

Five minutes with Nigel Farage: “The European Parliament elections may ultimately decide whether we get a referendum on EU membership”

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The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) has campaigned for the UK's exit from the EU since the early 1990s. In an interview with EUROPP's editor Stuart Brown and British Politics and Policy at LSE's editor Joel Suss, UKIP leader Nigel Farage discusses the importance of the upcoming European Parliament elections in May, the party's future prospects at the 2015 UK general election, and whether Scottish independence would help UKIP's electoral chances.



Previous European Parliament elections have been regarded as ‘second order’ elections, which have less importance than national elections. Will the 2014 European elections be different?

I think they matter because the issue of Europe matters. Over the decades, when one talked about Europe, generally you would get a collective ‘rolling of the eyes’ and it was seen to be an academic debating point rather than something that was directly affecting people’s lives. Now I think the link has been made, by a very significant number of people in this country, that actually the European question is extremely important. Whether you like it or don’t like it, the issue of Europe really actually matters – and European elections are the one time that you can express an opinion.

So I think because of this relevance there is going to be a lot more interest in the elections than ever before, and I think that the way British politics is poised will make them even more important. The European Parliament elections may ultimately decide whether we get a referendum on EU membership. I think that if UKIP are able to bring about an earthquake then I think we’ll get Labour to shift their position, and if that happens then I don’t think we can go into a general election with the two leading parties promising a referendum and it not happening.

Currently UKIP are touted to do very well in the elections. Do you view them as a springboard to the 2015 general election in the UK?

Well that’s a separate question, obviously. And that depends on lots of factors. It depends how sophisticated we are in terms of targeting our seats, and overcoming the perception that under a first-past-the-post system it’s very difficult for a party that isn’t based in socioeconomics to make the breakthrough. I think things will be clearer after the European elections but I don’t think we’re really going to find out until May 2015.

Would you be willing to cut a deal with the Conservatives for 2015 to help your prospects in certain seats?

I just don’t think that’s a very likely possibility with the current Conservative leadership. I would think it’s rather remote, they think we are ‘the lower orders’. I don’t think Mr Cameron would deign to speak to people like me!

What do you say to people who argue that UKIP is primarily an English political party, rather than a genuinely British party?

Well, actually no, we’ve done rather well in Wales in a series of elections – there was a by-election in Anglesey this summer for the Welsh Assembly where we went from absolutely nowhere to getting 15-16 per cent of the vote. So actually across Wales we’re getting some solid support. We are the only London-based party taking Northern Ireland seriously: we’re fielding a candidate for the European elections, while the other parties aren’t. We have a

representative in Stormont – the others don't. So I think, you know, with Wales and Northern Ireland, UKIP is taking things very seriously.

Scotland is very much more difficult – the word independence means something different. I think we have a realistic chance of winning a seat in the European Parliament elections in Scotland, I really do, but I don't think the kind of independence debate we want to have in Scotland will happen until after their referendum.

What would be your view on independence for Scotland? There is an argument that it could theoretically help UKIP...

Well it could, but actually Scotland is becoming more Eurosceptic too. It's quite interesting actually – there's been quite a marked shift. I personally think the United Kingdom should stay together, albeit I'm a fan of devolution and I don't see any inconsistency with that. We're sort of stick-in-the-muds on this and I've often said before that if we'd dealt with Ireland differently we would have had some very different outcomes!

But this desire to keep central power in London, and not devolve, has been a huge mistake. Now, I think the Scots are not going to vote to separate from Westminster. And actually it's not even logical is it? To say you want independence and you want to be part of the European Union. I just don't think the whole thing adds up.

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Note: This article gives the views of the interviewee, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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About the interviewee

Nigel Farage

Nigel Farage is the leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party and a Member of the European Parliament for the South East of England.

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