BALMUN'25

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Under Secretary General: Emre Tahmaz

Academic Assistant:
Ekin Şahin & Furkan Kazan

STUDY GUIDE

Letter From Secretaries General

It is our utmost pleasure to be able to serve this year's BALMUN Conference, a gathering where we unite to shape the world through democracy and collective ideas, as the Co-Secretaries General. We are more than prepared to provide you with the best 3 days journey of all your MUN experiences. With our excellent academic team, we greet you with 8 committees in total: 2 of them being General Assembly, 4 of them being Special and 2 of them as Crisis Committees. Let this conference serve as a reminder that leadership is not measured by the volume of one's voice, but by the integrity of people's ideas and the willingness to listen, adapt, and inspire the change.

 Sincerely,

Alin Asel Mordeniz & Ceylin Umay Köylü

Secretaries General

Letter From Academic Assistant

Dear Delegates,

It is my greatest pleasure to welcome you all to House of Commons committee at BALMUN'25. I'm a 9th grade student at Bahçelievler Anatolian High School, and I'm more than glad to be your Academic Assistant throughout this committee. This is my first time as an academic team member rather than as a delegate.

Although my role in this conference is within the chairboard, I can say without a doubt that we will all experience the thrilling ambiance of debate thanks to the hard work, dedication, courage, and communication skills of our fellow delegates.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude firstly, to Secretaries General, who have put forth their utmost efforts to make this conference a success, and secondly, to my USG, who is the main reason behind this exceptional committee and remarkable study guide. They are truly inspiring role-models for people like me in the MUN community, and it is my utmost pleasure to both be a part of this conference and this committee.

Over the next three days, I encourage each of you to embrace the excitement of debate, importance of critical thinking, and most significantly the power of collaboration with other delegates in a respectful manner. As the old British saying goes, "Many hands make light work." Only through sincere cooperation and mutual respect can we build something truly meaningful in this committee.

Wishing you all the very best throughout the conference.
Let's make this incredible experience unforgettable together!

Warm regards,

Doğa Baş

Academic Assistant

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1. Introduction to the House of Commons

The House of Commons is the lower house of the Parliament of the United Kingdom and serves as one of the most important legislative bodies in the world. It is a central arena for political debate, legislative drafting, and decision-making, reflecting the will of the electorate through its democratically elected Members of Parliament (MPs). The Commons is distinct from the House of Lords, the upper house of Parliament, in that its members are directly elected by citizens in general elections held at least every five years.

The House of Commons derives its authority from centuries of tradition, evolving over time into the cornerstone of the UK's parliamentary democracy. It traces its origins to the early medieval councils, which gradually developed into the bicameral system in place today. By the 17th century, the House of Commons had established its primacy over the monarchy and the House of Lords, making it the principal decision-making body in British governance.

The House is composed of 650 MPs, each representing a geographic constituency across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. MPs come from various political parties, and the composition of the House often reflects the political preferences of the public. The leader of the political party with the majority of seats typically becomes the Prime Minister, forming the government. In cases where no single party achieves a majority, a coalition government may be formed or a minority government may govern with conditional support from other parties.

The core responsibilities of the House of Commons include the following:

- **Legislation:** Proposing, debating, and passing laws. The House of Commons plays a crucial role in shaping the legal framework of the UK.
- **Scrutiny and Oversight:** Examining the actions and policies of the government to ensure transparency, accountability, and effectiveness.
- **Budgetary Control:** Authorizing government expenditure and taxation through the passage of budgets and financial legislation.
- **Representation:** Acting as the voice of citizens, with MPs advocating for the needs and interests of their constituents.

Debates and decisions in the House of Commons often reflect diverse perspectives, with party affiliation, constituency priorities, and individual beliefs influencing the positions of MPs. The Commons operates through a structured process of debates, committee discussions, and voting procedures. These processes are overseen by the Speaker of the House, a neutral figure responsible for maintaining order and ensuring fair conduct during debates.

2. Introduction to the Agenda Item

On September 18, 2024, the United Kingdom marks the 10th anniversary of the Scottish independence referendum, a historic vote that saw 55.3% of Scots choose to remain part of the UK. At the time, the referendum was hailed as a decisive resolution to the independence question, with promises of greater devolution made by Westminster to address the concerns of Scottish voters. However, a decade later, the political landscape has changed dramatically, reigniting debates about Scotland's constitutional future.

The 2016 Brexit referendum played a pivotal role in reshaping Scotland's relationship with the UK. While the UK as a whole voted to leave the European Union, Scotland overwhelmingly supported remaining, with 62% of Scots voting against Brexit. This divergence fueled renewed calls for independence, with the Scottish National Party (SNP) arguing that Scotland was being forced out of the EU against its will. Since then, tensions between Holyrood and Westminster have escalated, particularly as successive UK governments have dismissed demands for a second independence referendum.

In 2022, the UK Supreme Court ruled that the Scottish Parliament could not unilaterally legislate for an independence referendum without Westminster's consent, reinforcing the UK Government's position that the 2014 result was final. However, Scottish pro-independence parties continue to push for a legal and political mechanism to secure another vote, citing shifting public opinion and evolving political circumstances. The SNP and its allies argue that Scotland's democratic will is being denied, while opponents maintain that the union remains essential for economic stability, national security, and shared governance.

Now, as the House of Commons takes up the debate on the Scottish Independence Act, MPs are faced with a historic decision. Should Scotland be granted the legal right to hold another referendum? What conditions, if any, should be placed on such a vote? And if Scotland were to vote for independence, how would the transition be managed—both domestically and in terms of international recognition? The economic, legal, and geopolitical ramifications of such a decision are vast, from currency and trade to EU accession and defense policy.

3. Key Terms and Definitions:

Scottish Independence Act: A proposed legislative framework that could determine Scotland's legal pathway to independence, outlining the conditions, process, and implications of potential separation from the United Kingdom.

IndyRef2: A commonly used term referring to the potential second referendum on Scottish independence, following the first referendum in 2014.

Devolution: The process by which certain legislative powers are transferred from the UK Parliament to regional governments, such as the Scottish Parliament, while ultimate sovereignty remains with Westminster.

Reserved Powers: Powers that remain under the control of the UK Government and Parliament, including foreign policy, defense, immigration, and constitutional matters, including the ability to authorize an independence referendum.

The Union: Refers to the political and economic union between England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, forming the United Kingdom (UK).

Holyrood: The commonly used term for the Scottish Parliament, located in Edinburgh, which has devolved powers over areas such as education, health, and justice.

Westminster: A term used to refer to the UK Parliament in London, which holds ultimate legislative authority over all matters in the UK, including Scotland.

Section 30 Order: A legal mechanism under the Scotland Act 1998 that allows the UK Government to temporarily transfer powers to the Scottish Parliament, enabling it to legislate for an independence referendum. The 2014 referendum was held under such an order.

Scotland Act 1998: The foundational law that established the devolved Scottish Parliament and defined its powers and limitations. Any changes to Scotland's constitutional status require amendments to this act or additional UK legislation.

Brexit (British Exit): The UK's withdrawal from the European Union following the 2016 referendum, in which Scotland voted overwhelmingly (62%) to remain. Brexit has been a major factor in renewed calls for Scottish independence.

UK Supreme Court Ruling on Scottish Independence (2022): A landmark decision stating that the Scottish Parliament does not have the unilateral authority to hold an independence referendum without the UK Government's approval.

Self-Determination: The principle that a nation or people have the right to determine their own political status, including the option of independence. This principle is a key argument for Scottish nationalists advocating for IndyRef2.

Economic Viability of an Independent Scotland: The debate over Scotland's financial ability to sustain itself as an independent nation, including issues related to currency, trade, debt, and public spending.

European Union (EU) Membership: One of the key questions in the independence debate, as an independent Scotland would need to apply for EU membership and negotiate accession terms.

Sterlingization: A proposed economic policy where an independent Scotland would continue using the British pound without formal agreement from the UK Government, raising concerns about monetary policy control.

The Barnett Formula: The system used by the UK Government to allocate public spending to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. An independent Scotland would no longer receive funding through this mechanism, impacting its fiscal policies.

Unionist vs. Nationalist Debate: The political divide between those who support Scotland remaining part of the UK (Unionists) and those who advocate for Scottish independence (Nationalists).

Good Friday Agreement (1998) and its Implications: While primarily concerning Northern Ireland, the agreement established legal principles about self-determination within the UK, influencing arguments on whether Scotland should have a similar right to decide its future.

Civic Nationalism vs. Ethnic Nationalism: Civic nationalism, the dominant ideology of Scottish independence supporters, is based on shared civic identity rather than ethnicity, advocating for an inclusive approach to nationhood.

Border and Trade Implications: The potential impact on trade, travel, and border arrangements between an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK, particularly in the context of Brexit and EU relations.

4. Political Parties

Conservatives (Tories): The Conservative Party, currently the governing party of the UK, strongly opposes Scottish independence and any moves toward a second referendum. The Tories argue that the 2014 referendum was a "once in a generation" vote and that Scotland benefits from remaining in the UK, particularly in terms of economic stability, national security, and shared governance. Conservative Prime Ministers, including Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak, have repeatedly refused to grant a Section 30 order to allow a new independence vote.

Labour: Labour officially supports the unity of the UK but takes a more nuanced approach than the Conservatives. While rejecting Scottish independence, Labour has advocated for further devolution of powers to Scotland as a compromise. Some within the party argue that a second referendum should be allowed if there is significant public demand. However, Labour also seeks to regain lost ground in Scotland, where it once dominated before losing support to the SNP.

Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP): The SNP is the leading pro-independence party and has governed Scotland since 2007. It argues that Scotland should be an independent country to make its own political, economic, and international decisions. The SNP has consistently pushed for a second referendum, particularly after Brexit, claiming that Scotland was taken out of the EU against its will. However, legal barriers imposed by Westminster have so far prevented IndyRef2 from taking place.

Greens: The Scottish Greens are a left-wing environmentalist party that also supports Scottish independence. They argue that independence would allow Scotland to implement stronger climate policies, social justice measures, and rejoin the EU. The party has worked closely with the SNP in the Scottish Parliament, forming a pro-independence majority.

Plaid Cymru: Plaid Cymru, the Welsh nationalist party, supports Scottish independence as part of its broader vision for greater autonomy and eventual Welsh independence. It sees Scotland's potential exit from the UK as a precedent for Wales to seek a similar path toward self-rule.

Sinn Féin: Sinn Féin, the Irish nationalist party, does not participate in UK Parliament votes but supports Scottish independence. The party sees Scotland's push for self-determination as parallel to its own goal of Irish reunification. Sinn Féin believes that Scottish independence could trigger further constitutional change across the UK and Ireland.

Liberal Democrats: The Liberal Democrats oppose Scottish independence and argue for a strong UK with increased devolution. They believe that remaining in the UK provides economic and political stability and that breaking away would create uncertainty. However, the party strongly opposed Brexit and acknowledges that Scotland's EU vote has fueled the independence movement.

DUP: The DUP, based in Northern Ireland, is a staunchly pro-UK party that opposes Scottish independence. The party believes that maintaining the union is crucial for Northern Ireland's place in the UK, fearing that Scottish independence could increase calls for Irish reunification. The DUP also sees itself as an ally of Unionist Scots who wish to remain part of the UK.

5. Historical Background of Scottish Indepence

1. Early Scottish Independence and Union with England

Scotland was an independent kingdom for centuries, developing its own distinct legal and political institutions. However, during the late Middle Ages, Scotland frequently clashed with England over territorial and political control.

- Wars of Scottish Independence (1296–1357): Scotland, led by figures such as William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, fought a series of wars against England to maintain its sovereignty. The victory at the Battle of Bannockburn (1314) secured Scottish independence, later confirmed by the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton (1328).
- Union of the Crowns (1603): In 1603, King James VI of Scotland also became James I of England, uniting the two kingdoms under one monarch. However, Scotland and England remained separate states with independent governments.
- Acts of Union (1707): Economic and political pressures led to the formal union of Scotland and England, creating the Kingdom of Great Britain. The Scottish Parliament was dissolved, and governance moved to Westminster, though Scotland retained its legal and educational systems.

2. 18th–20th Century: Growing Calls for Home Rule

Although Scotland became integrated into the UK, nationalist sentiment never fully disappeared. Over time, debates over Scottish governance and autonomy resurfaced.

- Jacobite Rebellions (1715 & 1745): These uprisings, led by supporters of the exiled Stuart monarchy, sought to restore Scottish sovereignty but were crushed by the British government.
- Industrial and Economic Growth: Scotland benefited from industrialization, but economic downturns in the 20th century fueled dissatisfaction with Westminster rule.
- Rise of Home Rule Movements: By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Scottish politicians pushed for greater autonomy, similar to movements in Ireland.

3. Devolution and the Rise of the Scottish National Party (SNP)

- Scottish Devolution Referendum (1979): A vote on limited self-government failed to meet the required threshold, delaying devolution efforts.

- Scottish Devolution Referendum (1997): After decades of debate, Scotland voted in favor of devolution, leading to the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 with powers over domestic affairs.
- SNP Electoral Success: The SNP, advocating for full independence, gained political dominance in Scotland, eventually leading to calls for a referendum on independence.

4. 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum

- Referendum on Independence (2014): Scotland held a vote on leaving the UK. The "No" campaign, backed by Unionist parties, argued that remaining in the UK ensured economic security. The "Yes" campaign, led by the SNP, promoted the idea of self-determination.
- Result: 55.3% voted against independence, while 44.7% supported it. Many Scots were swayed by promises of increased devolution, known as "The Vow," made by UK politicians.

5. Brexit and Renewed Calls for Independence

- Brexit Referendum (2016): The UK voted to leave the EU, but Scotland overwhelmingly voted to remain (62%). This created tensions, as Scotland was forced out of the EU despite its preference to stay.
- SNP Push for IndyRef2: Arguing that circumstances had changed since 2014, the SNP repeatedly requested a second referendum. However, Westminster has refused to grant one, and the UK Supreme Court ruled that Scotland cannot unilaterally hold a referendum without UK government approval.

6. The Present Day: The Debate Continues

As Scotland marks the 10th anniversary of the 2014 referendum in 2024, debates over independence remain central to UK politics. The Scottish Independence Act being considered by the House of Commons represents a pivotal moment in the ongoing struggle over Scotland's constitutional future. The decision will shape the political landscape of the UK for years to come, determining whether Scotland continues within the union or embarks on a new path as an independent nation.

6. Current Actions by the Government Upon the Matter

As of April 2025, the Scottish Government, led by First Minister John Swinney, has shifted its focus away from pursuing immediate independence, emphasizing collaboration with the UK Government and addressing key domestic priorities.

Scottish Government's Current Approach:

In the aftermath of the 2024 UK general election, where the Scottish National Party (SNP) experienced a significant reduction in parliamentary seats, First Minister Swinney acknowledged the need to prioritize effective governance within the existing devolved framework. The government's current agenda concentrates on four main areas:

- *Eradicating Child Poverty: Child poverty remains a significant issue in Scotland, affecting thousands of families. The government is taking several measures to reduce financial hardship and ensure children have equal opportunities to succeed:*
  - *Scottish Child Payment: A financial support system that provides direct payments to low-income families to help cover basic needs*
  - *Free School Meals Expansion: Ensuring all primary school children have access to free meals, reducing food insecurity.*
  - *Affordable Housing Initiatives: Investing in social housing projects to provide stable living conditions for families in need.*
  - *Employment Support for Parents: Programs aimed at helping parents, especially single mothers, find stable jobs with fair wages.*

- *Growing the Economy: The Scottish economy has faced challenges due to Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and global economic shifts. The government aims to stimulate growth through:*
  - *Investment in Green Energy: Scotland is rich in renewable energy resources, particularly wind and hydroelectric power. Expanding these industries could create jobs and boost exports.*
  - *Support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs): Encouraging local businesses through grants, tax relief, and digital transformation initiatives.*
  - *Attracting International Investment: Promoting Scotland as a hub for technology, finance, and tourism to increase foreign direct investment.*
  - *Infrastructure Development: Improving transportation networks, including rail and road projects, to enhance connectivity and economic*

activity.

- ***Tackling the Climate Emergency:*** *Scotland has set ambitious climate targets, aiming to achieve* **net zero emissions by 2045**, *five years ahead of the UK's overall target. Key strategies include:*
  - ***Phasing Out Fossil Fuels:*** *Reducing reliance on North Sea oil and gas while investing in offshore wind and hydrogen energy.*
  - ***Public Transport Improvements:*** *Expanding electric bus networks and investing in rail services to reduce carbon emissions from transport.*
  - ***Support for Sustainable Farming:*** *Encouraging agricultural practices that lower emissions and protect biodiversity.*
  - ***Community Climate Initiatives:*** *Funding local projects that promote energy efficiency and climate adaptation.*

- ***Ensuring High-Quality and Sustainable Public Services:*** *Scotland's public services, including healthcare and education, face increasing pressure due to funding challenges and workforce shortages. The government's response includes:*
  - ***Healthcare Reforms:*** *Reducing NHS waiting times, increasing mental health support services, and addressing staffing shortages.*
  - ***Education Investments:*** *Improving school funding, expanding access to higher education, and supporting teachers with better pay and training.*
  - ***Social Care Expansion:*** *Enhancing elderly and disability care services, including financial support for caregivers.*
  - ***Digitalization of Public Services:*** *Upgrading government systems to make services more accessible and efficient for citizens.*

While the aspiration for independence remains a long-term objective, the SNP recognizes that substantial progress can be achieved within the current devolved powers. This pragmatic approach reflects an understanding of the complexities involved and a commitment to addressing immediate challenges facing Scotland.

UK Government's Position:

The UK Government maintains its stance against granting a second Scottish independence referendum. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has consistently rejected requests for a Section 30 order, which would transfer the necessary powers to the Scottish Parliament to hold such a referendum. The UK Government emphasizes the importance of focusing on shared challenges and delivering for the people of Scotland within the existing union framework.

Public Opinion:

Public sentiment in Scotland remains divided on the issue of independence. As of March 2025, approximately 54% of Scottish adults oppose independence, while 46% are in favor. This polarization underscores the complexity of the independence debate and the necessity for careful consideration of the path forward.

Conclusion:

Currently, both the Scottish and UK Governments are concentrating on collaborative efforts to address pressing issues such as economic growth, social welfare, and public services. While the question of Scottish independence remains a significant topic, immediate governmental actions are directed toward utilizing existing powers to improve the well-being of Scotland's citizens within the framework of the United Kingdom.

7. Points to Cover

-Should Scotland separate from the United Kingdom and declare independence or should Scotland stay with the UK and settle with their decisions?

-What are the main reasons for Scotland's need for independence?

-Should Scotland be granted the legal right to hold another referendum?

-In case of a referendum decision, what conditions, if any, should be placed on such a vote?

-How would Scottish independence affect the unity and stability of the rest of the Union?

-Would holding a second referendum encourage independence and set a precedent for other regions in the UK or Europe?

-Would independence truly offer devolution and more control to the Scottish Government, or just shift dependencies?

8. Matrix of our Committee

- Government Benches (Right Side – Unionist Block, Conservatives, and Allies)
    - Frontbench (Higher Exposure, Key Government Officials & Party Leaders)
        - Prime Minister – Rishi Sunak (Conservative)
        - Chancellor – Jeremy Hunt (Conservative)
        - Home Secretary – James Cleverly (Conservative)
        - Foreign Secretary – David Cameron (Conservative)
        - Scottish Secretary – Alister Jack (Conservative)
        - DUP MP – Gavin Robinson (DUP)
        - Liberal Democrat MP – Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat)
    - Backbench (Lower Exposure, Influential MPs & Party Figures)
        - Sir Bill Cash (Conservative)
        - Jacob Rees-Mogg (Conservative,)
        - Tom Tugendhat (Conservative)
        - Alicia Kearns (Conservative)
        - Lee Anderson (Conservative)
        - Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Conservative)
- Opposition Benches (Left Side – Labour, SNP, Greens, Plaid Cymru, Sinn Féin, and Allies)
    - Frontbench (Higher Exposure, Key Opposition Figures & Party Leaders)
        - Leader of the Opposition – Keir Starmer (Labour)
        - Shadow Chancellor – Rachel Reeves (Labour)
        - Shadow Scottish Secretary – Ian Murray (Labour)
        - SNP Westminster Leader – Stephen Flynn (SNP)
        - SNP Deputy Leader – Mhairi Black (SNP)
        - SNP Spokesperson for the Constitution – Tommy Sheppard (SNP)
        - Green MP – Caroline Lucas (Green)
    - Backbench
        - Diane Abbott (Labour)
        - John McDonnell (Labour)
        - Jess Phillips (Labour)
        - Dan Jarvis (Labour)
        - SNP MP – Joanna Cherry (SNP)
        - SNP MP – Pete Wishart (SNP)
        - SNP MP – Angus MacNeil (SNP)
        - Plaid Cymru MP – Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru)
        - Liberal Democrat MP – Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrats)
        - Sinn Féin MP – Michelle Gildernew (Sinn Féin)