ANDREW MARR SHOW, 10TH JUNE, 2018

NICOLA STURGEON MSP
First Minister of Scotland

AM: The Scottish National Party meanwhile at their conference in Aberdeen is being prepared for a summer of campaigning on independence. But can another referendum be carried out before Britain as a whole has left the European Union? Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland’s First Minister, joins us now from Aberdeen. Good morning, Nicola Sturgeon.

Can I ask you about that timing issue first of all. Is it possible for you to have another referendum before Scotland, with the rest of the UK has left the EU?

NS: Oh, anything in life is possible, but as you know, I think we’ve spoken about this before, I feel that the uncertainty around Brexit right now is such that we shouldn’t make any decisions on timing about a possible second independence referendum and I’ve said I won’t give that any further consideration until we get more clarity, which I hope will be sooner rather than later for a whole host of different reasons. And what I was saying to my party conference yesterday was let’s stop obsessing all of the time about when we might get the chance to vote on independence again. Instead let’s engage people in the substantive arguments, let’s address people who still ask the question, why should Scotland be independent? And of course this is a good time to have a debate that is very much focused on maximising our opportunities as a country rather than just resigning ourselves to the inevitable damage that Brexit seems destined to do to us.

AM: And yet the timing is crucial, because it’s the difference between Scotland potentially becoming independent while still part of the EU with all of those obligations and rights and so forth, or having to start to negotiate to join the EU completely afresh after
she had left and therefore it’s very important. And if you are saying, as I think you are, you’re not going to look at this again until the autumn there is not time between then and March 2019 when we leave the EU to have that second referendum, is there?

NS: No, but even if it doesn’t happen before then Scotland will still have options. I think one of the things Scotland and the people of Scotland are probably going to be quite sceptical about if this issue is being debated again are all the scare stories we heard in 2014 about if we become independent we’ll be thrown out of the European Union and it will take years and years to negotiate our way back in. It’s because we didn’t become independent that of course now we’re facing the prospect of being taken out of the EU even although most people in Scotland didn’t vote for that. But we’ve got an opportunity. Change is happening. Brexit makes change inevitable, so there’s an opportunity to debate the kind of change we want and how we shape that in a way that best serves our interests. Do we want to simply sit back and wait the meltdown, to use the language of the Foreign Secretary at the end of the week, or do we want to look much more positively and build a future based on optimism and hope and how we maximise the many, many opportunities we have as a country? And I think most people have an appetite to do the latter. To look forward with hope rather than constantly be caught in a debate that seems founded totally on despair, which is the Brexit debate at the moment.

AM: I think if I was watching at home I would hear Nicola Sturgeon say in effect, no Scottish independence referendum until after Brexit.

NS: Well, I’m not sure that’s a conclusion that anybody should necessarily reach. What people will hear is me saying exactly what I’ve been saying since this time last year actually, which is you know people feel very uncertain about the Brexit future. You
know, it’s quite hard to believe in many ways that two years on from the referendum we still have a UK Cabinet that can’t decide amongst themselves what they want in terms of customs arrangements or future trading arrangements and I think, and it’s certainly something I’ve had opportunity to reflect on, that people in Scotland think well, you know, before we’re asked to make another big decision about our future, let’s have some clarity on the future relationship between the UK and the EU. I’ve been saying that now consistently -

AM: A period of calm.

NS: - for the last year. So I’m not saying – I’m not saying anything today to you, Andrew, that I’ve not been saying repeatedly over the course of the last 12 months.

AM: Well that’s extremely disappointing, Nicola Sturgeon. Can I ask you about the –

NS: I know. I’m sorry. I’ll try - I’ll try to give you an exclusive in the remainder of the interview if I can.

AM: Thank you very much. Well, this is not probably that, but Amber Rudd and Iain Duncan Smith, writing today in the Sunday Telegraph have championed what’s happened to the Withdrawal Brill in the House of Lords where you wanted all the powers from the EU to transfer straight back to Scotland or Northern Ireland or Wales and they put a backstop of 7 years before that happens when it comes to big important things like fishing, and I can see the sea behind you, and agriculture. What’s your reaction to what’s happened there? You’ve been defeated and there’s no way back, is there?

NS: Well, what’s proposed in the Withdrawal Bill right now is unacceptable to the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Parliament voted overwhelmingly against giving consent to what’s been described as a power grab, so let me stress, it wasn’t simply the SNP that said we shouldn’t accept this. Labour, the Liberal
Democrats, the Greens, it was only the Tories who wanted to sign up to that power grab.

AM: So what are you going to do about it?

NS: Well there is - well firstly our MPs in the House of Commons this week will be trying hard to bring this to the floor of the House for a vote. I’m writing to the Speaker of the House of Commons today to ask him to ensure that there’s time for this issue to be properly debated, so I still hope, even at this 11th hour that common sense will break out on this issue. Because this is quite an important issue of principle. This is not about giving the Scottish Parliament new powers or extra powers, it’s simply about safeguarding the powers we already have, and there’s a very important convention that’s underpinned devolution for 20 years now which is that the UK parliament doesn’t legislate in devolved areas without the consent of the Scottish Parliament. So I hope the Tory government will not rip up that convention –

AM: You think this is an unconstitutional change?

NS: I think it is based on the conventions that underpin the devolution settlement, not just in Scotland but in Wales and Northern Ireland as well. It is unconstitutional. That’s why I hope and we’re getting very close to the end game in this, but I hope that we will see the UK government respect the Scottish Parliament, because if they don’t then I think it will simply prove a lot of people in Scotland have long believed that the Tories can’t be trusted with devolution.

AM: Okay, very, very quickly, there’s 14 big votes coming up on Brexit in the House of Commons in the week ahead, will the SNP be voting against the government on every single one of them?

NS: Well we’ll be voting for customs union membership, we’ll be voting for single market membership, we’ll be voting to protect the powers of the Scottish Parliament. I don’t know that we know exactly what issues will come to the vote, but I think you’ll find –
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AM: but on the big ones you'll be voting against?
MS: - the SNP opposing. Absolutely. I mean I think we are getting close to crunch point. We probably should have reached crunch point a long time ago, but the government is trying to reconcile lots of different irreconcilable issues and they risk taking the UK off a cliff edge on Brexit, so the sooner common sense around issues like the single market and customs union breaks out the better and I hope that we will see that happen this week.

AM: Nicola Sturgeon, a misty, cliff edge in Aberdeen behind you, thanks very much indeed for talking to us this morning.

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