Twitter Thread by Zach Elsbury ■■



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On this, I think it's highly unlikely to occur in the timeframe given. For several reasons, I don't think it's realistic for Scotland to secede, and then join the EU, in 9 years.

For that, thanks goes to Brexit.

A thread because why not...

> On the current trajectory, I think this is likely to be the map of Europe of 2030. pic.twitter.com/65i1A8CiP8
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> — Ben Judah (@b_judah) January 1, 2021

Two important dates: March 2016 and January 1st 2021.

Firstly, prior to the 2014 referendum, the Nationalists proposed a date of March 2016 to secede.

Secondly, today - the end completion of Brexit five-and-a-half years after Cameron's majority in 2015.

Brexit has demonstrated many things, primarily that splitting unions is not easy. The UKs membership of the EU was 47 years and by the end it was not at the heart of the EU. The Union has existed for over 300 as a unitary state.

Dividing a unitary state, like the UK, will not be easy. Frankly, it will make Brexit look simple. Questions of debt, currency, defence, and more will need to be resolved ... something not addressed with Brexit.

Starting with debt. Scotland will end up with its proportionate share of the UKs national debt. It's not credible to suggest otherwise. Negotiating what is proportionate won't be easy when both sides disagree.

It's importance will be seen shortly.

Secondly, currency. The Nationalists lack a credible currency policy. Sterlingisation or a monetary union are not credible, especially when the rest of the UK, as it did in 2014, is opposed to a formal monetary union.

Again, it's importance will be clear shortly.

Thirdly, the border. Secession will end the status quo, meaning a real, hard border between Gretna and Berwick. As the Nationalists want to join the EU, there's no avoiding that there will be a modern, hard border for the first time in the history of the British Isles.

Unless a separate Scotland were to form a customs and regulatory union post, independence, the border cannot be negotiated away or fudged. To suggest otherwise is not credible.

All this suggests any secession negotiation would be long, hard, and emotional.

The Nationalists' original plan for a secession vote to be achieved in 2 years is neither realistic, nor credible. If Brexit took 4.5 years, secession will take much longer.

Then there's joining the EU. Given Scotland's position post-secession, it's not as simple as ordering something from Amazon. It will not be a quick process.

A separate Scotland's debt and currency problem will ensure it isn't quick. With a debt-to-GDP level and budgetary deficits more than likely to be well above the convergence criteria, it's hard to see membership discussions beginning until after a protracted period of austerity.

Austerity that, might I add, will disproportionately affect the poor and disadvantaged who have already been neglected by the Nationalists.

Free uni tuition, for example, will most likely end to get the deficit under 3% of GDP.

The SNPs lack of a currency policy will not be survive first contact with the accession. The Copenhagen Criteria are clear: new member-states must apply the existing treaties - which include the Euro.

Keeping the pound in any way would not be possible. At all.

The UKs opt-out no longer exists and a separate Scotland would have no claim to it.

With every EU MS since Maastricht either legally obliged, making preparations to, or already having joined the Euro, Scotland would not be able to avoid it. After all, it would agree to join.

Secondly, the border. While Brexit did touch on the border, it has shown how the EU value maintaining their constitutional order.

The trade frictions the SNP decry and being ruinous for Scotland's trade with the EU (~18%) will apply to the majority of its trade (~60%). Scotland would have to police its, and the EUs, border from day one of EU membership. EU CU and SM checks will have to be applied.

Like the Euro, Schengen is unavoidable and the opt-out no longer exists.

This makes maintaining the CTA much more difficult. Especially if a secession agreement has a poison pill for the event a

separate Scotland signs an agreement incomparable with the CTA - like joining the EU

The Nationalists cannot have their cake and eat it. Secession to join the EU will impose a border between people.

Again, the EU have shown that undermining its constitutional order, which avoiding Schengen is, is not an option.

It cannot be fudged, and the EU have shown they have no intention of undermining the integrity of the single market and customs union.

It is simply not credible to suggest the EU will undermine its constitutional order to appease the Nationalists.

All of that considered, what would a timeframe look like for independence in Europe?

In short, not 9 years.

The EU referendum, and the resulting process, has shown the issues with rushing major constitutional decisions. It's unlikely the UK will timetable a short secession referendum. There would be no going back, and the problems outlined above deserve a thorough debate.

Secondly, with the SNPs backing of a second referendum, it's possible any secession treaty is put to a ratification referendum. Again, the difficult choices that would arise from the problems listed above would not make for an easy campaign.

Thirdly, EU accession will not be quick, either. Previous membership via the UK counts for little when a separate Scotland would not meet the Copenhagen or Convergence Criteria. Using a third-country's currency, officially or not, cannot be ignored.

Resolving all of those issues will take far longer than 9 years - regardless of what the polls say.

Again, Brexit showed the polls were inaccurate, as well as a consistent shift away from supporting Brexit in the first place.

For that reason, I don't think it would be as simple as 'the polls point to it, so it will likely be in 9 years' - especially given the differences above.

It's one thing to tick a box saying 'yes' on YouGove. It's another to go and vote for irreversibly dividing Great Britain.

It's one thing to answer 'yes' to a hypothetical question with no clear meaning - which secession has in common with Brexit. It's another to vote for splitting a unitary state with the problems listed above being known.

One reason I think the border wasn't that prominent in 2016 is that most people won't see much of a difference. Before Brexit you needed a passport to go to France, and that hasn't changed.

The border was, and is, always visible.

Because Schengen is unavoidable, that would change post-secession to join the EU. There will be a border where once there was none of a similar nature.

A customs, regulatory, and eventually Schengen border would be erected where once there was none. Selling one will not be easy.

@b_judah's takes are always well-thought and insightful. This, though, I don't think is one of those. The tasks at hand are complex and not in the SNPs control. Again, like Brexit, the larger of the two will dominate and there's little the other can do.

A no-fault, quick, and painless secession and EU accession simply doesn't exist. Suggesting it does is unrealistic and lacks credibility.

While Brexit, as well as other things, has nominally boosted support for secession in opinion polls, the practicalities of it weaken the argument for secession - as @FraserNelson (or @JGForsyth) has put recently in the @spectator, I can't recall which.

Pre-Brexit, the border would not have changed much. It would have been an internal-EU border. Internal enlargement and the continued existence of the UKs opt-outs may have provided a path for avoiding Schengen.

That is not the case now.

Previous external enlargement has made the process predictable and abundantly clear: Schengen and the Euro are unavoidable, and the EU will not undermine its constitutional order to facilitate Scottish accession.

The EU will hear any secession debate and how it relates to them. Saying a Scotland could simply not join the Euro and Schengen - despite the accession process requiring it, would not be conducive to a trusting accession process. Which like likely emphasise their unavoidability.

Which, in turn, does not lead itself to independence in Europe within the decade. It would protract the process, or, indeed, scupper it in any secession/ EU accession referendum.

From the UK to EU in 9 years is not ambitious, it's unrealistic and not credible.

This isn't to say Scotland is 'too wee, too poor' to secede. It is to say, though, that I don't think it's desirable to divide Great Britain as the Nationalists desire. I don't think it's desirable for Scots to need a passport every time they want to visit Granny in Carlisle.

The UK is an inter-connected web of people, stories, and history. With Scots, the English, Welsh, and N Irish forming a collective people and community who have lived, grown, and loved together.

Erecting a border across Britain would be a regrettable disaster that benefits none.