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Brexit

Britons in Hong Kong torn over whether their country should quit European Union

UK citizens have voted by post in the EU referendum, with many believed to have opted to remain in the body

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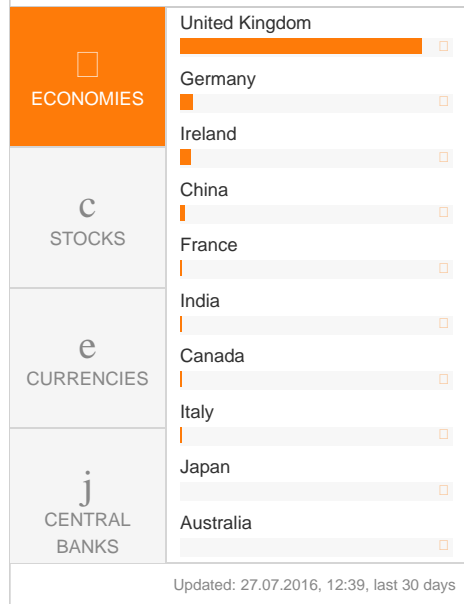
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Many Britons in Hong Kong are taking part in Thursday's referendum on its future in the European Union, with dozens returning postal ballots ahead of the nationwide vote.

Voters in Hong Kong have criticised the tone of the referendum campaign, questioned the durability of the UK's union if an exit takes place, and consider the option of remaining in or leaving the 28-nation bloc in a non-legally binding vote a fraught one.

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Not all Britons in Hong Kong have the right to vote. They cannot if they have been out of the country for more than 15 years. However thousands are thought to be eligible given the sheer number of Britons living and working in the territory.

A majority of Hong Kong-based Britons who voted by post in the last two weeks are thought to have opted to remain. A small proportion voted to quit the EU.

Andrew Kinloch was 19 at the time of Britain's 1975 Europe referendum vote. Britain faced a far more difficult choice now than in 1975, Kinloch said, adding everyone forgot the first objective of the European Union was that France and Germany should not go to war again.

Kinloch noted the expansion of the free trade area had been a "great success" but acknowledged concern about Brussels "fiddling" with domestic legislation. However, he said overall the EU had been a "great force for good", expanding into the former Soviet bloc.

The consultant was critical of how referendum arguments had been shaped. "I believe that most people don't understand what they are voting on," he said. "Referendums distil very complicated arguments down into simple 'yes' or 'no', and the vast majority of people are voting with their gut or what they read in the newspaper on the morning of the election."

Kinloch said without a precedent, it was "very difficult" to decide. "Overall I think it is a force for good and because no one knows of the alternative."

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Undecided which way he will vote, the UK's fragile economy is a small but important factor in his thinking.

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Hongkonger Vincent Chung Wai-kei, a lawyer based in Dundee, voted two years ago in Scotland's independence referendum, opting to stay in the union.

In the event of a result favouring an exit, it could trigger another independence vote on Scotland, and one that could be more favourable to Scottish nationalists.

Equally, for Northern Ireland and Wales, where there is greater support for the EU, a withdrawal from Brussels could prompt not just Scotland, but the other nations to consider their future within the union.

Chung said in the event of an EU exit and a fresh independence vote, he would switch sides.

"I wouldn't be too worried about the future ... my views have changed slightly. The independence argument is more coherent and persuasive and I do find the current Scottish nationalist leader [Nicola Sturgeon] charismatic so that influences the way I view things."

Chinese University academic Simon Haines, who has flown to Britain to cast his vote, said the ballot made him "very torn".

"I think Britain does a huge amount of good by being in the EU. Leaving is a step into the unknown. It's a difficult decision. I've been backwards and forwards on this ... but at the end of the day I am going to vote exit," he said.

Haines lamented the loss of sovereignty on domestic legislation and judicial affairs.

"That to me seems to be wrong and to me, a country that has its origins in the democracy of Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights, is being eroded because a lot of the legislation is not coming from its own parliament and the people making the legislation are unelected."

Despite the general worries of voters, the academic said: "We should be prepared to take a chance. It would be silly to avoid something if you think you are scared."

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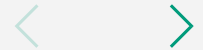
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