

# Brexit Explained



(Photo credit: Marco Verch)

## Advanced (C1-C2)

### *What is Brexit?*

Brexit refers to “British exit” from the European Union (the EU). The EU is a political and economic block of 28 member countries. The UK has been a member of the EU since 1973 but its membership has been hotly contested in recent years, with many Brits campaigning to terminate the union.

In 2016, the UK government held the Brexit referendum to determine whether the country should leave the EU, or remain. The results were 52% for the leave camp, and 48% for remain.

### *How did it happen?*

There are three main political parties in the UK and each supports very different ideologies and policies. The Conservative Party is a right wing party and they have been in power since 2010. Contrastingly, The Labour Party is socialist and falls on the left of the political spectrum. Finally, The Liberal Democrat Party (Lib Dems) is centre left in ideology. The Lib Dems

have only been in power once, when they formed a coalition party with the Conservatives in 2010.

The UK is also home to minority parties such as The Green Party, The Scottish National Party (SNP), and The UK Independence Party (UKIP).

The former British Prime Minister, David Cameron, promised the Brexit referendum in 2013 ahead of the general election in 2015. Although he didn't back Brexit himself, he hoped that this promise would secure a majority for the Conservatives, who were in danger, at the time, of losing votes to UKIP. Many UKIP voters vehemently supported the idea of leaving the EU, and so to appease them, Cameron put the referendum on the table. The Conservatives *did* win the 2015 election and the Brexit vote was scheduled for 2016.

*What happened after the referendum?*

After the referendum, David Cameron resigned and Theresa May took over as Prime Minister. She began negotiations with EU officials and member states, and promised the British people that the UK would leave the EU on 29 March 2019.

However, this promise was never met because the government was unable to pass the Brexit bill through parliament. May's deal continued to be rejected by members of parliament and, in July 2019, after failing to get her deal through the House of Commons, Theresa May too resigned as Prime Minister.

The new Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has recently called another election for 12 December 2019. He hopes to win a majority so that he can continue with his Brexit plans. The Labour party has said that, if they win the election, they will hold a second referendum. The Liberal Democrat party has said that they would cancel Brexit if they got into power (they are a small party and it is very unlikely that they would ever win a majority).

The December election has been dubbed the "Brexit election" because the result will determine what happens to the UK's relationship with the EU, moving forward.