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PM Scotland speech

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Good afternoon everyone and thank you very much for coming. It is great to be back in Edinburgh. Whenever I come to Edinburgh I always remember an early visit that I made here as a young man. A friend of mine got some tickets for Murrayfield and on that occasion Scotland beat England. And I remember walking back into Edinburgh, stopping at a chip shop I think it was, and as I walked through the door a Scottish fan said: 'What will you be having, humble pie?' And it is in that spirit that I come today.

The air in Scotland hangs heavy with history. Edinburgh's cityscape is studded with monuments to memories. Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Knox: they all compete for our attention. In Dundee, Captain Scott's Discovery lies at anchor. In Aberdeen, King's and Marischal Colleges remind us of a time when the Granite City had as many universities for its citizens as England had for all of hers. And while the hauntingly empty acres of the Highlands stand in mute memorial to the injustices visited on the victims of the clearances, Glasgow's magnificent architecture and art galleries remind us of the mercantile greatness of the Empire's second city.

For politicians north and south of the border, however, there is a danger of living in the past when thinking of Scotland. That is partly because its history is populated so thickly with great men and women who we might want to conscript for our contemporary battles. Those of us on the centre right will pray in aid of Adam Smith and David Hume: economic liberals and philosophical conservatives whose enlightenment thought laid the basis for later political action. On the left, the examples of James Maxton and Keir Hardie can still inspire class strugglers to one more heaven.

This has been a pioneering country all its life: as a home of learning in medieval times; a nursery of literacy and learning at the time of the Reformation; a champion of liberty in the Enlightenment; the turbine hall of the Industrial Revolution; a recruiting ground for freedom's fighters in two World Wars; the birthplace of John Reith, who gave us public service broadcasting; and as a powerful contributor to the last 25 years of economic growth. Scotland has so much of which to be proud and one of the reasons that we are tempted to look backwards is precisely because Scotland – as a nation and as part of the United Kingdom for over 300 years – has achieved so much.

But proud as that past and present are, I am convinced that both for Scotland and for the United Kingdom, our best days lie ahead of us. And that even though it may be a great historical construct, the United Kingdom is actually even more of an inspiring model for the future. Think of the key challenges of our times. There are the risks and opportunities of globalisation, with populations moving, cultures clashing, new routes to prosperity, and there is the impact of increasing economic competition from the new economic powerhouses of the world. I believe the United Kingdom has the answer to both of those challenges. In an increasingly uncertain world, where risks proliferate and atomisation threatens our ability to look out for one another, nothing encapsulates the principle of pooling risk, sharing resources, and standing together with your neighbour better than the United Kingdom. Whether it is ensuring the same disability benefits for those in need from Motherwell to

Maidstone, or ensuring that the resources of 60 million tax-payers stand behind our banking system. Whether in Edinburgh or London, the United Kingdom is a warm and stable home that billions elsewhere envy. And in an increasingly competitive world, where the future belongs to those who can collaborate, innovate, and co-operate together best, the support a nation of 60 million can give, for example, to knowledge exchange between bio-engineers in Edinburgh and Oxford, or venture capital for the best start ups: this could be the envy of the world.

So I come here today with one simple message: I hope and wish that Scotland will vote to remain part of the United Kingdom. That is not because I want to dragoon Scotland into an arrangement that is in my interest or, frankly, in my Party's interests. I know that the Conservative Party is not currently – how can I put this – Scotland's most influential political movement. I am often reminded that I have been more successful in helping to get pandas into the zoo than conservative MPs elected in Scotland.

So more than a little humility is called for when any contemporary Tory speaks in Scotland. In fact, some say it might be wiser not to speak at all. As well as avoiding any criticism from the press – or politicians from other Parties for 'interfering' – it might be thought wise of me to just let Scotland, in every sense, go its own way. And some people – not all of them Conservatives – have suggested that an independent Scotland might make it easier for my Party to get a majority in Westminster. But that does not interest me.

I am not here to make a case on behalf of my Party, its interests or its approach to office. I am here to stand up and speak out for what I believe in. I believe in the United Kingdom. I am a Unionist head, heart and soul. I believe that England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, we are stronger together than we ever would be apart.

It is time to speak out – whatever the consequences – because something very special is in danger: the ties that bind us in the place that we call home. The danger comes from the determination of the Scottish National Party to remove Scotland from our shared home.

Now it is absolutely right that since the SNP won the Scottish elections, they should be able to determine the business of the Scottish Parliament and the agenda of the Scottish Government. They want to put the question of independence to the Scottish people and their ultimate ambition is clear: they want Scotland to leave the United Kingdom. And it is right too that the choice over independence should be for the Scottish people to make. But that choice should not be made – with its consequences for all of us – without explaining why I believe in the United Kingdom, and why it matters to so many of us.

Let me be clear, though, I am not going to stand here and suggest that Scotland could not make a go of being on its own, if that is what people decide. There are plenty of small, independent nation states of a similar size or even smaller. Scotland could make its way in the world alongside countries like those.

Of course, every country in the world is facing new challenges and an independent Scotland would itself need to confront some big issues. There are those who argue about the volatility of dependence on oil, or the problems of debt and a big banking system. And there is – for some smaller nations – the risk that independence can actually lead to greater dependence.

Certainly today Scotland has a currency – the pound – that takes into account the needs of the Scottish economy as well as the rest of the United Kingdom when setting interest rates. And it can

borrow on rates that are amongst the lowest in Europe. An independent Scotland would have to negotiate in future for things it now gets as of right. But these challenges and the need to overcome them: they are not my point today.

My argument is simple. Of course Scotland could govern itself. So could England. My point is that we do it so much better together. I can – and I will – enumerate a number of practical reasons for our United Kingdom. But the reason I make the case is partly emotional. Because this is a question of the heart as well as the head. The United Kingdom is not just some sort of deal, to be reduced to the lowest common denominator. It is a precious thing; it is about our history, our values, our shared identity and our joint place in the world. I am not just proud of the Union because it is useful. I am proud because it shapes and strengthens us all.

Just think of what we have achieved together. Scotland has contributed to the greatest political, cultural, and social success story of the last three hundred years: the creation and flourishing of a United Kingdom built on freedom and inclusivity. Individual nations can – of course – adhere around ancient myths, blood-soaked memories, and opposition to others. But we have built – in the United Kingdom – something that also coheres around the values embodied in standing up for freedom and democracy around the globe: in free healthcare for all; in a generous welfare system for the poorest; and championing the most vulnerable on the world stage. A United Kingdom which is not monoglot, monochrome, and minimalist but multi-national, multi cultural, and modern in every way. Our United Kingdom, founded on the strengths, yes, of our constitutional monarchy, our parliamentary democracy, and the rule of law. But it is also the birthplace of the NHS, the BBC and Christian Aid. We have shared achievements that more than match those of any country anywhere in the world.

From Waterloo to the Second World War, our servicemen and women have fought and won together. The liberation of Europe was a battle fought to the skirl of the pipes, as Lord Lovat's Highlanders were among the first ashore on D-Day in the battle to defeat Hitler. Your heroes are our heroes. Men like Robert Dunsire, who – twice in one day – crawled out of the trench facing a hail of bullets to rescue injured men at the Battle of Loos in the First World War. And Lance Corporal Liam Tasker: the dog handler who helped save so many lives in Afghanistan before tragically himself being shot.

The Union has never been about shackling different nations: it is a free partnership – a joint effort – often driven by Scottish ideas and Scottish leadership. From the industrial and commercial leadership of James Watt and Robert Owen centuries ago, to Sir Bill Gammell and Ian Wood today.

And in Westminster, think of the cause of progress and how it has depended on the voices of politicians from Scotland: whether it has been the liberalism of Henry Campbell-Bannerman or Joe Grimond; the progressive conservatism of Iain Macleod and George Younger; or the generous and humane radicalism of Donald Dewar and John Smith. Together we have turned a group of off shore European islands into one of the most successful countries in the world.

But it is not just about what we have achieved together; it is about who we are together. The ties of blood are actually growing thicker. Far from growing apart, we are growing together. There are now more Scots living in England, and English people living in Scotland, than ever before. And almost half of Scots now have English relatives. I am something of a classic case. My father's father was a Cameron. My mother's mother was a Llewellyn. I was born and have always lived in England: I am proud to be English. But like so many others too, I am proud to be British as well. Proud of the United Kingdom and proud of Scotland's place within it.

But then there are the practical reasons for the Union to stay together. The United Kingdom helps to make Scotland – and all of us – stronger, safer, richer and fairer.

We are stronger, because through our shared Union, we count for more together in the world than we would ever count apart. We have a permanent place on the UN Security Council. We have real clout in NATO and in Europe. We have unique influence with key allies the world over. The Scottish pilots helped us to free Libya from tyranny, and prevented a failed pariah state festering on Europe's southern border.

We are safer, not just because of the expertise and bravery of our armed forces, to which Scotland has always made such an immense contribution, but also because of our policing expertise and our security services respected the world over. When that bomb went off at Glasgow Airport, the full resources of the UK state went into running down every lead, and our tentacles reach from the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as into the CIA computers at Langley.

Now, we are richer because Scotland's 5 million people are part of an economy of 60 million. An economy with no boundaries, borders, or customs, but instead a common system, of common rules and a common currency, which has helped to make us the 7th largest economy in the world. And far from growing apart, again, our economies are actually growing together. A fifth of all Scottish workers are employed by firms registered in Scotland but owned by companies based elsewhere in the United Kingdom. And Scotland sells twice as much to the rest of the UK as to the rest of the world put together.

And together we are not only stronger, safer, richer, I also believe we are fairer. Not just because we all benefit from being part of a properly-funded welfare system, with the resources to fund our pensions and our long-term health-care needs, but because there is real solidarity in our United Kingdom. When any part of the United Kingdom suffers a shock or a set-back, the rest of the country stands behind it. Whether it is floods in the West Country, severe weather in the north, or that economic dislocation that has hit different parts of our country in different times and in different ways, we are always there for each other. And together we have the power to do so much in the world to promote fairness.

One issue that is close to my heart is aid. And this is an issue where Scottish people have a huge influence. Together as a United Kingdom, we have the second biggest aid budget in the world. Through the UK, Scotland has a global reach to make our world fairer. And with that, we are saving thousands of lives and helping people in some of the poorest parts of the world to forge a new future, from the famine in the Horn of Africa to the support for people in North Africa and the Middle East as they seek new freedoms that we and others take for granted.

So, I believe there are emotional and practical reasons why Scotland is better off in the Union, and why we are all better off together than apart. But I do not think that is enough. I also understand why people in Scotland want to express their identity as Scots strongly, and to have greater control over their lives.

I believe in real devolution and I want to make devolution work better. I want a Scotland where more people own their own homes; where more people keep more of their money to spend as they choose; where more people have secure jobs and a secure future for their children. A Scotland where businesses can innovate and create the wealth and the opportunities that are so vital to local communities; and where we bring down the barriers to entrepreneurship that have for too long held Scotland back. I believe in devolution, not because I see it as a mechanism for obtaining power – hardly the case for my Party in Scotland – but because I believe in giving people choice and a real

say over their own affairs. I passionately believe that local is best, and the decentralisation of power is one of the core aims of the Coalition government that I lead.

One of my first acts as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom was to come here to Scotland to meet Alex Salmond and to show that I want the governments in Westminster and Holyrood – whoever they are and whichever Party they come from – to work together to get the best for Scotland, to listen to Scotland, to act on Scotland's voice and govern in Scotland's interests. On that first visit I said the only political input into senior Scottish civil service appointments, should come from the First Minister, and I delegated all my previous responsibility to the Cabinet Secretary. This was a small but I hope symbolic gesture of the kind of change I want to bring about.

Since then, ministers in Holyrood and Westminster have met regularly and soon a much bigger change will become law. The Scotland Bill has not, I believe, got the attention yet that it deserves, but it is an incredible opportunity for Scots. It is not London telling Edinburgh which powers it can have, but opening up Scotland's choice to expand the powers that it needs. By implementing the recommendations of the Calman Commission, devolving new powers to the Scottish Parliament – including for the first time the ability to raise tax revenue and borrow for capital and current expenditure – the Scottish government is getting real choice over how and when to invest in long-term projects that will benefit future generations.

And let me say something else about devolution. This does not have to be the end of the road. When the referendum on independence is over, I am open to looking at how the devolved settlement can be improved further. And yes, that does mean considering what further powers could be devolved. But that must be a question for after the referendum, when Scotland has made its choice about the fundamental question of independence or the United Kingdom. When Scotland has settled this question once and for all – and ended the uncertainty that I believe could damage and hold back Scotland's prospects and potential – then is the time for that issue.

So, I believe the strengths that have served us all through the centuries are precisely the ones that we need today. Our United Kingdom is a modern Union: it is one that evolves; one that protects us; one that allows our different nations to grow stronger; because we share the same secure foundations: institutions that celebrate diversity and turn it into a strength. Scotland's greatest poet said we should 'see ourselves as others see us', and that is worth doing, because our Union is not some antique imposition: it is living; it is free; it is adaptable; it is admired around the world as a source of prosperity, power, and security. Just think for a moment: could you explain to someone in America, or France, or Australia what was so intolerable about Great Britain that we decided to build artificial barriers between our nations? I do not believe that the people of Scotland – any more than the people of any other part of the United Kingdom – want to turn inward and away from each other at this time.

I believe – indeed it is my reason for being in politics – that it is when you pull together, when you set aside difference, when you roll up your sleeves in a common endeavour, you achieve things that are truly worthwhile – even noble – which you could never accomplish on your own. For me, the principle that we work best when we work together, without coercion or conscription, bullying or bossiness, but in a spirit of shared service: that sums up what is best about our countries. That is what the United Kingdom stands for: common endeavour; being part of something bigger; a greater Britain which believes in the virtues of sharing, of standing together; and of making a difference for our fellow citizens; those things guide our every action. And if anything is worth fighting for, that surely is, which is why I am ready to fight for the life of this country. Thank you.