

17147 Scottish independence: Nicola Sturgeon to seek second referendum

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Nicola Sturgeon has confirmed she will ask for permission to hold a second referendum on Scottish independence. Ms Sturgeon said she wanted a vote to be held between the autumn of 2018 and the spring of the following year. The Scottish first minister said the move was needed to protect Scottish interests in the wake of the UK voting to leave the EU.

Theresa May's spokesman responded to Ms Sturgeon's announcement by saying that the evidence "clearly showed a majority of people in Scotland do not want a second independence referendum". He added: "Only a little over two years ago people in Scotland voted decisively to remain part of our United Kingdom in a referendum which the Scottish government defined as a 'once in a generation' vote. Another referendum would be divisive and cause huge economic uncertainty at the worst possible time".

But Ms Sturgeon said the people of Scotland must be offered a choice between a "hard Brexit" and becoming an independent country.

The Scottish government has published proposals which it says would allow Scotland to remain a member of the European single market even if the rest of the UK leaves, which Mrs May has said it will.

Will the UK government give permission? Technically, they could say no. But politically, it might be very difficult for them to refuse outright. The real battle here may not be over whether there is a referendum, but when.

Ms Sturgeon is clear she wants the vote to take place before Brexit is complete, in the spring of 2019. The UK government may well argue it should take place after that, so there can be full focus on the tricky task of Brexit itself.

There remains a lot of detail to be hammered out before we get back on the campaign trail.

The Scottish first minister said the UK government had not "moved even an inch in pursuit of compromise and agreement" since the Brexit referendum, which saw Scotland vote by 62% to 38% in favour of Remain while the UK as a whole voted to leave by 52% to 48%.

Ms Sturgeon said Scotland stood at a "hugely important crossroads", and insisted she would continue to attempt to reach a compromise with the UK government. But she added: "I will take the steps necessary now to make sure that Scotland will have a choice at the end of this process."

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