

# ALEX SALMOND

## FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND

*Leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the current First Minister of Scotland. He is the Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for Gordon and has also served as a Member of Parliament (MP) in Westminster.*

*Recently you mentioned 'there's a clear and consistent demand for further Constitutional progress'. Which political scenario looks more feasible for twenty-first century Scotland?*

Well as you know, the SNP stands for independence. We understand that small countries are better ruled, more accountable and more able to face the challenges of a globalised world. However, we have a very small majority in our chamber, therefore, we need to build a bigger majority and for that we need to come to see other parties. It is important that along with the pro-independence discourse we run effectively the powers we have been granted.

*In which policy areas will your Parliament's powers be extended?*

The SNP clearly wants full independence - so clearly that means gaining powers over those areas currently held at Westminster. The Scottish Parliament has full powers except in those areas specifically listed in Schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1997 -key things include constitution, economic and fiscal powers, defence, international relations, the civil service, consumer affairs, social security etc, etc-. We want control over all of these.

The Calman Commission has recommended modest increases in powers in certain areas, including slightly enhanced taxation competences. The new coalition UK government in its Programme for Government state that they will implement the Calman proposals. Whilst the SNP did not take part in the Commission, the Scottish government



did publish a response. The Scottish government supported the implementation of those recommendations which can be immediately acted upon and has provided Draft Orders which would allow for this to happen. Nevertheless, there are a number of proposals in Calman which are unacceptable - and it is clear that it is nowhere near an adequate alternative to independence.

*Can you point out the main challenges your country (and also your government) faces?*

The ongoing global economic situation obviously throws up key challenges. Whilst the Scottish

government is actively involved in building towards recovery and have sought early engagement with the new UK government, Scotland currently lacks the full fiscal tools to set a clear Scottish agenda. Taxation powers remain largely reserved in Whitehall - and the Calman proposals offer little in the way of improvement.

*Before the worldwide financial crisis your government had plans to join the so-called Arc of Prosperity where countries like Ireland or Iceland were included: these countries have been terribly affected by the crisis. Has this crisis produced any strategic changes?*



It is true that both countries have been severely affected by the crisis, just like many big countries including Spain and the UK. We believe what we call the Arc of Prosperity can be a great opportunity for a country like ours. They are our neighbours and are prosperous and stable, I see no reason not to get closer to them. For example Norway, a small country, has been the country least affected by the crisis. Being capable of using our own resources would be a positive asset for us and would make us an even more responsible country.

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*Do you expect any significant political changes from Westminster once the new government is formed?*

In the next legislative term we will have tremendous opportunities in Westminster. The perspective of a hung parliament will bring a more

balanced parliament where our chances to exert influence should grow. We should play our cards effectively and advance the cause of the Scottish people.

*Will it somehow affect the devolution process?*

Not really. A Tory government will not change much from the policies the new Labour administration have inflicted on us. Both parties are clearly unionist, however it is true that the Tories' image has worsened over the years.

*In contrast to its spending autonomy, Scotland has very limited responsibility for raising money for public spending. Will this situation change?*

The need for borrowing powers to manage capital spending has huge implications for us. I think the argument for having strong fiscal powers, powers over revenue, powers to expand the economy within a monetary context, within a European Euro context, will prove to be a very strong one for the people of Scotland.

*Your government has opposed the arguments of the Commission on Devolution (the Calman Commission) with those of the so-called National Conversation. Still you don't yet have a clear majority in the chamber. How will you persuade or drag the other parties to move towards further devolution?*

In the National Conversation we have taken the views of the people into account. Any debate has to come to a conclusion and through the tool of the referendum the people will determine the future of the country. What's the point of us having a legislative chamber if we cannot decide on the affairs that really affect us. The Scots are a mature and a responsible society so we don't need either the London Government or Westminster to meddle in our affairs.

*How does your Government interact with the Secretary of State for Scotland? Is this institution trying to trim your powers or limit them?*

It interferes from time to time in our work. This is clear. It is nothing new, but nonetheless it seems to me a largely irrelevant institution. It keeps an eye on our affairs but we should not be too worried about it.

*What future do you foresee for European stateless nations? Can we expect any joint actions to help more policy coordination towards common goals?*

It is time for Scotland to take more responsibility in the world we share and, therefore, regarding stateless nations we remain attentive to the steps other countries are ready to undertake. Obviously we are very sympathetic towards nations that want to preserve their identity, language and culture and as a Scottish nationalist I know that having your own state is the most effective way to keep all of them alive. Having said this, launching a joint action is complicated since one nation like ours can

have a different political cycle or agenda than another one. We may have common problems and goals but often the channels and ways may differ.

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*Finally I would like to ask you something about Catalonia since you have been in our country several times. I wonder if you would like to send a message to our Catalan audience.*

I have followed the constitutional debate that has taken place in Catalonia, which finally led to the approval of the new Statute. I don't usually make comments on other countries' business since as a First Minister of Scotland that could be misinterpreted. However, I believe that only the Catalan people should be entitled to decide on their own future.

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