

Rhiannon Davies: How the 2017 Referendum is Changing the UK

Background

- In January 2013, bowing to popular pressure, including from UKIP, David Cameron promised a referendum on British membership of the European Union **if the Tories win a majority at the next general election**
- Since then, many business and political leaders have expressed their opposition to the idea BUT there is widespread support, particularly since the economic crisis, with immigration proving to be a key driver for anti-EU sentiment
- The largest ever poll of UK voters (in March 2014) showed the public to be split on the issue, with 41% in favour of withdrawal, 41% in favour of membership, and 18% undecided
- Recent debates between deputy PM, Nick Clegg and UKIP leader, Nigel Farage have bolstered anti-EU sentiment further

Why is skilled migration so badly perceived in the UK?

- Skilled migrant workers mostly stay in London so people living outside London do not necessarily see benefits. Instead, there is an image of migrant workers as 'scroungers' or 'taking British people's jobs' and sending money home instead of contributing to the UK's economy

Will a referendum take place?

- **Not if the Conservatives do not win a majority in 2015:** On current form, they may not be in a position to form a coalition, let alone take a majority, particularly if the result of the Scottish referendum is that Scotland stays within the UK (as the Conservatives' track record in Scotland is very poor). Additionally, UKIP may split the right-wing vote, meaning that neither party prevails

How do Europeans living in the UK feel about the referendum?

- There is a real sense of disappointment and bitterness that the UK does not realise how much it benefits from skilled migration; both in terms of the skilled workers it has been able to attract but also in terms of opportunities within Europe for British people