
POLLING BOOTHS OPEN IN UK'S LIMBO EU ELECTION

- 23.05.2019

EU Observer (23 May 2019)

Polling booths have opened in the UK for EU elections, with voters not knowing if Brexit will happen, if they have a prime minister, or caring that much who their MEPs will be.

The voting started at 6AM British time and ends at 9PM on Thursday (23 May) on the first day of the wider European Parliament (EP) election.

There will be no exit polls and the result will not be known until Sunday night, when the 27 other EU countries have also finished voting.

Britain is to choose 73 out of the 751 MEPs in the EU assembly, but voters there are doing so in the limbo atmosphere of Brexit.

The UK is due to leave the European Union on 31 October and for those MEPs to lose their seats.

The EU election was not meant to have happened in the first place, because Britain was due to have already left in March.

But indecision by MPs in London delayed the process, creating added uncertainty on whether Brexit will take place.

The British prime minister, Theresa May, has offered the option of a second referendum on EU membership in the newest version of her Brexit deal, to be voted on by British MPs in June.

The opposition Labour party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, has said that he represented both those who wanted to leave the EU and those who wanted to remain.

"We could allow ourselves to be defined only as 'remainers' or 'leavers' - labels that meant nothing to us only a few years ago. But where would that take us?," he said on Wednesday.

At the same time, the Liberal Democrats, the Greens, and a new party called Change UK have gained support on pledges to stay in the EU.

May to quit?

British voters also go to the polls not knowing who will lead their own country in the coming months.

Speculation mounted that May might step down on Friday after a cabinet minister, Andrea Leadsom, resigned on Wednesday over the second referendum proposal.

"I have been determined to deliver Brexit and I am just worried that this [EU withdrawal] bill with its new elements in it would not do that. It's been a really tough day," Leadsom told press.

May's spokesman said she was still "focused on delivering the Brexit people voted for".

But her "authority is shot and her time is up", Ian Lavery, a senior Labour MP, said. "Theresa May needs to go, and we need an immediate general election," he said.

"She must announce her resignation after Thursday's European elections," Tom Tugendhat, a senior MP from May's own Conservative party, also said.

Even if she survives Leadsom's resignation - her 36th minister to quit since the Brexit referendum in 2016 - May has pledged to go shortly after parliament's June vote on the EU exit deal.

The political mess has seen the Conservatives bleed support to the Brexit Party of Nigel Farage, an English eurosceptic MEP who advocates leaving in October no matter what.

Farage will storm to victory with 37 percent of the EP votes, pollster YouGov said on Wednesday, with Labour in second place, and the Conservatives in fifth place on seven percent.

Farage's rallies have seen crowds roar in anger at both "Brussels bureaucrats" and British officials.

Milkshakes and eggs have also been thrown at some EP campaign events.

Strong emotions even prompted violence on Wednesday, with two people arrested in Salford in northern UK when supporters of a far-right would-be politician, Tommy Robinson, threw bricks at anti-fascist protesters.

But the strange atmosphere, including Brexit fatigue, has left many in Britain feeling less excited about Thursday's vote.

Some 36 percent of the 47 million eligible British voters turned out in the last EP election in 2014.

That was not bad by EP turnout standards.

But only 32 percent of British voters thought the European elections had a great or fair amount of impact on their lives despite the Brexit fiasco, the YouGov pollster also said on Wednesday.

Some 92 percent of them could not name a single MEP standing in their region and out of the eight percent who said they could, four out of 10 gave the wrong answer, YouGov said.

Kaynak/Source: