

What Europe thinks about the British election

Written by The Conversation

Beyond deciding upon who will govern the country, Britain is about to decide on its future relationship with the European Union.

David Cameron promises that if the Conservative Party wins, he will hold a referendum on Britain's EU membership. A [continuous monitoring poll](#) conducted by the University of Essex suggest that the gap is narrowing between those Britons who approve their country's EU membership and those do not.

The stakes are high: a Brexit could have negative consequences for economic prospects in Britain and could harm its relationship with its European neighbours. But it could also mark a further political crisis in an already fragile EU.

EU partners have been careful not to take sides and there is certainly very limited news coverage of the UK election abroad. So while Britain's place in the EU is important in the pre-electoral campaign, it is not that widely discussed across Europe.

Nevertheless, EU partners are worried about the outcome of the elections that could destabilise not only Britain but also the EU. "Anything that weakens the UK also weakens Europe, and weakens NATO," [said Jacek Rostowski](#), an adviser to the Polish Prime Minister.

While warning against Brexit, EU member states and the EU institutions have made clear that they cannot give Britain anything it asks for.

The French foreign minister is against Brexit, [arguing](#) :

An eventual exit of Britain from Europe would be negative for Europe but very negative for Britain. There are things to reform, simplifications, of course, but there cannot be cherry picking. If you join a soccer club, you cannot play rugby half way through.

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Martin Schulz, the President of the European Parliament, has stated that treaty change is [too risky](#) in the current climate of political and economic crisis. Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, has also [ruled out](#) major treaty changes while arguing that he wants a “fair deal” for the UK.

While Germany’s Christian Democrats [officially support](#) the Conservatives, there is also a view that a Labour win would actually bring Germany closer to the UK on a pro-European agenda.

One of David Cameron’s key negotiation points would be to restrict state benefits to EU migrants. And while Angela Merkel does not support treaty change when it comes to freedom of movement, which is a fundamental principle of the EU, she is not so opposed to the idea that there is welfare abuse as a result of this principle, and that this may need to be addressed.

All in all, EU partners have been cautious not to appear to interfere with UK domestic politics. And they are very realistic. They know that whoever gets into power, some negotiation will take place. Potentially the uncertainty does not necessarily lie on whether the Conservatives or the Labour party would come first in the election.

What remains to be seen is who will be the coalition partner of either of these parties or which party they will rely upon in the case of a minority government. Relying on either UKIP or the SNP could even bring greater uncertainty in both Europe and the EU.

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