**Dominant Idea #3: Pro-Europe**

The SNP believe that EU membership delivers many social, economic and cultural benefits for individuals, businesses and communities across Scotland. The party believes that the best way to build a more prosperous and equal Scotland is to be a full independent member of the EU.

On 23 June the people of Scotland voted to remain within the European Union and the SNP firmly believes that EU membership is the best option for Scotland

The SNP website states that,

“Brexit undoubtedly changes the way that Scotland engages with the EU, but it will not change the EU’s importance to Scotland, nor our commitment to rejoining the EU as soon as possible. By rejoining the EU we will create jobs and regain full access to the European Single Market, which is seven times the size of the UK. We will prepare to rejoin the EU by keeping a close relationship with Europe. We will strengthen our Brussels base and make Scotland House (Scottish Government, Scotland Europa, Scottish Enterprise) the hub of our diplomatic representation across Europe.”

The UK leaving the EU has not changed the fact that a newly independent Scotland will not be a member of the EU. To join the EU, it must follow the same application process, as set out in Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), as any other potential applicant.

Article 49 allows any “European State” to apply to become an EU member. So Scotland must resolve its exit from the UK and be established as an independent sovereign state prior to making its formal application to join the EU.

Joining the EU would mean Scotland joining the single market and customs union – and as a result the Anglo-Scottish border would become a new external customs and regulatory frontier for the EU.

As an EU member, Scotland and its citizens would regain the rights and responsibilities of EU membership removed by Brexit, but as a new member state of the EU it is unlikely that Scotland could negotiate the same UK opt-outs – this means committing to adopting the euro, at least in principle, and to rejoining the common fisheries and agriculture policies.

The EU would probably welcome an application from an independent Scotland, but only if Scottish independence were based on agreement with the UK government.

Scotland’s path back to EU membership would run via Westminster. Under EU law, Scotland could only formally apply to join the EU once it had secured its independence from the UK, and the whole process could take the best part of a decade.

The SNP’s policy is not to seek to join the Euro, but, instead, to initially use sterling unilaterally (ie without a currency union with the UK) for a transitional period and then to introduce its own currency “as soon as practicable”.

In an independent Scotland, the SNP would seek an opt-out from the Schengen area as part of any process to join the EU. This is because joining the Schengen area would be incompatible with agreeing to continue passport free travel and free movement between an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK (and Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Irelands) as part of the Common Travel Area. Ireland and, before it left, the UK are the only EU members who were allowed opt-outs from the Schengen area when it became part of EU law with the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997.

Sturgeon launched the SNP manifesto in April 2021 which stated a vote for independence would mean “escape from Brexit”.

**The impact of this dominant idea on the support of and electoral performance of the SNP.**

Independence

Support for another independence referendum has steadily risen in the years since 2016, when the U.K. voted to leave the European Union, a move opposed by more than 62% of Scottish voters. After the Brexit referendum, the SNP argued that Scotland was being pulled out of the E.U. against its will and that this “material change in circumstances” justified another vote on Scottish independence.

The “hard” version of Brexit delivered by the Johnson-led UK government has increased the popularity of nationalism in Scotland and it could be argued that the idea of rejoining the EU as an independent Scotland had a significant impact on the electoral performance of the SNP in the May 2021 elections.

Sturgeon commented that remaining in the EU would have meant remaining in the single market and this would have protected “jobs, living standards, our economy and public services”.

Political landscape in Scotland

In the May 2021 election the SNP was the only major party that was pro-EU membership. The Scottish Labour Party did not define itself as a party of either nationalists or unionists, while the Scottish Conservatives defended the UK Government in negotiating an EU withdrawal (Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson and the majority of Conservative MSPs had to find a way to live with it and make it compatible with their commitment to the Union. Davidson quit as leader in 2019 citing ‘conflict over Brexit’).

Former Scottish Labour leader, Kezia Dugdale stated in April 2021 that “after the referendum, Labour voters felt guilty about voting for the union. They had thought it was right, but it wasn’t comfortable. They didn’t like their party working with the Conservatives. The SNP exploited this, to their credit, saying, this is supposed to be the progressive Labour party, and they sided with the Conservatives to sustain the status quo.”

**TASKS**

1. Summarise the SNP’s pro-European dominant idea.
2. Give a detailed example of an SNP policy that relates to this dominant idea.
3. How significant was this dominant idea in the electoral performance of the SNP in the May 2021 Scottish Parliament election? You should use data to support your argument.
4. Are there other interpretations (excluding the pro-European dominant idea) of the reasons for the electoral success of the SNP?
5. Was a vote for the SNP in May 2021 a vote against Brexit?