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- Sturgeon talks down importance of UK market again

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Scotland's First Minister has again talked down the importance of the UK market, hinting that she valued custom with other EU countries more.

In an interview in Brussels, Nicola Sturgeon claimed the European single market was "eight times the size of the UK market".

This is despite official statistics showing businesses here trade four times as much with other parts of the UK than Europe.

She told the audience as part of her Belgian trip: "It is important for Scotland to trade freely across the UK. It's vital for the rest of the UK to trade freely with Scotland. But it's really important for Scotland also to continue to be able to trade freely within the single market. The single market is eight times the size of the UK market, so we shouldn't have to be in a position where we are having to choose one or the other."

In the same interview, Ms Sturgeon claimed the Scottish independence referendum was a more pleasant experience than the Brexit vote, something the Scottish Conservatives dismissed as "fantasy analysis".

And she admitted to keeping in touch with predecessor Alex Salmond, who's come under severe criticism for continuing to work for Kremlin-backed TV station Russia Today.

She said: "The last time I spoke to him was probably a couple of weeks ago, but what I last said to him I can't remember."

Addressing last week's independence blueprint, she described points around currency as "recommendations" rather than SNP policy, distancing herself from some of the findings.

**Scottish Conservative MSP Annie Wells said:**

"It's plainly misleading to talk of the European single market in this way.

"The SNP government's own figures prove that the importance of the UK single market – the very one the nationalists want to destroy – is four times more important than the EU.

“For Nicola Sturgeon to make out like the independence referendum was a joyous occasion in comparison to Brexit is also fantasy analysis.

“The behaviour throughout that campaign, and since, from some of her most fervent supporters was appalling, and the SNP would do well to confront that.

“After the car crash of the independence blueprint last week, it’s also no surprise to see Nicola Sturgeon distance herself from some of the findings.

“The SNP was too afraid to talk up the report when it came out, and now it’s begun the lengthy process of backing away altogether.”