

Why is England the heir to the UK?

Published: January 13, 2026, 12:09 pm

I am surprised that Jose Barroso of the EU has said that Scotland would have to re-apply for membership of the EU if it voted for independence but omitted what seems to me to be quite an important detail.

The detail he omitted seems to me to be that if he is right then surely the remaining part of the United Kingdom would also have to apply for membership as well?

I cannot quite see why it is assumed that if the United Kingdom split Scotland would be a new state but the remaining bit (surely, not then the United Kingdom, almost by definition) would carry on as before.

Making this assumption the EU appears to make very clear that it thinks that Scotland is not now a separate country, and yet it has some very clearly defined characteristics, such as a separate legal system that pre-existed its joining the UK that clearly indicate that it is. It also has a very obvious independent history. But the EU logic is that Scotland is simply a province and not a partner when the very name of the UK implies not.

And what I cannot quite accept is the EU logic that if the UK splits then England is the heir. This appears to me to have dubious foundation in logic that is worrying even if the Union survives and suggests that it will need to take a very different form if it does, that may actually be harder to manage.

PS I am aware a former EU judge thinks Barroso wrong.

PPS Tax diversity is what will challenge the union if it survives: unfettered internal tax competition could ruin any chance of funding viable states within a union