

Big election gains for Eurosceptics could raise prospect of hard Brexit

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News

Belgium's Brexit coordinator has warned that significant gains for Eurosceptic parties in the European elections increase the chance of a "hard Brexit."



Photo credit: Press Association

Speaking in Brussels, Bart Vodderie said that if, as expected, the Brexit Party led by Nigel Farage performs well in the 23-26 May elections that could have a "huge impact" on British politics by increasing the prospects of a hard Brexit.

Vodderie, of the Belgian foreign affairs ministry, said that success for the Brexit party could "push the Tories to go for a hard Brexit and no-deal Brexit."

“These elections could have huge implications for the UK,” he added.

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The Belgian was speaking at an event co organised by the University of East Anglia on “EU-Asia relations post Brexit.”

He also said that the “attractiveness” of the UK as a trading partner had declined “quite a bit” as the result of “continuing uncertainty” over Brexit.

Vodderie said, “The ball is now in the UK’s court. But the EU side has made it clear again that there can be no renegotiation of the Withdrawal Agreement.”

Meanwhile, with the European elections just days away, a broad spectrum of individuals and businesses have stepped up their efforts to make sure as many citizens as possible cast a vote to choose their future.

“These elections could have huge implications for the UK” **Bart Vodderie, Belgian Foreign Affairs Ministry**

In the last election five years ago, voter turnout fell to the lowest since direct elections were first held in 1970. This time, Parliament has mounted a huge, multi-million-euro promotional campaign with the aim of substantially boosting turnout.

The objective is to get the figure above 50 percent (it was just over 42 percent last time).

More than 2,000 events organised by NGOs, businesses, dedicated individuals and European Parliament partners have taken place over the past months and these will continue until this weekend.

In Copenhagen, thousands are expected to take part in a march on Saturday “to make the election a climate election”.

Featuring an address by the climate activist Greta Thunberg, the gathering will call for “immediate climate action.”

In Germany, the Berlin main train station will be lit up in the colours of the EU flag each night until the elections. Passengers are also being reminded of the vote on train schedule leaflets.

The streaming service Spotify has created a dedicated Get Vocal, Europe! playlist featuring one song from each of the 28 Member States.

There are also a range of grassroots activities weighing in, in the hope that they can make the elections a success.

The European Parliament's awareness campaign includes the film Choose Your Future and thistimeimvoting.eu, a platform which aims to remind people of their "ownership of European democracy" and to get involved in the elections.

So far, more than 305,000 people have signed up and 340 organisations have promoted the elections.

More than 426 million citizens will be eligible to vote in all EU countries between 23 and 26 May.

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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