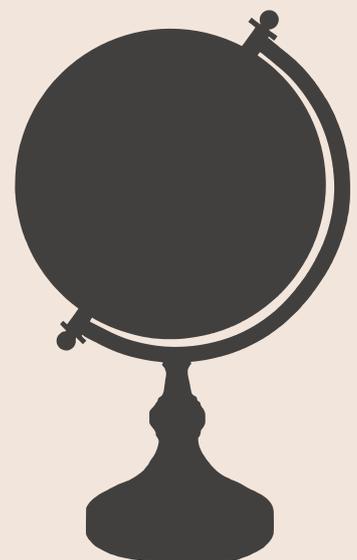


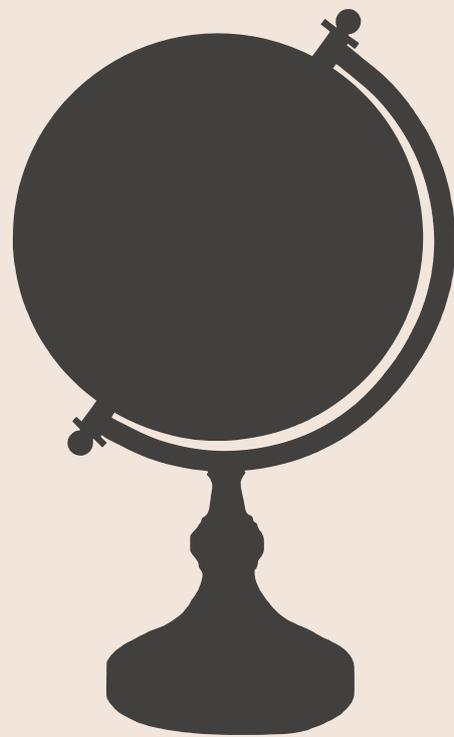
Scotland's Global Standpoint

Strategic Principles for Scotland's
European and International Relations

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SALAMONE

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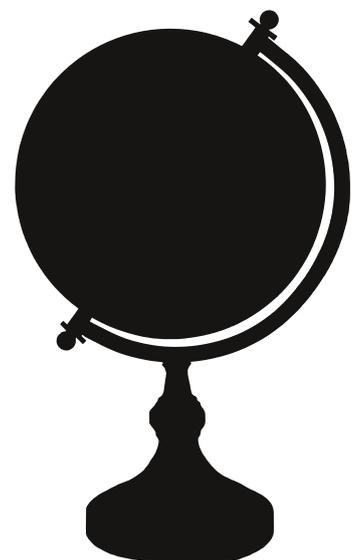


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About European Merchants

European Merchants is a Scottish political analysis firm based in Edinburgh. Our mission is to bring clarity and insight to Scottish, European and global politics. As *Purveyors of Political Insight*, we are dedicated to providing innovative analysis and bold ideas on the major questions facing Scotland and Europe. From our unique Scottish perspective, we decipher turbulent political currents to interpret the trends which shape our world. Thoroughly informed and connected, we are a foundry for political intelligence on Scottish, European and global affairs. We have particular expertise in Scottish debates on the constitution, devolution and independence, Scotland's European and external relations, and European Union politics and institutions. European Merchants is committed to furthering public debate and we offer our perspective through our own publications and external comment and analysis. We intend to make our contribution to understanding our times.

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Introduction

Given political developments in recent years, Scotland's relationships with the rest of Europe and the wider world have become a subject of growing interest. In particular, the UK's withdrawal from the European Union has resulted in profound transformation of the UK state, its foreign policy and the nature of Scottish and UK engagement with actors from the EU institutions and the Member States. That change is far from over.

Throughout its history, Scotland has always retained a distinct identity known across Europe and beyond. Since the beginning of devolution, Scottish political institutions have undertaken engagement at European and global levels. Neither of these realities is inherently incompatible with Scotland's place within the United Kingdom. Yet in our present politics, EU and international affairs are regularly interpreted and portrayed, by those on both sides, as merely an extension of the independence debate.

Such characterisation is unhelpful and unnecessary. Relating to the outside is simply a feature of the modern world. It can and should remain separate from constitutional questions. For its part, the Scottish Government has a responsibility to structure its EU and international engagement on the basis of Scotland's current circumstances, not of aspired independence. Moreover, regardless of the evolution of the independence debate, Scotland will not be a state, or part of the EU, for the foreseeable future.

Since the Holyrood election, the Scottish Government has demonstrated the ambition to increase its European and global profile. Its recent Programme for Government lists a series of commitments in this area, the most notable of which is the development of a Global Affairs Framework.¹ Its production is a vital opportunity to establish strategic direction and greater coherence on European and external relations. This framework should articulate substantive principles and objectives which, while ambitious, reflect sufficient realism on Scotland's relatively peripheral position in international politics.²

Government action should focus intently on the global challenges and opportunities facing Scotland. Its strategy should recognise that the greatest potential for Scotland to influence European and global developments rests in cooperating with partners, including the UK Government wherever possible. If the Scottish Government aims to increase its EU and international engagement, it is logical for the Scottish Parliament to intensify its scrutiny of the Government in this field accordingly. Such expansion of efforts would require both institutions to evolve their current respective practice.

This report outlines strategic principles in respect of the European and international relations of the Scottish Government. It reviews the present state of affairs in Scotland on the subject and the realities which govern its EU and global relations. It then lays out principles for building credible and effective strategy and recommendations for the design of purposeful and strategic engagement. The report is a call to establish a more informed and substantive Scottish debate in this area. Building on its innovative publications and contributions to date, European Merchants will continue to provide rigorous and insightful analysis of Scotland's European and external relations.

Anthony Salamone FRSA

12 October 2021

1 | State of Affairs in Scotland

Of all its European and international connections, Scotland's relationships with the EU are its most consequential. Through its political and economic size, the EU exercises direct and indirect influence over innumerable matters affecting Scotland and the UK, whatever the formal status of their relations with the Union. In Scottish politics, the EU has held a singular consistent salience, throughout the process of Brexit and dating back to the original independence referendum. Scotland's pro-European sentiment will surely endure, despite the realisation of Brexit. It should have a stable political basis for engagement with the EU and more widely with international actors, separate from the constitution. In reality, any such basis has weakened, if not disintegrated.

The state of affairs in Scotland on European and external relations is defined by two principal factors. The first is a lack of Europeanisation of Scottish politics and public life. In general terms, Scotland's politics, government, media and wider institutions are largely disconnected from the politics and debates of the EU collectively and of the Member States individually. A strange and persistent gulf exists between Scotland's ostensible pro-EU position and its relative absence from the topical matters of the EU. This situation is a question of degrees: Scotland and its actors of course engage in European affairs, but not to the extent or the depth which one would expect – certainly not for a country which might conceivably seek to join the EU in the years to come.³

The second factor is a lack of consensus on the Scottish Government's European and international engagement. Given the relevance of EU and global dimensions to many different policy fields, it is entirely sensible, and usually beneficial, for the Government to interact with European and international colleagues. In Scottish politics, however, such engagement is often conflated with the independence debate. With the advent of Brexit, and its resulting challenges for pro-EU Scottish unionism,⁴ the growing trend in Scotland is for advocates of independence to support government participation in EU and global affairs and for advocates of the UK union to oppose it. Discord over the purpose of the Scottish Government's representative offices is a prominent case.⁵

In combination, these two factors have fostered a strong tendency for polarisation on Scotland's European and external relations. Contrasted hyperbolic arguments have gained increasing prevalence. Some proponents of independence contend that all engagement, irrespective of purpose, content or outcomes, is unreservedly welcome. Under their logic, the Scottish Government should use its position to make the case for independence at European and international levels in preparation of imminent statehood. Some opponents of independence argue that any engagement, even if it relates directly to the competence of Scottish institutions, is manifestly unacceptable. By their argument, the Scottish Government should desist from involvement in foreign affairs and leave all engagement to the UK Government. Such extremes ignore reality.

In truth, the Scottish Government should participate in European and global affairs. In this domain, however, it should concentrate on substance and avoid independence. The current polarisation is not a sustainable basis for good public debate. Scotland is further disadvantaged by the absence of a sufficient policy culture on European and international relations. At present, Scotland's situation in this regard is unfavourable.

2 | Governing Realities

To develop credible and effective strategy for its European and external relations, the Scottish Government will have to contend sufficiently with four realities which govern its current outlook. The first is that Brexit has been concluded. The EU-UK relationship will be based on the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, with periodic negotiations on various matters, for years, if not decades, to come. The centrepiece of the Scottish Government's communications with EU and global actors since the EU referendum – that Scotland did not support Brexit – is no longer relevant. That message has already been successful and reiterative opposition alone will have ever less utility over time. The Government should focus on sustaining and growing European relationships on the basis of substantive bilateral and multilateral cooperation oriented to the future.⁶

The second reality is that international relations are a complex business. If the Scottish Government aims to engage more substantively in this area, it should be cognizant of the realities of the international system and Scotland's place within it. Scotland is not a state and it is not part of the EU. Its capacity for relative EU and global influence will be modest. State and multilateral actors may pay more attention to Scottish positions on issues in the years ahead – to assess possible implications of Scotland becoming a state for them, not to demonstrate great interest in Scotland's role in the world. It is right to be guided by values. At the same time, credibility demands acceptance that many global situations do not have straightforward solutions. Where approaching a particular issue, the Government should resist the predilection to embrace reflexively whatever response cursorily appears to be 'the most progressive'. It should consider the context, consult with partners and take decisive action as appropriate.

The third reality is that its relationship with the UK Government matters. It is a defining aspect of Scotland's global engagement now – and it would be important if Scotland were an independent state. The two governments have an antagonistic relationship and differing political agendas on EU and foreign policies at present. That situation is negative for the Scottish Government. Given that it is not the central state, this discord reduces its ability to engage productively with EU and international actors due to their desire to avoid involvement in the UK's internal politics. The Scottish Government will find greatest success in global affairs where it can work well with the UK Government.

Most notable of all, the fourth reality is that Scotland will not be part of the EU for years, whatever its future. If a referendum agreed by the Scottish and UK Governments were held in September 2023, for instance, with a result for independence, the transition could reasonably take three years and Scotland could become a state in September 2026.⁷ It could not apply to join the EU until it was a state, and it would be unlikely to do so on the exact date of statehood. On an ambitious timetable, it might apply in December 2026. Following *Scotland's EU Blueprint*, Scotland's EU accession process could reasonably take 44–78 months, and probably 48–60 months, from the point of application to accession.⁸ Scotland could then become an EU Member State between December 2030 and December 2031. If a referendum were held later, the other dates would likewise be later. If the voters rejected independence, or an agreed referendum did not happen, Scotland would not join the EU – unless the UK successfully rejoined.⁹ In any event, Scotland will most likely not be part of the EU for the rest of this decade.

3 Principles for Strategy

In announcing its plan to create a Global Affairs Framework, the Scottish Government has committed to the concept of greater strategy in this area. To establish a framework for European and international relations which is credible, realistic and innovative, the Government should build its strategy on five core principles. The first is that it should define its primary principles and objectives for European and external relations. These statements should structure the entirety of the Government's engagement on EU and global affairs. They should be values-based and ensure alignment between domestic policy and external action. Their functions will be to prioritise the Government's efforts and to organise the deployment its finite resources to achieve its strategic objectives.

The second principle is that the strategy should cover a specific long-term horizon. It would be reasonable for this particular framework to span the rest of this decade, from 2022–2030. In the future, the Government should produce successive five-year or ten-year strategies for European and external relations. They could be subject to periodic review and amendment as required. The longer perspective will emphasise the core objectives and ensure that the Government is not entirely preoccupied by reacting to global developments. Given the governing realities, this first strategy should assume that Scotland will not be part of the EU throughout its duration from 2022 to 2030.

The third principle is that the strategy should constitute the singular foundation for all the Government's frameworks and plans in this domain. Current documents, such as the Arctic Policy Framework, Nordic-Baltic Policy Statement and country engagement plans,¹⁰ should fall under its jurisdiction and be amended or superseded as necessary. Future documents, such as the proposed Cultural Diplomacy Strategy, should accord with the primary strategy from inception. This approach will encourage coherence of Government activity on EU and global affairs. In general, all engagement should align with the strategy. If existing engagement does not align, it should be discontinued.

The fourth principle is that the strategy should minimise Scottish constitutional affairs. It should facilitate purposeful separation of European and international relations from the independence debate. The strategy should be designed to operate regardless of that debate and its objectives should be suitable for Scotland's current arrangements. Government political leaders should reduce their regular references to independence in their EU and global engagement, recognising the limited value in reminding actors continually of their position on that issue. Bilateral and multilateral relations should be focused on relevant matters of mutual interest, not diverted to Scottish politics.

The fifth principle is that the strategy should facilitate cross-party engagement on the Government's European and external relations. It should acknowledge that a lack of cross-party consensus on such engagement is negative for Scotland. In response, the strategy should develop new meaningful avenues for cooperation. Opposition parties could be invited to participate in some of the Government's outward engagements, creating multi-party delegations. The Government should seek consensus on matters of potential common ground, such as on trade and investment, a Scotland brand and international development. In respect of strategy, it should consider the approach of Finland, where all-party parliamentary groups support major national EU plans.¹¹

4 | Design Recommendations

In the design of strategy for European and external relations, the Scottish Government should undertake the following eight recommendations. First, considering Scotland's political, economic, social and geographical position, it should pursue a Europe First Strategy. Relationships with the European Union – the EU institutions and the Member States at all levels – should have the greatest attention, investment and engagement. The Government should rename its Directorate for External Affairs as the Directorate for European and External Affairs to reflect the reality of its work and to facilitate a shift in government culture. It should implement substantial measures to Europeanise and internationalise all facets of government, not just the Directorate, significantly more than at present. Given that Scotland is not a state, and the Government does not have the powers or resources of a state, the balance of its engagement should be notably in favour of European relations, with international relations strategically targeted.

Second, Government strategy should establish an Order of Priority to structure all its EU and international activity. This order will define a sequential prioritisation of states, regions, subjects and other themes for engagement. Such an approach will promote the optimisation of the Government's investments. Within the EU, the bilateral order of priority should begin with France and Germany. They could then be followed first by Italy, Spain and the Netherlands; second by Ireland; third by Sweden, Finland and Denmark; fourth by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Outwith the EU, it should begin with the United States and Canada. The Government's engagement should align with the order in general. Such prioritisation will be essential to achieve its strategic objectives.

Third, strategic principles which the Government determines should be implemented comprehensively. For instance, the Programme for Government references adopting a Feminist Foreign Policy. That aspiration is positive and would place Scotland in the company of states like Sweden and Canada.¹² In setting such a goal, the Government should be forthright that, as a result, it will have to examine and adapt its policies and institutions accordingly. The credibility of principle-based commitments will depend on aligning the Government's institutions, policies and practice with those principles. Under any values-based approach, the Government should ensure harmony between its internal and external action. If peace and human rights were central elements of its international engagement, the Government should make connections to its efforts on peace and human rights within Scotland. It should seek to learn as well as to share.

Fourth, strategy should foster greater exploration of the specific engagement vectors available to Scotland. Most notably, the Scottish global diaspora is a large and diverse population to which the Government should regularly connect. The diaspora should be defined broadly, inclusive of anyone with affinity for Scotland – among them those educated in Scotland who now occupy positions of influence worldwide.¹³ Diaspora policy should promote meaningful connections in a unique global community. Trade and investment, while important, should not be the singular focus. Culture, education, all-directions migration and friendship are equally important dimensions. In that spirit, the Government should make contributions to support the Scottish global diaspora.¹⁴ It should also invest more to build annual occasions, especially St Andrew's Day and Europe Day, into focal points connecting sentiment with values, interests and policies.

Fifth, the Government should endeavour to forge high-quality bilateral relationships with relevant states. At their most successful, such relations will be sustained through productive cooperation on areas of mutual interest, creating long-term partnerships. While the Government should appreciate the inherent asymmetry in bilateral relations with states, since Scotland is not a state, it can nevertheless find common ground on subjects of shared values and interests. For EU members, the Government will have to determine the balance of engagement between direct bilateral issues and EU issues. With those Member States where it has representation, it should aim to build effective bilateral triangulation between Edinburgh, Brussels and the national capital. It should conduct Strategic Bilateral Audits to assess existing relations, identify opportunities for new cooperation and establish related objectives.¹⁵ Where reciprocal interest is demonstrated, the Government should explore joint initiatives with states, including bilateral conferences and exchange programmes, to further particular priorities.

Sixth, its network of representative offices should be fully integrated into its strategy. The Government should conceptualise the wider role of its offices beyond their local objectives and plans, recognising that, in the service of strategy, they should function as a coherent network. Such coherence depends on Edinburgh. Headquarters should exercise an active organising role, marshalling the collective activities of its offices to achieve its strategic objectives. It should facilitate their coordination, while ensuring that they have sufficient operational flexibility to address their local circumstances. In respect of political intelligence, headquarters alone can provide the infrastructure for its central collection, assessment and utilisation. Purposeful expansion of the network is reasonable to a limit proportionate to Scotland's current constitutional position. In accord with the Order of Priority and balance of engagement in favour of EU relations, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands should be the principal locations for future offices.

Seventh, the Government should propose a new concordat on international relations with the UK Government. The current international relations concordat dates to 2013 and the EU relations concordat was rendered obsolete with the conclusion of Brexit.¹⁶ The UK Government's stated intention, as part of the long-running Intergovernmental Review, is to retain the former unchanged.¹⁷ However, a new agreement could better reflect the shape of the Scottish Government's European and external engagement in the present. It could broaden the terms of sanctioned engagement to include political dialogue with states, the EU institutions and international organisations, codifying the Government's actual practice. It could better delineate the operation of co-location of Scottish Government offices within the premises of UK diplomatic missions. Provision of UK support for Scottish outward engagements could also be defined in more detail. Above all, a new concordat might reset the strained bilateral relationship in this area.

Eighth, the Government's public communication on European and external relations should be increased. In particular, its representative offices should have a more robust presence on the Scottish Government central website. For states and sub-states alike, it is common practice for individual missions to have a unique website or subdomain, showcasing news, events and activities, as well as offering content in local languages. At present, the Government maintains one minimal perfunctory page for each office. It should upgrade this current digital presence to provide greater relevant information to interested actors – including from host governments, businesses and civil society. Over time, this unified digital presence should become central to public engagement.

Conclusions

The Scottish Government's European and international relations are now an intrinsic part of modern Scottish governance. Such engagement is logical, where founded on the present constitution. Yet Scotland's global standpoint is defined by challenges. Scotland is no longer part of the EU, with its access and relevance reduced as a result. The Scottish and UK Governments hold divergent views on EU and foreign policies. Scottish politics is marked by polarisation on European and external engagement.

Moreover, if the Scottish Government intends to increase its participation in European and global affairs, it should recognise the realities of its current position. Not being a state, Scotland is a relatively peripheral actor in the world. Scottish politics and public life are not sufficiently Europeanised. However the independence debate progresses, Scotland will most likely remain outside the EU for the rest of this decade. The global arena can often be calculated and thankless. Whether as part of the UK or as a state, Scotland will face constant global headwinds. Some it will influence; others it will not.

At this stage, the Scottish Government should build credible and effective strategy for its European and international relations. The promised Global Affairs Framework is an essential chance to establish such strategic direction. It could be an innovative long-term strategy that articulated primary principles and objectives, provided definitional structure to general engagement and ensured greater coherence of related policies. If so, it would be notably distinct from previous Government documents in this field.

Relations with the European Union have such prominence in Scottish public debate, much more so than international relations. Many recognise, regardless of their views on independence, the importance to Scotland of its EU relationship. With Brexit over, however, the default is that Scotland will fade into the European political background. The Scottish Government and wider Scottish actors will have to strive for relevance in the EU's debates and policies. That challenge is made all the more difficult by the dual lack of Europeanisation and lack of consensus on EU and wider relations at home.¹⁸

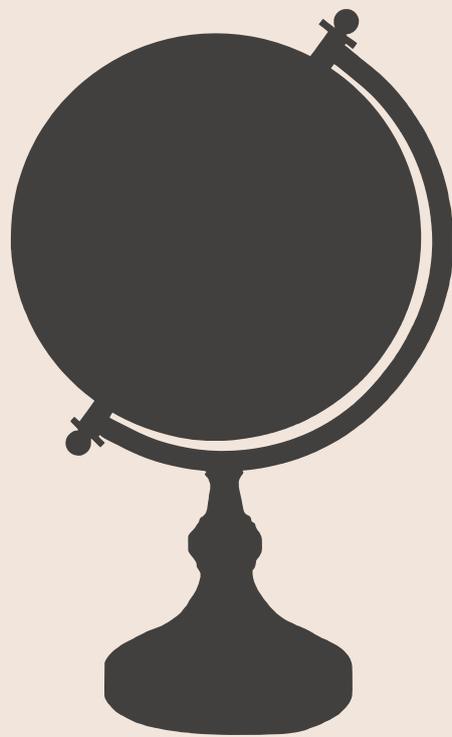
Rebuilding cross-party consensus in Scottish politics for European and international engagement is vital. The Scottish Government should take the initiative by minimising the constitution in its EU and global activity, operating based on its governing realities and seeking cooperation with the UK Government. Responsibility for separating EU and international relations from the independence debate rests with both sides. Given the current state of affairs, such expectations might appear excessively aspirational. It is time, however, to test the proposition that Scottish politics is defined by collegiality.

Scotland's European and international relations should be a serious policy field, not a superficial function of the independence debate. It is a domain worthy of significant analysis and strategy. It requires a more sophisticated policy culture, with enhanced scrutiny by the Scottish Parliament and greater public debate. Otherwise, the Scottish Government will face little substantive challenge in an area into which it is expanding on the basis of manifest, but often undefined, ambitions. The collective objective for Scottish society should be to reimagine our debate on Scotland's global standpoint.

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