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MYTH



REALITY

The British Elections and their Impact on the EU – Why it doesn't matter.

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Early signs for optimism

- David Cameron's first prime ministerial visit – to Paris.
- William Hague – From Euro-bashing leader and loud support for invasion of Iraq to 'quietist position on the EU.'
- Europe minister David Lidington – a pragmatic former FO adviser.
- Lib-Dem influence on Conservatives



Coalition programme for Government: No, No, No?

- Britain should play a leading role....
- But ‘no further powers should be transferred to Brussels without a referendum.’
- Being constructive while being obstructive?
- Defending British sovereignty – too little too late?



European Foreign Policy post-Blair

- Hague is not Miliband but has big say over foreign policy.
 - Reviving the Foreign Office (where Mr Hague is going down well).
 - Creating a National Security Council.
 - Sending the best diplomats to Brussels.
 - Exactly the kind of technocracy that bored Blair.
 - Exactly the kind of thing Hague has a feel for.
- Cameron must bind in left-leaning Lib Dems without alienating right-wing Tories.
 - Disgruntlement is quiet but real (and intensifying).
 - Hague not a ideologue – a positive for Britain's relations with Europe.
 - Importance of the Coalition, that he helped broker.

Britain and Europe – with but not of...



- Europe à la carte has emerged as Britain's vision for the EU.
- Offers the country what it wants without obstructing others.
- It also reflects reality:
 - some EU members use the single currency, the rest retain their own;
 - some belong to the Schengen agreement on border controls, others have opted out.

The hazards for Britain

- Two-tier Europe
 - European Council and the Euro group
 - Euro crisis
 - Franco-German motor
- Con/Lib-Dem outlook:
 - Coherence can be overrated, especially when set against the need to keep together two parties with radically different takes on Europe.
 - Cameron can continue muddling through with his vague and piecemeal Europe policy.
 - Not clear if Cameron understands the EU – exit stage left from EPP.
 - Ultimately, he's not Thatcher.

The curse of Europe

- Europe matters a lot to a minority of voter.
- Majority rarely rate it as a decisive influence on how they vote.
- No votes in Europe – potentially troublesome.
- Undermined two former Conservative PMs.
- History not forgotten – issue has potential to tear party apart.
- Cameron could easily cheer core supporters by picking a fight with the European Union.
- Has a Thatcherite edge



Why it doesn't matter, much

- No confrontation likely over Europe.
 - Far too pragmatic
 - Agreeing next budget
 - Recession – a stick to beat the dog...
 - Reform of the CAP
 - European Working Time Directive, a meddlesome tool for limiting overtime.
 - Should pro-Europeans be worried?
No...
 - Not until the next Parliament.
 - **The coalition will struggle to agree on crudely populist policies.**
- Neither Cameron nor Clegg can easily announce policies that drip with the red blood of partisan conflict.
 - Domestically, dangers are bigger for Lib Dems than Tories.
 - Possibility of defections to Labour?
 - Radical reform (Big Society) at home (if successful) *might* spill over onto the Continent.