



## DEBATE PACK

Number 0186, 20 July 2018

# Strengthening the Union

By David Torrance

## Summary

This debate pack has been produced ahead of the debate on “Strengthening the Union”, to be held in the House of Commons on Monday 23 July 2018 at around 3.30pm and led by the Government.

This briefing provides an overview of current issues and debates surrounding the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

# 1. Overview

In the Prime Minister's speech on the UK's future economic partnership with the European Union delivered at Mansion House on 2 March 2018, she said any deal between the UK and EU "must strengthen our union of nations and our union of people".<sup>1</sup>

Debates about the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – or "the Union" – are long-standing, but have been particularly prominent in the past decade, especially following two referendums, that in Scotland on independence in September 2014 and that across the whole of the UK on membership of the European Union in June 2016.

While the main UK political parties at Westminster – the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats – are committed to retaining and in some cases "strengthening" the existing Union, it is contested by other parties in Wales (Plaid Cymru), Scotland (the Scottish National Party) and Northern Ireland (Sinn Fein and the SDLP). More recently, a debate has begun to emerge about the "English Question", as more power is devolved to the cities and regions of the Union's largest "home nation".

This paper provides an overview of current debates about the Union, puts them in the context of "Brexit" and highlights key proposals for its reform. It also provides recent useful material in the form of Parliamentary Questions, debates, speeches and press material.

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister's Office, [PM speech on our future economic partnership with the European Union](#), 2 March 2018.

## 2. The Union and Brexit

### 2.1 Different results in the referendum

Whereas the UK as a whole voted by 51.89% to 48.11% in favour of leaving the European Union (EU), this was not reflected in the four constituent “home nations” of the United Kingdom. The UK-wide trend was reflected in England and Wales (where the Leave vote secured 53.38% and 52.53% of the vote respectively), but in Scotland and Northern Ireland Remain secured more votes (62.00% and 55.78% respectively).

This difference has had implications for the wider debate about both whether and how the UK should leave the EU, and for what kind of ongoing relationship the UK (or indeed parts of it) should have with the rest of the EU.

### 2.2 Brexit Legislation and Legislative Consent

Brexit will have significant implications for the powers of devolved institutions in Edinburgh, Wales and Belfast. These are explored in greater detail in the House of Commons Library Briefing Papers:

[\*Brexit: Devolution and legislative consent\*](#),<sup>2</sup> and

[\*Legislative consent and the European Union \(Withdrawal\) Bill\*](#).<sup>3</sup>

### 2.3 Future “common frameworks”

One of the consequences of Brexit is that EU-wide “common frameworks” in areas like agriculture and fisheries will no longer apply to the UK. This means the devolved authorities (and UK Government with respect to England) will no longer be required to abide by certain common standards.

The UK Government intends to legislate to create replacement frameworks for some of these areas within seven years of exit day (on 29 March 2019). These new frameworks, provisionally to be provided for in 24 areas, would restrict devolved competence in policy areas where there is an element of common UK interest (e.g. the “internal market”, future trade agreements, security and management of shared resources).

There is still uncertainty as to what these new frameworks will look like, what their decision-making processes will be, and to what extent they will provide for dispute-resolution procedures in the event that the governments of the UK cannot agree on certain issues.

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<sup>2</sup> CBP 08274, [\*Brexit: Devolution and legislative consent\*](#), 29 March 2018

<sup>3</sup> CBP 08275, [\*Legislative consent and the European Union \(Withdrawal\) Bill\*](#), 23 May 2018

### 3. “Strengthening the Union”

Extracts from the Prime Minister's speech on the future economic partnership with the European Union, delivered on 2 March 2018:

We must bring our country back together, taking into account the views of everyone who cares about this issue, from both sides of the debate. As Prime Minister it is my duty to represent all of our United Kingdom, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; north and south, from coastal towns and rural villages to our great cities.

So these are the five tests for the deal that we will negotiate:

Implementing the decision of the British people; reaching an enduring solution; protecting our security and prosperity; delivering an outcome that is consistent with the kind of country we want to be; and bringing our country together, strengthening the precious union of all our people.

[...]

Our departure from the EU causes very particular challenges for Northern Ireland, and for Ireland. We joined the EU together 45 years ago. It is not surprising that our decision to leave has caused anxiety and a desire for concrete solutions.

We have been clear all along that we don't want to go back to a hard border in Ireland. We have ruled out any physical infrastructure at the border, or any related checks and controls.

[...]

As Prime Minister of the whole United Kingdom, I am not going to let our departure from the European Union do anything to set back the historic progress that we have made in Northern Ireland – nor will I allow anything that would damage the integrity of our precious Union.<sup>4</sup>

#### 3.1 White Paper

The UK Government published its White Paper on [The future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union](#) on 12 July 2018. This stated that the Prime Minister's commitment to “strengthening the union” (her fifth test) had been met “by protecting the peace process [in Northern Ireland] and avoiding a hard border, safeguarding the constitutional and economic integrity of the UK, and devolving the appropriate powers to Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast”.<sup>5</sup>

#### 3.2 “The State of the Union”

In a recent paper for the Policy Exchange think tank, Professor Arthur Aughey analysed [The State of the Union](#). Some of his observations included:

- The Union has survived rupture (in the form of Irish independence) serious readjustment (in the form of devolution), historical trauma

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<sup>4</sup> Prime Minister's Office, [PM speech on our future economic partnership with the European Union](#), 2 March 2018.

<sup>5</sup> HM Government, [The future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union](#), 12 July 2018, pp6-7.

(from the decline of the British Empire to two world wars) and the Northern Irish “Troubles” and unexpected challenges (of which Brexit is the most pressing today);

- There is a long-established tendency in British political and intellectual life to run down the Union. [...] The anti-Union narrative [...] often takes the form of “endism” (predictions that the death of the Union is only a matter of time) and is usually tied up with a “declinist” view of the United Kingdom, as constitutionally weakened, bereft of former self-confidence and purpose;
- Critiques of the Union have legitimacy, should be taken seriously and should be considered on their merits. [...] Some of these [points] – from doubts about the strength of a British national identity to imbalances in democratic representation – require the attention of pro-Union voices. It is true that the Union is in some ways an “artifice”, “constructed”, or “unnatural”, although this is to measure against criteria that many modern states would fail to fulfil;
- [...] Making the case for the Union has never been easy. It is easier to mobilise people around a dream of the future (soaring dove) rather than the defence of a somewhat clumsy and contingent status quo. The Union is a “historical fact” but for that reason it is hard to create great enthusiasm around it;
- At the same time, there is an “imagined community” and sense of common allegiance across the Union that is not dependent on a single, one-and-indivisible, collective identity (sport comes to mind here). More precisely, the instrumental sharing of risks and resources is sustained by common affinities across the Union and enable the nations to choose to stay together;
- The Union depends, above all, on the “principle of consent” [...] people elect to associate together through various democratic means (from referenda on the Belfast Agreement or Scottish independence to votes for Union-orientated political parties). The principle of consent also accepts a degree of contingency: that people may choose to separate if, for example, the instrumental case for the Union is diminished; or the affinities that underscore these begin to fray beyond repair.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur Aughey, *The State of the Union*, May 2018, pp5-9.

## 4. The debate in Scotland

### Sustainable Growth Commission

The Scottish independence debate most recently focused on the recommendations of the Scottish National Party's [Sustainable Growth Commission](#) (SGC). Its formal remit was:

To assess projections for Scotland's economy and public finances, consider the implications for our economy and finances under different potential governance scenarios and make recommendations for policy.<sup>7</sup>

Ahead of the report's publication, a press release previewed the report's "core finding" that "an independent Scotland can emulate the world's 12 best performing small advanced economies (SAEs), closing the growth gap and driving GDP per head to the median of these best performing countries".<sup>8</sup> This would involve "a target of delivering the initial deficit target of under 3 per cent of GDP within 5 to 10 years".<sup>9</sup>

### Fraser of Allander Institute

In an article for the Fraser of Allander Institute, its director Professor Graeme Roy offered some "early thoughts" on the SGC report. Calling it "an important contribution to the debate on Scotland's economic future", he said it outlined "some of the opportunities for Scotland – particularly over the long-term – but also highlights some tough choices in getting there".

Of the SGC's recommendation that an independent Scotland reduce its deficit from almost 6 per cent in 2021-22 to below 3 per cent within a decade, Professor Roy wrote:

There are clearly upside and downside risks to this. Economic growth *might* surge ahead post-independence and this will help boost Scotland's fiscal position. But the reverse is also possible. [...] the report allows for modest real terms spending increase (around ½% pa including debt interest payments). But with health needing to rise by 1% pa just to keep up with an ageing population, other areas of the budget will be squeezed. Population growth can help only to an extent. It should be remembered that these are challenges that all countries face – including the UK – but by inheriting a slightly weaker fiscal position combined with Scotland's demographic profile, the task will be more difficult.<sup>10</sup>

### Scottish Trends

In a press release dated 6 June 2018, John McLaren of Scottish Trends also responded to the SGC's recommendation on deficit reduction:

This is a prudent course of action but it clearly involves a tighter fiscal strategy over this period than is likely for the rest of the UK. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), currently expects the

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sustainablegrowthcommission.scot/about-1/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sustainablegrowthcommission.scot/latest/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sustainablegrowthcommission.scot/report/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://fraserofallander.org/scottish-economy/fiscal-policy/some-early-thoughts-on-the-sustainable-growth-commission-report/>

UK to have a deficit equivalent to 2.3% of GDP in 2021-22 and falling, which should allow for an easing in public expenditure settlements over time. Meanwhile Scotland will be moving from a deficit equivalent to nearly 6% of GDP towards a 3% target. It doesn't take a mathematical genius to work out the implications.

McLaren added that this did "not mean that public spending will not be growing in real terms", simply that it would "likely to be growing at a consistently slower pace" than in the UK, whether that was "labelled as some form of relative austerity or not". He also noted that if Scottish GDP growth was stronger, as anticipated by the SGC, then the above effect would be "lessened".<sup>11</sup>

## 4.1 Institute for Fiscal Studies

And David Phillips of the [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) (IFS) had this to say:

The Commission claims their proposals do not amount to austerity as public spending would be increasing in real terms. But their plans would mean spending on public services and benefits falling by 4% of GDP over the course of a decade. That's on top of the reductions delivered and planned by the UK government for the decade from 2010 to 2020, and the Commission's proposals for immediate cuts to defence and other spending currently undertaken by the UK government. The ageing of the population – which adds to pressures on the health, social care and state pension budgets – means that keeping to an overall spending increase of just 0.5% a year would likely require cuts to many other public services.

Phillips also "commended" the SGC for tackling the deficit "issue head on" and praised its "sensible suggestions" for the role that increasing productivity, labour force participation and the size of the working-age population could play in boosting economic growth.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <http://scottishtrends.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Recent-report-commentaries-020618.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/13072>

## 5. The debate in Wales

The Commons Library Briefing Paper [“A process, not an event”: Devolution in Wales, 1998-2018](#), gives an overview of the constitutional debate in Wales, including ongoing debates regarding Wales’ place in the Union.

### 5.1 Constitutional debates

Plaid Cymru’s manifesto for the 2017 UK general election stated: “It remains our ambition for Wales to become an independent nation, standing on its own two feet.”<sup>13</sup> Polling suggests support for independence has been lower than 10 per cent since 2011.<sup>14</sup>

In a speech at Plaid Cymru’s 2018 party conference in Llangollen, the Assembly Member Adam Price pledged that a referendum on Wales’ constitutional future would be held at the end of a second term of a Plaid government, asking “this coming generation where they want Wales to be mid-century” and including “independence as a realistic option”.<sup>15</sup>

Former Secretary of State for Wales Ron Davies joined Plaid Cymru in 2010. At an event in Cardiff on 5 July 2018, he stated: “I want to see an independent Wales”.<sup>16</sup>

### 5.2 Federalism

The idea of Wales as one part of a federal UK was first advocated by the Conservative Assembly Member David Melding in his book, *Will Britain Survive Beyond 2020?* (2009). A subsequent electronic publication, *The Reformed Union: The UK as a Federation* (2013), considered how to translate that idea into a practical reality.

Melding’s arguments appear to have influenced First Minister Carwyn Jones, who had long been a supporter of a UK-wide “constitutional convention”. In 2014 Jones called for “some federal thinking” and, following the EU referendum in 2016, for “some sort of federation”.<sup>17</sup>

Federalism is also supported by the Liberal Democrats in Wales, while in 2013 the then Plaid Cymru AM and former Presiding Officer Dafydd Elis-Thomas stated: “I’m an out and out UK federalist [...] There was never a project for Welsh independence, anyway.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Plaid Cymru, [Action Plan 2017](#), May 2017.

<sup>14</sup> [“Poll for BBC Wales on Brexit attitudes and voting”](#), BBC News Wales Politics, 1 March 2018.

<sup>15</sup> [“Plaid Cymru would hold Wales independence referendum”](#), BBC News Wales Politics, 24 March 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Wales Governance Centre, “In Conversation with Ron Davies”, 5 July 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Carwyn Jones, [“Our future union-a perspective from Wales”](#), speech to Institute for Government Conference, 15 October 2014; [“Brexit could lead to a federal UK. Carwyn Jones says”](#), BBC News Wales Politics, 30 June 2016.

<sup>18</sup> [“Dafydd Ellis-Thomas calls for liberation of England in new federal arrangement for UK”](#), Wales Online, 12 July 2013.

## 6. The debate in Northern Ireland

### 6.1 Calls for a “border poll”

Since the 2016 EU referendum, there have been several calls for a “border poll” from the Sinn Fein leadership.

Under the terms of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, a referendum can be called if the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland believes a majority of voters in Northern Ireland no longer want to remain part of the UK.

Earlier this month, former Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams said:

This is not a task for Sinn Fein alone. All political parties and others who support the Good Friday Agreement and an end to partition should also campaign for this modest step forward.

How a shared Ireland, an agreed Ireland is created is another matter deserving of careful, generous and positive inclusivity. To begin with we need to understand that many unionists hold to their sense of identity as strongly as we do. So new thinking is needed by us all.

We are a diverse people. That should be proudly proclaimed and not used to divide us. Ireland is an island – a society – in transition. The future is bright despite the dire threats of Brexit.<sup>19</sup>

### 6.2 Opinion polls

A recent opinion poll, conducted for former Conservative Party treasurer Lord Ashcroft, found that a majority of voters in Northern Ireland believe the UK’s vote to leave the EU had made unification with the Republic of Ireland more likely in the foreseeable future. It found a majority of just five points in Northern Ireland for staying in the UK, with 49% saying they would vote for the Union and 44% for Irish unification if a referendum was held now.<sup>20</sup>

### 6.3 Peter Robinson

In a recent lecture at Queen’s University, Belfast, the former First Minister and DUP leader Peter Robinson suggested holding fixed generational polls on Irish unification could stabilise politics in Northern Ireland. He said:

In this I am not, of course, talking about the nature and shape of the new state that would emerge if there ever was a vote to exit the UK. I am alluding to the need to agree a process for negotiations, timescales and not only the means of reaching agreement on all the particulars but also who would be involved in negotiating such an agreement. With those details settled, my own view, for what it’s worth, is that fixed generational border polls would be less divisive and disruptive of our local political process.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.itv.com/news/2018-07-01/former-sinn-fein-leader-calls-for-irish-unity-poll/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2018/06/brexit-the-border-and-the-union/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2018/06/08/news/peter-robinson-suggests-fixed-generational-polls-on-irish-unification-1350916/>

## 6.4 Prime Minister's visit to Northern Ireland

The Prime Minister visited Northern Ireland on 19 and 20 July 2018. In a speech at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast, she said she would “never accept” the “economic and constitutional dislocation of a formal 'third country' customs border within our own country”.

This was a reference to the EU's proposal for a “backstop” arrangement to keep Northern Ireland in the customs union and single market for goods. Earlier this week, the Government backed an amendment to its *Customs Bill* that would make it illegal for Northern Ireland to be outside the UK's customs territory.

The Prime Minister also said:

For all of us who care about our country, for all of us who want this union of nations to thrive, that duty goes to the heart of what it means to be a United Kingdom and what it means to be a government. Our job is not to deal with Brexit in theory, but to make a success of it in practice for all of our people.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-44892385>

## 7. The debate in England

### 7.1 An English Parliament?

In March 2018, the Constitution Unit published a report on [Options for an English Parliament](#). In reviewing existing proposals for an English Parliament, it uncovered “two distinct” visions, what it termed the “separately elected” and “dual mandate” models for such a body. The report continued:

Proponents of an English Parliament want to achieve equity for England, representation and a distinct English ‘voice’ (including in intergovernmental forums), and potentially a new sense of English political identity. Opponents’ main argument is that an English Parliament could potentially destabilise the Union, as England accounts for almost 85% of the UK population. Opinion polls sometimes suggest limited support for creation of such a body, but this depends on how the question is asked.<sup>23</sup>

### 7.2 Devolution in England

The Commons Library Briefing Paper SNO029, [Devolution to local government in England](#), summarises the main developments regarding the process of devolution of powers to local government within England since 2014. It covers the devolution deals agreed between the Government and local areas up to July 2016, including the powers to be devolved, the procedures required for devolution to take place, and reactions to the policy from the local government and policy-making worlds.

### 7.3 Calls for more devolution

Several city mayors in the north of England have called for additional powers to be devolved from London as the “best answer” to the challenges of Brexit.

Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester (and former Labour Cabinet Minister), said:

We need to go further, faster and deeper. It is the best answer to Brexit. The time has come to free up places like Greater Manchester to chart our own path and our own way of responding to the uncertainty it brings. [...] Devolution is an incredible opportunity to build a better political culture in this country. It is only when you leave Westminster you realise how frustrated people get with the point scoring and the tit for tat. Devolution is a life raft for British politics.<sup>24</sup>

### 7.4 The “English Question”

Another former Labour Cabinet Minister, Professor John Denham, [delivered a Speaker’s lecture on “English identity”](#). In the speech, he argued that Englishness had been neglected despite being a key driver

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/publications/tabs/unit-publications/179-options-for-an-english-parliament>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/7a6aa9c0-52ce-11e8-b3ee-41e0209208ec>

of the vote to Leave the EU in 2016. In a letter to the *Guardian* newspaper, Denham wrote:

Politics has always been about identity. Highly unionised working class voters supported “the Labour man” (or, more occasionally, woman) as the person most likely to “stand up for people like us”. Those affiliations have weakened as the factories closed, tight-knit communities were disrupted, and Labour became ever more graduate and middle class. New forms of political identity are emerging. The low-pay towns are usually much more English than British. Until Labour can acknowledge and share the power and legitimacy of this identity, it will sound like a party that doesn’t want to stand up for English voters.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jul/10/english-identity-politics-and-labour>

## 8. Parliamentary material

### 8.1 Oral Questions

#### UK Administrations: Co-operation

HC Deb 3 May 2018 c295

**Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the agreement—announced last week—between the Welsh Government and the UK Government in respect of clause 11 of the Bill shows what can be achieved when Governments work together constructively for the benefit of the whole United Kingdom and all its peoples?

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** My hon. Friend has made an extremely important point. I think the agreement demonstrates the maturity of the relationship between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations. The Welsh Government recognised the merits of providing certainty and security for businesses and communities. I am still hopeful that we can underline the benefits of the scheme to Scottish businesses and communities, and that we can attract the support of the Scottish Government.

[...]

**Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP):** I am sure that, in the interests of co-operation, the Government would not want to do anything that undermines the devolution settlement. Do they not recognise that the Conservatives are isolated in the Scottish Parliament, where there is a cross-party consensus that the EU withdrawal Bill is not fit for purpose? Will the Secretary of State therefore ensure that the House of Lords is not asked to consider the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill on Third Reading until all the devolved Assemblies have had a chance to pass a legislative consent motion?

**Alun Cairns:** [...] so long as we focus on outcomes—and the Scottish Government focus on outcomes and delivering for Scottish businesses—I am confident we can reach an agreement. The Welsh Government clearly would not undermine the devolution settlement as far as Wales is concerned, and I hope the Scottish Government will see the merits of the certainty and security that we can offer Scottish industry and Scottish business with this agreement.

#### Leaving the EU: The Union

HC Deb 28 March 2018 cc737-739

**Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP):** What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on strengthening the Union during the process by which the UK leaves the EU

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington):** The Government are unapologetically committed to the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom. As the Minister responsible for constitutional issues across the

Government and as chair of a number of Cabinet Committees, I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues about such issues.

**Gavin Robinson:** I am grateful to the Minister for that reply and for his commitment to our precious Union. He knows that Northern Ireland will achieve a significant milestone on the day after the transition period: its centenary as part of this Union. Will he agree to meet with me and some of my colleagues to discuss how best to advance the celebration and recognition of that achievement?

**Mr Lidington:** I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, as I am always happy to talk to the elected representatives of Northern Ireland constituencies here. It is important that we find a way to mark that centenary appropriately and do so in a way that is genuinely inclusive and recognises the sensitivities associated with many centenary anniversaries affecting the island of Ireland that have fallen in recent years.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** Given that we are leaving the EU, will my right hon. Friend assure this House that he will do everything he can to preserve the single market of the United Kingdom, which is infinitely more important to many Unionist Members than the single market of the EU?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend is right. The United Kingdom's common market existed well before we joined the European Union, and it will continue to exist after we leave. The living standards of people in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland alike benefit from the existence and strength of the internal market of the United Kingdom, and the Government will do their utmost to protect and defend it.

**Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab):** Given that the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill places additional and somewhat unwarranted restrictions on Scottish Government Ministers that do not apply to Ministers down here, does the right hon. Gentleman think that that strategy strengthens the Union or puts it at risk?

**Mr Lidington:** The Withdrawal Bill, in providing for the transfer of considerable additional powers from Brussels to the devolved Governments in Scotland and Wales both strengthens devolution and upholds our constitutional settlement.

**Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend share my frustration at the actions and attitude of the SNP Government regarding clause 11 of the withdrawal Bill? While he has been working on an agreement with the devolved Administrations, they have been blocking, frustrating, agitating and doing everything in their power to manufacture a constitutional crisis in our family of nations.

**Mr Lidington:** One of the virtues that I have sought to cultivate in this job is patience, as well as endurance, so we continue talking to both the Scottish and Welsh Governments, but the allegations of a so-called power grab are completely unmerited.

## Prime Minister's Questions

**HC Deb 28 Feb 2018 c823**

**Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con):** It is obvious that there will be concern about the draft from the EU of the withdrawal agreement. Can the Prime Minister assure me that when she responds, she will have uppermost in her mind the importance of both preserving and strengthening the Union of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. First, if I can reiterate the point that I made in response to an earlier question, we are very clear that we want to ensure that we are able to see that trading and that movement between all parts of the United Kingdom—that common single market within the United Kingdom that all parts of the United Kingdom benefit from. We are committed to protecting and enhancing our precious Union of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The devolved Administrations should be fully engaged in preparations for the UK's exit. They are—discussions have been taken from them—and as I said earlier, also in response to the Westminster leader of the Scottish National party, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), it is our intention that the vast majority of powers returning from Brussels will start off in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, not in Whitehall. We will continue to talk to the devolved Administrations, because we also need to ensure that we maintain the single market of the United Kingdom.

## 8.2 Written Question

### Devolution: Devolved competence

**PQ HL6275**

**26 Mar 2018**

**Lord Taylor of Warwick:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of how the competences currently held at the EU level will be distributed between the various countries in the UK after Brexit; and what impact this will have on the management of the devolution settlement and on relations between those countries.

**Lord Young of Cookham:** The Government has committed that EU exit will result in a significant increase in the decision-making powers of each of the devolved legislatures. The Government's provisional frameworks analysis, published on 9 March, sets out where frameworks may and may not be needed in respect of the 153 policy areas where EU law intersects with devolved competence. It indicates that legislative frameworks will only be needed in a minority of areas. Moreover, our ongoing discussions with the devolved administrations suggest that within these areas, legislation may only be required in relation to specific elements, rather than the entire policy area. Constructive discussions with the devolved administrations continue.

## 8.3 Debates

### **Emergency debate on the Sewel Convention**

**HC Deb 18 Jun 2018 cc79-131**

On the motion: That this House has considered the Sewel Convention.

### **Lords debate on Brexit: Devolved Administrations**

**HL Deb 25 Jan 2018 cc1093-1133**

On the motion: That this House takes note of the role of the devolved Administrations in the process of withdrawal from the European Union and future opportunities for strengthening the union of the United Kingdom.

## 8.4 Select Committees

### **Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee**

#### **Devolution and Exiting the EU**

Inquiry announced 11 October 2017

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry into internal constitutional arrangements of the UK after leaving the EU.

## 9. Further reading

### 9.1 Press articles and blogs

#### **Will England ever get its own Parliament?**

**Brian Wheeler, BBC News, 7 June 2018**

Most people in England feel disconnected from decisions made at Westminster, but don't necessarily think an English Parliament is the answer, a BBC survey suggests. Has the moment for it passed?

#### **A Union for the 21st Century? - IWA blog on the future of the UK Union**

**Glyndwr Cennydd Jones, Western Mail, 28 March 2018**

Glyndwr Cennydd Jones discusses the future of the UK Union, made modern and fit for purpose in the context of Brexit.

#### **What an English Parliament might look like – and the challenges of giving it proper consideration**

**Constitution Unit blog, 9 March 2018**

Constitution Unit researchers have been working on a detailed project on Options for an English Parliament, whose final report has just been published. In this post, report authors Meg Russell and Jack Sheldon reflect on the key design questions associated with the two main models for an English Parliament, and how proposals for such a body relate to wider political questions about the UK's territorial future.

### 9.2 Commons Library briefings

SN07078, [Corporation tax in Northern Ireland](#), 16 May 2018

CBP-7938, [Brexit: red lines and starting principles](#), 22 Jun 2017

SN05984, [Devolution of tax powers to the Scottish Parliament: the Scotland Act 2012](#), 23 Jan 2015

### 9.3 Lords Library Note

LLN-2018-0009, [Leaving the EU: Role of the Devolved Administrations and Implications for the Union](#), 22 Jan 2018

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