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## **UK LONG-TERM EXPATS LOSE BID TO SCRAP 15-YEAR VOTING RULE AHEAD OF EU REFERENDUM**

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A British court has ruled that Britons who have lived abroad for more than 15 years do not have the right to vote in the upcoming EU referendum. Some two million UK expatriate citizens will be affected by the decision.

UK High Court judge David Lloyd Jones on Thursday rejected claims that a law preventing people from voting in British polls after more than 15 years living abroad restricted their right to freedom of movement under EU law.

The two judges at London's High Court said in Thursday's ruling that they accepted the government's argument that there were "significant practical difficulties about adopting - especially for this referendum - a new electoral register which includes non-resident British citizens whose last residence the United Kingdom was more than 15 years ago."

### **Altered voting rights**

On June 23, around 46 million Britons are eligible to vote on whether the UK should remain a member of the EU or leave the 28-nation bloc. Unlike in general elections, electoral exceptions have already been permitted, with citizens of Commonwealth countries living in Britain, as well as inhabitants of Gibraltar, all allowed to vote.

With regards to EU citizens, only those from Ireland, Malta and Cyprus who are living in the UK qualify to cast a ballot.

### **British pensioners abroad fear Brexit fallout**

The case was brought before the court by war veteran Harry Shindler, 94, and his co-claimant, Jacquelyn MacLennan, who live in Belgium. Lawyers acting for the two expats argued that Brexit would mean the claimants were no longer EU citizens and therefore no longer afforded the rights of free movement which flow from EU citizenship.

Following Thursday's ruling, the claimants said they would appeal the decision,"so that all British citizens living elsewhere in the EU can be part of the democratic process to vote in this referendum which will have a very real impact on their lives."

## **Too close to call**

The decision came as a relief for the UK government, however, whose lawyers had argued that a decision in favor of the claimants could have made it impossible to hold the referendum in less than three months' time.

The outcome of the referendum is expected to be close. The most recent survey conducted by YouGov on April 25-26 found that 41 percent of pollers would vote to remain in the EU, while 42 were in favor of leaving. Thirteen percent of those asked said they were undecided. The remaining four percent said they "won't vote."

kb/jm (Reuters, AP)

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