussion. **In terms of the second clause of your question, the SNP's long standing policy and commitment has been to membership of the European Union. Obviously we are in different circumstances now than we have been in the past, but that has been and remains our position. But on this issue, as on all of the many other issues that people will want to consider in advance of a choice, I've said very clearly that we will set out our proposition in advance of that choice so that it is an informed choice.**

...

Question (non-verbatim) – What reassurances do you have from other EU members that Scotland can be in or re-join?

Nicola Sturgeon: We have over the past 9 months been working very hard to influence the UK Government's negotiating position, and that has been partly as a result of some of the advice and feedback we've had from other countries across Europe, that if we wanted to seek a differential arrangement for Scotland then Europe would be open to that, but it had to come through the track of the UK Article 50 negotiations. So that has been our focus. Clearly we will continue to discuss with the other countries of the European Union and indeed with the institutions of the European Union. I know from my own experience across Europe that there is an incredible warmth of feeling towards Scotland, an incredible support, and a feeling that should Scotland democratically choose to be an independent country, then that is something that the EU would accept and respect and these discussions will continue no doubt in the months to come.