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Devolution in the United Kingdom: Ever Looser Union?*

Abstract

The devolution reforms in the UK were designed, and function in disconnected ways. The devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were each established for distinctive reasons. England continues to be governed in a centralised manner by central government institutions in London. The structures for coordination between the different parts of the UK, and between them and central government are weak. The article explores the reasons for this disconnected union, and the centrifugal dynamics that have resulted.

Key words: Devolution, constitutional change, asymmetry, federalism

1. Devolution: The First Decade

The first wave of devolution reforms was introduced in a remarkable flurry of legislative activity following Labour's victory under *Tony Blair* in the May 1997 UK general election. By the end of 1998 Acts of Parliament had been passed which established the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. These were highly asymmetrical reforms. The powers of the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly are similar, but not identical, and are exercised in quite different institutional settings. Northern Irish devolution is distinguished by its mechanisms of proportional government and the cross-border relationship with the Republic of Ireland. Scottish devolution has more of a classic government-opposition pattern, but leavened by a proportional electoral system that makes single party majority government improbable. Scotland and Northern Ireland both have 'primary' legislative powers, so can make laws on whatever matters and in whatever ways they see fit in areas of policy not 'reserved' to Westminster. The National Assembly for Wales has less systematic legislative powers based in empowerments to act under individual items of Westminster legislation (which were widened in a second Government of Wales Act in 2006). It was initially established as an all-party 'corporate body', but has moved to a government-opposition pattern shaped by a rather less proportional electoral system than Scotland.

Though Labour initially envisaged a programme of English regional devolution, that programme was abandoned after the rejection of an Elected Regional Assembly in the North East in 1994. After that, regionalisation in England amounted to modest administrative decentralisation outside London, and in London to an elected Greater London Assembly (GLA) with limited responsibilities for strategic coordination of policy imple-

mentation in a small number of fields. England, the GLA excepted, remains a unitary nation at the heart – and with the overwhelming majority of the population and economy – of a state which has devolution only in its much less populous and economically much less significant nations.

Table 1: Asymmetrical Devolution in the Four Nations of the UK

Nation	% UK Population	% UK GDP	Form of government
England	83.6	85.7	Direct rule by Westminster with some regional administration of central government policies, but no elected regional government except in London
<i>London</i>	12.2	19.1	<i>Greater London Authority with responsibilities for strategic policy coordination in transport, economic development, policing, and fire services; elected executive Mayor held to account by separately elected Assembly</i>
Scotland	8.6	8.1	Scottish Parliament with primary legislative powers in matters not reserved to Westminster (most fields of domestic policy); limited fiscal autonomy; electoral system favours government by majority coalition or minority single-party government
Wales	4.9	3.9	1998 Act: secondary legislative powers dependent on Westminster legislation; initial vision of all-party 'corporate body' gave way de facto to government-opposition model 2006 Act: expanded powers to legislate within areas established under individual Westminster statutes; confirmed government-opposition pattern. Electoral system favours (less strongly than Scotland) majority coalition or minority single-party government
Northern Ireland	2.9	2.2	Northern Ireland Assembly with primary legislative powers in matters not reserved to Westminster (with some held back by Westminster subject to the security situation); electoral and government formation rules produce multi-party proportional government to ensure cross-community balance; embedded in international relationships with Republic of Ireland

These reforms, taken together, were of tremendous constitutional significance. Depending on the commentator they were described as the most radical constitutional change the UK had seen since either 1910 (when the House of Lords veto on legislation was abolished – *Keating* 1998, S. 217), or 1832 (the Great Reform Act which modernized the electoral basis of the House of Commons – *Bogdanor* 1999, S. 1), or even 1707 (when the Treaty of Union between Scotland and England came into force – *McLean* 1999, S. 133). The epochal significance of Labour's reform plans was emphasised too by *Tony Blair* (1996, S. 321) in a book written shortly before he took office: 'The reforms I have set out will transform our politics. They will redraw the boundaries between what is done in the name of the people and the people themselves.'

Blair perhaps did not expect those boundaries to be redrawn quite as swiftly as they have been. Ten years on from his victory in 1997, the third round of devolved elections was held in spring 2007. The devolved electorates returned governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland which included nationalist parties committed to renegotiating the relationship of their nation with the UK. The Scottish National Party (SNP) became the largest party in the Scottish Parliament and formed a minority government. In Wales a strengthened Plaid Cymru joined a weakened Labour Party as junior partner in a Welsh coalition government. And the republican Sinn Féin became the Northern Ireland Assembly's second largest party after the Democratic Unionists (DUP), and co-leader of the Northern Ireland government with the DUP.

This nationalist sweep confirms that, despite the reforms between 1997 and 2000, the territorial constitution of the UK is still deeply contested. This was confirmed as a second phase of constitutional debate about devolution unfolded. Wales had already seen a devolution reform Commission sit from 2002-4. This laid some of the groundwork for the 2006 Government of Wales Act, which widened the scope of the Assembly's powers. Nonetheless, just a year after this second Welsh Act, the new Labour-Plaid coalition agreed a plan for a referendum on still further-reaching devolution by 2011. In 2008 it established an All-Wales Convention to prepare the ground.

In Scotland, the new SNP government published a historic White Paper on Scotland's constitutional options in August 2007 (Scottish Executive 2007). The White Paper prompted an intense cross-party debate on additional powers the Parliament might seek – or rather two debates: the SNP government's own 'National Conversation', a consultation process focused on options of further devolution or (the SNP's preference) Scottish independence; and the unionist parties' response, the Commission on Scottish Devolution, charged with preparing recommendations on reform to Scotland's devolution arrangements, but excluding the option of independence.

2. Underpinning the Union: Are Values Enough?

The fluidity and persistence of the constitutional debate raises questions about the robustness and territorial integrity of the UK state. Rather oddly, those questions have barely been addressed in political debate. The current UK Prime Minister *Gordon Brown* is the only senior UK politician to have devoted sustained attention to the implications of devolution for the future of UK union. In a series of speeches on 'Britishness', extending back to the late 1990s, he has conceded that devolution might seem to offer a challenge to the cohesion of state and society in the UK, but argued that this challenge is contained by shared values of Britishness. His British Council Annual Lecture in 2004 put the point forcefully:

Take devolution and nationalism. While the United Kingdom has always been a country of different nations and thus of plural identities ... the issue is whether we retreat into more exclusive identities rooted in 19th century conceptions of blood, race and territory, or whether we are still able to celebrate a British identity which is bigger than the sum of its parts and a Union that is strong because of the values we share and because of the way these values are expressed through our history and our institutions (*Brown* 2004).

Brown's claim serves as a riposte to the pro-independence nationalism of the Scottish National Party and though it is put intemperately (the SNP does not articulate its nationalism as one of blood and race), it is an intriguing one. The values he talks about in the speech – standing firm for freedom and liberty against tyranny, a sense of duty and fair play, openness to new ideas and new influences – are indeed shared across the component parts of the UK. The British Social Attitudes survey and its counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland provide the most authoritative data on UK public attitudes. They consistently show that citizens across the UK think in much the same ways about their sense of obligation to one another, and about the roles that the state should be performing collectively on behalf of all. Table Two gives one example through a question designed to tap values on social solidarity, in *Brown's* terms the British sense of fair play. It shows that differences between the UK nations are small and any year-on-year variations follow no obvious territorial pattern.

Table 2: 'Ordinary people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth'
(% agree/agree strongly)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2005
Scotland	58	71	61	64	54	57
England	60	61	58	61	60	55
Wales	61	—	61	60	59	—
Northern Ireland	62	60	55	62	59	52

Sources: British Social Attitudes, Scottish Social Attitudes, Welsh Life and Times Survey, Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, Devolved Election Studies

Whether these commonalities add up to something that helps bind the UK together, as *Brown* suggests, is less clear. It is a fair bet that if the same question were asked of citizens in different parts of France, or Spain, or Germany, some similar pattern of answers would be found. *Henderson and McEwen* (2005, S. 182) made a similar point when they compared the fissiparous pressures of sub-state nationalism in UK with the Quebec-Canada relationship: they found that the 'values' claimed by the Parti Quebecois as the foundations of Quebec nationhood 'are virtually indistinguishable' from the values promoted by those committed to Canadian unity. A recent Eurobarometer survey across the European Union underlines the point, finding that 'most Europeans say that they can differentiate a set of collective European values' and that these 'largely overlap with a broader set of global western values' (*European Commission* 2008). In other words, the existence of common values within a state does not necessarily underpin a shared commitment to the same state as *Brown* suggests; those values may simply express a broader set of commonalities shared across western democracies. That Scottish and English (and Welsh and Northern Irish) citizens have broadly the same values clearly does not stop them from having and pursuing different constitutional preferences. To press the point further: if Scotland became independent, it would not stop having in common with the rest of the UK the values that *Brown* singles out as 'British'.

Brown does, though, point to a different way in which values may underpin union: when they are embodied in institutional structures that express and contain union. In particular he focuses on the BBC and the NHS as archetypal institutions of Britishness. Both were singled out in a speech *Brown* made to the Smith Institute in 1999 (and in similar phrasing in later speeches) as examples how resources can be pooled to general benefit. The BBC 'was created by a Scot, but healthy devolution should not obscure the fact that it is a service that operates for the whole of Britain, is paid for by a sharing of costs by all the people of Britain and is seen as a defining feature of Britain'. Similarly,

when people talk of the National Health Service whether in Scotland, Wales or England people think of the British National Health Service: here national is unquestionably 'British'. And its most powerful driving idea is that every citizen of Britain has an equal right to treatment regardless of wealth, position or race and, indeed, can secure treatment in any part of Britain (*Brown* 1999).

There is much to *Brown's* claims here. The BBC and the NHS are iconically British, and do express values shared across the UK's internal boundaries; recent survey research on attitudes to the NHS has for example shown that 'what matters to the public is much the same in Scotland as it is in England' (*Ormston and Curtice* 2007, S. 73). But while the BBC and NHS may still embody shared *values* the practice of nearly a decade of devolution has weakened their *institutional* cohesion across the UK. Even if citizens identify the 'national' in the NHS as British, in reality there are now four increasingly distinctive na-

tional health services in the UK. From headline issues like prescription charging, the licensing of treatments for use in the NHS and free personal care for the elderly through to underlying questions of organisation and philosophy the four services do things in different ways and deliver different priorities and outcomes (as indeed they did, to lesser extents, before devolution) (*Greer 2004*). And while the BBC remains institutionally (British)-national it now is under increasing pressure to diversify to reflect more systematically the territorially distinctive arenas for public debate, culture and entertainment that have become consolidated in the decade since devolution (*Fraser 2008*).

This institutional centrifugalism would seem to jar with the shared values that people across the UK claim. It is increasingly fostering policy outcomes that vary across the four UK nations, within healthcare and broadcasting, but also in many other policy fields. There are plenty of indicators that citizens do not much like these variations: from regular controversies about post-code lotteries in the delivery of public services, through mischievous opinion polling suggesting that the people of Berwick-on-Tweed would prefer to re-unite with Scotland to enjoy what they perceive as more generous public services there than in England, to the more reliable scholarly analysis of the British Social Attitudes survey about public preferences for territorially uniform public policy. Yet shared values are now confronted increasingly by (and have no obvious capacity to prevent) unshared outcomes across the four nations of the UK. This dissonance reflects a failing the Britishness debate has barely touched on, yet is arguably fundamental to prospects for the future of the UK union: the design and operation of the post devolution political system.

3. The Dynamics of Disconnected Union

To be blunt: the post-devolution political system was not designed as an integrated system of government. This lack of integrated design is a long-standing tradition in UK government. The UK state grew (and in Ireland later contracted) through a set of relationships between England and the other nations in which England has always been the sole common denominator. The UK state has always been asymmetrically organised, with a generally and over time increasingly uniform approach to public administration in England, and different sets of distinctive arrangements for public administration, with varying degrees of policy discretion and institutional underpinning, in the other nations. The relationship of the English core and the other nations has always been a piecemeal one; changes to administrative arrangements in, say, Scotland did not lead to equivalent changes in Wales or (Northern) Ireland. Relationships have always been bilateral and partial, not multilateral and statewide. The UK union has always been curiously disconnected as between its non-English parts.

That tradition of disconnection was continued in 1997-99. Different UK government departments introduced reforms for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (with a half-hearted and then aborted attempt to add English regional reforms following in the period 2002-4). Those reforms were introduced for different reasons in different places, and were discussed in government and parliament for the most part as discrete issues. This characteristically piecemeal approach has a number of consequences which underline and exacerbate the centrifugal tendency noted above.

First, approaching each reform as a discrete renegotiation of the relationship of one part of the UK to the UK as a whole carried with it the danger of spillovers, that is unan-

anticipated consequences of reforms designed to meet a need in one part of the UK for another. *James Mitchell* (2006) has highlighted the most obvious example: while devolution in Scotland met a Scottish need (to re-legitimise the UK system of government after a protracted period of being governed in Westminster by a Conservative Party that was increasingly weak in Scotland), one consequence has been to open up perceptions in England that Scottish devolution is unfair to the English:

- in terms of political representation (the so-called West Lothian Question, which points to the anomaly whereby after devolution a Scottish Westminster MP can vote on health legislation for England, but an English Westminster MP cannot vote on health legislation for Scotland, because this is now a devolved competence);
- in the distribution of resources (Scotland, for historic reasons unconnected to the devolution reforms, has a block grant from the UK Treasury which awards more public spending per capita than England); and
- in terms of policy provision (where post-devolution policy innovations in Scotland like reduced prescription charges and fee-free higher education are not available in England).

In consequence there has been further debate about how to address these perceptions of inequity, including proposals to restrict Scottish MPs' rights at Westminster and/or to devolve fuller tax-raising powers to Scotland so that public spending in Scotland is financed more fully by Scottish taxpayers and less by the general UK taxpayer. The risk is, of course, that addressing these spillovers of Scottish devolution into England in the same piecemeal way as the earlier Scottish reforms were introduced will add further spillovers, for example concerning perceptions of unfairness in Scotland about 'second class' status at Westminster, or emulative demands in Wales for tax-raising powers, and so on. The prospect is one of continual flux.

A second consequence of the piecemeal approach to reform in 1997-99 concerns the relationships between England and the rest. England is one of the most centralised political units among liberal democracies. It is also, in relative terms, very big: around ten times the size of Scotland, 17 times the size of Wales and 30 times the size of Northern Ireland. The combination of one unit of large size and centralised government alongside smaller units with extensive devolution is, in comparative terms, unique. It brings with it its own spillovers. Irrespective of the formal distribution of powers, decisions taken by Westminster for England inevitably spill over into areas of devolved responsibility given England's predominance on the UK's single market, single welfare state and single internal security area. They do so all the more given the ways that the government of England is fused (and often confused) with the government of the UK in the institutions of Westminster and Whitehall. Moreover, where UK institutions act for the UK as a whole the mindset of decision-making is, logically enough, dominated by the largest part, England, and equally logically neglectful of interests outside England or effects in devolved settings. Finally, because it is in this way 'captured' by English interests UK government is ill-placed to arbitrate concerns or conflicts over spillovers between jurisdictions (*Jeffery 2009*).

That this mix of devolution outside England and centralisation of England was not understood as an integrated system of government is confirmed, third, by the practices the UK uses for coordinating the work of its different governments. These have projected forward an approach to the accommodation of different territorial interests inherited from pre-devolution UK government. That approach sees coordination as an ad hoc process,

lubricated by assumptions of civil service collegiality, referred to ministers only in case of dispute, and carried out entirely beyond public view. It was, no doubt, appropriate to the pre-devolution situation. It functioned more or less adequately from 1999-2007 when Labour led governments at the UK level and in Scotland and Wales (and when Northern Irish devolution was in the main suspended), and dispute could be managed within the Labour Party 'family'. But it appears unfit for purpose now the SNP provides the Scottish government, Labour is in coalition with Plaid Cymru in Wales, and Northern Ireland devolution, with its distinctive party system, is in operation again. Ad hocery and intransparency do not appear well-suited to managing the growing number of intergovernmental disputes, especially between Scotland and the UK, allowing accusations of duplicity and grandstanding to be made on both sides. More importantly there is minimal provision in this practice of intergovernmental coordination for identifying and pursuing *common* interests shared between governments across jurisdictions.

To put this last point another way, there is no apparent sense of the need, or desirability, of the UK's different governments to join together to make policy across their different jurisdictions *for the union as a whole*. This is a striking absence. It expresses the fourth consequence of piecemeal devolution: the purpose of union, in its post-devolution form, is unclear and under-articulated. The UK operates after devolution as a collection of governments working side by side in a sense by default, rather than because they are joined in some kind of common endeavour in service of the citizens of the UK. *Gordon Brown's* discussion of British values is an attempt to suffuse this disconnected political system with some kind of commonality, but for the reasons discussed above is flawed and insufficient. What needs to be added to the mix is a more explicit articulation of the shared *interests* that all UK citizens might draw from the union in its new, post-devolution form. A glance at other devolved and federal systems gives some pointers. Germany and Australia operate systems of fiscal equalisation based on commitments that all citizens should enjoy similar levels of provision of public services, despite the existence of a tier of decentralised government. Canada and Belgium have significantly more decentralised and diverse sub-state governments, but in each case diversity is bounded by continued commitments to statewide 'social union' in Canada and a statewide social security system in Belgium; diversity is highly prized, yet still tempered by explicit commitments to statewide solidarity.

The UK has failed to problematise the balance between the commitment to diversity that devolution embodies, and the commitment to solidarity and equity that continued union implies. There has been no general articulation of the balance of interests that might best be secured for citizens at a statewide scale, and those that might best be secured for citizens in each of the four nations of the UK. There has been no explicit distinction between policy outcomes that can or should vary across jurisdictions, and those that should not and should be delivered for all citizens no matter where they live. There has been no systematic discussion of the allocation of resources between levels of government as a means of achieving balance between territorial diversity and statewide fairness. As a result the post-devolution state lacks generally understood, generally accepted rules of the game which might mark out limits of policy variation, offer a general rather than a piecemeal framework for addressing the concerns and relationships of the UK's component nations, consider more systematically the government of England and connect it to government outside of England, and inform a framework of intergovernmental coordination capable of pursuing statewide objectives and balancing them against devolved autonomy. In

sum, the UK has failed to identify how ‘Britishness’ – in this sense some conception of the interests shared by all citizens, across all UK-level, English and devolved jurisdictions – can be understood, debated and delivered by the post-devolution political system.

4. Options for a New Britishness

Can this be fixed? There are two directions to a ‘new Britishness’ in the post-devolution political system, the first involving more union, the second less. The first would involve mechanisms and techniques for expressing and guaranteeing shared statewide interests more explicitly. This might involve (vgl. *Jeffery* 2005, S. 26):

- Guarantees of minimum or common standards of policy provision in some policy fields for all citizens. The UK currently has common standards in the field of social security. Equivalent guarantees might be established – though inevitably with wider margins of variation around the common core or from the minimum level – in health, education and other policy fields.
- Mechanisms to express union more explicitly in the UK’s territorial financial arrangements. These might include a system of fiscal equalisation to replace the Barnett system, in which differential territorial need was compensated as an expression of solidarity between the different parts of the UK. The purpose of such systems is to ensure sub-state governments have roughly the same fiscal capacity to provide public goods and services, not to provide uniform goods and services. Additional mechanisms could be used to ensure uniformity if deemed desirable in particular policy fields by the UK’s governments: some element of fiscal transfers could be made conditional on achieving agreed UK-wide priorities; or UK and devolved governments could agree to combine resources to joint-fund shared priorities.
- Policy-making for the union by intergovernmental agreement. The UK’s approach to intergovernmental coordination could be modified to add a policy development role to meet objectives across jurisdictions. This would need to provide much fuller guarantees of devolved government input, not least in agreeing any minimum or common standards, the terms of fiscal equalisation, or areas for conditional or joint funding. It would also need a more systematic distinction of the UK-wide and England-specific roles of the UK government, with more systematic consideration of the government of England (as distinguished from the government of the UK) nudging the UK in the direction of a federal system.

Any movement in this direction of more union, more ‘Britishness’ in the operation of the devolved political system, would require a subtlety of thought often lacking in UK constitutional debate: though such measures would increase the capacity for union-wide government in areas formally devolved outside of England, they would not automatically imply a loss of function of devolved governments. Rather – assuming effective guarantees on intergovernmental policy-making – devolved government would add functions by having a greater grip over the central UK state. Moreover, establishing elements of union-wide decision-making into which devolved and UK governments are bound is not incompatible with further devolution of policy-making powers or fiscal autonomy. Indeed, introducing mechanisms for more union might most easily be achieved as part of a package deal including further devolution.

The second direction of possible change is one involving less union. This direction of change would follow the logic of centrifugalism in the current arrangements and institutionalise it more explicitly. This logic could involve the further devolution of powers to the non-English nations and the establishment of fuller degrees of fiscal autonomy without the balancing measures of the 'more union' route. The logic would imply continued and growing diversification of policy portfolios in the different nations of the UK, weak(ening) intergovernmental coordination and perhaps reduced representation of the devolved nations at the UK centre. A result would be a further and fuller diminution of commonalities and solidarities – that is, an acceptance of significantly greater asymmetries – between the different nations of the UK. The institutional direction would not be that of federalism, but one of two other routes:

- The establishment of Scotland, and perhaps Wales and Northern Ireland, as 'special status' nations of the UK or, in academic jargon, 'federacies', 'political arrangements where a large unit is linked to a smaller unit of units, but the smaller unit retains considerable autonomy and has a limited role in the government of the larger one' (*Watts* 2007, S. 243).
- Scottish (and perhaps Welsh and Northern Irish) independence.

There might be ultimately little practical distinction between special status devolution within the UK and independence. A special status Scotland might have very extensive or even full fiscal autonomy, full control over domestic policy (though no doubt hedged by reciprocal arrangements with the rest of the UK on cross-border portability of entitlements), and growing international engagement (for example in trade promotion and development aid). An independent Scotland might well retain the pound sterling and by implication remain subject to UK monetary policy; it would certainly in this field and more generally still have to reckon on spillover effects on its policy autonomy arising from the size and economic weight of neighbouring England. An independent Scotland might recast the UK as the union of Scottish and English crowns which existed for the century or so prior to the union of the Scottish and English states in 1707. There would no doubt be some level of cross-border portability and reciprocity of citizenship rights with the rest of the UK, over and above that exists, for example between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. And common EU membership would provide an additional context for continued borderlessness between Scotland and the residual UK. Scottish independence in a contemporary British Isles/European Union setting would not, in other words, be anything like the '19th century conceptions' *Gordon Brown* pointed to in his 2004 Britishness speech; it could still embody a continued 'Britishness' of economic interdependence, shared currency, joint crown and common citizenship.

5. Outlook

Which kind of 'Britishness' the UK might be headed towards – a recast system of government with a more systematic approach to union or something looser somewhere in the grey area between special status and independent statehood – is a moot point. The UK currently has several forums for constitutional debate.

The SNP's 'National Conversation' in Scotland rules out the status quo, highlights the SNP's preference for independence, but is open to further reaching devolution (as a kind of interim measure en route to independence). The unionist response in Scotland, the Calman Commission on Scottish Devolution rules out independence and has a remit focused on more devolution alongside measures to reaffirm union, as set out in its interim report of December 2008 (Commission on Scottish Devolution 2008). The All-Wales Convention launched in mid-2008 has the task of facilitating a wide debate in Wales on the possible move of the National Assembly to adopt 'full law-making powers', that is something like the current Scottish model of devolution. The Conservative Party's Democracy Task Force has produced new proposals on how to adapt the business of Westminster to give fuller consideration of English policy needs (Conservative Party 2008).

None of these forums appears likely to endorse the status quo. Only the Calman Commission has a remit which has elements of 'more union', albeit this from a Scottish-UK perspective rather than a union-wide one. All of them have a limited focus on one or other part of the UK. None of them are concerned with the establishment of an overarching balance of purposes between union-wide and devolved government. In other words, each is offering yet more piecemeal change. The picture is no more systematic at UK level. Mystifyingly, though one of *Gordon Brown's* first initiatives as Prime Minister was to publish a Governance of Britain Green Paper, none of the initiatives that have spun out of it have identified arrangements for governing the post-devolution union as a challenge or priority. Nor do the Conservatives appear to be thinking systematically about the relationship of devolution and union. Their main concern so far has been with piecemeal fixes to English concerns about the perceived advantages the Scots have after devolution.

The continued absence of a systematic approach to the territorial government of the UK, and the existence of various forums for discussion of one or other nation's concerns point to a continuation of the centrifugal dynamic of the UK's strangely disconnected union. The prospects for institutionalising a sense of union-wide Britishness – the identification of shared interests across the jurisdictions of the UK's governments – in the operation of the post-devolution political system appear at best distant; there appears to be no credible counter-balance to the UK's post-devolution centrifugalism. And continued centrifugalism suggests, more or less by default, that an ever looser union is set to evolve, perhaps as a set of relationships between autonomous nations contained within a single state, perhaps as a set of unusually close and interdependent relationships between two or more different states.

Note

* The use of the phrase 'ever looser union' as an evaluation of the trajectory of the post-devolution UK state is that of *James Mitchell* (2009, S. 225-7).

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