

## SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

*Alex Salmond*

I am grateful for the invitation to return to this summer school, two years after I last spoke here. At that event Peter Sutherland, replying to a question on the implications of the single currency for Irish sovereignty, used the words 'We are all Irish Nationalists here'. I want to open what I say today by affirming that everyone who is attending this event are 'Friends of Ireland', and at this particular time, after the horrific bombing at Omagh, it is as friends that we will speak - friends who wish the best for this island and for its peoples, and who want to work with you to achieve such an end.

The process of positive change in Ireland took a major step forward with the Good Friday agreement, and with the building of confidence through new structures and new relationships. I want to pay tribute today to the key role in that building played by your Taoiseach and by the parties in Northern Ireland, particularly the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists. Bertie Ahearn, John Hume and David Trimble are figures of the 21st century in that regard. The SNP has consistently supported the search for peace in Ireland, and will continue to be positive in that support. In that connection I also praise the work for stability and security in the Northern Irish political process undertaken by Tony Blair, and by his predecessor John Major.

When I was preparing this address, it was as a friend looking forward to celebrating with you the progress that has been made: but friends are doubly important in the darker times. The carnage wrought by a handful of fanatics last Saturday has echoed through the whole of our islands. But it has not, and must not, succeed in turning back the clock to a time of fear and mutual suspicion. Rather it must - and it will - renew the determination of every democratic politician to make certain that the resounding vote last May for peace and progress will be the final and absolute arbiter of the future of this island. It is the people who decide on how they will go forward and they

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know that Ireland cannot and must not live in the shadow of the gunman and bomber. The people have chosen the clear bright air of democracy and reconciliation as their goal. I know that is your hope and intention to help achieve that - it is a hope and intention echoed and supported by your friends everywhere.

It is time for all of us to learn the lessons of the past, and to apply those lessons to secure a better future for all our citizens. It is a particular honour to be invited here to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the 1798 rising, after whose French hero this event is named. I hope today to draw some lessons from history and apply them to the need for our generation to embrace whole heartedly structures of co-operation which can move us forward in the 21st century.

In two days time it will be exactly two centuries since General Humbert landed at Killala. Bishop Stock - held prisoner for a month by the French in his own castle - described Humbert as 'intimidating: his eye small and sleepy, like a cat waiting to spring' and although he first behaved like a perfect gentleman, when the Bishop failed to secure the assistance that Humbert wanted he 'poured forth a torrent of vulgar abuse, roared, stamped, laid his hand frequently on a scimitar that battered the ground, presented a pistol at the Bishops' eldest son ... and at last told the Bishop himself that he would punish his disobedience by sending him to France'. Humbert's officers apologised to the Bishop later, claiming that their General was 'a hasty man, but very good natured'. And certainly Humbert's military genius was allied with a keen sense of honour and decency. It was, however, an honour and decency not shown by the victors in 1798, whose depredations marked this country for generations.

Scotland played but a small part in the events of 1798. Some of those fleeing Ireland took passage for Stranraer and Galloway. And Scottish troops were used in various parts of this island, including at Castlebar, where Fraser Fencibles from the Highlands put up a strong fight against Humbert's army and the United Irish volunteers, one of them continuing to shoot from the town wall when all around had fled, until he too was cast down into the street.

From time to time we have found ourselves on different sides during our British past. But that is true of all the peoples of these islands. For example - and taking another anniversary that falls due - eight hundred and fifty years ago tomorrow the Scots suffered one of their most devastating defeats by an English army at the Battle of the Standard, when David the First led a diverse army of 'Normans, Germans, English, Northumbrians and Cumbrians, men of Teviotdale and Lothian, Galwegians and Scots', as a contemporary chronicler

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put it, into battle, shouting the 'war cry of their fathers - Albanaich, Albanaich'. Scots, Welsh and Irish have fought each other, fought together against the English, and at times fought with the English against the others. Sometimes we have even kept our battles to ourselves, and fought within our nations. We have not been short of grudges and complaints, and in the past not slow at trying to settle them with force of arms. Indeed it might be fair to say that the only thing that Celtic amnesia and the mists of time do not erode, is the grudges!

But we are now in a different age. As we enter the twenty first century we are all trying to find not just solutions to age-old antagonisms and political inequalities, but also the right language and approach to reconcile such differences for ever. To note just one more anniversary - the 23rd of August is also the date on which William Wallace was hanged, drawn and quartered for the 'treason' of supporting the freedom of his country. I never walk through Parliament Hall at Westminster without pausing at the plaque that commemorates Wallace's trial - and yet today in London the annual memorial lecture to Wallace is being delivered for the first time by an English woman Dot Jessiman, the Convener of New Scots for Independence who is vigorous in her promotion of Scottish independence, active in the SNP and yet firmly rooted in, and proud of, the culture from which she comes. New Scots is a positive approach to reconciliation and the future: so is the existence of bodies like Scots Asians for Independence, who stand firmly on their cultural and religious roots in Pakistan, India, Kashmir and Bangladesh, but who are also strongly active in support of the SNP. On Sunday night the SNP will again be an active contributor to the annual dinner of the Pakistan Welfare Association, just one of the bodies that speaks for the vibrant Asian community in Scotland.

These positive actions for a better future are important in Scotland. They unify our country, and express the reality that the independence process springs from, and can deliver, a modern, inclusive, generous, civic force for good. That can only be enhanced by involvement in modern inclusive and developing structures of government - structures such as our own new Parliament, and structures such as the European Union.

The theme of this summer school is EU Expansion, Reform and Local Development. And of course the European Union - borne out of two crippling European Wars this century - is one such body that can secure not just lasting peace, but also the fruits of that peace - economic and political stability, free trade and sustainable growth. The tide of euro-scepticism that has swept English politics for the last decade may be abating but it is still a powerful force. Certainly the delay in joining the single European currency

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has much more to do with that tide than it has with economics: and the delay will be damaging particularly to the Scottish economy which is far more export-dependent than that south of the border.

The work that Ireland has undertaken to investigate the probable effects of a single currency on each sector of the economy, and the building of a consensus towards acceptance of the single currency, were far-seeing actions which have not been paralleled in the United Kingdom. However, when such work does take place (as it must) I am sure that there will be a growing acceptance of the economic integration that is essential for sustainable and secure growth in Europe.

That needs to be buttressed with a more positive and co-operative approach to other European Institutions, and expressed in a language more in keeping with the concept of equality in Europe than that used by the British Prime Minister during the British presidency. The old imperial language of 'leadership' and 'pride of place' were too much in evidence, and a willingness to learn from others, and to work co-operatively with others, was notable by its absence. The crazy and profligate waste of post imperial symbols like the Millennium Dome, and the ridiculous hubris of 'Cool Britannia', still typify Westminster Government, which has not yet realised that a great country is one which is great for its citizens - all its citizens - to live in. Great because there is no poverty, no discrimination: great because its business and industry is world class, and enterprise, compassion and democracy go hand in hand.

The first European reform, therefore, that the UK has to undergo is a reform of successive Governments' approach and attitude towards Europe. For Scotland that reform requires independent membership which can only be achieved by independence itself. Thus for me the most important expansion has to be one that includes Scotland as an independent, self respecting European nation.

Scotland will, of course, have some limited access to European institutions by means of its devolved government. Such access is nothing like the right of attendance enjoyed by the German Länder, and indeed has been consistently watered down from the original Convention scheme which was the precursor of the devolution legislation. There are indications at Westminster that even the inclusion of Scottish representatives in delegations is causing concern to the Whitehall civil servants and their political masters: certainly the working out of the detail of European involvement and its operation in practice will require strong advocacy by a Scottish administration, and a refusal to settle for any less than the limited powers enshrined in the Scotland Bill. Such advocacy and firmness of purpose is unlikely to come from a Labour

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administration in Scotland, were one to be elected, for Tony Blair's writ would still run no matter who the titular New Labour first minister was.

Many of you here today will have followed some of what has been happening in Scottish politics since I last spoke at the Humbert summer school. The referendum on the Scottish Parliament was won by an overwhelming majority, with Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP working together in a campaign that secured three quarters of the Scottish vote. The ability of these parties to work together was built upon a simple democratic principle: the principle that the people of Scotland had the right to choose their own constitutional future. In the year since the referendum support for the SNP has doubled - 44% in the latest opinion poll on voting intentions for the Scottish Parliament as opposed to 22% at the General Election in May 1997. For the past five months Labour has been behind the SNP in the main Scottish opinion poll in **The Herald** newspaper. We are now at a time of extraordinary political intensity. The Scottish Parliament elections take place on the 6 May next year - 258 days from today. Labour is, in desperation, throwing every resource it has into Scotland - including those funded by the taxpayer. There are an unprecedented 7 ministers in the Scottish Office, one of whom is not even yet a member of either the House of Commons or the House of Lords, breaking a constitutional practice that is generations old! There are 3 Governmental special advisers, paid for by the state, including one whose job seems entirely devoted to attacks on the SNP.

But the reality is that the positive message from the SNP has been able to rise above such tactics. That is because we have laid out the ground for the future with great care. We have identified those things which Scotland wants from its Parliament and have been developing our thinking on them. Obviously these include better health care, better education, and better local government services, but they also include a more positive approach to Europe and the world.

Already the SNP has brought forward positive proposals to involve Scottish Euro MPs in an 'assemblée paritaire' - bring these democratic representatives together with representatives of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish local authorities to debate and discuss areas where all three parts of our democracy can work together. It is encouraging that such a proposal appears to have the backing now of the European Commission which is also reported to be about to strengthen its presence in Edinburgh, as indeed is Ireland through the opening of a welcome Consular office. I hope to see the new Irish consul take his place with the rest of the diplomatic corps at the SNP's coming conference in Inverness. For the SNP, Europe will be one of the main issues for the Scottish Parliament election. Ireland has demonstrated the benefits of

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whole hearted membership of the European Union - not only economic benefits, but also the increase in the reach and influence of small nations such as this. We wish to do the same.

In a ground breaking lecture at Glasgow University two years ago, Mary Robinson articulated the way in which the European process enhances the sovereignty of smaller member states. It should be compulsory reading for the foolish commentators who fail to differentiate between the positive experience of small countries in a European confederation and the negative experience of small nations within the British Union. For Scotland, Devolution will not secure independent membership of the European Union. But it does prise open the doors of Europe a little for Scotland. There can be no clearer contrast between what Labour offers in administration in the Scottish Parliament, and what the SNP offers than over the question of Europe. Labour in Scotland will, as it always does, go on acting as a telephone extension of the Whitehall exchange. It will not fight for presence, it will not insist on Scottish issues being resolved in Scotland's favour, and it will not gainsay the directives from Westminster. The SNP will advocate Scotland's case. It will argue for a place at negotiations. It will seek to find solutions that benefit Scotland and Scotland's place in Europe. Later this year the SNP will set out a detailed set of proposals and objectives for the participation of a devolved Scottish Government in Europe. It will state clearly our determination to have Scotland's voice heard. It will differentiate the SNP's vigorous and positive approach very clearly from that which will have to be pursued by the still very British New Labour Party. It will be another step forward in our campaign for the new Parliament at Holyrood. But we will not express our ambitions in isolation from other developments in Europe. The SNP will take a progressive stance on the major issues being faced by the European Union and will build on the work in that regard undertaken by our two excellent ambassadors to Europe, our two MEPs Winnie Ewing and Allan Macartney. And we will seek to integrate that stance with the views of other small nations on our continent - including Ireland.

I believe that Scotland has much to learn from the Irish experience. Perhaps it would have been better for us both had James V done more in 1538 than mull over but ultimately reject an offer of the Kingship of Ireland. Perhaps Edward Bruce might have been more successful in an even earlier time. But there is little point in crying over historical split milk! We have the potential to work together on certain issues in the future, and that brings me to the second set of structures, and the second institution which I want to talk about today.

The British-Irish Council, or the Council of the Isles as I prefer to term it, is being set up as a result of the Good Friday agreement, but had a poor press to

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start with. Some feared that it was a diversion from the main thrust of the agreement, perhaps designed to weaken the North-South bodies. But the SNP welcomed this aspect with particular warmth. For a start the proposal bears some similarity to a long standing SNP hope which envisages , after independence, the creation of an 'Association of British States' which would embrace Scotland, Ireland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. But more importantly the proposal adds a much needed, wider and internationalist dimension to the devolution of power to Scotland - a bridge perhaps between the devolved parliament and an independent one. And it begins to re-establish the link between Scotland and Ireland which can benefit both of us in very substantial measure.

When in May the Taoiseach visited Scotland, he spoke publicly about the reestablishment of this link, pointing to the historical sundering of it for many generations. Certainly our relationship has strong roots in the past, but in the last few centuries, as I have indicated, it has been dislocated by the affairs of the United Kingdom. Now, for the first time in many generations, there is coming into being a structure which can allow us to communicate directly, work together on shared interests and influence each other by example.

I have already written to all the parties in Ireland - North and South - suggesting that we consider jointly the priorities for the Council and its work. Developing a programme of work and action for the Council is something that will take some time, and needs the input of all the involved parties. But today I want to indicate four areas where I think the Council can be of early importance, and suggest some ways in which Ireland and Scotland can make it grow. It is crucial that the Council quickly becomes more than a talking shop - important to the Irish peace process, to Scottish and Welsh devolution, and to the aspirations of all those who seek to move forward from such positions. It will be more than a talking shop if it takes on clear priorities and is supported by the members in bringing those priorities to fruition.

The four priority areas that I want to mention today - they are not exclusive, but they are a start - are Education, Culture and the Media, Transport and Europe.

### ***Education***

In a television interview which I conducted a couple of years ago with your then Finance Minister, Ruari Quinn, I asked him to what he attributed Ireland's outstanding economic success, expecting a reply about the latest governmental wheeze on low business tax or something similar. But he would have none of that - instead telling me of the bi-partisan Irish decision in the

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1970s to invest in education, and the way in which that had provided the foundation for growth. Moreover, I understand, it was to Scotland that the Government looked for a model on which to develop a distinctive Irish system.

Scotland needs to return that favour by looking at what investment in education can bring. I would be keen to see joint educational studies between our two countries - keen to encourage teacher exchanges, and pilot projects in which the Irish curriculum can be examined for its strengths and its potential for application in Scotland. Our universities need to work together to develop strategies for rural and distance learning, and to develop joint programmes on technology and innovation which will be the shock troops of economic advance in the 21st century, continuing to encourage inward investment.

If our two educational systems can learn from each other, and if we can assess and implement the types of educational investment which you have undertaken, then we can put flesh on the bones of our relationship and make it work for our futures.

#### ***Culture and Media***

In cultural and media matters there is also great potential. That potential lies not just with our Irish and Gaelic speaking areas, though that is an important issue. It also lies in the majority language that we share.

How deep our sharing is I only realised when visiting Frankfurt some time ago. Having left a meeting with the then President of the European Monetary Institute, I walked round one of the plushiest shopping areas on the continent. There I came across four separate Irish exhibitions - one on whiskey, one on textiles, one on golfing holidays and one on Irish culture: the last mentioned of which, I could not but help notice, featured such great Irish authors as George MacKay Brown! It certainly is time to repatriate our poets - it might well also be time to project a common cultural heritage which can, in part at least, celebrate whiskey, textiles, golf and literature!

Your positive approach to film making, and your encouragement of artists, are other areas we need to learn from and move towards emulating in our own way. Tax powers for the Scottish Parliament will not permit some of your solutions, but there may be other ways forward, even under devolution.

We should also be working to learn more of each other through broadcasting and the media - encouraging perhaps a new shared television channel on one of the digital multiplexes that might also allow more interaction between your Telefis Na Gailge and our under-achieving Gaelic language television sector.

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The fact that broadcasting is not a devolved matter as yet should not stop practical work of this nature, given the goodwill of Scottish and Irish broadcasters.

### ***Transport***

In transport we have an economic and social need to develop East/West links which have been neglected as we concentrate on North/South ones. A corridor for fast, quality access between Scotland and Ireland - a corridor that includes Northern Ireland - is one which could become an economic growth point. That corridor might include the long-needed development of a European focused East Coast ferry port in Scotland, providing alternative access to European markets for Irish companies.

### ***Europe***

Finally I have included Europe in my list of priorities because there will be a need for Scotland to express its European identity and its European intentions not just through UK membership. By that I mean that it will be important for Ireland and other small countries in Europe to be aware of the Scottish perspective on Europe, and to allow Scotland to discuss European issues within a structure that is not always focusing on the needs of London. I hope that the Council of the Isles can facilitate such a role, allowing European issues to be raised and coordinating the feedback and views from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I also hope that London government will welcome this broader view of the European debate, one which can bring to it and its considerations some new perspectives too.

These four areas for discussion can, I am sure, be supplemented by many others. There will be much hard work to do to make the Council of the Isles an effective tool for debate, agreement and co-ordinated action. Resource issues may mean that not everything can be done at once. But if we start on the road to agreeing and implementing joint priorities, then I think even we will be surprised by how far and how fast we can travel.

In the eight months that remain before the Scottish Parliament elections I am sure that you will see, and read and hear a great deal more about what is taking place in Scotland. In past years you might have participated in that way, but in no other. But now what happens in Scotland has some bearing upon an Irish audience as well. The Council of the Isles can assist both Scotland and Ireland in establishing a useful additional tool to enhance the lives and prospects of our citizens.

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It is a structure that can draw from the past in order to lay the groundwork for the future. It can do so without asking any of us to give up our distinctive identities or lay aside any of our badges of allegiance. All it requires of us is to take on new aspects to our political lives, aspects that value co-operation and which welcome new collaborative ventures.

At the SNP National Conference in Perth in 1995, George Reid, an SNP MP from 1974- 1979 and recently returned to Scotland from a ten year assignment as Public Affairs Director of the Red Cross in Geneva, delivered the annual Donaldson lecture, entitling it 'Home thoughts from Abroad'. In his address he drew attention to the feeling that the state is both too big and too small. Too big because it does not recognise and enhance identity: too small because it needs collaborative international effort to make significant progress. Scotland today is in that position. It is asserting its identity after three centuries of Union because the United Kingdom is too big, too wrongly focused to serve Scotland well. But Scotland recognises that it is also too small to stand aside from the world - and accordingly we are positive in our approach to organisations and structures that allow us to participate to the full.

The European Union is one such structure: the new Council of the Isles is another. Participating to the full in these structures - alongside another ancient nation, free now for almost a century - is the best way forward for Scotland. We are small countries who have seen enough of the cul de sac of imperial ambitions. What Scotland aspires to is not anything unusual. It is indeed the normal condition of a nation: the condition of statehood and equality with its neighbours. We can work towards that through our new devolved Parliament. It is not everything we seek, but it is a start. We are pledged to make that new Parliament work, and to build on it for the future.

Two years ago I started my address with a quote from Seamus Heaney. Let me finish today with another. It might stand not just for what is happening in Scotland today, but also what happened here two hundred years ago. Then, it failed; but ultimately Ireland has succeeded. Scotland, by a very different route, stands on the verge of success now. As Heaney says:

What looks the strongest has outlived its term  
The future lies with what's affirmed from under.

From under three centuries of Union, Scotland is at last affirming its identity and moving towards statehood. It is a process that is firmly underway and in which devolution can play an important part. But devolution does not end the

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process. As you know, only independence does that - and we know that because, to quote Peter Sutherland, we are all nationalists here!

*August 1998*