

## An independent Scotland would face little European opposition to membership of the European Union.



*The question of Scottish independence has been heavily debated in the United Kingdom, with one claim against it being that some European countries might not recognise its independence from the UK and would therefore block Scotland's membership of the European Union. Citing the examples of Kosovo and South Sudan, **James Ker-Lindsay** argues that this argument is not based on any real evidence.*

The question of Scottish independence is likely to dominate British politics over the next two years. One issue that has already arisen in the debate already is Scotland's likely relationship with the European Union. While supporters of independence insist that it would continue to be a member of the European Union, others have suggested that this cannot be taken for granted. To justify this view, the case of Kosovo has often been mentioned.

When Kosovo declared independence from Serbia over four years ago, it was quickly recognised by most of the members of the European Union. However, five members – Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain – refused to follow suit. This has led to suggestions that **these countries may also refuse to accept Scottish independence** and keep it out of the EU.

This is very unlikely, for a number of reasons. For a start, the problem in the case of Kosovo is not the issue of secession. It is the unilateral way in which it was done. If a territory becomes independent with the consent of all the parties concerned, there is little reason to believe that these countries will oppose the move.

The strongest evidence to support this view is their reaction to **the independence of South Sudan**, in July 2011. This occurred with the overt support of the Sudanese government, which was the first country in the world to recognise it. Within hours, the European Union issued a joint statement congratulating the new state on its independence. There was not a murmur of dissent from any of the five countries to this act of collective recognition. Even at an individual level, there seems little to suggest that any of them would block Scotland's membership of the European Union.

In the case of Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriot unilateral declaration of independence is clearly a concern. However, as long as Scotland's split is by mutual agreement between London and Edinburgh, there is little reason to believe that Nicosia would stand in the way of an independent Scotland. (Indeed, there might just be more than a little glee at the thought of seeing Britain, the former colonial power on the island, break apart.)

As for Greece, there is even less reason to believe that it would pose a problem. Its position on Kosovo is shaped solely by its solidarity with Cyprus. Had it not been for this, it is likely that it would have joined most of the rest of the EU and recognised Kosovo long ago. Indeed, its relations with Pristina are exceptionally cordial and amount to recognition in all but name.

Romania and Slovakia are also unlikely to stand in the way of Scotland. Their concerns about Kosovo are really about specific minority communities using the Kosovo precedent to press their own separatist claims. Given Scotland's clearly identifiable boundaries, its long history of independence prior to the union with England, and the consensual nature of any divorce, an independent Scotland

will not be met with a negative reaction in Bratislava or Bucharest. Indeed, Slovakia is itself the product of a consensual split along accepted boundaries.

In reality, **the only EU member that could potentially pose a problem is Spain**. However, a recent claim by an unnamed British government minister that Spain would seek to block an independent Scotland from joining the EU was strongly denied by the Spanish foreign minister. Moreover, **Spain's decision to recognise South Sudan**, as well as Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovakia, Moldova and the Czech Republic, to name just a few of the new states that have emerged since 1990s, is more than **ample evidence** that Madrid is not as obstructive on matters of secession as some observers would like to suggest. To repeat, Spain's problem with Kosovo's independence relates to its unilateral nature.

In the coming years we are going to hear a lot of arguments for and against an independent Scotland. While there are certainly many important questions that need to be answered about the relationship between an independent Scotland and the European Union, the claim that its membership would be blocked by those countries that have refused to recognise Kosovo is one that does not appear to be based on any real evidence.

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*You may also be interested in Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond's LSE event **Independence and Responsibility: the future of Scotland**, held on 15 February 2012. Event **transcript and video and podcast**.*

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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## About the author



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James Ker-Lindsay is a Senior Research Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science. A specialist on issues relating to conflict, peace and security, his authored books include *Kosovo: The Path to Contested Statehood in the Balkans* (2009), *Crisis and Conciliation: A Year of Rapprochement between Greece and Turkey* (2007), and *EU Accession and UN Peacemaking in Cyprus* (2005). He is the co-editor of *The Cyprus Review*.

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