

Scots head for shake-up after rejecting independence

Written by Taipei Times

Saturday, 20 September 2014 05:42 -



Disappointed YES campaign supporters gather in Edinburgh yesterday after the result of the Scottish independence referendum.

Photo: EPA

Scots rejected independence yesterday in a referendum that left the centuries-old UK intact, but headed for a major shake-up that is to give more autonomy to both Scotland and England.

Despite a surge in nationalist support in the final fortnight of the campaign, the “no” camp secured 55.30 percent of the vote, against 44.70 percent for the pro-independence “yes” camp.

After a campaign that fired up separatist movements around the world and stoked political passions across the country, turnout was 84.6 percent — the highest ever for an election in the UK.

“No” campaigners across Scotland cheered, hugged and danced as the results came in the early morning and British Prime Minister David Cameron said he was “delighted.”

“It would have broken my heart to see our United Kingdom come to an end,” he said outside his Downing Street offices in London, looking visibly relieved after averting a humiliating defeat that could well have cost him his job.

Many “yes” activists watched dejected and in tears in the streets of the Scottish capital, Edinburgh, although Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond urged them to take heart from the

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huge numbers — 1.6 million — who backed independence.

The result reassured investors worried about the economic risks of a break-up and the British pound reached a two-year high against the euro, while European stock markets rallied.

A “yes” vote would have brought to an abrupt end a union between Scotland and England stretching back to 1707, and was being closely watched by separatist movements who are also now clamoring for a referendum, like the Catalans in Spain.

However, while the UK survived, it could soon look very different.

The British government must now deliver on promises made in the heat of the campaign to give more powers over tax, spending and welfare to the devolved government in Edinburgh.

In his televised address, Cameron said he would offer all parts of the UK greater local control — heading off growing demands from right-wing Conservatives and the UK Independence Party for England to be given more powers.

“Just as Scotland will vote separately in the Scottish parliament on their issues of tax, spending and welfare, so too England, as well as Wales and Northern Ireland, should be able to vote on these issues,” he said.

In what would be a radical shake-up of the constitutional order, he said these new powers would be delivered “at the same pace as the settlement for Scotland,” suggesting legislation would be drawn up as soon as January next year.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2014/09/20](#)