Ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to be here today and thank the Institut Francais des Relations Internationales for the invite to discuss Scotland, and explain to you what I believe is an energising "good news" story about faith in democracy, faith in Europe and a real world discussion about how power should be shared in our interconnected lives.

Today I'll touch on:

* The background to where we are in Scotland and what drives us; and
* Our present and future relationships with the EU.

Where Scotland's come from

Our discussion in Scotland is about the future, not the past, but it is crucial to understand the historical context of what's going on because it explains a lot of what is happening and shoots down a number of misconceptions.

**Independence is not about flags or songs, history, identity, language or national pride**much as we are fiercely patriotic and look forward to welcoming the French Rugby team to Edinburgh on 8 March - whether we'll look forward to the result is perhaps another question!

**We have all those things now. Independence is about not about them, it is about power, and democracy. In our multilateral world, it is imperative to be represented by a government that shares your values. Westminster does not share Scotland's.**

**Our democracy operates differently, is reflected in a different type of politics and a different sense of our place in the world and our relationship with it. Our claim to independence is based on impeccable foundations.**

* Scotland has been independent for longer than we've been part of GB.
* Our borders, the land ones at least, haven't changed in hundreds of years, largely because we're a peninsula and a series of islands, but our physical and psychological borders are distinct.
* Our Parliament, for a variety of reasons, voluntarily wound itself up in 1707 by the Treaty of Union, note, Treaty (given it was an international agreement between two states).
* The Treaty of Union guaranteed a number of things: the independence of Scotland's education and legal systems; the church; and other institutions. Three hundred years later they remain distinct.
* Nobody in Scotland with any sense of history talks about independence as a new thing, we talk about powers coming back. That, truly, does distinguish us from pretty much every independence movement worldwide, and especially in Europe.
* Scotland was represented, in various ways, at Westminster, as we still are, but there was always a degree of discontent with a perceived democratic deficit.
* In 1999, our national Parliament was reestablished in Edinburgh. It is a limited Parliament, but responsible for real stuff with legislative capacity - Scotland's legal system was and remains distinct to the English system. Holyrood deals with all aspects of education, health, justice, local government, the environment, agriculture and fisheries.
* It operates to a different democracy to Westminster. I think a better one. A variant of proportional representation, so we have a chamber more reflective of the national vote, and builds in co-operation and coalition to our democracy.
* All Scottish parties have accepted that change is going to happen, and is desirable. We disagree on what degree of change, but all parties accept the people of Scotland have the right to make this choice, and are committed to respect the outcome - again, a crucial difference to pretty much every European independence movement.
* The UK and Scottish governments have signed the Edinburgh Agreement, which, again, and crucially, commits both governments to respect and implement the outcome of the vote.

So, we will vote on 18 September this year, answering the question "Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?"  A recent poll has Yes on 37% and No on 44% with Undecided on 19%. With eight months to go.

I'm not clairvoyant, but it feels good! And the people are in charge. So, there's two scenarios: yes, or no.

If no, we're democrats, we continue as we are, governing what Holyrood governs and promoting the case for more powers.

If yes, then we start by our calculations, eighteen months of negotiations with the UK, and in parallel to that, the EU and other international organisations, with our new status in international and European law taking effect simultaneously.

And for this audience it is worth stressing our pro-EU credentials. The EU is not a necessary inconvenience - a foreign-accented infringement on our sovereignty - it is a framework within which we can shine.

We are a left-of-centre party in the European social democratic tradition. We sit in the European Parliament with the European Greens. We believe that Scotland will be a better nation as an independent nation, setting our own priorities and representing them ourselves. We believe in the European Union and in the pursuit of a peaceful and prosperous Europe. We are internationalist in outlook and intent on Scotland playing a full role in the international arena. Smaller countries "do" multilateralism, and promote and respect the international rule of law - because we lack the delusion of exceptionalism that we can get away without it. It was Jean Monet who said "the world is full of small nations, only some have had the luck to realise it".

So being European, and being internationalist is, for me and for the SNP, part of our DNA. We are a part of the EU now, albeit not a member state, but we are a proudly European country. And part of a member state that is increasingly odd, unco-operative and at times downright obstructive.

Whenever you hear Prime Minister Cameron do please remember, he may represent the United Kingdom but he does not speak for us all.

So, on the transition, there are negotiations to come, and things to be resolved, of course. We have set out in our White Paper how we think this should progress, on the basis of mutual self interest and common sense. All the logic, all the weight of convenience, on all sides, points to continued EU status for Scotland.

It is an exciting time to be involved in Scottish and European democracy. We are living through a period that historians will write books about. It was our Deputy First Minister Nicola Strugeon who described our situation best when she said:

*“Our referendum may be asking only one question, but in truth Scotland faces two choices – the first is whether to bring the powers home to govern ourselves, rather than stick with UK governance.*

*And the second is – what kind of society do we want to be.*

*But we don't get to make the second choice without being prepared to make the first.”*

These are exciting times, thank you for being interested.

Merci.