ANDREW MARR SHOW, NICOLA STURGEON, 26TH JUNE, 2016

Nicola Sturgeon

AM: Can I ask first of all, is it your priority to have a negotiation as Scotland with Brussels to allow Scotland to more or less seamlessly stay inside the EU?

MS: My short answer to that is yes, but let me perhaps expand on the position that I find myself in. The first thing I should say is I didn’t want to be in this position this weekend. I hoped very much and campaigned to help persuade people across the UK to stay in the EU, but obviously people in England have voted differently to people in Scotland. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain a member of the European Union, so my challenge now, as First Minister, is to work out how I best protect Scotland’s interests, how I try to prevent us being taken out of the EU against our will with all of the deeply damaging and painful consequences that that will entail. Now Independence is not my starting point in this, protecting Scotland’s interest is my starting point, but if it is the case that looking again at the question of Independence becomes the only way in which we can protect Scotland’s interest then that is a debate and a conversation and a decision that the people of Scotland have a right to take over the next period. But in all of this it’s about protecting Scotland’s interest. And the last point I would make is this. If we do find ourselves in the position of looking again at the independence question, this is not going to be a rerun of the 2014 referendum. The context and the circumstances have changed dramatically. The UK that Scotland voted to remain within in 2014 doesn’t exist anymore and this is a case of how do we best protect the stability and the interests of Scotland.

AM: So you would like to be prime minister of an independent country but you’re First Minister of a country that is not independent.
NS: Absolutely.

AM: So how can you lead a delegation, as it were, to Brussels and argue for Scotland’s interests while Scotland is still inside the UK? Can you do that?

NS: Well, I’m certainly going to seek to do that. The reality is we’re in unprecedented territory here. You know I’ve heard people over the last couple of days talk about the rules that will apply to the Article 50 process. The reality is there are no rules, there is no precedent. This is something that’s never been done before. What will happen from here on in will be a matter of negotiation. Now my challenge, but also my responsibility as First Minister is to seek to negotiate to protect Scotland’s interests. Now I therefore am going to -

AM: Have you spoke to anyone yet in Brussels about this?

NS: Look, I will be speaking to people in Brussels over the next few days. I haven’t done that yet. We’re in a period of only a couple of days since this vote happened, but my priority is to seek to protect Scotland’s interests in unchartered territory and that’s going to be my guiding principle. Now are there challenges for Scotland in this? Of course there are, but what I want to do is have an open, honest conversation with people in Scotland about how we best lead this country forward.

AM: There are two options in terms of the way forward as regards Brussels. One, you have a successful negotiation with Brussels which allows Scotland as it were to stay inside the UK and then at the time of Brexit to move more or less seamlessly back into the EU, that’s option one. That seems to be being turned down by people in Brussels today. If they turn it down then you have to go into the queue to join as a new independent country. Which would you prefer?
NS: Look, there are a number of options that are potentially open here. I’m not going to be rushed into saying this is the best option or that’s the best option. I don’t think it is the case to say that anybody in Brussels has turned anything down. If you’re talking about a story in the Mail on Sunday today I don’t think it will surprise anybody in Scotland to see the Mail on Sunday pour cold water on our democratic aspirations. It’s what they do. But the substance of that story goes back to the point I made earlier on, appears to be, you know, here are the rules that will apply with the Article 50 process. There are no rules, there is no precedence. So my job over the coming days, weeks and months is to get in there and to seek to discuss and negotiate the best way forward for Scotland and I’m going to do that in a way that as far as possible tries to unify people in Scotland behind what is in our best interests.

AM: You are still part of the UK at the moment. There are suggestions from the Leave campaigners that they want Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland to be part of the UK-wide delegation to go Brussels to discuss the terms of exit. Would you be part of that or would you think that was ridiculous?

NS: I will do everything to protect Scotland’s interests, but let me be clear. Scotland voted to stay in the European Union. We made it very clear. More than 60% of people across Scotland voted to stay, every single local authority area in Scotland voted to stay. It was overwhelming, it was emphatic. So of course in every eventuality my priority is to protect Scotland’s interests, but my starting point here is to protect Scotland’s interests within the EU. Because this is not just a matter of principle. What is going to happen –

AM: I understand.

NS: No, this is important. What’s going to happen with the UK is that there are going to be deeply damaging and painful consequences of the process of trying to extricate the UK from the
EU. I want to try and protect Scotland from that. I don’t want to see the damage done to our economy, to our society, to our culture, to our place in the world that will come from this. My job is to try to protect us from that.

AM: Back at the time of the 2014 referendum one of the problems the Yes campaign had was over the currency. Presumably you can’t share the pound with a UK that’s outside the EU while being in the EU. You would have to go for the Euro now wouldn’t you?

NS: No, I don’t think that’s the case, but let me try and take this step by step. Firstly, and this comes back to the point I made, we’re in very different circumstances to those that pertained in 2014 and one of the important differences is in a sense – and I know this might initially sound a bit odd – but this would not be a decision about Scotland leaving anywhere, this would actually be a decision about Scotland staying. And therefore the moral argument about us retaining the current terms that we have would be even stronger than in 2014. But the second point is this –

AM: Coming back to the currency if you wouldn’t mind.

NS: Well, OK, but on the currency or any other issue I am not saying here just now that there are not questions and challenges that Scotland would have to face up to. I’m not going to be rushed in today to giving definitive answers on that because as a country we’ve got to work through what these issues are, but the point that I think is very important is that as we do this – 2014 I was convinced in 2014 that independence was best for Scotland but understandably some people in Scotland saw it as a choice between a step into the unknown with independence and the security and the stability and the known quantity of the UK. But that’s not the case just now.
AM: But that is why Scotland’s continued membership of the EU is so important isn’t it? That’s why Scotland’s continued membership of the EU is so critical -
NS: Absolutely.
AM: My point is that if you can’t get back in again as it were until the UK has left, which seems the likelier thing at the moment –
NS: Hold on a second, Andrew.
AM: You don’t agree with that?
NS: Well no I don’t, because we’re in unchartered territory right now. For anybody to say right now it’s the likely option that Scotland would have to sort of wait to get back in. The whole point here is that our argument is that we don’t want to leave. It’s not that we want to leave and get back in, we want to stay.

AM: So you need that voice to be heard while you are still part of the UK. How do you go about doing that? Have you assembled a delegation to go there, have you got any timetable, who do you intend to speak to?

NS: I’ve set this out, the Scotland Cabinet met yesterday and again – and what I’m saying here, I’m not suggesting for a second that the path ahead is without complexity or it’s easy. The Scottish Cabinet has decided and made very clear that in the days, weeks and months to come we are going to seek discussions with the European Union institutions, with other member states to explore all options for giving effect to the democratic will of the Scottish people. That’s how I’m going to proceed. And my guiding principle is the best interests of Scotland and protecting what Scotland voted for.

AM: There is one other thing clearly you’ll have to think about which is that if Scotland is a member of the EU and England isn’t there, then has to be a border, doesn’t there, a proper border with controls and checks?
NS: Whatever happens with Scotland this issue of a border is going to have to be resolved in the context of Ireland of course and some of these issues that would arise for Scotland, not all of them I accept, but some of these issues that would arise for Scotland in these circumstances arise anyway in the Irish context and are going to have to resolved, so these are issues that are live. I certainly don't want to see in any circumstances a border between Scotland and England. Whatever happens here England is our nearest neighbour and will always I hope be our best friend, but these are circumstances in which Scotland hasn't chosen to be -

AM: There will have to be some kind.

NS: Well no, I'm not prepared at this stage –

AM: You may have to go into a referendum saying the currency is the Euro and there will be a border with England that's going to be tough for you.

NS: I think you're jumping several steps ahead. We're in unchartered territory.

AM: I'm a young gazelle, that's what I do!

NS: We're in unchartered territory, Andrew, not because of choices Scotland has made, because of choices that have been made elsewhere and I'm not prepared at this stage to just accept that certain things are inevitable. I have a job to do to protect Scotland and to negotiate the best way forward for Scotland. Now I look on at what's happening in Westminster just now with a sense of utter despair on behalf of people across England and other parts of the UK as that vacuum of leadership, both in the Tories and Labour develops, but what I'm absolutely clear about there's no vacuum of leadership in Scotland. As First Minister I'm going to do everything I possibly can to prevent Scotland being taken out of the European Union because of consequences of allowing us to be so will be devastating.
AM: We’re going to get a new Conservative Prime Minister, what happens if that Prime Minister says to you, ‘Nicola Sturgeon, you had a referendum in 2014, I will not allow you to have another one now?’

NS: Well I just think people in Scotland would find that completely unacceptable. If we were in the situation where the Scottish Parliament had voted for a second referendum because it saw as the best way –

AM: Would you hold it anyway?
NS: Look again, you know, I don’t think it is acceptable in the context we find ourselves in of anybody trying to dictate to Scotland the terms of how we seek to take the country forward. It’s simply not acceptable and I would caution any future Prime Minister against putting themselves in that position.

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